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Lived Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Blind Students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities: A Phenomenological Study

Tadesse Beza

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Lived Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Blind Students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities: A Phenomenological Study

A dissertation submitted to the Department of Special Needs Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Special Needs Education

By

Tadesse Beza

Under the Supervision of
DR. Alemayehu Teklemariam (Associate Professor)

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A Doctoral Dissertation

by
Tadesse Beza

Approved by the Board of Examiners

Chairperson

Name _____ Signature _____Date _____

Advisor

Name _____ Signature _____Date _____

Internal Examiner

Name _____ Signature _____ Date _____

External Examiner

Name: _____ Signature _____ Date _____

DECLARATION

I, undersigned, declare that this doctoral dissertation entitled: *Lived Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Blind Students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities: A Phenomenological Study* - is entirely my research project towards the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Special Needs Education. The dissertation has not been previously submitted by the researcher in either in part or whole in any other universities, or elsewhere for the award of any degree or diploma. Any of the referenced materials or written sources in the research report are duly acknowledged and credited as being sourced from other researchers, authors, or writers in the reference section.

Tadesse Beza

Addis Ababa

Signature: _____

Data of final submission: _____

CERTIFICATION

I, hereby, certify that the dissertation entitled: *Lived Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Blind Students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities: A Phenomenological Study* - submitted to the Department of Special Needs Education by Tadesse Beza for the award of the degree of DOCTOR of PHILOSOPHY in SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION is carried out under my professional guidance and supervision. The entire thesis or a part of it has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in other higher education institutions.

Dr. Alemayehu Teklemariam (Associate Professor)

Dissertation Advisor

Department of Special Needs Education

Addis Ababa University

Signature: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this doctoral journey to the loving memory of my little fingure, a younger sister, Tiringo Beza, who died 30th of August, 2004 (E.C.).Your untimely death is often in our heart! Rest in everlasting peace! I also dedicate this dissertation work to my mother W/o Belainesh Tekletsadik and my father Ato Beza Gebretsadik, the first people in my life, who sent me to school - the opportunity they didn't get themselves. Thank you so much for the sacrifices you paid to plant your seed! Thank you for helping me to realize my early childhood dream of becoming a doctor.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AOP	Anti-Oppressive Practice
AOT	Anti-Oppressive Theory
AT	Assistive Technology
CDSC	Centre for Disability Support and Care
DET	Disability Equality Training
EFA	Education For All
ESDP	Education Sector Development program
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IE	Inclusive Education
ITPs	Inclusive Teaching Practices
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
MMD	Medical Model of Disability
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
MOSHE	Ministry of Science and Higher Education
PSS	Personalized Support Services
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
RQs	Research Questions
SCD	Social Construction of Disability
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SMD	Social Model of Disability
SNSC	Special Needs Support Centre
SWDs	Students with Disabilities
SWVIs	Students with Visual Impairments
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHO	World Health Organization

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion amongst blind students (4 males and 4 females) who were pursuing their undergraduate studies at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. To collect data, semi-structured interview guide was employed. The data were analyzed utilizing Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological analysis framework. The analysis resulted in the following major findings: Equal access to basic student services and facilities (uniqueness being recognized), and access to personalized support services (feeling respected and access to physical interaction) represent participants' experiences of social inclusion. Also, isolated campus-living, being ignored, non-participation in extracurricular activities, limited access to friendships, being Othered (typified as aggressive in nature, perceived as often complaints and treated as academically weak), and classroom marginality (sidelined teaching and favoritism classroom interaction) consisted of their experience of social exclusion. Moreover, social challenges (peers' stereotypes and prejudices, and teachers' reluctance), physical challenges (unfriendly physical spaces and buildings), and institution-related challenge (inaccessible ink-print information and notices) were challenging experiences of participants as having contributed to social exclusion. The findings can be summarized as that blind students were experiencing both social inclusion and exclusion in the same classrooms and campuses. These findings have vital implications for trainings, educational practices and policy formulations. Based on the major findings, the following 4 conclusions were drawn: (a) higher education institutions selected for the study are not barrier-free and that they are not fully welcoming for blind students; (b) blind students are not truly accepted for real peer (social) integration, and (c) classrooms and campuses of the selected institutions are not social exclusion free environments, and (d) the teaching-learning activities of classroom teachers who taught 8 blind students lack inclusivity. Finally, the following strategies were suggested to address social exclusion and thereby enhance the social inclusion of blind students in the classrooms and campuses of both public universities: Disability awareness creation, social skills training, trainings on inclusive teaching practices and formulating accessibility policy.

Keywords: *Phenomenology, Colaizzi's analysis, social inclusion, social exclusion, higher education, lived experiences, descriptive phenomenological approach*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter mainly aims at funneling the overall contexts of the study. It begins with describing the general background of the topic being studied. Then, it continues presenting the statement of the problem, research questions and research objectives driving the study, and significance of the study, delimitation of the study, and organization of the dissertation.

1.2. Background of the Study

Long ago, Aristotle said, "man is by nature a social animal", which indicates that humans are naturally social species that have common values, strong linkages and life interdependence. Based on the Aristotelian proverb, it can be understood that being valued by others around, forming relationships and partaking in normally prescribed social activities pervasively involves a fundamental desire of all human beings (Baumeister, Brewer, Tice & Twenge, 2007; Levitas, Pantazis, Fahmy, Gordon, Lloyd, & Patsios, 2007). In this sense, latest research evidence showed that being included in relationships and participation in activities consist of fortunes, and positive social experiences of all individuals all times (Heyder, Sudkamp & Steinmayr, 2020). By contrast, being excluded from interaction, relationships and participation in activities is unpleasant social experience, and threatening phenomenon (Mathieson, Popay, Enoch, Escorel, Hernandez, Johnston, Rispel, 2008; Rawal, 2008; Fischer, 2011). As it is discussed herein, social scientists and psychologists have abundantly worked on and contributed to the bulk of literature on the phenomena of being socially included and excluded.

Historically, extant literatures and research studies showed that the dichotomous notions of social inclusion and exclusion were first rooted in Europe. Particularly, social exclusion was popularized in French by René Lenoir as early as 1974, the then French Secretary of State for Social Action in the Government. He coined it from his study entitled as *Les Exclus,* which is a French term to refer to the situation of certain individuals, or specific groups such as the mentally retarded, physically handicapped, lone or single parents, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers or drug addicts, delinquents and asocial persons, those living in poverty and socially maladjusted who were administratively considered as outsiders in French

society (Labonté, Hadi & Kauffmann, 2011). R. Lenoir described in his book that those mentioned above were officially marginalized by the French government from its social insurance system (Lenoir, 1974 as cited in Silver, 2007). In this regard, Lenoir's description showed that the term social exclusion was primarily understood as social disqualification or disaffiliation of certain individuals or groups of people (Duffy, 2001). Thus, when it was first used, the term refers to a process in which individuals identified by the French government were generally considered as not part of the French society (SEU, 2001). Later, in the mid-1980s, the concept was employed to refer to other individuals such as school dropouts, unemployed, the poor, the disadvantaged and the immigrants (Rawal, 2008).

Likewise, literatures have shown that the contested term of social inclusion was appeared, by and large, as a policy response to tackling social exclusion (Mathieson *et al.*, 2008). However, unlike social exclusion, my endeavor to reviwing important literature was not able to significantly show particular details pertaining to by whom, when and how the term social inclusion was introduced and initially conceptualized in the field. In most general sense, the concept of social inclusion refers to efforts of bringing those excluded *in*, and it is about closing physical, economic, social and any other distances and/or boundaries among individuals, or groups (Silver, 2007; Mathieson *et al.*, 2008; Fischer, 2011; Wazed, 2012). Until recently, the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion have been utilized as the most important themes of policy debates, development discourses and new ways of understanding the conditions of individuals or groups in poverty, health problems and those in the marginalized positions in society in countries in the continent of Europe (Klasen, 2001; SEU, 2005).

In an attempt to understand the notions of social inclusion and exclusion, I surveyed different literature and found out that these are elastic and very ambiguous concepts with no fixed definitions. In this vein, researchers concerned in the area of social inclusion and exclusion have frequently redefined and continuously argued that there is no one agreeable and consistent definition to these terms. Instead, it is proved that these are very vague, multidimensional and still remain as contested continuum. However, in their usage of these terms, different writers attached multiple definitions and descriptions for the same terms. The following few paragraphs highlight the attempts I made to understand each term: Primarily, it is found from existing literatures that there are different conceptualizations of the term social exclusion. For instance,

Levitas et al.'s (2007) multidimensional analysis of social exclusion showed that the term represents a process that prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic and political life that are normally available to the majority of people in society. In the same fashion, Silver (2007) elucidated that social exclusion can be roughly understood in the following ways: In one hand, it is the denial of the rights and opportunities to individuals that others freely enjoy. On the other hand, it refers to lack of meaningful participation and relationship of individuals or groups in the normally existing activities that are commonly available for majority of the members of society in which they live, and that plays integral roles for their interactions and relationships. Meanwhile, Mathieson et al. (2008) viewed the concept of social exclusion as the process through which individuals or groups are systematically blocked wholly or partially from rights, opportunities, facilities, services or resources that are normally available to other members of society and which are key to social integration in the mainstream social contexts within which they live. Additionally, certain literatures showed that the conception of social exclusion greatly vary across governments and countries. For example, in France, it is perceived as a progressive process of rupturing of social bond that socializes and integrates individuals, or groups (Silver, 2007). In this sense, it is described above that the term was first introduced in the country as a total breakdown, or detachment of individuals or groups from social networks (Labonté *et al.,* 2011). In the United Kingdom, the governments' Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) has indicated that the concept is considered as a social pain and utilized to describe a situation when people suffer from problems such as unemployment, bad health and family breakdown (SEU, 2005). In India, it is the process that involves the denial of individuals or groups from basic welfare services and citizenship rights (Kadun & Gadkar, 2014).

Likewise, I endeavored to understand the term social exclusion in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, there are scantiness of research studies and literatures that adequately show the understanding of the concept in Ethiopian context. Let me give one example of social exclusion research conducted in non-education settings by Tamiru (2017). He has conducted the study focusing on assessing the causes and effects of social exclusion: The case of 'pot makers' in Yem Special Woreda in Sothern Nation, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State. Indeed, his study revealed that the concept can be perceived in terms of the multifaceted disadvantages and chronic poverty of the 'pot makers'. More specifically, Tamiru's (2017) study underscored that social exclusion includes mass occupational minorities, low earnings, joblessness and ongoing socio-cultural and

economic deprivations in the livelihood of society (p.69). It further showed that social exclusion applies to the separation of ethnic groups from the mainstream society based simply on who the individuals or groups of people are, and what they do in the mainstream society. In addition to this, Tirusew (2005) has resounded that social exclusion in Ethiopian context is 'involuntary social marginality' that exist in society at individual, interpersonal, group and community level (p.7). Of course, it is described that I found scarce resources and properly documented data that clearly show what the notion exactly looks in Ethiopian perspectives. Nevertheless, from practical and social points of views, and on the basis of the local studies identified above, I certainly deduced that the term is meant for situations whereby individuals or groups from different racial, political and ethno-linguistic background formulate the categories of "Us and Them" among themselves. In recent years, it can be manifested through the displacement of specifc groups, ethnic-based conflict, political groupings, and economic disadvantage of certain groups, or section of society in the country. Contrary to my conviction, Ethiopian Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed's political philosophy of *Addition* (He coined the term as *Medemer*, which is a buzz word of politicians nowadays and implies a concerted effort and method of building national unity) is a new pathway for strengthening Ethiopians' social re-integration and inclusiveness.

On the other hand, it is broadly noted in literatures that social inclusion is the social integration of individuals or groups who were excluded, or those who are at greater risk of being socially excluded (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, & Bereded-Samuel, 2010). These authors' centered their discussion on social inclusion that the concept is meant for equality, diversity and it calls for actions, or strategies in response to social exclusion. Contrary to social exclusion, social inclusion emphasized on valued recognition, human development, involvement and engagement and proximity and placement in physical, psychological and social spaces (Sedaghatnia, Lamit, Abdullah & Ghahramanpouri, 2015). Nevertheless, most literatures showed that social inclusion is likely to be defined in terms of social exclusion as they are inseparable side of the same coin (Robo, 2014; Kearney, 2009). In this vein, Nugent, Pollack and Travis (2016) made notes that these vague terms inseparably co-exist. Similarly, the report delivered by the World Bank showed that social inclusion (or just simply inclusion) is a binary opposition to social exclusion (just simply exclusion) (World Bank, 2013). The report delivered that inclusion implies the process of searching answers for the question "inclusion in what?", for instance, in

services, facilities or spaces, relationships and on the contrary, exclusion is the process of searching answers for the question of "exclusion from what?", for instance, from services, facilities, spaces, relationships, and participation (World Bank, 2013). More generally, Mathieson et al. (2008) have concluded that these terms are highly diffused, multi-layered and slippery that can be used to mean many things to many people in different contexts. Additionally, other writers alluded that these terms lack universality in a way these have been understood and utilized thus far (Levitas *et al.,* 2007; Silver, 2007). On top of this, the ascriptions made by Rawal (2008) showed that social inclusion and exclusion are multi-faceted, or nebulous with a likelihood of numerous classifications of their own definitions.

As noted above, social inclusion and exclusion involve various competing views and multiple understandings. Hence, it can be attested that there is no synchronization in the definition of these terms in a precise manner. For example, it can be seen in Chapter 2 of this dissertation (please see Table 2.1 and Table 2.2) that different writers and researchers in the field of social inclusion and exclusion struggled to construct the meanings of these terms in different styles and tones. However, they failed to reach an agreement of how these phenomena can be defined. Most importantly, they emphasized on depicting ideas about who are vulnerable to social exclusion, and the reasons behind their exclusionary experiences. Indeed, Silver (2007) and Levitas et al. (2007) construed that everybody is susceptible to exclusion related experiences, and finally confirmed that it is an inevitable part in human life situations. This idea is further reflected by Kadun and Gadkar (2014) that social exclusion represents a common occurrence to all human beings. Based on their explanation, all of us at one point in our lives might have faced social exclusion. More precisely, Gorden et al. (2017) noted that children, adolescents, women, individuals with disabilities and elders are vulnerable to exclusion due to various reasons associated with their social and physical environment.

Nonetheless, literatures displayed that some of the individuals or particular groups are significantly more at greater risk of social exclusion than others. In line with this idea, Levitas et al. (2007) asserted that social exclusion is more likely to happen to those who are relatively different from the majority of members of society. On a practical basis, various research studies and literatures indicated that persons with disabilities (PWDs) are at greater risk of being socially excluded in society than other members (UNESCO, 2009; Coe & Wapling, 2010; Shanimon &

Rateesh, 2014; Islam, 2015). Other researchers also approved this idea. For instance, Tobias and Mukhopadhyay (2016) explained that PWDs consisted of the most vulnerable segments of human society to social exclusion. Additionally, the world disability report delivered by World Health Organization showed that PWDs constitutes among uniquely vulnerable section of society to social exclusion (WHO, 2011).

In the Ethiopian context, studies showed that PWDs face exclusion from gaining access to education, employment and housing as well as social participation due to tremendous structural, environmental and social-cultural challenges, or barriers. More specifically, the study conducted by Tirusew (2005) revealed that PWDs have limited participation in community affairs and social occasions such as local community organization, festivals, wedding ceremony, and funerals activities mainly due to deep-rooted traditional beliefs and misconceptions including fear of stigmatization. In another instance, the study about the conception of disability and challenges of PWDs conducted by Adugna (2015) in Sebeta District Southwestern Zone of Oromiya Regional State showed that they often imposed limitations on the day-to-day activities, and thus they are highly vulnerable to exclusion due to communities' misconceptions and stereotypes. Other local disability studies conducted by Dagnachew (2011) and Almaz (2012) also indicated that PWDs are excluded from involvement and participation in development sectors in the country due to environmental, socio-cultural and information barriers.

Methodologically, literatures showed that inclusion and exclusion (social) lack strong ideological orientation (Rawal, 2008). Also, these concepts have no scientifically proven measurements and sound theoretical frames in research (Kadun, & Gadkar, 2014; Gordon *et al.,* 2017). Likewise, this study is not theory driven and guided. In fact, researchers like Dominelli (2002) ascertained that Anti-Oppression Theory (AOT) can highlight general essence in understanding social exclusion as a socially threatening or oppressive phenomenon. Within the realm of AOT, the paradigm of Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) is a much needed perspective that mainly aimed at promoting social inclusionary practices in equality, social justice and rights-based approach (Baines, 2011). Additionally, advocates of models of disability highlighted that the Social Model of Disability (SMD) can precisely inform about how individuals or groups become socially included and excluded (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). In research practices, these underpinnings can be installed to serve different purposes. In this study, the theoretical

perspectives of AOT/AOP and SMD are employed as the basis of knowledge and detail explanation of my study. Nonetheless, these underpinnings are not used to drive or guide the current study. Instead, they are to contribute in the following ways: Primarily, these would validly inform the findings of the study and thereby to substantiate the scientific nature of the study. Secondly, the SMD in particular is employed in this study to identify the theme of data analysis about the challenges related to social exclusion, or barriers to social inclusion. In relation to this, researchers have noted that this model of disability is often used to examine the challenges, or barriers that can impact on the day-to-day functioning and inclusion of PWDs (Tugli, Klu & Morwe, 2014). Thirdly, these perspectives are utilized in this study to provide directions to propose strategies of combating social exclusion and promoting social inclusion, which is, of course, one of the objectives of the current study. Further discussion on AOT/P and SMD are clearly presented in Chapter 2 of the dissertation (see the detail in section 2.10.2).

The aforesaid discussion implies that disability-based social inclusion and exclusion can be comprehended on the basis of the prominent theoretical models of disability. Cognizant of shaping our views regarding PWDs, medical and social models have noticeable roles in understanding disability-related concepts, contemporaneous problems, challenges and how they experience the challenges in their everyday life (Retief & Letšosa, 2018, p. 1). Their explanation showed that these models of disability are perspectives that play a number of important purposes to understand disability, terminologies linked to disability, disability experiences, and casual attributions in the contexts of disability. In the one hand, medical model of disability (MMD) provides assertions that disability or impairment of the person is as a disease, and it is tangibly a bad situation that predominantly adheres to medical issues (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). Based on the MMD, the person with a disability or his /her family is faulty and more responsible for the disability and problems concurrent to his/her disability (Shakespeare, Watson & Alghaib, 2017). Accordingly, this model ascertains that disability and its concurrent challenges (problems) basically happened due to the inability (incapability) of the person to adapt, or adjust his/her socio-cultural, physical, structural components of the environment where he/she normally lives.

On the other hand, the SMD claimed disability as a socio-culturally constructed phenomenon (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). In this approach, the emphasis is not the individual and/or his disability (Oliver, 2013). Instead, the social, cultural, physical environmental and

institutional barriers made the person become disabled (Shakespeare *et al.*, 2017). Professionally, my stand is consonant with the premises of the SMD. The reason behind involves my strong believe that PWDs are vulnerable to various challenges and environmental trajectories by virtue of not the existing disability or their inability to withstand the challenges or problems. As a substitute, it is due to attitudinal barriers and challenges related to environmental inaccessibility, which are beyond their control. Contrary to this, some empirical evidences asserted that MMD plays its own role for these individuals' social and environmental challenges including social exclusion. For example, researchers like Tobias and Mukhopadhyay (2017) and Beteinaki (2019) were favoring this model and identified that the individual (personal) factors such as personal characteristics, presence of disability, severity of disability and poor skill of the individual (s) contributed a lot for social exclusion. In this regard, the reason behind the individual's exclusion is the individual himself/herself and related individual factors such as disability and its severity, or onset, low performance, poor skills, and the like (Kim, Kim, Shin &Yoo, 2013).

Therefore, it is highlighted above that the conspicuous models of disability are vital to particularly provide the spectrum of understanding social exclusion/inclusion in the contexts of disability. In this vein, I understand that authors in the areas of social inclusion/exclusion have provided conceptualizations to these terms standing on the positions of either of the medical or social model of disability. First and for most, Amartya Sen's attempt of demystifying the concept of social exclusion is closely related to medical model of disability. According to him, social exclusion indicates individuals', or groups' capability deprivation which further removes them from access to the good life or the means to acquire it (Sen, 2000: 6). In A. Sen's capability approach of social exclusion, being excluded is the incapability of the individual to participate in activities, form interactions and long-lasting relationships with others around (Sen, 2000). Inversely, being included in relationships and activities is determined on the basis of the capabilities of individuals or groups.

Based on Sen's conception, the notion of social exclusion is used to describe a situation by which an individual or certain group becomes powerless or unable to normally function as other individuals in the mainstream society. Other authors also advocated Sen's capability approach of understanding social exclusion. For example, Wazed (2012) and Rawal (2008) noted that specific individuals or groups of the French society were socially separated from the

mainstream society because they were incapable to work and maintain the requirements of social lives and systems of society. Therefore, it is noted above that when the term social exclusion was originally used, and understood by R. Lenoire to simply imply inability of individuals or groups to adapt themselves with their environments, lack of control of the individual on their own lives, being powerless and voiceless in the socio-cultural environment of the French society (Kabeer, 2000). In turn, this also shows that the initial conception of social exclusion corresponds to the MMD. Importantly, the MMD claims that social exclusion is a condition that happened due to individual factors (Burchardt, Grand & Piachaud, 2002). In total, Sen' capability approach has pointed out that exclusion is the indicator of lack, or failure of capability that subsequently demonstrates powerlessness, or voiceless-ness of individuals, or groups to successfully meet the demands of his/her own environment (Sen, 2000). In this vein, the MMD asserted that the disability of the person is a medical problem, and he/she may become vulnerable to social exclusion when he/she is unable to achieving life demands in the environment where he/she normally resides (Retief & Letšosa, 2018).

On the contrary, other authors conceptualized social inclusion/exclusion from the perspectives of SMD. As argued before, the social and environmental challenges are understood as major contributive factors to social exclusion of individuals or groups of people (Subrayen, 2011). This implies that individual (personal) factors of risk are not considered in SMD. Instead, this perspective claimed that the people's disability and related problems are resulted due to the social, cultural, physical or institutional barriers that are beyond the control of individuals (Oliver, 2013). Thus, unlike the MMD, the SMD asserts that the environment is the disabling world. As a consequence, Levitas and her colleagues' framework of multidimensional approach of analysis to social exclusion decisively yielded a wide-ranged comprehension of social exclusion through the scope of SMD. As known through reviewing literatures and research studies, these authors provided a general (global) perspective and analytical framework to understand a generic concept of social exclusion.

In academic arenas, the term social inclusion and exclusion are attracting the attention of many researchers and academicians (Harrist & Bradley, 2002; Kearney, 2009). This shows that the concepts are closely linked with research, and academic disciplines such as education, sociology, social work, psychology, and economics (Pierson, 2002; Ziyauddin & Kasi, 2009;

DeWall, 2013). Thus, social inclusion and exclusion are not only emotional and social issues, but also academic issues (Kadun, & Gadkar, 2014; Gordon *et al.,* 2017). In particular, these terms received considerable attention and contemporary research agenda alongside the field of special needs and inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Kearney, 2009). In this academic discipline, the agenda of disability-based social inclusion and exclusion of students with disabilities (SWDs) are vastly explained in various literatures and empirical works and have recently galvanized teachers and researchers (Sayeed, 2002). As a member of the academia, these concepts have engrossed my professional orientation and knocked the door of my heart and mind to conduct a research on the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion of blind students in higher education institutions in Ethiopia.

In particular focus to education settings, numerous literatures and research studies showed in abundance that SWDs that are found in the inclusive conditions are highly vulnerable to social exclusion in the classrooms or education compounds (Kearney, 2009; Low, 2009; UNESCO, 2009; Holmes, 2011; Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl, & Petry, 2012; Tessa, 2016). In this regard, plenty of other research studies chiefly reported that there is exclusion in the name of inclusion (Harrist & Bradley, 2002; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Lourens, 2015). This shows that the mere physical integration of SWDs in education settings is not a guarantee for their full and real social inclusion (Hall, 2010; Bossaert *et al.,* 2012; Hewett, Keil, & Douglas, 2015). On top of this, Alemayehu (2018) stated the following focusing more on what physical placement of SWDs in the context of inclusive education really mean: "**…ይህ አስተሳሰብና ድርጊት ግን ፈጽሞ አካቶ ሊሆን አይችልም፡፡ የአካቶ የመጀመርያ ዕርምጃ ግን ሊሆን ይችላል**" (**ገጽ** 20), which can be translated as [*"…the practice of inclusion does not mean the physical placement of SWDs in regular education settings/classrooms, but it can be a preliminary step for further inclusionary actions"]* (p.20). Therefore, proper social inclusion is beyond the ordinary physical integration of SWDs with non-disabled peers in mainstream education classrooms and settings.

The above local and international studies showed that in addition to physical placement, meaningful inclusion of SWDs in education settings needs to involve real physical inclusion, social inclusion, academic inclusion and psychological (i.e., emotional and spiritual) inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Human, 2010; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018). Primarily, physical inclusion involves physical integration of SWDs with other students

without disabilities in specific education settings like classrooms (Heyder *et al.,* 2020). In Ethiopia, it is certain that the SWDs who have got the opportunity to attend higher education have access to physical spaces in the classrooms and campus settings as other students without disabilities. Nevertheless, it is noted above that their mere physical placement in education settings with other students without disabilities does not necessarily warrant their real social inclusion unless the social, academic and psychological aspects of their inclusion are not effectively fulfilled. Secondly, the social aspect of social inclusion involves the following features: In one hand, it includes the participation of SWDs in major social activities such as clubs and sports that generally encompasses part of the social lives of students without disabilities (Katz, Porath, Bendu, & Epp, 2012; Dare & Nowicki, 2018). Thus, this aspect of social inclusion solely involves social dimensions such as social participation or social integration (Koster, Nakken, Pijl & Houten, 2009; Bossaert *et al.*, 2013). The most up-to-date research evidences also showed that the social aspect of social inclusion covers the interaction and relationships of SWDs with other non-disabled peers, classroom teachers and other staff members in the education settings (Heyder *et al.,* 2020). Their explanation shows that true social inclusion involves basic social components of inclusion such as valuing (respecting) SWDs, acknowledging their roles and activities, acceptance and welcoming them.

Thirdly, academic (pedagogical) inclusion contains access to curriculum in terms of teaching-learning materials, resources and classroom teachers' teaching methods (Lewis, 2009; Kearney, 2009). It also involves participation in core curricular, or academic activities; and equal access to the teachers' teaching-learning processes as other students (Dare & Nowicki, 2018). In this regard, a synthesis of recent literature showed that academic inclusion involves promoting inclusive pedagogy, which is an equitable teaching-learning approach in the classrooms and the provision of academic support services in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms (Sanger, 2020). Fourthly, psychological inclusion implies the students' sense of being included in the mainstream classrooms or education settings (Heyder *et al.,* 2020). To be truly included, these students should have positive feelings of being included in the mainstream education settings or classrooms just despite their disabilities (Human, 2010). In this respect, other previous researchers like Hall (2009) also revealed that one of the psychological aspects of inclusion is feeling belonging to certain individuals, groups or social settings. However, research evidences revealed that those physically placed in education settings together with their peers without

disabilities often face social exclusion (Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Alhammadi, 2014; Teferi, 2016). These studies showed that being physically integrated with other students without disabilities; the SWDs are more likely to be vulnerable to social exclusion in terms of the physical, social, academic and psychological aspects of exclusions. In the first place, physical exclusion is a complete exclusion that involves total rupture of relationships, or being invisible for a while or total physical non-existence (Silver, 2007; Levitas *et al.,* 2007). According to them, such exclusion is the most severe and daunting form of social exclusion. It can also be exhibited in education settings. For instance, Kearney (2009) analyzed that physical exclusion from the school settings involves school drop outs, school failure or withdrawal. In addition, the study conducted at higher education institutions (HEIs) by Streeter (2007) showed that the physical exclusion of students with visual impairment (SWVI) consisted of their detachment from involvement and participation in clubs and other social activities.

Consequently, the physical aspect of social exclusion involves being out of the sight of others that comprises keeping an individual or group out of social situations (Williams, Forgas & Hippel; 2005; Silver, 2007; Levitas *et al.,* 2007). Nevertheless, most literatures clarified that such an absolute form of social exclusion was worse in the past than in the 21st century (Mathieson *et al.,* 2008; Omtzigt, 2009; Omtzigt 2009). These days, there are changes in the communication of the idea of social inclusion and exclusion as a result of the implementation of different directives, and policies and society's progressive improvement in attitudes, knowledge and awareness about disability (Gordon *et al.,* 2017). However, it may not be surprising that social exclusion is still practiced in more passive ways, forms and manifestations (Lindsay, & Mcpherson, 2011). According to them, the SWDs who are pursuing their education together with their peers without disabilities are highly vulnerable to either of the academic, social or psychological aspects of social exclusion. They also reflected that such exclusions occurs more systematically with no blatant action of exclusion as the students are still physically placed together with other students without disabilities. Secondly, academic (pedagogical) exclusion is the aspect of social exclusion in education settings that the SWDs experienced most (Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013). Such exclusion involves lack of access for these students' to curriculum pertaining to the teachers' teaching-learning processes, curriculum materials, and resources as other able-bodied peers (Alhammadi, 2014). In this instance, studies conducted by Subrayen (2011) showed that SWDs lack equal access to the teachers' teaching style, presentation and method of teaching and

thereby remain marginal in their own classroom settings during the teaching-learning process. Adding to this, other researchers noted that the SWDs are mostly denied of equal access to choose their field of studies of their interests (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007; Biniam, 2016). In addition, academic exclusion includes low participation of SWDs in core academic/curricular activities connected to the classrooms. In relation to this, Kasiram and Subrayen (2013) noted that SWVI have poor participation in classroom related academic activities such as group works or assignments. Thirdly, the social aspect of social exclusion indicates exclusion from social relationships and interaction, and social participation (Paavilainen, 2017). In other words, it is found through literature reviews that denial of equal access to relationships, opportunities or participation is one of the social aspects of exclusion (Burchardt et *al.*, 2002; Silver, 2007).

Alike, social exclusion researchers reminded that the social dimension of social exclusion involves lack of participation of individuals in social relationships and activities that are widely available for the majority of people in specific social settings (Levitas *et al.,* 2007). Their explanation on the social aspect of social exclusion connotes the following two important points: In one hand, social exclusion involves poor participation in social relationships such as conducting free dialogues, conversations and exchange of ideas with others, and hence it represents inadequate reciprocal relationships, lack of social exchanges and sharing experiences with others. On the other hand, social exclusion also entails absence of, or limited access to involvement and participation in customarily prescribed social activities and events together with other individuals. Thus, individuals or group of people are socially excluded when he/she has limited or poor participation, or non-existence of participation in social relationships and activities in specific settings (Levitas *et al.*, 2009, p.9).

Finally, psychological (emotional) exclusion involves the feeling aspect of social exclusion. For instance, Hall (2009) noted that psychological exclusion involves deficit in a sense of belonging to certain social groups or situations. According to Hall, psychological exclusion is the emotional aspect of social exclusion that happening when an individual or groups lack a sense of being belonged to other groups or social settings. Other researchers like Subrayen (2011) also noted that the emotional aspect of social exclusion consisted of negative feelings about the specific social situations. Most recently, Heyder et al. (2020) disclosed that the psychological aspect of social exclusion involves socio-emotional disintegration, and it is mostly

difficult to achieve in real contexts as it is related to students' feelings. Most importantly, my synthesis of the research studies conducted about the social inclusion/exclusion of SWDs cited above suggested that the phenomenon of social exclusion of SWDs who are physically placed in the mainstream education settings together with other studnets without disabilities is not well-researched, and hence it is an urgent area of investigation. In this vein, DeWall (2013) noted that the topic of social exclusion among learners with disabilities is understudied, and represents a neglected area of research. As an alternative, more emphasis is given to its opposite twin- social inclusion. In that light, the issue of social inclusion of SWDs in general educational settings is a much-discussed topic in Ethiopia, and worldwide, too. The reason behind is that once these students are physically placed in the mainstream education institutions, their social inclusion is taken for granted and accepted as a normal practice of inclusion. With this in mind, researchers have called for research in the area of the social inclusion and exclusion of SWDs who are already physically placed in the education settings and classrooms (Papasotiriou & Windle, 2012; Urnikyte, 2017).

In post-secondary education settings, studies abundantly portrayed that despite the physical placement in the campuses and classrooms, blind students are among the most vulnerable students to social exclusion (Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Alhammadi, 2014; Lourens, 2015; Hewett *et al.,* 2015). Other researchers also showed that the social inclusion status of blind students is often doubtful and questionable as they do not often feel included in the inclusive education setups (Anderson, 2006; Human, 2010; Wainman, 2010; Parvin, 2015; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Beteinaki, 2019). To this end, the following convictions were understood from the amalgamation of aforementioned international studies: Firstly, though included in the classrooms and campuses of HEIs, these learners do not truly mix with the sighted peers and remain outsiders due principally to their vision loss, and other concurrent problems and challenges. Secondly, they are socially rejected by their sighted peers mainly for being a different member with visual impairment. Thirdly, they often tend to isolate themselves from relationships and interactions with sighted students. Finally, they have less access to friendliness with the fully sighted peers.

Therefore, the physical placement of these students at HEIs is not a guarantee for their meaningful social inclusion. In this sense, local studies also exhaustively displayed that the

SWVI who are placed at higher education settings miss important social relationships, and become unable to participate in extracurricular activities that are commonly available and essential for other students without disabilities (Yohannes, 2015; Biniam, 2016; Teferi, 2016; Kahsay, 2017; Tilahun, 2017; Mulugeta & Mekuriaw, 2017). I intensively reviewed these national studies and finally realized the following points: (a) these students who are placed in a regular class and campuses of HEIs are still sufferers of social exclusion; (b) they are not meaningfully integrated with their sighted peers, and they are at risk of becoming socially excluded, and (c) except for the physical aspects, the rest components of social inclusion are still problematic. Peculiarly, I understood from these empirical evidences that the real social inclusion is beyond their physical placement, and achieving full inclusion requires further scrutiny, and courses of actions and measures.

In Ethiopia, the government is striving to show commitment to promoting the social inclusion of all SWDs including those with visual impairments in regular education settings through ratifying various international covenants and adopting them into its different national legal and policy frameworks, strategies and programs. In this sense, Yared (2008) identified that the country has ratified many international policy frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975); the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), and it integrated them into its various national policy frameworks. On the basis of these international documents, a number of local policy frameworks such as the Ethiopian national Special Needs and Inclusive Education Strategy, the Education and Training Policy and Higher Education Proclamation No.650/2009 were enacted to promote the inclusion, equal rights, and full participation of SWDs in all schooling levels including higher education institutions (Teferi, 2016). First and for most, the country's Special Needs Education Strategy has proclaimed that all SWDs have the right to obtain education and training with other non-disabled students in all schooling levels including HEIs (MOE, 2012). As the matter of fact, the existence of such disability-specific national legislative measures or actions, frameworks and policies contributed a lot for opening access and equalization of opportunities for PWDs (UNESCO, 2009). Upon this idea, Teferi (2016) unveiled that the strategy primarily pledged to (a) ensuring equal learning (educational) opportunities; (b) promoting the social inclusion of SWDs in their academic and social lives in the education system; and (c) creating conducive and friendly educational environment to all

SWDs at all levels of education and training including HEIs. In addition, the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation No.650/2009, Article 40 (1) states that higher education institutions shall make, to the extent possible, their facilities and programs amendable to use with relative ease in the interests of all SWDs (FDRE, 2009, p.5005). Moreover, public universities have embedded different policy issues, provisions and they have legislatively proclaimed the rights of their SWDs in an attempt to provide equalization of opportunities in their social and academic lives. For instance, Debre Birhan University has its own legislation that states that SWDs have rights to access various opportunities (Debre Birhan University Senate Legislation, 2012). On the basis of its legislation, the university has declared a special policy on Inclusive Education and Support under Chapter 11, Article 137 and states as the following:

> *The University in general and various academic units as well as operational Departments of the University in particular shall be vested in the responsibility to provide inclusive education [opportunities] and support in an attempt to facilitate the active involvement of students with visual and hearing impairments, students with physical challenges and students with intellectual disability and the likes* (p.104). [Emphasis added].

This shows that the university has a legally proclaimed access to all SWDs focusing on inclusive education and support provision with an aim to enhance their equal rights and inclusion. The senate legislation has emphasized that all students with and without disabilities of the university have the right to lead a campus life free of any forms of oppressive conditions that affect their safety, rights and dignity; and achieve high academic and social goals and wishes as other able-bodied students (Debre Birhan University Senate Legislation, 2012).

Additionally, Addis Ababa University has determined that all SWDs, regardless of their disabilities, have equal rights to lead an active and independent campus life as that of the able-bodied students (Addis Ababa University Senate Legislation, 2019, p.154). In particular, the university's legislation under Article 171.2 has stated the following about the rights of students with disabilities including those with blindness:

- **Sub-article 171.2.1:**Making its facilities and programs amenable to use with relative ease by students with disabilities;
- **Sub-article 171.2.2:** Relocating classes, developing alternative testing procedures, and providing different educational auxiliary aids in the interest of students with disabilities;

- **Sub-article 171.2.3:**Taking into account the interests of students with disabilities in its building designs, campus physical landscape, computers and other infrastructures;
- **Sub-article 171.2.4:** Working towards elimination of physical hazards within its premises and its vicinities; and
- **Sub-article 171.2.5:** Ensuring that students with disabilities get academic assistance, including tutorial sessions, exam time extensions and deadline extensions.

As shown above, the articles of the University's legislation indicate that all SWDs have equal rights to independently lead their campus life as other students without disabilities.

As a whole, the national policy issues and legal frameworks, higher education proclamations and university legislations discussed above primarily aimed at promoting the rights, inclusion, equal opportunity and participation of all SWDs. The existence of national and institutional provisions, legislative actions, programs or strategies played great roles for these studnets to access higher education in Ethiopia (Yared, 2008). However, Ethiopian researchers expressed their dreads that despite the existence of legislative actions, and provisions, SWDs including those with visual impairments are still facing tremendous challenges that seriously impact their real social inclusionary practices (Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016, Mulugeta & Mekuriaw, 2017; Getachew, 2018; Asmerom, 2019). In this particular instance, a study conducted by Yared (2008) at Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar Universities indicated that though there are different university-based policies and provisions, the SWDs are not able to exercise their disability rights as claimed. In broad spectrum, Yared's study portrayed that there is discrepancy in the institutional policy proclamations and the reality on the ground. To this end, he concluded that even if university disability rights, policy and provision are boldly available, their implementation is still insignificant.

Other studies conducted at different HEIs in the country also reported that despite the availability of disability rights laws and institutional legislative measures, the SWDs are still encountering dozen of diverse academic, environmental and social challenges in their own classrooms and campuses that can immensely affect their social inclusion (Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016). Adding to this, Biniam (2016) revealed that SWVI in particular are still facing social, academic and environmental obstacles that affect their social interaction and relationships, and eventually act to socially exclude them. Biniam's study generally connotes that

these learners are still excluded in most facets of their social and academic lives due to academic, social, institutional and physical challenges. Moreover, Teferi (2016) uncovered the following specific instances: Firstly, these students lack equal opportunities to access social facilities in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms, compared to the sighted students. Secondly, they found it difficult to have full and fair access to all social components that are common for other sighted peers. Finally, these students lack social opportunities to establish, develop or sustain relationships and participate with their sighted peers and also with other members of the university. In the other vein, the research-based evidences gained from the Education and Training Roadmap of Ethiopia indicated that the higher education proclamation and subsequent university legislations do not adequately address the issue of access, full inclusion and equity for learners with disabilities (MOE, 2017). This shows, however, that there are inconsistencies between national and institutional legal and policy frameworks concerning real inclusion, rights and provisions for SWDs in the education systems in the country (Yared, 2008). In this vein, other researchers concluded that there is still a serous gap in praxis in the national education system (Belay, Fantahun & Missaye, 2015). Based on their analysis, it can be understood that gaps still exist between policies, the rhetoric and the practice (reality) on the ground in Ethiopian education system. This is also evidenced through a recent research study conducted by Asmerom (2019) that HEIs in Ethiopia are not able to fully addressing the queries related to social and academic challenges of the SWDs. According to him, these students have undesirable experiences due to factors like limited support, unresponsiveness of teaching and assessment practices to the needs of these students, and inaccessible physical environment that can affect their equalization of opportunities, social participation, interaction and relationships in comparison to the students without disabilities.

Therefore, despite the valuable steps, progressive efforts and commitments of the higher education sector toward enhancing social inclusion, the SWDs particularly those with visual impairment are still at greater risk of being excluded in contrast to their peers without disabilities (Yohannes, 2015; Biniam, 2016; Teferi, 2016). Blending these national research evidences, it can be argued that though these students are being physically integrated at higher education campuses and classrooms, their real social inclusion is not achieved yet. Even more, these researchers vividly explained their anxieties in two related ways. In one hand, the social inclusion of these students is still threatened. On the other hand, social exclusion is a common

occurrence and still remains a major issue in the education settings in Ethiopia. This also instigated me to become eager to explore the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion at two public HEIs in Ethiopia: Addis Ababa and Debre Birhan Universities. Of course, further initiating factors to conduct this study are discussed in section 1.3 below. To this end, I found it quite convincing to look and glean the thick description of the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students who are physically placed in mainstream classrooms and campuses of these institutions.

As an emergent researcher, I perceived that a qualitative research methodology that specifically involves descriptive phenomenological research approach is valuable and deemed more important for me to study as I want to deeply look into the phenomena that were not properly conceptualized in prior local research studies to refer to (Morrow, Rodriguez & King, 2015; Wirihana, Welch, Williamso, Christensen, Bakon, & Craft, 2018). It is described in Chapter Three of this dissertation that the prime goal of such descriptive phenomenological research design is consistent with the overall objective of my study, which is an exploration and description of social inclusion and exclusion amongst blind students and how these experiences occurred on the basis of their emotions, perspectives or subjective points of views.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

The fly caught in the spider web is included, but victimized, McCollum (1998: 184)

The entry into higher education is an important opportunity for blind students to meet new students, participate in many socializing activities and form relationships with the fully sighted students and other university members. In certainty, the physical placement of these students at HEIs in Ethiopia has given them the access to physical presence in the classroom settings and campuses. Nevertheless, it is repeatedly noted in the background part of this dissertation that physical placement *per se* does not guarantee their full and effective social inclusion at such education settings (Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016; Biniam, 2016; Tilahun, 2017; Mulugeta & Mekuriaw, 2017; Asmrom, 2019). Based on these studies, I generally become conscious that the real social inclusion of students with severe visual impairment in the higher education settings is still in question and remained a controversial issue.

In a related manner, international studies revealed that being included in inclusive education settings; these students faced denial of equalization of opportunities pertaining to

interactions, relationships, friendships and participation in social activities as compared to their peers without visual impairments (Anderson, 2006; Subrayen, 2011; Wadegaonkar, Sonawane, & Uplane, 2015; Oliva, 2016; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Beteinaki, 2019). More significantly, the synthesis of these research evidences showed that these students are: (a) less preferred for companionships compared to the sighted peers; (b) systematically prevented from opportunities to participate in regular activities; (c) not likely to attain the same psychological, social, and academic benefits as their sighted classmates; (d) not found in the atmosphere of mutual respect; and (e) remain outsiders from involvement and participation in formally and informally organized social and academic activities. From practical points of views, blind students who are interviewed for this study are found physically placed in Addis Ababa and Debre Birhan Universities with thousands of other students without disabilities who come from different regions in the country. In essence, it is noted above in local and international research evidences that irrespective of the access to physical spaces, the true and meaningful social inclusion of these students who are found in physically inclusive conditions is not fully achieved yet. This prompted me to posit a conviction that they are still experiencing the opposite social malady- exclusion.

In this particular sense, a great amount of my understanding of social exclusion of blind students at higher education settings comes from the following sources: Firstly, my previous professional experiences at public college and university helped me to recall that blind students are often at greater risk of social exclusion. Before starting to pursue my doctoral study, I used to work as an instructor of education and psychology courses at a Teacher Education College for five years, and also at a university for about three years. Throughout my teaching career, I have had the chance to teach SWVs together with other fully sighted students. This allowed me to enormously observe the situation that being physically placed together with their sighted classmates in the same classroom environment, most students with severe visual impairments did not have equal opportunity to follow teachers' instructional process as the sighted peers. This strengthens my understanding that these learners are more vulnerable to social exclusion due to various challenges related to the classroom teacher, sighted peers and the physical environment.

Secondly, my practical experience of learning together with these students during my studentship in a range of educational settings (elementary, high schools and universities) also

helped me to become acquainted with two remembrances: In one hand, they were not actively engaged in the friendliness formation, and classroom related activities such as assignments, classwork and project works. On the other hand, it is also my memory that (a) they kept invisible in school-based recreational activities, sports and clubs; (b) spent most of their time in silence and with their head down, and (c) observed mostly with other blind students than with their sighted counterparts. Thus, in addition to the research reports reviewed for this study, my professional experiences, and practical observations echoed that these students were facing the incidence of what is indicated in the breathtaking proverb indicated above. Based on this proverb, one can understand that SWVIs are physically placed in the same contexts together with other students without visual impairments However, they are trapped in the classrooms and campuses where there are challenges for their learning, relationships and participation as the spider's net is powerful to catch their prey. In the meantime, I made certain that their experiences of social inclusion and exclusion in the broader higher education settings are important subjects to scrutiny mainly aiming at two avenues: (a) exploring the lived experiences by which blind students are socially included in and excluded from, and (b) identify contributing risk factors and/or challenges by which these students become socially excluded.

Therefore, studying the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students who are undergoing their undergraduate studies at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities constitutes the crux of the issue in the present study. As discussed in the next few paragraphs, my growing enthusiasm to look into experiences of social inclusion and exclusion of blind students was mainly driven by the following initiated factors: Firstly, my heart felt interest to conduct the study comes from my professional eagerness to show efforts toward addressing the problem of social exclusion. It gave me a sense that despite the earnest attempt to include these students in the classrooms and campus settings, peculiar emphasis is not given in regards to the reduction and elimination of the problem of social exclusion. I think the reasons behind the lack of attention in this area include, but not limited to the lack of independent policy, peculiar guideline that prohibits the practice of social exclusion, and thereby promote social inclusion. Suggestively, it is likely in the higher education system of the country that more accentuation and prior emphasis is given to their physical integration, students' administrative issues and fulfillment of their basic needs such as food, dormitory accommodation, and disability grants (MOE, 2012). Inevitably, I have found it more imperative that unless blind students' experiences

on the phenomenon of social exclusion is documented, and evidence-based awareness is created about this issue, it will undoubtedly affect the effective implementation of the quality of inclusive education in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. In addition to this, if this problem is not studied well, appropriate intervention strategies can't be designed to promote the social inclusion of these students at these higher education settings. In further related views, I firmly believed that leaving it unstudied would aggravate exclusionary practices that subsequently can threaten the attempt to the realization of the future agenda of building inclusive university, which is one of a national priority area of the country (MOE, 2017). This inspired me to consider that exploring the blind students' experiences of social inclusion and exclusion is the biggest agenda. The second prompting factor to conduct the present study is originated from my need to filling the existing knowledge gap in the: (a) specific area of social inclusion and exclusion in the context of blind studnets, and (b) research methodologies most preferably used to conducting the study about the social inclusion and exclusion. These are highlighted in the following fewer paragraphs.

Primarily, I thought that this study would lay droplets of contributions in narrowing the knowledge gap in line with the epistemological view points. Through my search, I become certain that there appears to be a scarcity of substantial quantitative or qualitative empirical findings, published or unpublished thesis, dissertations or journal articles regarding the study of social inclusion and exclusion at Ethiopian higher education contexts. Then, I understood that there is still a gap on the researchers' epistemological instances as there is a dearth of research-based knowledge about the phenomena of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students. Essentially, I also intuited that there is a gap on the proper understanding of the subjects of the study as the basic reality about the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion is not known through research yet. More specifically, I found no organized or documented data, independent empirical study and research based explanations conducted in the area of social inclusion and exclusion of blind students in the study sites: Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. This also elevated my research interest and curiosity, and become another source of motivation to conduct the study.

In contrast, several disability studies have been conducted at Addis Ababa University, but majority of the studies covered the exploration of the academic profiles of SWVI rather than

explicating the social inclusionary or exclusionary practices. For example, Teferi (2016) has conducted a study about the challenges and prospects of inclusion of SWVI at Addis Ababa University (main campus), but his study emphasized more on the academic challenges of these learners. Similarly, Mulugeta and Mekuriaw (2017) conducted a study about the academic challenges of visually challenged female students in Addis Ababa University (main campus) and unearthed that these students faced tremendous challenges to their social and academic lives in the university. Also, Biniam (2016) explored the experience of SWVI at Addis Ababa University (main campus) focusing on assessment of their academic experiences, and reported that these students faced serious challenges pertaining to their academic lives compared to students without disabilities. Unfortunately, none of the above local studies shed critical light on the experiences social inclusion and exclusion of SWVI. And yet, I was not able to locate any disability studies that particularly focus on an embodied phenomenological account of social inclusion and exclusion among SWDs in general and blind students in particular. Unluckily, to my best knowledge and effort I found no research studies conducted in the areas around social inclusion or exclusion of SWVI at Debre Berhan University. Finally, the unavailability of substantial research works that adequately shows the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion left me to think that these areas are unexplored in these universities.

Alternatively, there are comprehensive research studies on different issues other than social inclusion and exclusion in other HEIs in the country. To mention some, Yared (2008) studied about policy and provision for SWDs in HEIs of Ethiopia, and displayed that student with visual impairment face academic, physical and social barriers. Still, his study did not establish the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among the learners with visual impairments. In the same fashion, Yohannes (2015) studied the learning experiences of SWVI in Mekelle and Hawassa Universities and found that these students were not well integrated with the sighted peers. Nevertheless, his study was not able to sufficiently depicting the picture of the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion of these students. In community settings, Tamiru (2017) has conducted a study about causes and effects of social exclusion of ‘pot makers’ Southern Ethiopia and revealed that social exclusion is mainly resulted due to attitudinal barriers and it has far reaching social and cultural consequences on victims in society. Nevertheless, his findings did not reflect experiences of social inclusion and exclusion of students as it is conducted in non-education settings. Most recently, Asmirom’s (2019) studied the overall

experiences of SWDs in four dimensions (academic experiences, social experiences, physical experiences and policy environments) in three selected higher education institution Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, Hawassa and Haramaya Universities) and conclusively revealed that these HEIs were undesirable to these students due to factors like limited support, unresponsiveness of teaching and assessment practices to their needs, inaccessible physical environment, and absence of disability related inclusive policy at institutional level. Still, his study did not blatantly outline these students' experiences of social exclusion and inclusion. As a whole, most of the bulk of existing local studies in higher education spheres focused more on studying the academic challenges of SWDs including those with visual impairments. These studies did not either identified the experiences, or forms of social inclusion or exclusion at HEIs in the country. Nonetheless, as explained in the background section of this dissertation, Ethiopian researchers forwarded their hesitations that though physically placed in the classrooms and campus settings together with the fully sighted peers the students with profound visual impairments are still vulnerable to social exclusion.

Generally speaking, I evaluated the local studies that the reported findings are not closely connected to my research objectives. That being so, the current study would presumably like to fill the existing epistemological gap pertaining to sufficiently producing knowledge in regards to the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion including how the blind students' experiences of social exclusion particularly happened at the selected higher education contexts in Ethiopia. In particular, this study is expected to address the knowledge (epistemological) gap in the phenomena understudy on the basis of the emic perspectives. In this vein, none of the local studies revealed research outcomes on the basis of the perspectives of blind studies. As an example, Teferi (2016) studied the inclusion of SWVI at Addis Ababa University on the basis of the perspectives of students, lecturers, and university managers including department heads, deans of faculties and student affairs. Likewise, other studies did not solely involve the views of blind students in their attempt to contribute to knowledge in the field of profession and practice. This shows that previous studies reviewed in the dissertation laid limited contribution in the production of knowledge through constructing the view points, or perspectives of blind students.

The current study would be vitally different from the aforementioned local research studies because it primarily focused on the exploration and description of the lived experiences

of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students on the basis of their own perspectives (consciousness). For all intents and purposes, the study conducted on the basis of their views will provide a foundation to take into account their voice to propose strategies of combating social exclusion and promoting social inclusion. Secondly, the current study is expected to fulfill the crack in the methodological gap. Most of the local studies mentioned above are conducted applying different research methodologies such as cross sectional survey (Tamiru, 2017); case study design (Yohannes, 2015; Biniam, 2016); mixed-method research design (Yared, 2008; Asmerom, 2019), and case study approach using Delphi investigation method (Teferi, 2016). None of these empirical studies were conducted on the basis of the principle of qualitative phenomenological research approach. With this information in mind, the current study could add to the body of knowledge of research methodology about the application of descriptive phenomenological research design, which is the most recognized and highly valuable phenomenological research framework frequently employed: (a) when there is scarcity of research studies and subsequent knowledge gap in the area of the study (Suryani, Welch & Cox, 2016; Shosha, 2016), and (b) when the researcher is in need of an in-depth description of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009; Tufanaru, 2013; Morrow *et al.*, 2015; Wirihana *et al.*, 2018). Thus, the current study may contribute to methodological literatures about the application of descriptive phenomenological method of inquiry to explore and describe the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students at two higher education settings.

1.4. Research Questions

The overarching research question of the study asks: *What is the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?* To answer this principal research question, the following sub-research questions were posed:

1. What are the experiences of social inclusion for blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?

2. What are the experiences of social exclusion for blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?

3. How do blind students experience social exclusion in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?

4. What strategies can be proposed toward addressing social exclusion and thereby improving social inclusion at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?

1.5.Objectives of the Study

1.5.1. General Objective of the Study

The overall purpose of the study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion as experienced by blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities.

1.5.2. Specific Objectives of the Study

To achieve the above general objective, the following specific objectives were purported to:

1. explore the experiences of social inclusion for blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities.
2. explore the experiences of social exclusion for blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities.
3. identify challenging experiences of blind students as having contributed to social exclusion in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?
4. provide possible strategies of addressing social exclusion and thereby improving social inclusion at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The prime aim of the current study is an in-depth exploration into the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion amongst blind students at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. With this aim, it is likely that the findings of this study are expected to have importance for knowledge generation, practice and policy development. Primarily, it can be hoped that the findings of the study may have significance for knowledge production. As mentioned in section 1.3 above, I did not know one that has put the conceptualization of social inclusion and exclusion in place in the higher education settings in Ethiopia. To the best knowledge of mine, it becomes clear to me that the experience of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students is not significantly explored through research and hence so much is not known yet. Perhaps, the outcome of this study would have much more contribution as a knowledge base in the existing literature. In my opinion, understanding the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion and how these phenomena occurred in the classrooms and campus settings may particularly bring to

the attention of teachers, special needs education professionals and university authorities that the problem of social exclusion still exists in the so called inclusive education settings. In turn, it may add to their knowledge that the earnest attempt to promote the social inclusion of their students is being threatened by challenges related to social exclusion. Additionally, the study will be great importance for knowledge development in the areas of research methodologies. As one can easily understand the descriptive phenomenological research design employed in this study is vital to deeply look into the lived experience of research participants. Expectantly, research paradigms, philosophical instances, the research design, methodological approaches, methods and procedures I utilized in this study can be used as preliminary information for ambitious researchers who might have interest in the area of exploring lived experiences utilizing descriptive phenomenological research design. Put simply, this study may possibly provide good insights and research expertise about descriptive phenomenology to conduct disability studies in both education and community setting.

Secondly, the study can be of a paramount importance for practices. Hence, teachers and special needs education professionals and university line managers at large might become benefited from the outcomes of the study. This study may help them as an alarm to lay solid ground for designing evidence-based strategies to put efforts forward to promoting inclusionary practices. In similar light, studying the phenomena of social inclusion and exclusion may be used as impetus to rethink, and formulate courses of actions such as awareness creation and training interventions to abolish the problem of social exclusion. Finally, the outcome of this research can be used as a spring-board for policy formulation. Quite possibly, it may help the universities as a base to particularly (a) revisit their legislations to address the problem of social exclusion and thereby improve social inclusion, (b) design institution-based independent policies, particular provisions or guidelines to create accessible university atmosphere, and which stands for the equalization of opportunities in all respects of the academic and social lives of blind students.

1.7. Delimitation of the Study

As for this study, I wanted to rely on a deeper exploration and description of the phenomena of social inclusion and exclusion, and identifying the challenges that have contributed to the experiences of social exclusion on the basis of the perspectives of eight blind students (4 males and 4 females) who are attending their undergraduate studies within two public universities in

Ethiopia: Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. Again, the strategies that are vital to address social exclusion and thereby promote social inclusion in the classrooms and campuses of these learning institutions were proposed. To do so, a qualitative research genre of descriptive phenomenology was applied.

1.8. Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six different chapters that encompass multiple subject matters.

Chapter One: This chapter presents the introduction of the study covering background, statement of the problem, research questions and objectives that guided the study, description of the significance and delimitation of the study.

Chapter Two: This chapter entirely dedicated to a critical review of important scientific literatures and previous research evidences relevant to the current study. As well, it shows the summary of the review of the related literature chapter.

Chapter Three: In this chapter, the research paradigm, philosophical assumptions and the research approach and design employed were outlined. It also depicts the description of the study sites, methods and procedures of data collection. Furthermore, the participants and their selection process, procedures of data analysis and methods of establishing trustworthiness in the study are discussed. Finally, the ethical considerations employed in the study are described.

Chapter Four: This chapter primarily consisted of the presentation of key findings of the study via showing the thematic divisions about the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion, and how these phenomena occurred at higher education classrooms and campuses. Finally, it underlined a brief summary of important findings of the study.

Chapter Five: This chapter thoroughly provides the discussion of core findings of the study in relation to the previous studies, existing literature and my general reflections. Also, it contains the implications of the findings of the study for policy and practices.

Chapter Six: This chapter presents summary of the study, conclusions drawn, and recommendations made for concerned stakeholders. Next, it outlines the strengths and contributions of the study, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research avenues. At the end, it incorporated lists of references and relevant appendices itemized.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Chapter Overview

The main purpose of this literature review is to gain an understanding of existing literatures, empirical evidences and theoretical perspectives pertaining to the specific foci under investigation. Additionally, the chapter has provided contexts to achieve the intended objectives of the study. To this effort, different points were highlighted in the reviews. At the end, the summary of the main points discussed in the chapter are briefly presented.

2.2. Social Inclusion and Exclusion

Historically speaking, most of the existing literatures agree that social inclusion and exclusion were emerged in Europe in the 1970s (Silver, 2007). In particular, the term social exclusion was introduced into French social and political discourse by a René Lenoir (1927-2017) as early as 1974 (Levitas *et al.,* 2007; Wazed, 2012; Kadun & Gadkar, 2014; Gowda, 2014). Accordingly, it was initially coined from Lenoir's study called *Les Exclus*, which is a French term applied to describe the situation of certain individuals or groups of people such as the disabled (those who are mentally disordered and the physically handicapped), suicidal people, the elderly or age invalids, drug abusers, asocial individuals, or social misfits, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households and those with a wide range of serious social and economic problems (Lenoir, 1974 as cited in Silver, 2007). These people were administratively excluded by the French government from the social insurance systems (Labonté, Hadi & Kauffmann, 2011). In particular, Lenoir has described in his study that these sections of the French society fit the category of being socially excluded mainly because of their incapacity to normally live together with other parts of the French society (Sen, 2000; Rawal, 2008).

Unlike social exclusion, my attempt to significantly locate the particular details regarding to the historical root, specific information that pertains to when and by whom the concept of social inclusion was introduced and how it was initially conceptualized in the field was failed. The reason behind is that to the best of my search and knowledge, I was not able to get specific literatures that particularly show these points. In most general sense, it is claimed in literatures that social inclusion is introduced as a policy response to tackling social exclusion in Europe

(Mathieson *et al.,* 2008; Rawal, 2008; Wazed, 2012). Other literatures also showed that social inclusion refers to efforts of bringing those excluded in, and thus it is about closing physical, social and any other distances among individuals, or groups (Omtzigt, 2009). Since 19th century, these two comprehensive concepts were highly debated and topical matters in policy development and implementation across Western World (Mathieson *et al.,* 2008). For example, in 1990, the UK‘s government has widely used social inclusion and exclusion as a political and policy discourse to refer to families, groups or individual(s) who fall in poverty and unable to adapt ordinary living patterns, customs and activities (SEU, 2005; Levitas *et al.,* 2007; Silver, 2007). Later, the concepts are applied in other parts of the world as another way of understanding and explaining poverty, deprivation and disadvantage (Kabeer, 2000; Duffi, 2001; Wazed, 2012).

In general, the following four points can be understood from the aforesaid description highlighted about the historical root of social inclusion/exclusion: First, when social exclusion was first used, it refers to specific individuals or groups (those mentioned above) who were officially marginalized from the mainstream society in French population. In this sense, it was legally utilized to dislocate these people from the French society. In other words, its earliest conceptualization indicates total rupture, non-existence or physical disaffiliation of individuals or groups from relationships, interaction and participation with typical members. Therefore, the initial understanding of the term involves disconnection of individuals, or groups from social bond, institutions, and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of society in which they live (Silver, 2007). In this sense, it has the overtone of distancing them from the center of society and implies being physically pushed out to the edge (margin) against the mainstream community on the basis of race, language, ethnicity, poverty and the incapability to work and live together (SEU, 2005). Second, individuals or groups (noted above) fit the category of being socially excluded, and were formally listed out as vulnerable to “social exclusion” from the mainstream French society (Rawal, 2008, p.162). Thirdly, social inclusion was, in contrast, utilized as a policy response to addressing social exclusion.

Conclusively, in the previous years, probably before 40-50 years the phenomenon of social exclusion was more worse than in the 21st century as it was practiced in the form of total physical dislocation or complete rip apart of particular individuals or groups from normal social groups (Silver, 2007; Levitas *et al.,* 2007; Mathieson *et al.,* 2008). These days, there are

continual changes in the communication of social inclusion and exclusion as a result of the implementation of different policies and society's progressive improvement in attitudes, knowledge and awareness about disability (Gordon, Davey, Waa, Tiatia, & Waaka, 2017). However, despite the inclusionary efforts, social exclusion is still practiced in different forms and manifestations (Heyder *et al.,* 2020).

2.3. Understanding the Concepts

On the basis of social inclusion/exclusion literatures and research studies, it can be confirmed that there is no single meaning and definition for each concept. In this vein, Sayeed (2002) provided a concluding idea that there is no *one size fits all* approach in the conceptualization of social inclusion and exclusion. Some of the prominent authors of these terms underscored that there are diverse perspectives and ideologies regarding the conceptualization of these terms (Sen, 2000; 2004; Silver, 2007). Thus, these terms are vaguely defined in the existing literatures as their understanding varies across time, and they exists in different forms or occurrences taking into account the multifaceted dimensions of people's lives and day-to-day activities (Levitas *et al.,* 2007). Nonetheless, it is outlined in sub-section 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 below that these terms are demystified by different writers in different ways. As a result, it can be generally argued that social inclusion and exclusion lack contemporarily used comprehensive meanings and definitions that are consistently agreed by writers, researchers and academicians.

As part of the meaning and definition of social inclusion and exclusion, Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 shows selected review of literatures. The selection process involves relevance of the literatures for the current study. Specifically, the most frequently appearing and valuable meanings that coincide with the general objective of the study are given emphasis while selecting the literatures:

2.3.1. The Concept of Social Inclusion

It is found from extensively reviewed literatures and research studies that the concept of social inclusion has a range of conceptualizations. As depicted in Table 2.1 below, different researchers and writers have given different meanings and definitions in their continuous attempts to comprehend this vague term:

Table 2.1: Selected Definitions of Social Inclusion

Author(s)	Definition of Social Inclusion
Booth and Ainscow (2002)	It is a process that involves ways in which education institutions respond to and reflect the diverse needs of their students with disabilities on the principle of equity, equality and respect.
Cappo (2002)	It refers to the situation where all individual (s) feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met in comparison to other members of society in similar situation, or circumstances.
Jaeger and Bowman (2005)	It consisted of providing equal access to physical spaces, facilities, resources, technology, and the like that are widely available to the members of society in specific social settings.
Anderson (2006)	It entails establishing and sustaining relationships, reciprocity and developing friendships with others around, participation in activities and the opportunity for shared life experiences with others.
Nimmo (2008)	It is a process by which all students with and without disabilities physically placed, learns together and gain equal access to curriculum that pertains to classroom learning opportunities, teaching materials, resources and academic information and communication.
Rawal (2008)	It is the condition when individuals or groups have full and fair access to actively engage in activities and maintain positive relationships alongside with other non-disable individuals in their every-day life.
Hall (2009)	It is a process more concerned about having an equal access to places (physical and social) for participation, and relationships. This concept includes three elements: involvement in activities, maintaining reciprocal relationships, or interactions and having a sense of belonging.
World Bank (2013)	It is the process of enlightening the life of individuals or groups of people who are disabled, disadvantaged or any other social backgrounds through improving their ability, potential, opportunity, and dignity on an equal and respectful manner as other members of society (p.12).

Source: Compiled by the researcher (October, 2019)

The above table presents a review of research works and literatures about social inclusion that are found in the literature in the last few years. As outlined in the table, different authors have deduced different definitions of the same term. However, they failed to arrive on an agreeable definition that is common for all of them. This shows that there is no one linear fashion to follow to define it simply because the experience of being included among individuals or groups varies greatly with situations, and areas of inclusion (Hall, 2009).

Generally speaking, when I look all the possible definitions put forth by authorities, the following three points can be understood: (a) the definitions showed that being *included-in* is a process. In this sense, Silver (2007) noted that social inclusion involves a complex process, and hence it is not a state; (b) all the available definitions revolve around central ideas such as equal access or opportunities to, fair treatments, and meaningful relationships that involves being recognized by others around and active participation in activities. Contemporarily, these facets of inclusion reflect equity, mutual respect, and equality (Sanger, 2020).

2.3.2. The Concept of Social Exclusion

Social exclusion literatures showed that the term has multiple meanings and hence it lacks a globally agreed up definition (Silver, 2007; Levitas *et al.,* 2007; Mathieson *et al.,* 2008). Different authors justified different reasons for its myriad of definitions. As an instance, Sayeed (2002) affirmed that the possible reason for the continual re-definition, unstable meaning and lack of scientific agreement on social exclusion is its openness to many meanings, or interpretations. Accordingly, professionals and other bodies interested in the area of social exclusion can use it to refer to different things to serve their own purposes (Sayeed, 2002). Additionally, Daly (2006) forwarded that its understanding lacks synchronization because it was first introduced and utilized as a political and social policy discourse without an adequate definition and conceptualization. Besides, Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman (2007) ascribed that the fluidity of the term lends itself to various understandings and conceptualizations. Again, Millar (2007) posited an idea that the prime reason for its definitional problem includes its amorphous and elusive nature. Moreover, Silver (2007) asserted that the definition of the concept is highly problematic due to its breadth, elusiveness, elasticity and multidimensionality. Finally, Gordon et al. (2017) posited an idea that it can be understood in different styles and tones because it has no clear theoretical underpinnings, and scientifically proven methodological perspective that may

help to comprehend it. Therefore, the term is rarely clearly defined and hence it is an ambiguous concept with definitions lacking agreement and transferability (Mathieson *et al.,* 2008). By and large, different authors have proposed different definitions to the same term. After exploring a wide range of the existing literatures, I summarized the selected definitions in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2: Selected Definitions of Social Exclusion

Author	Definition of Social Exclusion
Sayeed (2002)	It is the process of preventing certain groups or individual(s) from entering in normal interactions and relationships and denied of full access to various rights, opportunities and resources normally available to members of the majority in the group, and which can play great roles for integration and interaction with members of society, or group.
Burchardt, Grand & Piachaud (2002)	It indicates the breakdown of an individual's social relationship, which involves living without companionship, lack of social support, few or no social contacts and non-participation in activities together with others by virtue of certain identities such as ethnicity, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, race and many others. It is resulted due to reasons beyond the individuals, or groups' control, and finally accompanied by social isolation and loneliness.
Levitas et al, (2007)	It is a process that mirrors the lack of access to participation in social relationships and activities that are common for others, and which plays integral roles for relationships and interactions with others in specific social settings.
Silver (2007)	It is the social process that represents social rupture, alienation or detaching groups and individuals from social relations, and preventing them from full and equal participation in the normatively prescribed activities that act as a basic components for establishing meaningful relationships and interactions in society in which they live. It also takes the form of separation of certain individuals or groups from institutions (e.g., schools, university, and the like) that are keys to social relationships, interactions and participation with others.

DeWall (2013)	It is a process that involves systematic denial or prevention of equal access to resources, goods and services which are common for the majority of society and that have key roles for relationships.
Kawamoto, Ura and Nittono (2015)	It is a social process that involves an intra and interpersonal process for the lack of social connections with others, and hence it includes concepts like ostracism, and social rejection.
Oliva (2016)	It is social phenomenon that involves physical displacement, detachment, invisibility (being out of site), or poor social participation.

Source: Compiled by the researcher (November, 2019).

The table above depicted that social exclusion is an all-encompassing and a slippery concept. Hence, it is still left as the topic of definitional disagreements among intellectuals and writers, and that they conceptualized, and re-conceptualized it in different ways at different times. From the authors' explanations, it can be understood that they were not able to provide a fixed and common understanding for this term. Agreeably, it is implied in a range of definitions provided above that social exclusion is recognized as (a) a threat or unpleasant social experience of human day to day life, which can be alternatively seen as a threat to relationships, interactions and participation, and (b) a process that involves a systematic mechanisms of excluding individuals or groups. Nonetheless, some authors understand it as either a state, or a process or both. For instance, Sen (2000) comprehended social exclusion as a state like poverty, deprivation or marginalization. By contrast, Silver (2007) attributed the term as (1) a process that involves gradual or progressive rupturing of participation, interaction and relationships, and (2) a process of deprivation and disadvantage. Of course, most literatures agree that social exclusion is a process. In this vein, a recent study conducted by Apie and Moses (2019) showed that the concept consisted of ongoing and never-ending process.

Pointedly, it is likely to forward an idea that denial of access, or opportunity to social relationships, participation in activities; and lack of access to materials, resources and the like that avail to the majority in the specific social settings, and which can play basic roles for interaction and relationships constitutes the heart of nearly all the meanings and definitions proposed by scholars, government bodies and non-governmental organizations (Gordon *et al.*,

2017). As a whole, Table 2.1 and 2.2 depicted that both social inclusion and exclusion are contested terms that have no clear understandings among researchers and writers. Based on these tables, it can be argued that the definitions and meanings of these terms vary with contexts. However, researchers have advised others that the vague terms of social inclusion and exclusion can be (re)conceptualized considering the contexts where these occurs (Mathieson *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, providing workable definitions for these vague terms is immensely vital as the interest in social inclusion/exclusion research is increasing steadily in recent years (Fischer, 2011).

2.4. Workable Definitions of Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Academic Settings

Vividly, it can be understood from Fischer's (2011) assertion that reconceiving and proposing working definitions for concepts like social inclusion/exclusion is vital to: (a) reduce ambiguities, and that way to draw clear understandings in these particular phenomena; (b) precisely examine how these phenomena occurs, and (c) distinguish these concepts from other related terms. In other words, it is noted above that the phenomena of social inclusion and exclusion varies in conceptualizations as these are closely related to the multifaceted living conditions and day-to-day real life situations of groups of people.

In academic perspective, social inclusion and exclusion are now knocking the attention of many researchers and academicians (Heyder *et al.*, 2020). For example, the study conducted by Sayeed (2002) showed that these terms are serious academic concerns for education institutions like schools. Relatedly, Harrist and Bradley (2002) exhibited that social exclusion is a real problem in the classroom contexts mostly occurs in the form of peer rejection of individuals or groups with disabilities by their own able-bodied peers. Adding on it, Kearney (2009) suggested that the issue of inclusion and exclusion have got momentum in the areas of special needs and inclusive education. She also added that in the realm of this discipline, the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion of students with disabilities (SWDs) is viewed in terms of access/denial of relationships and participation in the classrooms and education settings.

To this end, it is known through reviewing literatures and research studies that the social inclusion and exclusion of SWDs are topical agendas of research in the inclusive education set ups (Alexiadou, 2002; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Alqaryouti, 2010). In this dissertation, the discussion of social inclusion and exclusion is held from academic points of views taking into account the field of special needs and inclusive education. Therefore, from the instances of

multiple definitions given thus far, it is likely to propose working definitions of social inclusion and exclusion to adopt in the current dissertation study. In one hand, it is proposed here that social exclusion is a process that occurs when individuals or groups of blind students are denied of equal access to academic and social opportunities that are normally available to majority of fully sighted students, and which can play fundamental roles for their social interaction or relationships in the classroom settings and outside of the classroom settings. Conversely, social inclusion is the process of through which individuals or groups of blind students get equal opportunity to: (a) participate in social activities (e.g., sports, clubs, physical activities and the like) and academic activities (e.g., group works, assignments, and the like), and (b) maintain meaningful social interactions and relationships with members of the university community including sighted students. The term also includes social-emotional involvement and feeling of a sense of belonging to other groups, or social settings (Heyder *et al.,* 2020). As said above, these working definitions are proposed on the basis of the previously alluded meanings and definitions of social inclusion and exclusion in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2, respectively.

On the other hand, the following section provides highlights in accordance with peculiar characteristics of social inclusion and exclusion. Thus, understanding their characteristic is mainly important to redefine them accordingly, and draw conceptual clarity (Fischer, 2011).

2.5. Characteristics of Social Inclusion and Exclusion

Through examining literatures, it is found that the umbrella concepts of social inclusion and exclusion have the following unique characteristic features: Multidimensionality, multi-typological, operates at multi-level, dynamic, requires agency and context specificity. These attributes are discussed in the following few paragraphs.

Multi-dimensionality: The queried concepts of social inclusion and exclusion are multidimensional (Silver, 2007; Levitas *et al.,* 2007). In particular, the multidimensional nature of these terms is resulted from the fact that they are interdisciplinary concepts that are related with social sciences, sociology, social work, and social psychology (Omtzigt, 2009; Yekkalam, 2012). These authors identified social dimension, political dimension, economic dimension and spatial dimension of social inclusion and exclusion. Additionally, Donlevy (2009) illustrated other dimensions of inclusion and exclusion like academic (pedagogical) dimensions, psychological (spiritual/emotional) dimensions. On the other hand, the multidimensionality of

inclusion and exclusion lay down for lack of standardized measurement (Burchardt *et al.,* 2002). This characteristic also contributes for the lack of consistent and precise definition of social inclusion and exclusion (Levitas *et al.* 2007). Most importantly, the social dimension, academic and psychological dimensions are preferably important in this dissertation: Primarily, the social inclusion/ exclusion encompass relational (interpersonal) dimensions that include access to/denial of reciprocal relationships, participation in activities together with others (Levitas *et al.,* 2007; Silver, 2007). Such dimension also includes access/denial of social services and facilities that are commonly available in specific social settings, and which can play integral roles for interaction and relationships (Omtzigt, 2009). Secondly, the academic (pedagogical) dimension of social inclusion/exclusion includes access to/denial of access to curriculum materials, and resources, classroom teaching-learning process and participation in academic activities (Kearney, 2009; Lewis, 2009; Subrayen, 2011). To this end, psychological dimension of social inclusion and exclusion includes the feeling aspects of inclusion and exclusion (Hall, 2009).

Multi-typological: Social inclusion and exclusion are multi-faceted, and hence these involve different forms and typologies (Sen, 2000; Silver, 2007). For example, it is found through reviewing literatures that Sen (2000) has revealed major types of being included, or excluded: These are favorable inclusion, unfavorable inclusion, favorable exclusion, unfavorable exclusion, passive exclusion and active exclusion. In his capability approach, Sen's (2000) analysis of social exclusion shows that *favorable inclusion* is a situation when specific groups or individuals become included-in relationships, participation, access to resources, facilities, and the like on the basis of their needs and interests. Conversely, *unfavorable inclusion* is where some people or individuals (s) are being included in relationships or activities without their primary needs and interests. Such inclusion is termed as forced inclusion (Ziyauddin & Kasi, 2009).

On the other hand, *favorable exclusion* is alternatively called self-exclusion (Levitas *et al.,* 2007). In Sen's capability approach of social exclusion, self-exclusion (voluntary exclusion) is a commonly noted phenomenon that happens when individuals or groups voluntarily exclude themselves from relationships and/or participation scenes through the choices of their own (Omtzigt, 2009). Finally, *unfavorable exclusion* is where someone or some people are being kept out from relationships or participation without the needs and interests of the victims and hence, it is forced exclusion, or involuntary exclusion (Sen, 2000; Burchardt *et al.,* 2002). Such exclusion

is mostly happened compulsorily due to challenges, or factors that are beyond the control of the victims (Chakravarty & D'Ambrosio, 2006). To this end, Sen (2000) has annotated that inclusion should be favorable, and that exclusion should not be favorable. On the other hand, Sen (2000) has differentiated two additional types of social exclusion: Active and passive exclusion. According to him, active exclusion is an explicit form of exclusion that occurs due to an intentional attempt to exclude individuals or groups by other individuals, authorities, policy, a government discriminatory procedures, or rules with an aim to exclude some people from some opportunity. Moreover, Sen (2000) has typically explained that such form of exclusion mostly occurs in the awareness of the excluders (perpetrators) who commit the exclusion. In the social settings, active exclusion includes purposeful actions such as bulling, rejection, ostracism, or ignoring, and peer victimization, which may result total (maximal) exclusion of an individual, or groups (Leary, 2001). In active exclusion, excluders apply systematic mechanisms to consciously exclude others from any possible opportunities (Kawamoto, Ura & Nittono, 2015). In other words, active form of social exclusion complies with the earliest understanding of the notion of exclusion (social) that indicates the idea of expelling, being physically cut-off or keeping out an individual or groups from interaction, relationships or participation (Sen, 2000). This involves separation and/or total rapturing of individuals or groups from the existing social interactions and/or relationships, which represent most severe form of social exclusion (Silver, 2007). In other words, passive exclusion is a non- deliberate or unintentional attempt to exclude groups or individuals from a set of opportunities, participations and relationships, and even this may occur without the awareness of the excluders, and it is usually the result of specific social processes (Sen, 2000; Nevile, 2007). It is mostly occurs through subtle a (implicit) social process which is not under the consciousness of the excluders (Kawamoto *et al.*, 2015).

Nowadays, an active form of social exclusion has been changed a bit as a result of the execution of various legislative frameworks and the awareness of the general public (Mutuku, 2011). Nevertheless, the passive forms of social exclusion still operates systematically in social settings in different styles and occurrences just subtly and/or implicitly without committing any explicit or overt actions, behaviors or practices toward others (Mutuku, 2011). This connotes the idea that social exclusion can be held in a more passive and subtler ways, which is often worse than active form of exclusion (Lindsay & Mcpherson, 2011). Following Sen (2000), other researchers also identified other forms of social exclusion such as strong and weak exclusion

based on the severity exclusion (Mutuku, 2011). Strong (deep) exclusion occurs when there is (1) persistent exclusion that happens for a long period of time just repetitively, and (2) total exclusion, which involves a complete rupture of the individual from the relationship or interaction contexts. Such exclusion is pervasive and severely unpleasant experience (de Leeuw *et al.*, 2018). Understandably, weak exclusion often occurs discontinuously, and when there is partial exclusion. In this vein, Levitas et al. (2007) analyzed the degrees of social exclusion in individuals and deduced that it may represent a partial or full social exclusion. Such exclusion may consist of mildly, or moderately unpleasant experience (de Leeuw *et al.*, 2018). Adding to the idea of the seriousness of social exclusion, Paavilainen (2017) has revealed that it might happen momentarily, or intensively. While an intensive exclusion is a more severe, strong or deep type that occurs persistently (continuously) for a long-period of time, momentary exclusion happen temporarily for a brief period of time (Paavilainen, 2017).

Operate at multi-levels: Social inclusion and exclusion operates at three distinct social levels: Micro (individual, institution or specific groups' level); meso (community level) and macro (societal, country or state level) (Silver, 2007). This shows that social relationships and interactions are found at multi-layers of social fabrics such as individual, groups; or community (Burchardt *et al.*, 2002). Accordingly, the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion of individuals or groups can be analyzed at these three major levels depending on how the individual interacts with his/her environment (Silver, 2007). At micro-level, social inclusion or exclusion emerge in the interpersonal interactions at the immediate social, psychological and physical environment such as school, classrooms, work places, and meeting halls where individuals or groups directly and frequently interact each other (Silver, 2007).

The analysis of social inclusion and exclusion at the micro-level is vital because it includes the level at which social exchanges, participations, interaction and relationships and the sources of the inclusion and exclusion do occur in the everyday life of individuals in their immediate environment (Héra, 2016). Hence, the micro-level analysis of social inclusion and exclusion involves analyzing the interpersonal process and factors that lead the inclusion or exclusion of individuals or groups in the immediate environment where individuals or groups have close social ties such as their family, and friends so that researchers can clearly understand how the phenomenon of social inclusion/exclusion does occur at this level (Mutuku, 2011, p.

20). In addition to this, the analysis of social inclusion and exclusion at micro-level can be easily conducted because both the sources (agents) of the inclusion/exclusion and the beneficiaries/victims are particularly found here (Saraceno, 2001). Therefore, when researchers want to thoroughly reveal the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion including the challenges, barriers or contributory factors to social inclusion and exclusion, they better to turn their attention at the micro-level (Silver, 2007). For instance, at the higher learning institutions (campuses and classrooms), the experiences of social inclusion/exclusion of students with visual impairments can be best studied at micro-level (Subraye, 2011). In this vein, Paavilainen (2017) analyzed the experience of social exclusion of children from peer interaction and relationships at micro-level in a day-car center in Finland. At meso-level, social inclusion and exclusion occurs with respect to sub-cultures, sub-populations where there is identifiable "social divide, or boundaries" (Silver, 2007, p. 15). Further, she explained that the boundary process entails the formation of socio-culturally opposite dualism of 'outsider' and 'insider' perspectives by which the insiders are sacred (i.e., in-groups are clean, innocent, religious, etc.) and the outsiders are profane (i.e., out-groups, dirty, marginal, under-human, etc.) with a possibility of the formation of two or more social settings (p.15). At this level, the analysis of social exclusion involves examining the implementation of policies and administration of a country (Mutuku, 2011).

Finally, the macro-level consisted of socio-cultural and political values and ideological orientations such as the culture of inclusion in the mainstream education systems, societal attitudes toward inclusive practices, and government's disability legislation on the progress towards inclusion in the country (Khochen, 2016). For instance, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's (PhD) new political persuasions termed by a slogan as "*Addition*" (Amharic Translation: *Medemer*) is a new integrative campaign that is functioning at a national level for unity and social solidarity of the people. The buzzword of *Medemer* is popularized by the premier, which means to be included in the big tent he is overturning. At this level, social exclusion is a progressive rupturing of social bond across national and sub-cultural contexts and the process may result decline in solidarity, and reduction of national integration (Silver, 2007).

Dynamic nature: The dynamic nature of social inclusion/exclusion implies that the terms are not static. Instead, they involve the change of forms and dimensions over time with tremendous interlinked factors for the phenomena coming together in the present and possibly continuing

into the future (Gordon *et al.,* 2017, Jehoel-gijsbers & Vrooman, 2008). Due to their dynamic nature, their processes, related concepts and dimensions can be shifted in the circumstances of those included or exclude (Silver, 2007; Levitas *et al.,* 2007). Distinctively, social inclusion is a fortune, and thus when it happened may result further social integration, unity and development (Donlevy, 2009). Contrarily, social exclusion is a threat itself, and when it happened it may become a risk factor for different phenomenon such as poverty and conflict (Jehoel-gijsbers & Vrooman, 2008; Fischer, 2011).

Require agency: Agency shows the relationship between the included/excluded, the excluders doing the exclusion and what the included/excluded are included in, or excluded from (Mathieson *et al.,* 2008). In this sense, an agent of inclusion, or a perpetrator of exclusion can be an individual, or group, government, or an institution that actively generates the phenomena of inclusion or exclusion (Islam, 2015; Gordon *et al.,* 2017). Therefore, social inclusion and exclusion are actor-oriented processes (Hutchison, Abrams & Christian, 2007; Khan, Combaz & Fraser, 2015). This implies that the phenomena often occur when others (i.e., individuals, a policy, and the like) play significant roles in inclusionary or exclusionary experiences of some other party (Levitas *et al.,* 2007; Silver, 2007). In relation to this, Omtzigt (2009) showed that exploring who is included or excluded, or who is including/excluding the included/excluded, from what they are included in, or excluded from and how the inclusion/exclusion occurs is essential while analyzing the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion of individuals or groups. For instance, at tertiary education institutions, the students with visual impairments (SWVI) spent great deals of their time with other students without disabilities, and possible the later may intentionally (explicitly) or unintentionally (implicitly) excluded their peers with visual impairments (Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013). In this sense, these researchers analyzed that the SWVI are the victims of social exclusion, and their peers without visual impairments were the perpetrators in the exclusionary process.

Require context specificity: As described above, social inclusion and exclusion are broad, imprecise, undefined and even complex concepts that need continuous re-conceptualizations (Fischere, 2011). Nevertheless, it is also mentioned that the discrepancy and complexity in the understanding of social inclusion and exclusion mostly rooted due to their multidimensionality and dynamic nature (Silver, 2007, Levitas *et al.,* 2007). Thus, they recommended that

conceptualizing these slippery concepts within the spectrum of specific contexts is paramount importance. Other writers also commended to identify specific dimensions of social inclusion and exclusion to provide a workable definition of social inclusion and exclusion of individuals, or groups (Donlevy, 2009). In other words, other writers also provided directions that these terms can be effectively defined in context-specific manner (Levitas *et al.*, 2007; Omtzigt, 2009). In this regard, Silver (2007) noted that creating context is vital to understand these terms in at least three senses: Primarily, the ideal of inclusion and exclusion varies with places (e.g., education and non-education settings, country and region, and the like). Relatedly, different places have different contexts, historical backgrounds, socio-cultural make-ups and structures. Thus, the definition of social inclusion and exclusion varies with these contexts. Finally, the conceptualization of these terms may vary with the day-to-day activities of individuals or groups. In this regard, it has been briefly explained in the subsequent section that social inclusion and exclusion attracts the interests of researchers in academic settings with particular reference to the experiences of students with disabilities (SWDs) in the inclusive education setting (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Accordingly, these notions vary from contexts to contexts, from individuals to individuals, from fields of study to the field of study (Kearney, 2009). In that matter, a clear understanding of these terms requires context-specificity (Kadun & Gadkar, 2014).

Generally speaking, the subjects of social inclusion and exclusion in the context of disability and inclusive education will be highlighted below in section 2.6 and 2.7, respectively.

2.6. Disability, Social Inclusion and Exclusion: Brief Highlight

2.6.1. Disability Inclusion

Being included is a treasure for all human individuals (Donlevy, 2009). However, persons with disabilities (PWDs) need it more, and benefit more from their inclusion than the inclusion of other persons without disabilities (UNESCO, 2009). In other words, disability inclusion is an approach that ensures the opportunities, rights, respect and dignity of PWDs (Rohwerder, 2015). The World Bank defines social inclusion as "*the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society*" (World Bank, 2013, p. 4). Thus, inclusion is the rights issues of all PWDs. In this respect, disability inclusion emphasizes more on equal access to participation in all aspect of social domains to the best of these individuals' potentials, needs and interests, abilities and desires. The report

delivered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization disclosed that the opportunities of PWDs to normally lead their lives are mostly reduced due to the physical inaccessibility and society's deep rooted misconception (UNESCO, 2015). However, the actualization of disability inclusion requires overcoming barriers and creating accessible social, physical and institutional environments (Islam, 2015). According to Islam, being included is an important element of human rights of PWDs. Inversely, the report delivered by International Labor Organization uncovered that excluding PWDs from development arenas such as employment and education opportunities and workplaces has unreasonable prices (ILO, 2012). With this in mind, countries are presently taking into consideration the program of disability-inclusive development as national and global agenda (ILO, 2012). In this regard, Coe and Wapling (2010) connoted that an *inclusive bus* is required to moving together with PWDs, and ultimately achieve disability inclusion

In Ethiopia, disability is nowadays becoming a burdensome as it has far reaching psychosocial and economical disadvantages (Tirusew, 2005; Adugna, 2015). The World Report on Disability jointly issued by the World Bank and World Health Organization in 2011 estimated that 17.6% of the Ethiopian populations have a disability (WHO, 2011). Evidences from other sources showed that a vast majority of PWDs in Ethiopia live in remote rural areas in the country where access to basic facilities and services is scarce as most of the rehabilitation and habilitation services are highly concentrated in urban areas (MOLSA, 2012). Again, the Ethiopian National Plan of Action of Persons with Disabilities (2012-2020) estimates that 95% of PWDs in Ethiopia are living below the poverty line (MOLSA, 2012). Many of them lead their lives through begging and family support and subsequently they are more vulnerable to social exclusion (Dagnachew, 2011). According to Dagnachew, different disability rights movements; national disability related proclamations, laws and policies have limited contribution for the inclusion of PWDs in Ethiopian development endeavors. Resultantly, their full involvement and participation in wider community life domains is still limited and hence they are most vulnerable to social exclusion (Adugna, 2015).

Despite the fact discused above, concrete national research evidences underscored that mainstreaming the issue of disability inclusion in every sectors and development agendas of the country is a step forward to curbing the challenges related to disability inclusion in wide-ranging

aspects (Tsegahun, 2016). In this sense, the country is now engaged in a process of empowering PWDs and mainstreaming disability inclusion as policy and cross-cutting issue both in education and non-education settings. Essentially, it has adopted almost all of the international conventions, UN initiatives and policy and legal contexts on the rights of PWDs (MOLSA, 2012). On a national level, the federal constitution and its Growth and Transformation Plan gave due emphasis for the inclusion, well-being and rights of PWDs (Adugna, 2015). Despite the effort exerted toward *disability-inclusive development* in the country, there is still a need for more strong disability specific actions, initiatives, and determinations toward full inclusion of PWDs in all aspects of society. In education settings, the inclusion of SWDs is to be actualized through effective implementation of the program of inclusive education in every schooling level including HEIs (MOE, 2012). In relation to this, studies revealed that inclusive education is a global momentum, a decent program and approach in place to ensure equality, justice and improve full participation of SWDs on an equal basis with students without disabilities (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Floria, 2014; Galaterou, 2017). It is generally a means to achieve inclusion, equity, diversity in education settings including higher education (Sanger, 2020). Precisely, this topic will be detailed under section 2.7 below.

2.6.2. Disability and Social Exclusion

Probably, all of us have faced exclusion at some point in our life courses, whether we are aware of it or not (Williams, 2001; Wesselmann, Grzybowski, Steakley-Freeman, DeSouza, Nezlek, & Williams, 2016). Nevertheless, persons with disabilities (PWDs) are more at the target of the risk of social exclusion mainly due to their disability and related physical, legal, financial, environmental and attitudinal barriers (UN, 2006; Islam, 2015). Other studies also revealed that these sections of society have either experienced it in the past, or are currently deemed to be at risk of exclusion (Hall, 2005; Shanimon & Rateesh, 2014; Dauti, 2015). These studies revealed that social exclusion constitutes of one of their tormented and chronic life events in comparison to other normally developing individuals in the same circumstances or situations.

Undoubtedly, therefore, disability and social exclusion are strongly linked (Morris, 2001). In particular, Burchardt (2003) noted this situation as *"becoming disabled [is] being socially excluded"* (p.57). [Emphasis added]. Based on Burchardt's explanation, becoming a persons with disability is also means being more vulnerable to exclusion from participation,

interaction and relationships. In Ethiopian context, PWDs are highly vulnerable to becoming socially excluded from social-cultural, community activities and core public-life domains due to various factors of risk related to the socio-culturally deep-seated misconceptions, negative attitudes and environmental barriers (Almaz, 2011; Dagnachew, 2011). The synthesis of these national research studies revealed that PWDs are not sufficiently involved in the country's development endeavors and core community-based activities. Instead, they are often at greater risk of being socially excluded in their daily life situations. In particular, one of the magnificent studies conducted by Adugna (2015) in Sebeta Hawass District Southwestern Zone of Oromia Region, Ethiopia showed that PWDs are vulnerable to exclusion from both spiritual and secular life domains at community settings. The following two outcomes were reported in Adugna's (2015) study: Firstly, PWDs are mostly sidelined from membership and participation in community level (local) socio-cultural activities such as Dabo, 1 to 5 social networking, Idir, Ekub and Mahiber. Based on Adugna's explanation, these are community based social institutions and supportive agencies informally organized by the village community for their common goal which are particularly important during difficulties such as death or mourning. Nonetheless, PWDs have limited opportunity to participate in such community-based associations/institutions. Secondly, PWDs are excluded from special events like weddings, marriage ceremonies, funeral rituals, or burials, religious congregations, and they are also denied from full access to basic services achieving formal education, access to common public resources and health that are common to the majority of the local people without disabilities.

In addition to empirical reviews, an extensive review about disability and exclusionary practices was made on Tirusew's (2005) work on disability issues in Ethiopia. Tirusew particularly articulated the socio-cultural image of disability in Ethiopia and described the overall situation of individuals with disabilities in the country. Based on Tirusew' (2005) explanation, the social exclusion of PWDs in Ethiopia is mostly manifested through (a) marginalized interpersonal relationships; (b) exclusion from participation at family, neighborhood and community levels; (c) limited provision of public services and special programs (e.g., health, education, transportation, information, recreational activities and legal protections; (d) restricted involvement in socio-cultural, sports and recreational activities as well as the discriminatory practices in employment opportunities. Based on the more convincing and clear explanation of Tirusew (2005), the following general points can be understood: Primarily, the most violent

practice of stigmatization in the country is seclusion (e.g., the mother may hide her disabled child out of shame due to traditionally held believes) by which parents of children and youth with disabilities unglued their children at their homes because there is a general perception that issue of disability among the Ethiopian people, particularly at the rural areas has always been treated as a taboo. Orthodoxly, therefore, there is a belief that having children with disability is a curse and sign of sin, a source of shame/embarrassment, or a punishment from the Almighty God, and due to this children with disabilities are more likely to be kept secretly out of the public eye in that parents prefer to hide, or leave their children in-doors than exposing them to the school systems, or in any other public common places mainly due to the social stigmatization. This shows that the issue of disability is mostly mysterious particularly in rural community settings in Ethiopia. Secondly, the major cause of the social exclusion of these individuals includes negative or exclusionary attitudes and practices and, deep-rooted socio-cultural myths including fear of stigmatization. In spite of the social exclusionary practices discussed above, government of Ethiopia has implemented a number of laws, policies and standards concerning the equal opportunity of PWDs to lead productive and decent life. At federal level in Ethiopia, key line ministries are also becoming responsible for these sections of society. Among others, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) is one of the government organs responsible to promote the inclusion of all PWDs in all areas of their lives as other members of community on an equal basis. Nevertheless, the above local studies revealed that the individuals with disabilities are still facing an enduring experience of discrimination and social exclusion.

On the other hand, some studies and disability reports revealed that the experience of social inclusion and exclusion of PWDs significantly varies with the nature and type of disability of the person. As an instance, the study conducted by Julie (2001) showed that individual with intellectual disability took more the greater degree of exclusionary experiences than other disability categories. Relatedly, Wainman (2010) revealed that it is a greater challenge for people with complex, dangerous and severe disabilities to establish friendship, initiate, develop and maintain social relationships with other normally developing individuals. Moreover, it has been mentioned in literatures that individuals with severe visual impairment (IWVI) are the target of the phenomenon of social exclusion in their daily lives than other sighted person with and without disabilities (Subraye, 2011; Alhammadi, 2014; Wadegaonkar *et al.,* 2015; Dauti, 2015; Hewett *et al.,* 2015; Parvin, 2015; Biniam, 2016; Kahsay, 2017; Mboshi, 2018). The combination

of these studies indicates the following: In one hand, visual impairment is inherently a very isolating disability. On the other hand, those with total vision loss are often left behind, encounter obstructions to meet others, participate in activities, relationships and understand the behaviors of others due to insufficient visual information and perception. Again, these individuals become invisible in locally available socializing activities and relationships due to the presence of sight loss, environmental, organizational and socio-cultural barriers. Therefore, visual impairment and social exclusion are closely linked (Streeter, 2007). In addition, Wadegaonkar et al. (2015) extensively reviewed literatures about the socialization of (IWVI) and revealed the following: Firstly, the presence of visual impairment results in a low motivation and limited capability to explore the environment, to initiate interaction and to share common visual experiences due to the absence of vision. Secondly, visual impairment has tendency to restrict individuals' capacity to normally function as other individuals or groups without visual impairment. Thirdly, a person with severe visual disability is limited to properly act in the environment on an equal basis by virtue of their vision loss. Finally, these individuals have limited access to interaction, relationships and participation.

2.6.3. Models of Disability, Social Inclusion and Exclusion

From the perspectives of disability, there are different models that shape people's perceptions and ideas about PWDs (Retief & Letšosa, 2018, p.1). These authors reviewed that medical and social models are leading perspectives of disability that are highly predominant these times. In the context of disability, the phenomenon of social inclusion/exclusion can be understood via the lenses of models of disability. In the first place, medical model of disability (MMD) bases itself on medical science and emphasizes that disability is as a disease (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). Regarding to the characteristics of this model Olkin as cited in Retief and Letšosa (2018, p. 3) insightfully summaries the following points:

> *Disability is seen as a medical problem that resides in the individual. It is a defect in or failure of a bodily system and as such is inherently abnormal and pathological. The goals of intervention are cure, amelioration of the physical condition to the greatest extent possible, and rehabilitation (i.e., the adjustment of the person with the disability to the condition and to the environment). Persons with disabilities are expected to avail themselves of the variety of services offered to them and to spend time in the role of patient or learner being helped by trained professionals.* (p. 26)

Based on the above explanation, the PWDs are conceived as a sick person. Thus, disability is the issue of the individual, and problems related to the persons' disability are fundamentally resulted from inability of the individual himself/herself and his/her families to adjust with the physical, social or cultural conditions around him/her (Rohwerder, 2015). In the realm of MMD, the problem of social exclusion is perceived as individuals or groups incapability to keep up with the living standards to work and live together (Duffy, 2001). For instance, it is described in the background section of this dissertation that when the term was first used in France by R. Lenoire, it indicates disaffiliation of specific groups of individuals or people from the mainstream French society because they are incapable to work and maintain social order and thereby adjust themselves to the requirements of social lives and systems (Kabeer, 2000; Rawal, 2008; Wazed, 2012). In this regard, it can be understood that on the basis of its earliest conceptualizations, social exclusion is incapability of individuals or groups of people to normally withstand with other section of society, or part of it (Sen, 2000).

In the context of disability, the premises of medical model informs that social exclusion is inability of individuals to fully participate in normally set social activities of the life of the majority in the community, and thereby sustain relationships and interactions with others in society where they live (Rohwerder, 2015). This shows that individual factors contribute to their experience of social exclusion. For example, literatures and studies showed that personal and social behaviors such as hostility, aggressiveness and other comorbid conditions are psychosocial discriminators related to the personality of the IWVIs (Salleh & Zainal, 2010). In relation to this, Wadegaonkar et al. (2015) illustrated that those with total visual disability are likely to display socially annoying responses and mannerisms such as rocking their bodies to and from, twisting their fists into their eye sockets, waving their hands in front of their eyes, or constantly twisting their heads around continuously (p.32). Due to these mannerisms, the sighted peers may distance themselves from the IWVI that subsequently let them become loners (Almog, 2011).

Obviously, vision (the seeing sense) is critical for the day-to-day activities and functioning of IWVI (Morris, 2014). Notably, a recently reviewed empirical study showed that vision impairments impact the abilities of individuals in all life domains, and it is closely related to social isolation and exclusion from relationships and participation (Beteinaki, 2019). Hence, loss of vision is becoming vulnerable to environmental threats, physical and social challenges

including social exclusion (Tobias & Mukhopadhyay, 2017). Therefore, visual disability has a divorcing effect from every day desired routines, goals and habits including social interactions and relationships (Wadegaonkar *et al.*, 2015). For example, as the sighted individuals, they may dream of becoming an engineer, professional footballer, a surgeon, or a medical doctor, etcetera, but the existence of vision loss, indeed, obstructs these life projects, and left them unable to pursue their life goals (Darling, 2003). Similarly, the study conducted by Tobias and Mukhopadhyay (2017) revealed that those with total vision loss are extremely exposed to social exclusion in their daily lives in their homes, education and other social settings by virtue of their sight loss as it severely obstruct their environmental and social interactivity. The outcome of their study uncovered that personal (individual factors) such as behavioral problems, existence disability (blindness) and related issues like onset of vision loss and severity contribute for the experience of social exclusion of IWVIs. On the contrary, some personal factors are quite possibly to facilitate the social inclusion of IWDs. For instance, Nimmo (2008) examined different literatures and produced that positive attitude of the person; physical appearance and attractiveness are personal factors for successful inclusion of IWVIs. On top of this, Beteinaki (2019) revealed that the extroversion of IWVIs potentially determined his/her interaction and participation in social groups. In general, the discussion held above shows two important points: Primarily, MMD is related to the social inclusion/exclusion of PWDs. Next, personal (individual) factors may put in place to contribute to both the social inclusionary and exclusionary experiences of PWDs in specific social and educational settings.

On the other hand, the SMD claimed disability as a socio-culturally constructed phenomenon (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). Precisely, they stated as: "*Fundamental to the social model of disability is the notion that disability is ultimately a socially constructed phenomenon"* (p. 3). In relation to this, the Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation's manifesto document (UPIAS, 1976 as cited in Retief and Letšosa, 2018, p.3) stated the following emphasizing on the understanding of SMD as:

> *[Dis]ability is a situation, caused by social conditions, which requires for its elimination, (a) that no one aspect such as incomes, mobility or institutions is treated in isolation, (b) that disabled people should, with the advice and help of others, assume control over their own lives, and (c) that professionals, experts and others who seek to help must be committed to promoting such control by disabled people.* (p. 3)

It can be generally drawn from the above blocked quotation that disability is not an individual issue. Instead, it is an issue that happened when the physical and social environment impose limitations on certain individuals or groups of people (Oliver, 2013; Rohwerder, 2015). Thus, the solution for any of the disability-related problems involves environmental modification and societal change pertaining to attitudes and conceptions (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). This part of the review literature will be further demonstrated under section 2.12.1 below.

2.7. Inclusive Education, Social Inclusion and Exclusion

These days, social exclusion, social inclusion and inclusive education are fashionable in education settings (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Sayeed, 2002; Kadun, & Gadkar, 2014). These terms represent among other academic dialogues, and continuously redefined from academic (disciplinary) perspectives in many respects. In this vein, it has been deeply described above that these concepts have immensely attracted the attention of professionals, intellectuals and researchers in the academic spheres. Accordingly, the issue of social inclusion and exclusion of children and youth with diverse types of disabilities are the recent agenda in the discipline of special needs/ inclusive education (Kearney, 2009). Nevertheless, literatures and research studies in this field generally averred that one is the contradictory string for the other. Specifically, the following sub-sections outlined brief descriptions of these terms as applied to the situations of SWDs in all education contexts.

2.7.1. Social Inclusion versus Social Exclusion

The review of research studies and literatures pertaining to social inclusion and exclusion showed that one stands in marked contrast to the other (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Roe, 2008; Kearney, 2009; Hall, 2010; Robo, 2014; Mutswanga & Mapuranga, 2014; de Leeuw *et al.*, 2018; Apie & Moses, 2019). The summary of these studies showed the following important points: Firstly, both of these contested terms are two facets of the same thing, and hence one can be defined in relation to the other. Regarding this, Rawal (2008) stated as: "*both inclusion and exclusion are inseparable side of the same coin"* (p.171). His explanation shows that these events are inseparable and do not exist in an absolute isolation. However, both connote binary oppositions, or contradictory meanings and definitions. In this sense, Silver (2007) pointed out that the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion generally involves being *included-in* and *excluding from* in particular social or institutional settings. In the context of education, Human (2010) analyzed that social inclusion is the process of providing access to opportunities for

SWDs to accomplish the following: (a) be involved as members and meaningfully participate in contexts where their age mates and non-disabled members are found; (b) equally contribute as others, their contribution is being recognized and valued, and (c) they enjoy life together and develop sense of belonging. In contrast, social exclusion involves the process by which SWDs are being shut out of activities, relationships and opportunities, which may contribute to their integration or socialization with other members of students without disabilities, have devalued recognition, and lack the feeling of belonging (Subrayen, 2011). In relation to understanding social inclusion and exclusion of SWDs, popular authors like Booth and Ainscow (2002) showed that while exclusion indicates denial of equal access to opportunities and prevention of participation, inclusion is meant for equal access to opportunities and full participation of SWDs with their chronologically age-appropriate peers in the same circumstances in the classroom or education environments. Secondly, while social exclusion is problematic that constitutes a risk or threatening event in the individuals' suffering from it, social inclusion is a safety, human opportunity and fortune that create happiness for individuals. In this vein, Ficher (2011) confirmed that social exclusion and inclusion are contradictory opposite twines as the previous one is meant for stratification, or categorization, the latter one is togetherness, or synergy. Again, the most recent study revealed that while social inclusion is a fortune, social exclusion is a threat to the life of learners with special educational needs (Heyder, Sudkamp & Steinmayr, 2020).

Generally, it has been mentioned in the discussion so far that being socially included is one of the human essences of the new times. In contrast, being socially excluded is being unwanted and it represents a risk to healthy relationships and interaction. However, both phenomena signify the day-to-day experience of human beings. Accordingly, the research report delivered by Nugent, Pollack and Travis (2016) showed that the most important characteristics that can distinguish social inclusion and exclusion involve c*o-existence, invisibility* and *salience* (p.3). These characteristic features of these terms are described in the following few paragraphs:

Co-existence: Both phenomena can be existed together. Regarding this, Robo (2014) remained that individuals or groups can be excluded in one domain and included in another domain. Put in another way, the continuum of social inclusion and exclusion are the two dichotomous terms that co-exist together as inclusion is the other side of exclusion (Crisp, 2010). Accordingly, inclusionary and exclusionary practices do not occur inseparably as there are interfaces between

them (Rawal, 2008). In addition, these are entangled or intertwined experiences of SWDs indicating that they may experience both events in the same situations or circumstances (Robo, 2014). Practically, in the specific classrooms settings, these learners may experience exclusion in some domains of their academic or social lives, and also may at the same time experience inclusion in some other aspects of these domains (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). This implies that there is no absolute exclusion and inclusion that exist in separate states (Nugent *et al.*, 2016). Instead, they may occur concurrently (Robo, 2014). This also implies that there is no exclusion without inclusion, and vis-a-vise (Sedaghatnia, Ghahramanpouri & Lamit, 2018). In this regard, these concepts are inter-mingled each other (Robo, 2014). In a general sense, it has been mentioned above that social exclusion is often perceived as a logical opposite twine to social inclusion. Being an opposite echoes, inclusion and exclusion represent students with disabilities' every-day experiences in education settings (Hall, 2009; Kearney, 2009; Robo, 2014).

In research practices, authors uncovered the fact that both phenomena can be studied either at the same time, or separately. In one hand, some of them believed that the research study on one phenomenon can primarily be used as an alternative lens or framework to conceptualize and in-depth analysis of the other phenomenon as well (Nugent *et al.*, 2016). At this point, Rawal (2008) assured that "*only if the question of what constitutes inclusion is addressed can the question of what constitutes exclusion be posed*" (P. 172). Other researchers have a different view to what is explained above. For example, Kearney (2009) believed that studying social exclusion and inclusion at the same time is studying two conflicting stories of research participants at the same time. Additionally, Robo (2014) simulated that studying these two binary opposites at the same time seems confusing, and hence emphasizing on studying one of such phenomenon is commendable.

Finally, I reached to a supposition that both the phenomenon of social inclusion and exclusion can be studied together. In that sense, the dissertation study about the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion of blind students at higher education settings (HEIs) can be studied simultaneously. The reason behind includes the following: In one hand, these students are likely to experience both social inclusion and exclusion in the same classroom and education settings. Thus, studying one phenomenon is the mirror image of the other phenomenon. On the other hand, I conceived that studying these contrasting experiences of blind students at higher

education settings at the same time is helpful to undergo an in-depth exploration and description in the study.

In/visibility: By nature, humans are more likely to remember bad or threatening life experiences and negative events than positive experiences that create happiness in the life-course (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, Vohs, 2001). On top of this explanation, other psychologists like Berntsen (2002) argued that for many people negative life experiences that create shocks to life are unforgettable and hence more frequently remembered than positive experiences that contributes pleasure to life. Thus, the experience of exclusion is one of the shocking experiences, which is more frequently memorable, or vividly remembered as it is not easily decayed from memories (Nugent *et al.*, 2016). Inversely, the experiences of inclusion are mostly invisible and are challenging to describe, and even difficult to remember, too (Baumeister *et al.,* 2001). They also reflected similar ideas that individuals or groups have more memories of exclusion than inclusion. It is also described below that the experiences of social exclusion have saliency and visibility, and are more readily memorable and easily recognizable than the experiences of inclusion.

Salience: Social inclusion and exclusion can be distinguished in terms of their salience (Nugent *et al.,* 2016). Based on their research-based explanations, the experience of exclusion is more salient than the experience of inclusion and hence it is likely to be remembered more frequently than its opposite thread. In particular, the day-to-day exclusionary experiences are more salient, immediately identifiable and more readily recallable than experiences that happened in more positive manner (Berntsen, 2002). Frankly, exclusion indicates keeping or expelling someone from something, and it is a condition of being in an inferior position within the social network (Subrayen, 2011). Thus, experience of being excluded is most prominent or noticeable by the victims as it is more salient to their day-to-day life situations (Nugent *et al.,* 2016). In other words, social exclusion of individuals or groups occurs in obvious ways, and result psychosocial damaging effects like depression, isolation and loneliness and thus, it is more salient than inclusion (Hutchison, Abrams & Christian, 2007; Freedman, Williams & Beer, 2016).

2.7.2. Social Inclusion as a Basic Component of Inclusive Education

Fundamentally, inclusive education (IE) is an educational movement and reform designed to address the problems of social exclusion within education and social system (Booth & Ainscow,

2002; Haihambo, 2010). Accordingly, one of the aims of IE is reducing discriminatory practices through providing equal opportunity for SWDs and to access the same classroom learning, resources, services and facilities as their peers without disabilities (Floria, 2014). In this regard, the report delivered by UNESCO (2009) revealed that education system with inclusive orientation is an effective means of combating discriminatory practices, creating a welcoming learning environment, building inclusive education community, and ensuring access to education for all. Through IE, students and teachers are hopped to develop non-discriminatory or positive attitudes that are vital to accept, recognize and value learners with disabilities (Galaterou, 2017). In other words, IE primarily stands for guaranteeing rights to access, increasing opportunities and participation (Kioko & Makoelle, 2014). In addition, a very recent literature reviews on inclusion in higher education shows that inclusive pedagogy (education) is a promising area for building inclusion, diversity, equity (fairness), and equality (Sanger, 2020).

Therefore, effective implementation of inclusive education is a device to achieving social inclusion and reducing social exclusion in the classroom settings, and outside of the classrooms, too (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). With this general aim in mind, it can be asserted that IE is an educational methodology that predominantly involves identification and addressing the barriers that impede students' real social inclusion in the education settings (Kioko & Makoelle, 2014). Hence, successful social inclusion of SWDs in education settings involves one of the fruitions of inclusive educational goal (Heyder *et al.*, 2020, p. 1). This hottest research report uncovered that students' real social integration is one of the indicators of the effectiveness in the implementation of inclusive education. Based on their explanation inclusive education generally has inclusive values and social inclusion is one of the key goals of inclusive education. Accordingly, in inclusive education set ups, all students feel valued, accepted, equally recognized, supported and welcomed, and their basic needs are met as their age-appropriate groups (Galaterou, 2017; Apie & Moses, 2019).

In essence, the discussion above can be summed up as that both social inclusion and IE are closely related and the former is one of the goals of the later. Yet again, true social inclusion in the classrooms and even outside of the classrooms indicates among the successes of IE. As a final point, IE principally aims at removing barriers to inclusion, or overcoming exclusion, which is a threat to the realization of social inclusion and IE.

2.7.3. Social Exclusion as a Threat to Social Inclusion and Inclusive Education

Inclusive education includes an approach in the teaching-learning process which provides equal learning opportunities for all students irrespective of students' disabilities, backgrounds or any other areas of differences (Apie & Moses, 2019). It avoids differential treatments and creates the classroom setting where everyone belongs (Haihambo, 2010). Relatedly, inclusive educational settings are places that give all students the opportunity to equally participate and learn together, equally welcomed, feel supported and safe (Haihambo, 2010; Robo, 2014; Anwar, 2017). However, research studies showed that SWDs do not have the same opportunities to socialization as well as psychological, physical and social benefits as sighted peers of their ages in the same inclusive education settings (Wadegaonkar *et al.,* 2015). In this regard, social exclusion is one of the tensions and potential challenges that systematically spoil status of social inclusion of SWDs which subsequently affect the efficaciousness of inclusive educational practices (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Sayeed, 2002; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Mutswanga & Mapuranga, 2014; Sherlaw & Hudebine, 2015; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). These researchers utterly explained the threatening impact of social exclusion on social inclusion and inclusive education. In line with this, Ethiopian researchers also strengthened the idea that social exclusion is one of the fundamental barriers to relationships, participation and opportunities for SWDs, and hence it is still a dilemma of the implementation of inclusive education in the education systems in the country (Belay, Fantahun & Missaye, 2015; Zelalem, 2018; Asmirom, 2019). These researchers have expounded their stand point in abundance that though there are promising efforts in promoting social inclusion and inclusive education, social exclusion is still a threat to the fulfillment of these educational agendas.

2.8. Facets of Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Special Needs/ Inclusive Education

In the background part of the dissertation, it is highlighted that the real or true social inclusion of SWDs in education settings should obviously be a *holistic* inclusion that involves the physical aspect of social inclusion, the academic (pedagogical) aspect of social inclusion, the social aspect of social inclusion, the psycho-emotional (spiritual) aspect of social inclusion. Regarding this, researchers stressed that the inclusion of SWDs should be concerned with the *inclusion of the whole-person* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Unfortunately, its logical opposite also involves the physical, academic (pedagogical), social, and psychological (emotional) aspect of social exclusion in the education settings (Robo,

2014; Alhammadi, 2014; Harris, 2017; de Leeuw *et al.,* 2018). This also shows that there are different conditions and facets to which SWDs are included in, or excluded from relationships, interactions and participation scenes. The following sub-sections involve the discussion of the basic facets of the social inclusion/exclusion of SWDs inclusive education settings.

2.8.1. Social Aspects of Social Inclusion and Exclusion

The social aspects of social inclusion/exclusion includes social dimension of being included in, or excluded from interactions, relationships and participation in activities in the education settings such as schools or universities (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018; Dare & Nowicki, 2018). Thus, research studies showed that this aspect of inclusion/exclusion for SWDs can be examined through considering their interactions and relationships with other non-disabled peers, classroom teachers and other staff members, and their opportunities to involvement and participation in social or academic activities (Katz, Porath, Bendu, & Epp, 2012).

In brief, the social dimension of inclusion/exclusion involves the social aspects of inclusion/exclusion that can be described in terms of the status of social integration, or social participation of SWDs (Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl & Petry, 2013; Koster *et al.,* 2009). Based on these authors, social integration and social participation in the context of education are alike and can be used interchangeably as alternative word. Their explanation shows that social integration involves the interaction and relationships of individuals or groups with other individuals or groups. Relatedly, social participation involves the involvement and participation of SWDs in different classroom-based academic and socializing opportunities that are available for other students without disabilities, and that can essentially play roles to interaction and relationships with students with and without disabilities, and classroom teachers, as well. Thus, these synonymous terms have commonality that centers on the interaction and relationships of individuals or groups (Bossaert *et al.,* 2013).

Therefore, the social aspect of social inclusion can be meaningfully realized when SWDs have access to either social integration, or social participation, which commonly involves basic themes like social contact/interactions, friendships, healthy relationships, acceptance by others, perception being accepted by others around and participation in social/academic lives of other peers (Koster *et al.,* 2009). Contrarily, the social dimension of social exclusion involves poor, or non-existence of participation in social relationships and activities (Levitas et al., 2007, p.9).

Alternatively, it involves limited social integration where there is no friendship, acceptance, interaction/contact, and pleasant relationships and engagement in activities together with other counter parts (Heyder *et al.*, 2020).

2.8.2. Academic Aspects of Social Inclusion and Exclusion

In the context of inclusive education, the notion of inclusion is also understood as academic inclusion (Dare & Nowicki, 2018). These authors noted that academic inclusion includes equal access to learning opportunities and teachers' teaching practices that supports students' equal access to core curricula. In other words, Katz et al. (2012) expressed that academic inclusion implies that all students are a part of the life of the classroom as they learn in interaction with their able-bodied peers and classroom teachers. In the other vein, such aspect of inclusion involves equal access to curriculum materials, facilities, services, or resources for SWDs on an equal basis as peers without disabilities (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Sayeed, 2002). At the end, real inclusion in the classroom settings (i.e., academic inclusion) entails that students are accepted and equally welcomed within the classroom environment and that they feel respected and recognized each other regardless of their disability (Lourens & Swartz, 2016). Further, effective social inclusion in the classrooms involves the process by which they are placed and learn together with peer without disabilities, and gain equal access to curriculum pertaining to teaching methods, assessment and academic information/communication (Nimmo, 2008). Oppositely, the academic aspect of social exclusion signifies lack of equal access to learning opportunities as other age mates in education settings (Alhammadi, 2014; Teferi, 2016); lack of equal access to participate and contribute to the classroom instructional process (Subrayen, 2011; Lewis, 2009), and insufficient participation or absence of participation in core academic/curricular activities, assignments, group works and the like pertaining to the classroom teaching-learning processes (Kearney, 2009; Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013).

In summary, the academic aspect of social inclusion/exclusion involves more of the pedagogical aspects of inclusion/exclusion mostly exhibited in relation to the classroom teaching-learning process and related curricular activities in the classroom settings.

2.8.3. Psychological Aspects of Social Inclusion and Exclusion

The psychological aspect of social inclusion involves an emotional integration of children and youth with special educational needs (Heyder *et al.*, 2020). These researchers annotated that emotional inclusion is how and what the SWDs feel about being included in the classrooms or

education settings together with other non-disabled ones (Schwab, 2015). In other words, other researchers noted that the psychological level of inclusion can be assessed in terms of a sense of belonging to a specific group or social arena (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Based on these researchers, it can be deduced that being included benefit SWDs not only socially and academically, but also psychologically. On the opposite side, psychological aspect of exclusion implies dissatisfaction in the existing relationships and emotional misfit (Heyder *et al.,* 2020). It also involves lack of the feeling of belonging (Hall, 2009). Thus, psychological exclusion is the manifestation of lack of emotional benefit from inclusion in the education settings. Generally speaking, the psychological aspect of inclusion/exclusion is more of the emotional experience of SWDs as a result of being placed in the classrooms or outside of the classrooms.

2.8.4. Physical Aspects of Social Inclusion and Exclusion

Physical inclusion involves the physical integration of individuals in physical spaces (places) (Dare & Nowicki, 2018). Nonetheless, it has been argued above many times that physical placement alone does not meet the requirements of social inclusion. Once more, it is confirmed by researchers that meaningful social inclusion and inclusive education are more concerned with the inclusion of the *whole child*: academically, physically, emotionally, spiritually and socially (Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Regarding this Hall (2010) summarized stating as: *"…physical integration does not necessarily mean social integration"* (p.10). However, physical placement represents the gateways for further social, academic or psychological inclusion (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). On the contrary, the physical exclusion involves the complete non-existence, total rupture or dislocation of relationships with others (Levitas *et al.,* 2007). In the school contexts, it involves withdrawal or dropouts of school settings (Kearney, 2009). It generally implies being out of the sight of others or keeping away from social situations, or places (Williams, Forgas & Hippel, 2005). However, such profound aspect of exclusion was practiced in the distant past as it involves the practice of total displacement (Silver, 2007; Mathieson *et al.,* 2008).

As a final point, most social inclusion and exclusion literatures and comprehensive research studies uncovered that except the physical aspects of social inclusion the other aspects may not meaningfully achieved to the best needs and interests of students with diverse needs and disabilities (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Anderson, 2006; Roe, 2008; Kearney, 2009; Hall, 2010; Ressa, 2016; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018). This conviction is also supported by national

researchers that though the SWDs in general are physically placed in education settings and classrooms, their social, academic, and psychological aspects of their inclusion is not yet properly promoted (Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016; Biniam, 2016; Getachew, 2018; Zelalem, 2018; Asmirom, 2019). These researchers also figured that the full-fledged inclusion of these students is still questionable, often tricky and still unmet.

2.9. Students with Disabilities in Higher Education Institutions: The Ethiopian Context at a Glance

Based on the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009, higher education refers to universities or university colleges that can afford degree programs at undergraduate or higher qualification levels (FDRE, 2009). The Federal Ministry of Education annual abstract stated that "higher Education in Ethiopia includes education programs which are offered as undergraduate degree for three, four or more years and specialized degrees such as Master's and PhD programs" (MOE, 2016, p.135). Most notably, modern and secular higher education system in Ethiopia has a very short history of not more than seven decades. It was introduced in 1950 with the establishment of the then University College of Addis Ababa, which was upgraded as Haile Sillasie I University in 1960. In 1974, the university was renamed Addis Ababa University, which had remained the only university until the opening of Alemaya (now given new name as Haramaya) University in 1985. Nevertheless, in the past two decades, the sector is under massive expansion both in terms of the enrollment of students and number of universities to function as a breeding ground for knowledgeable, skilled, attitudinally matured and competent graduates that would contribute for the country's development trajectory (MOE, 2017).

Currently, the country embarks on expanding its higher education institutions (HEIs). It is known that there are 45 public HEIs that are operating under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MOSHE). These institutions are established in different regions of the country and basically grouped under first, second, third and fourth generation universities on the basis of their year of foundations. More specifically, the country's higher education system is aimed to promoting equality and meeting educational diversity for all students regardless of their disabilities, ethnic backgrounds, or language disparities (MOE, 2012). Hence, one of the areas of special attention and action priority in the country's higher education arena is the inclusion of students with diverse special needs with other able bodied ones in the same social and academic environment in higher education settings (ESDP V, 2016). Resultantly, the students who

complete secondary and preparatory schools and who successfully pass the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Examination can luckily join HEIs. In the higher education sector of the country, the most enrolled types of SWDs include students with hearing impairment, students with physical impairment and students with visual impairment (MOE, 2016). Except the students with hearing impairment who are exclusively found in Addis Ababa University, the other two categories are admitted across all universities in the country (Tirusew *et al.*, 2014). Nevertheless, the annual abstract of the Federal Ministry of Education showed that the overall number of SWDs at higher education constitutes only 2% of the total student population (MOE, 2016). This shows that the enrolment of young SWDs in Ethiopian higher education is still low.

These days, the country has restructured its education system in new education road map and tirelessly working on the transformation of its education system in accordance with the national vision and development agenda as it is aspiring to be one of the middle income countries by 2025 (MOE, 2017). The newly scheduled education roadmap (2017-2030) is a new education and training program with the intention of reforming the oldest education and training policy of the country. To this end, it is hopped to curbing the shortfalls and major challenges to result a swift change in the accessibility of university environment for all SWDs and to accord with the requirements of 21stcentury inclusive higher education (MOE, 2017). Specifically, the newly drafted education roadmap has considered special reforms in the areas of inclusive education such as separate support package by dedicated budget for SWDs; trainings for instructors on disability support mechanisms; and full-fledged disability service centers (MOE, 2017, p.52). In this vein, the road map has given due attention to promoting inclusive education and the inclusion of SWDs in all education settings as well as HEIs (MOE, 2017). Hopefully, specialized legislative frameworks can be developed on the basis of the education roadmap for the full and real social integration of SWDs with other peers of students without disabilities.

Apart from this, prior research studies conducted at HEIs in Ethiopia showed that the SWDs including those with visual impairment who are enrolled to pursue their studies at HEIs together with other students without disabilities still faced tremendous academic and social challenges that impede their equal access to participation, learning and relationships (Tirusew *et al.*, 2014; Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016; Getachew, 2018; Asmerom, 2019). Certainly, these studies affirmed that the physical placement of SWDs at HEIs has given them a physical access

in the campuses and classrooms. However, they have insufficient access to different socializing avenues and opportunities in comparison to peers without disabilities. On the other hand, it is evidently understood from the local research studies reviewed in this dissertation study that after transition from secondary and preparatory schools, and entry into higher education settings, most of the learners with disabilities are undoubtedly vulnerable to academically or socially undesirable or threatening experiences such as social exclusion and marginalization either at the individual or group level. In this particular instance, the experience of social inclusion and social exclusion of SWDs in higher education institutions will be briefly outlined in the following section (s).

2.10. Studying Social Inclusion and Exclusion among Studnets with Disabilities in Higher Education Institutions

In this section, methodologies and theoretical perspectives that are vital to study individuals' with disabilities experiences of social inclusion and exclusion are succinctly reviewed.

2.10.1. Methods Employed in Selected Studies Related to Social Inclusion and Exclusion

From the aforementioned discussion, it can be understood that the concept of social inclusion and exclusion are complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional, and thus, their operationalization/conceptualization may vary across contexts (Levitas *et al.*, 2007; Silver, Omtzigt, 2009). These authors showed that measuring social inclusion/exclusion is daunting in that there is no agreement on the core components of these social maladies. In the context of disability at higher education settings, literatures and research reports are reviewed and indicated that the issues of social inclusion and exclusion are studied utilizing different research approaches, methodologies, participants and the data needed. As a whole, I understood that qualitative research approach, methodological and empirical perspectives that specifically employ phenomenological research design are widely utilized by researchers to best explore various lived experiences of university SWDs.

In particular, this research approach is most relevantly utilized as little is known on the topic of the study. In this sense, researchers utilized different typologies of qualitative research designs. For example, Lourens (2015) studied the lived experiences of higher education for students with a visual impairment at two universities in the Western Cape, South Africa through adopting the principle of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In the other time, Lourens

and Swartz (2016) studied the lived realities and experiences of SWVI who learned at HEIs utilizing a qualitative phenomenological research design. In most specific instances, empirical studies were conducted through extensively utilizing phenomenological qualitative research process, data collection method and analysis techniques to study the experience of social inclusion and exclusion of SWDs in higher education settings. For instance, Subrayen (2011), and Kasiram and Subrayen (2013) utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and describe the lived experience of social exclusion among SWVI at two tertiary education colleges and campuses in South Africa. What is more, Human (2010) utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to document the lived experience of social inclusion at higher education settings.

In addition, efforts made while reviewing literatures showed that most of the exploration of the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion involves the perspectives of those who are thought to experience these phenomena. In this regard, methodologists and phenomenologists acclaimed that the research participants are individuals or groups of people who have consciousness and meaningful experiences with the particular phenomenon being studied (Patten, 2002; Giorgi, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Bearing this in mind, the review of literature made by Dimitrova-Radojichikj (2018) suggested that studies of social inclusion and exclusion of SWVI should involve their views perspectives about their experiences on these phenomena. Once more, de Leeuw, de Boer and Minnaert (2018) claimed that the voice of those who experienced social inclusion and exclusion is paramount importance to properly understand their lived experiences. Most recently, Beteinaki (2019) gave the idea that hearing the voices and lived experiences of youths with visual impairment from their own perspective is the best suited way to explore their experiences on the phenomenon of social inclusion and exclusion.

In conclusion, phenomenological research design is the most preferred and commonly utilized research strategy to qualitatively examine the phenomena of human lived experiences that avails in their day-to-day live situations (Creswell, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, this dissertation examines blind students' perspectives on their experiences of inclusion and exclusion using qualitative data and employing descriptive phenomenological research methodology.

2.10.2. Theoretical Frameworks to Study Social inclusion and Exclusion

In this dissertation, the theoretical underpinnings of Anti-Oppressive Theory (AOT) and Social Model of Disability (SMD) are fixed for the following basic rationale: Primarily, both perspectives are excellently important to inform the findings of the current study. In this way, these are employed as the basis of knowledge and detail explanation of the findings of the study. In particular, the SMD is subscribed into this study to use as theme of data analysis. Regarding this, Tugli, Klu and Morwe (2014) reflected that this model of disability has vital implications to analyze the social, physical (environmental) and organizational barriers to the lives and functioning of these students. Secondly, these theoretical frameworks are hoped to provide directions to propose possible strategies of abolishing social exclusion and improving inclusion for blind students at higher education settings.

Consequently, integrating the theoretical perspective of AOT and SMD helps to perhaps give greater validity and credibility in the study. Thus, the subsequent sections highlighted the summary of theoretical arguments coomonly employed to explain studies concerning the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion and to propose strategies of reducing social exclusion and promoting inclusion in the inclusive education settings.

2.10.2.1. Anti-Oppressive Theory

Basically, the ideology of Anti-Oppressive Theory (AOT) asserts that oppressive relationships emerge between the excluders and the excluded as the former are more privileged, powerful and dominant over the later that are inferior, sub-ordinate and powerless in comparison to the other (Dominelli, 2002). He ascribed AOT in terms of the oppressive relationships between dominant groups and inferior groups, and that the dominant group members are more privileged, and feel the sense of superiority, and attempt to ignore, reject, and dominate the members that are inferior or sub-ordinate groups on the basis of a particular characteristics such as disability, race, sexual orientations, class, or age. In this tone, oppression includes social pathologies frequently occurring to negatively affect and make discomfort for PWDs in social settings such as exclusion, discrimination, bulling, etcetera (Shera, 2003).

In the education settings, the concept of oppression of SWDs includes academic, social and psychological disadvantages imposed on them in the classroom settings and outside of the classroom (Subrayen, 2011). Overall, oppression refers to unfair treatment, unequal access,

systematic denial of opportunities, and restrictions of the oppressed who suffer a lot by oppressors, or oppressive conditions (Hollomotz, 2012). Additionally, Baines (2011) has provided an extended definition of oppression as:

> *Oppression takes place when a person acts or a policy is enacted unjustly against an individual (or group) because of their affiliation to a specific group. This includes depriving people of a way to make a fair living, to participate in all aspects of social life, or to experience basic freedoms and human rights. It also includes imposing belief systems, values, laws, and ways of life on other groups through peaceful or violent means. Oppression can be external, as in the examples above, or internal, when groups start to believe and act as if the dominant belief system, values, and life way are the best and exclusive reality. Internal oppression often involves self-hate, self-censorship, shame, and the disowning of individual and cultural realities* (p.2).

Based on the explanation of Baines, oppression involves any form of unfair human treatments including discomforts experienced by an individual or groups of people as a result of their presence in the specific socio-cultural and physical environments. Hence, it involves lack of equality, being disadvantage and deprivation of one's own rights and freedoms among individuals in the same circumstances (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007). On top of this, Baines (2011) noted that there are two categories of oppression: Internal and external.

On the one hand, internal oppression includes oppression(s) directly related to the oppressed individual or group. In this vein, Williams (2012) noted that internalized oppression is a concept that shows the situation in which an oppressed group or individual act as an oppressor against itself. According to him, internalized oppression occurs when one group of people recognizes a distinct inequality of value compared to another group of people. Of course, it can be manifested on a group level as well as an individual one. To this end, internalized oppression may result in disagreement, or conflict within the group, and discrimination among the group (Williams, 2012). For instance, some groups or members of PWDs hold an oppressive view, or attitude toward their own group. In addition, some university SWDs may start to affirm negative stereotypes of their own or they may deliberately exclude themselves from participation or relationships. In such case, the source of the oppression and oppressive practice is the group or members of the group (Baines, 2011; Williams, 2012).

Contrarily, the explanation given by Baines (2011) indicates that external oppressors are life challenges, attributes or obstacles that are outside of the individuals' or groups' control.

Hence, these include social, organizational (in terms of policies, laws, administrations); cultural and physical environmental oppressive practices (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). Thus, the sources of oppressive conditions and practices are other individuals, groups or the environment that are beyond the oppressed (Williams, 2012). In this sense, external oppressions can be categorized into four forms of oppression such as cultural oppression, social (interpersonal) oppression, environmental oppression and organizational (institutional) oppression (Baines, 2011). In the context of disability in education settings, social exclusion is one of the interpersonal or social forms of oppression (Subrayen, 2011; Beckett, 2015). As the matter of fact, being oppressed, or to oppress others around us is the day-to-day personal experience of all individuals (Hollomotz, 2012).

At HEIs, fabulous local and international studies revealed that the SWDs including those with visual impairment are more likely to be placed at oppressive conditions including academic and social disadvantages in comparison to their counter parts without disabilities (Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Lourens, 2015; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Asmirom, 2019). For instance, prior to these studies Subrayen (2011) conducted a master's study adopting the theoretical perspective of AOT to study the experience of social exclusion among SWVI, and revealed the following core points: Firstly, there is abuse of power by the sighted university members that denied the opportunities for SWVI and violated their rights. Secondly, the sighted peers dominate, or act as superior groups to ignore SWVI, and arrange resources around them to benefit them, and finally exclude their peers with visual impairment. Thirdly, at HEIs campuses and classrooms the non-disabled individuals feel superiority and act as a dominant group, and hence tend to oppress, impose, ignore, and intentionally or unintentionally deny access or opportunities for SWVI. Finally, she evidently ascribed that the sighted peers and other individuals oppress the SWVIs in a way to lead the social exclusionary process.

In general, it is found through reviews that AOT primarily emphasizes on stipulating oppressive socio-cultural and environmental condition encountered by PWDs (Dominelli, 2002; Shakespeare & Watson, 2002; Beckett, 2015). Thus, the discussion held above indicates that the SWDs encounter oppressive socio-cultural, organizational or environmental experiences in their own learning environments. However, these oppressive conditions can be categorized into two forms. In one hand, it is likely for them to face oppressive relationships (including

unhealthier/uncomfortable relationships) with peers without disabilities. On the other hand, they are vulnerable to become disadvantaged (including denial of equal access and opportunities to academic and social lives of their peers and other members, too) in relation to their academic and social lives. In this vein, the perspective of AOT shed illustrative light on the vulnerability of SWDs to negative socio-cultural experiences such as social exclusion. Therefore, one has to view through the lens of AOT that it specifies oppressive practices by which individuals or certain groups are imposed/oppressed (Dominelli, 2002). As mentioned above, it can be easily understood that the experience of social exclusion of PWDs is an oppression imposed by other sighted individuals, the organization or the environment (Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013). Relatedly, AOT gives due attention on the inclusion of those excluded, or on the provision of equal access and opportunities for all (Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013). In this vein, it greatly provides directions to the improvement of social, organizational or environmental practices to be free from oppressive conditions (Shera, 2003). For this particular purpose, AOT involves the approach of Anti-Oppressive Practices (AOP) that principally aimed at creating environments that are free from barriers and oppressive conditions. It has been discussed in the following sub-section that AOP entirely emphasis on alleviating oppressive practices and contrarily promoting inclusive practices in specific social settings (Baines, 2011).

2.10.2.2. Anti-Oppressive Practice

The land mark work of Paulo Freire on Pedagogy of the Oppressed entails that oppressive practice is any form, conditions, or forces that cause harm to human beings by which they are systematically and unfairly treated, and unjustly burdened that happen between the oppressor and the oppressed (Freire, 2000). It can be understood from his magnificent book that oppression occurs when someone (e.g., a classroom teacher) dominates the actions, behaviors, thinking, and the like of the other individual or specific groups (e.g., students in the classroom). In the other vein, Baines (2011) noted that oppressive practices included any of the harmful conditions (i.e., psychological, socio-cultural, or natural) to human well-being and life. On top of this, the study conducted by Subrayen (2011) showed that oppressive practices are challenges, barriers, or risk factors that can directly or indirectly affect the wellbeing, equality, justice and human rights of individuals or groups. However, AOP is a paradigm of changing the contexts of oppressive practices to basically ensure equality, justice and human right and building human health and well-being (Baines, 2011; Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013). On the other hand,

social inclusion often reflects the principles of equity or social justice, equality, respect and human rights perspectives (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Anderson, 2006; Sanger, 2020). In the other vein, Baines (2011) noted that AOP is an emerging paradigm that is inherently intended to identify oppressive practices with a prime aim to create an environment in an inclusive manner based on equality, social justice and rights-based approach. According to Baines, the social inclusions of individuals or groups are achieved on the basis of these key dimensions. In the other vein, AOP is an anti-discriminatory in its very nature that has ambitions to respond to oppressive practices with a potential to provide equality, safety, and safeguard the rights of individuals or groups (Baines, 2011). In this vein, AOP directly inform the agenda of inclusionary practices, and hence it is a much needed approach in every social or environmental setting to promote inclusion, equality, human rights, and equity (Dominelli, 2002; Shera, 2003; Baines, 2011; Beckett, 2015). For instance, in education settings, doing anti-oppressive practices is indisputably vital to maintain the inclusion, equal opportunities, and rights of SWDs (Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013). In particular, anti-oppressive frameworks are strongly needed for learners with disabilities to promote their inclusion in any of the present-day education settings (Subrayen, 2011). According to her, anti-oppressive classroom or educational practices are vital to promote equal opportunities to learning, interaction and relationships, and open opportunities for wider participation.

In conclusion, anti-oppressive framework involves three important perspectives: Equality, social justice and human right which are basic to promote the social inclusion of individuals (Shera, 2003; Subraye, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013).

2.10.2.3. Social Model of Disability

As mentioned in section 2.6.3 above, the SMD is principally important to understand disability and related issues, which are beyond individuals or groups of PWDs. As talked about it in detail below, the socio-cultural, environmental and organizational (contextual) factors play roles to cause the disability and its problems (Mattews, 2009; Shakespeare, 2014). Thus, this theory heavily echoed that the issue of disability is a socio-culturally created phenomenon that is impacted by specific factors found in the above major domains (Oliver, 2013). According to Oliver, the SMD entirely asserts on the social construction of disability. From its very conception, the tenet of the theoretical model of SMD asserts that disability and its related phenomenon such as discriminatory practices and exclusion are socio-culturally constructed

(Shakespeare & Watson, 2002; J Dray, 2008). Regarding the social construction of disability (SCD), as an up-to-date spectrum for realizing disability, J Dray stated the following:

> *The social construction of disability offers a new lens for understanding ability and disability as a social construction that frames how society [and institutions] understands and interacts with individuals who behave in ways that are different from the norm. It is a tool to assist in recognizing how ability is framed so that people can recognize and work toward more equitable, inclusive practices and perceptions of individuals who are different* (p.722). [Emphasis added].

On the basis of J Dray's ideas, the notion of (dis)ability itself is socially constructed and influenced by the physical or organizational environment where the individual lives. Accordingly, the interaction and relationships of able-bodied people with PWDs depends on how the specific disability the individuals is conceived in the local settings such as social institutions (e.g., schools, work organizations) (Bolt, 2005). Based on Bolt, the SMD claims that PWDs become disabled due to a number of reasons, but it is only by society they become disabled (p. 539). In most instances, PWDs are perceived as different from the norm because members in specific social settings have constructed that these individuals are different from themselves (Oliver, 2013). In this regard, society label, or assign different disability identities, and exclude PWDs because of the pre-conceived views of society toward PWDs.

Other researchers also noted that the SCD is the concept by which society and its institutions have the tendency to construct disability and related challenges based on certain social or institutional expectations (Damaj, 2008; Newman-Stille, 2013). Cognizant of the importance of SCD in shaping the idea that individuals or groups of people with disabilities are not disabled by their impairment, Bolt (2005) and Oliver (2013) reflected similar ideas that these PWDs become disabled due to social, cultural and institutional barriers, and not due to the impairment. This implies that all the barriers and disablement are outcomes of socio-cultural production. For example, in the light of SCD, the idea of visual impairment is a socially constructed phenomenon in that those with visual impairment become disabled due to barriers pertaining to social, cultural, a physical or social institutional condition that potentially limits their daily functions (Bolt, 2005; Damaj, 2008). In particular, Bolt noted that the terminologies such as blind, blindness and visual impairment are socially constructed. When one say a person is blind, it can be noted in the lens of SCD that he/she is said to be blind as a result of the

challenges that limits him/her abilities, potentials, and independence, which are constructed by society, and not due to the impairment. Therefore, the SCD reflects a glance that a person is blind because the expectation of society, the institution or environment toward the person is as sighted (Newman-Stille, 2013). According to Newman-Stille, even though the disability (blindness) is absolutely positioned on the person, it completely exists in a socio-cultural vacuum and resultantly the individual face tremendous social, cultural, environmental and institutional challenges/barriers that potentially limit his/her day-to-day life functioning. In brief, the challenges that impact the social inclusion of PWDs are found social-culturally constructed in the specific socio-cultural and institutional context (J Dray, 2008; Shakespeare, 2014). This implies that all the barriers and disablement are outcomes of socio-cultural production. With the above discussion in mind, the tenet of SMD principally claims that PWDs are outcast social groups as a result of the social, contextual and physical environmental factors (Human, 2010).

Hence, the SMD is still an important and widely recognized theoretical paradigm to powerfully explain, predict and understand various interrelated aspects of contributory factors that places PWDs to the risk of socio-cultural problems like social exclusion (Shakespeare, & Watson, 2002). Unlike the MMD, this paradigm to disability does not illustrate the idea that the individual himself/herself is responsible for his/her disability and other related difficulties (Mattews, 2009). Rather, it strongly argue that external factors (extrinsic to the individual) that constitute the barriers constructed by society in which the person lives are the root causes responsible for his/her disability, disabling conditions and other coexisting problems (Oliver, 2013). This implies that the environment, organizational structure and society are the main contributory factor in disabling people and letting them become vulnerable to socio-culturally created problems such as social exclusion.

In summary, the social model theoretical perspective entirely focuses on the social, environmental and contextual factors that may have major roles for the individuals' life, participation and development (Shakespeare, & Watson, 2002). In other words, the SMD advocate an idea that PWDs are the most oppressed group in society, and are highly vulnerable to unnecessary isolation and exclusion from equal and full participation due to the challenges that are beyond the control of the victim (Bolt, 2005; Oliver, 2013). Further discussion on the

challenges related to the social exclusion of blind students as viewed through the theoretical lens of SMD will be concisely held in the other section (see section 2.12 below).

2.10.3. Linkages between Anti-Oppressive Theory, Anti-Oppressive Practice and Social Model of Disability

The discussion held above showed that the aim of one theory speaks to the aim of the other, which involves: (a) creating social, organizational and physical environments that are free of any oppressive actions and/or practices, and (b) enriching equalization of opportunities for PWDs as other non-disabled members of society (Subrayen, 2011; Dominelli, 2002; Mattews, 2009). As far as this dissertation is concerned, the linkage among these theoretical perspectives is discussed in areas organized under two points: Identification and description of the undesirable experiences such as social exclusion, and providing directions to propose strategies of reducing social exclusion and improving inclusion. Primarily, the emergent theoretical perspective of AOP and SMD construe disability in the context of oppression, and represent PWDs as the most oppressed group in society due to social, cultural, environmental and organizational barriers, or challenges that unnecessarily put them in place to socially threatening experiences (Baines, 2011; Shakespeare, 2013). In this sense, these paradigms rely on describing the oppressive human experiences, challenges or chronic life events that are despotic for the IWDs (Mattews, 2009; Oliver, 2013). However, these paradigms strongly focus more on emancipation (freedom, independence), and eradication of any environmental, social, or organizational barriers, or challenges that caused the oppressive experiences to happen (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002).

Secondly, both AOT and SMD are intended to provide important directions to possibly propose strategies of addressing the phenomenon of social exclusion and promoting promising inclusionary practices. Thus, they generally aim to transform their lives through attaining inclusion, equity, equality and rights approaches (Dominelli, 2002). For instance, AOP advocates that anti-oppressive pedagogical practices are needed in the classroom level to provide equal opportunities for all students with and without disabilities (Beckett, 2015). In addition, the SMD informs researchers that socially oppressive experiences such as social exclusion occurred through socially, environmentally and institutionally oppressive circumstances that result restrictions for equalization of opportunities for participation and relationships (Subrayen, 2011). In particular, the tenet of SMD ascertains that trainings or policy directions are needed to address the barriers and create conducive environment for the life and well-being of PWDs (Shakespeer

& Watson, 2002; Mattews, 2009; Oliver, 2013; Tugli, Klu & Morwe, 2014). Above all, the AOP and SMD wishes to create an environment free of challenges (oppressive conditions) related to the individuals' immediate environment. Thus, central to these theoretical perspectives is the execution of emancipation (liberation), empowerment, anti-oppression, social justice and human rights practices (Dominelli, 2002; Mattews, 2009; Subrayen, 2011). More precisely, the paradigms of AOT and SMD follows anti-oppressive framework to moving toward inclusive practices (Shakespeer & Watson, 2002; Shera, 2003). This part of the reviews is illustrated in section 2.13 below that these models generally lead to structuring and restructuring oppressive conditions related to the curriculum, social and physical environments to triumphing inclusive excellence in the education settings.

2.11. Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion among Students with Visual Impairments at Higher Education Institutions

Vision impairment refers to the degree of vision loss or a significant limitation of visual capacity ranging from total blindness to low vision (WHO, 2011; Mboshi, 2018). Hence, students with visual impairments mean that those who are either totally blind or low vision. In the first place, total blindness is a total or complete loss of vision with no possibility of receiving information through the eye sight (Mboshi, 2018). On the other hand, low vision is partial sightedness that can range from minor sight defects such as short sightedness or long-sightedness to the extent that can be correctable by wearing conventional or magnifying devices such as eye glasses (Parvin, 2015). In what follows, the sub-section shortly covers empirical evidences and arguments in relation to the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among students with visual impairments (including those with total vision loss) at higher education classrooms and campus settings.

2.11.1. Experiences of Social Inclusion among Students with Visual Impairments

Contemporarily, the philosophies and principles behind inclusive practices, the availability of disability rights laws, policies, directives, conventions and frameworks for actions gives opportunities for all SWDs to access higher education and precede their learning and participation together with other able-bodied students (Mutswanga & Mapuranga, 2014). For example, legal and policy issues adopted from international covenants, and nationally enacted proclamations and strategies (e.g., the Special Needs Education Strategy) in Ethiopia has given

rises to the rapid growth of the education of SWDs in all levels of education settings including HEIs (MOE, 2012). Nevertheless, effective social inclusion of these students should be beyond getting access to attend their learning at education institutions together with their peers without disabilities (Robo, 2014; Lourens, 2015; Ressa, 2016; Teferi, 2016; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018). These researchers strongly argued that social inclusion of SWDs involves not physically placing them, or allowing them to have an access in the mainstream settings *per se*. Furthermore, it is deeply discussed in section 2.8 above that they should be truly mix together socially, academically, emotionally, and psychologically. With the above point in mind, writers provided different ideas regarding to the situations when specific individuals or groups are said to be truly socially included in education settings. For example, Levitas et al. (2007) deduced that individual or specific groups are socially included when they have equal access to involvement and participation in social relationships and normatively prescribed activities. Adding to this, Hall (2009) reflected that specific individuals or groups are said to be socially included when they have: (a) meaningful interactions and relationships with others counterparts; (b) access to involvement and participation in normatively prescribed activities, and (c) sense of belongingness in the particular social or educational settings. In this vein, the following sections briefly demonstrate the discussion of the themes and sub-themes that represent experience of social inclusion in the classrooms settings:

2.11.1.1. Social Inclusion Within the Four Walls of the Classrooms

The social inclusion of SWVI is not limited outside of the four walls of the classrooms only (Harrist & Bradley, 2002). Rather, inclusionary practices should start within the classrooms where there are reciprocal interactions, participations, and specific relationships (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013). Beyond their physical placement in the classroom settings, they should have all things as their sighted counter parts (Lourense, 2015). Therefore, they are truly socially included in the classrooms when they are accepted as members, and welcomed in the same classrooms (Katz *et al.,* 2012). Other studies also revealed that their social inclusion is realized in the classroom level when their full involvement and participation in all academic opportunities that are available for the majority of their non-disabled peers and total access to the necessary curriculum-based provisions, opportunities and benefits as their sighted peers are ensured (Mutswanga & Mapuranga, 2014; Beteinaki, 2019). In addition, researchers like Lewis (2009) noted that learners with disabilities are socially included in the classrooms when they have equal

access to the teachers' teaching methods and styles of presentation as other students without disabilities. Relatedly, Kearney (2009) revealed similar findings that these students need to have equal opportunities to curriculum access in the classroom settings. On the other hand, Human (2010) and Morris (2014) noted that the SWVI are socially included in the classrooms when they get equal opportunity to participate in classroom discussions, class works, and other aspects of the classroom teaching-learning processes. In the other vein, it is found in the empirical reviews that feeling of belonging to the classroom is part of the social inclusion of SWVI (Anderson, 2006; Morris, 2014). Their studies reflected ideas that for true inclusion to occur in classroom settings, learners with disabilities need to feel part of the classroom social environment.

In sum, it is found in the reviews that being welcomed and accepted in the classrooms, access to academic opportunities in the classrooms, and feeling a good sense of being part of the social (peer) groups in the classroom settings are emanated as important themes to represent the experience of social inclusion in the classroom settings.

2.11.1.2. Social Inclusion Outside of the Four Walls of the Classrooms

Researchers identified different elements of social inclusion for SWVI outside-of- the classroom settings. For example, the study conducted by Subrayen (2011) showed that SWVI are socially included on their campus environment when they are equally recognized in campus-related social activities. Similarly, studies conducted by Hall (2010), and Lourense (2015) revealed that participation in the social lives (e.g., activities including going to events where others are found, engagement in clubs, and sports, and contributing to these activities) of sighted peers represent the core aspects of inclusion of SWVI in education settings. The most recent research study also indicates that developing and maintaining meaningful relationships are also aspects of being included (Beteinaki, 2019). In this vein, Beteinaki's analysis shows that SWVI are said to be truly socially included if they have equal access to opportunities of developing relationships with sighted peers. Other studies also uncovered that forming friendships with sighted students of their age mate is a critical aspect of social inclusion for SWVI (Wadegaonkar *et al.*, 2017).

In summary, the reviews held in an attempt to explore the experience of social inclusion outside of the classrooms of HEIs showed that involvement and participation in social lives of other students, meaningful relationships and forming friendships with sighted students consisted of the social inclusion of SWVI outside-of- the classroom environments.

2.11.2. Experiences of Social Exclusion among Students with Visual Impairments

In spite of the opportunities to enrollment, and learning in higher education, research evidences revealed that the SWVI often face dozens of challenges that affect their social inclusion and subsequently place them at the risk of social exclusion (Anderson, 2006; Beauchamp-Pryor, 2007; Subrayen, 2011; Holmes, 2011; Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013; Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016; Wadegaonkar *et al.*, 2017). When the findings of these research studies summed up, it may not be surprising that physical placement in the classrooms and campuses settings does not guarantee their meaningful social inclusion. Thus, those physically placed in the classrooms and campus settings of HEIs are still experiencing different forms and patterns of social exclusion. In this vein, the study conducted in higher education settings by Kasiram and Subrayen (2013) showed that the SWVI included at a tertiary education setting in South Africa experience social exclusion, which is multi-structural, multi-dimensional and complex. In this regard, Hall (2009) also posited an idea that the experience of social exclusion among individuals or groups ranges from being totally excluded (e.g., non-presence, non-participation in activities, or being out of sight) to poor participation and fewer relationships.

In the first place, it is essential to delineate instances when individuals or groups are presumed to be socially excluded. In this vein, research studies and literatures have described situations when specific individuals or groups are said to be socially excluded. For example, Burchardt, Grand and Piachaud (2002) noted two conditions when individuals or groups become vulnerable to social exclusion: In one hand, individuals or groups are socially excluded if they are geographically in the isolated places due to other reasons that are beyond their control. On the other hand, individuals or groups face social exclusion if they cannot meaningfully participate in key and normal activities of a mainstream society due to factors beyond their control. Again, Burchardt (2003) noted that an individual is socially excluded if he/she does not participate in key activities of society in which he or she lives. In addition to this, Chakravarty and D'Ambrosio (2006) indicated that a person is said to be socially excluded if he or she is involuntarily unable to participate in the basic socio-cultural activities connected to their life in society where they live. Finally, Kabeer (2000) showed that an individual or groups of individuals have said to be socially excluded when (1) they are objectively or physically alienated from the participation or relationship contexts where they feel like they belong, and (2) they become invisible in participation, and relationship areas where others interaction and

relationships can be occurred and celebrated. In this sense, Sayeed (2002) noted that individuals are vulnerable to social exclusion when they have skewed interactions and relationships with other members of a mainstream society. Bearing this in mind, the following sub-sections provided details of the themes and sub-themes attributed to the experience of social exclusion among SWVI in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms:

2.11.2.1. Social Exclusion Within the Four Walls of the Classroom

Multiple studies showed that the classroom is a small teachin-learning community for students with and without disabilities, and teachers that involves memberships, bilateral, multilateral and reciprocal relational patterns, friendship interactions, and participation in classroom-based activities (Lewis, 2009; Lindsay & Mcpherson, 2011; David & Kuyini, 2012; Suárez-Orozco *et al.,* 2015; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). This is also confirmed by Wadegaonkar and Uplane (2017) and de Leeuw et al. (2018) that the classroom is a small social community and immediate social environment for SWDs to develop socialization. However, research studies revealed that compared to the classmates without disabilities, those with disabilities have inadequate access to curriculum that involves different classroom learning opportunities such as following the teacher's lecture, participating in classroom discussion and student-student and teacher-student interaction (Harris & Bradley, 2002; Kearney, 2009; de Leeuw *et al.,* 2018). These studies showed that the SWVI experience different forms and patterns of social exclusion in the classroom level.

Regarding the experiences of social exclusion in the classroom settings, Harris and Bradley (2002) studied the experiences of social exclusion of SWDs and revealed that peer rejection and ignoring (ostracism) are common experiences of social exclusion in the classroom settings. According to them, the peer rejection experiences of these students were manifested through the verbal or overt action of the excluder such as verbal aggressions (e.g., insult, or shout) and physical aggressions (e.g., hitting, pushing and other forms of physical actions). In this case, other researchers noted that the rejection-based experiences are exhibited more blatantly (either utilizing physical actions or verbal expressions), and generally indicate that the victims are not really wanted by the ejectors (Wesselmann, Grzybowski, Steakley-Freeman, DeSouza, Nezlek, & Williams, 2016). In their study, the SWDs faced rejection mean that they were not needed by their own peers without disabilities in the same classroom situations (Harris

& Bradley, 2002). In the other vein, peer ignoring (Ostracism) also indicates rejection, but often made to happen non-verbally without any physical or verbal actions (Williams, 2009). Such an experience is often commonly called *silent treatment* that may be displayed in different symptoms in more seemingly passive ways, or subtle tactics that occurred in the following conditions: When they are neglected or abandoned; when they are not given attention, or mind; when their ideas are not recognized, and when they were totally shut up (Wesselmann & Williams, 2017). Therefore, peer ignoring is a passive form of peer rejection (Lindsay & Mcpherson, 2011; Wesselmann *et al.,* 2016). Nonetheless, the experience of peer rejection or ignoring (Ostracism) can be exhibited both in the classroom settings and outside of the classroom settings (Harris & Bradley, 2002). Similarly, the study conducted by Lewis (2009) also showed that learners are more vulnerable to marginalization within the classroom settings when they lack equal access to the teachers' teaching methods and styles of presentation (p.19). In other words, being included in the same higher education classrooms with other able-bodied classmates; they lack relevant provisions to their specific learning needs; did not enjoy the same classroom opportunities and benefits as their sighted classmates (Lindsay & Mcpherson, 2011; Teferi, 2016). Such experiences of SWVI made them feel like unequal, have no place in the classrooms and also triggered them a sense that they are in a completely different world with their different classes and different schedules (Alhammadi, 2014). This also affected their motivation to learn and achieving as other learners of their age (Mutswanga & Mapuranga, 2014).

Moreover, multiple studies uncovered that SWVI have poor involvement and participation, devalued recognition and contribution in cooperative learning activities such as group works, assignments, and project works in comparison to their sighted peers (Sayeed, 2002; Anderson, 2006; Lourens, 2015; Harris, 2017). In relation to this, Subrayen (2011) and Kasiram and Subrayen (2013) identified the theme of academic exclusion as a form of social exclusion in the classroom settings. According to them, SWVI placed in classrooms settings lack equal access to the curriculum pertaining to the teachers teaching, teaching materials and resources and they become highly vulnerable to academic (pedagogic) exclusions within their own classrooms. Their study also added that the form of academic exclusion in the classroom settings includes poor participation of SWVI in academic activities (e.g., group works, or assignments). Relatedly, a study conducted by Lewis (2009) clarified that though included in the seemingly inclusive classroom settings, they faced from denied of equal access to the classroom learning

opportunities in comparison to the sighted peers, and hence, become marginalized during most of the teaching learning process. Most notably, other researchers also confirmed that these students have unvalued or undervalued recognition and contribution in most group-based learning activities (Beaucham-Pryor, 2013). Generally, through scrutinizing different research studies, it is found that denial of classroom learning opportunities, teachers' teaching, peer rejection/ignoring/, poor participation, under/un/valued recognition and limited contribution in cooperative learning activities represents the experience of social exclusion of SWVI within the classroom settings.

2.11.2.2. Social Exclusion Outside-of-the Four Walls of the Classroom

Through reviewing empirical evidences, it is found that the social exclusion of SWVI outside of the classroom settings at HEIs includes poor participation, or non-participation of SWVI in campus-based extracurricular activities (e.g., clubs, games, athletics and general exercise, clubs, sports); non-involvement in commonplaces where other age mates are found, and the like (Gordon *et al.,* 2017). Based on the reviews, it is understood that extracurricular activities are basically non-academic activities that mostly represent the social life of university students (Streeter, 2007). Mostly, such activities are ceremonial and voluntary that carries no academic credit as they occurred outside of the normal teaching-learning hours on the campus setting. Inevitably, these activities can afford students multitudes of academic (e.g., better grades and higher education attainment) and social benefits (e.g., higher self-concept, acquire skills such as interpersonal or teamwork skills, and social skills, recreation and leisure skills, leadership and decision making skills) (Labonté, Hadi & Kauffmann, 2011). Among other things, these activities have strong binding forces and provide incredible socializing opportunities (Wadegaonkar *et al.,* 2017). The review of literature made by these writers indicated that these activities are key venues for building friendships, social interactions and relationships. In culmination, Labonté et al. (2011) noted that such activities are as sponges that bring different people at the same venue and interlink together, and ultimately enhance social integration.

In higher education settings, empirical findings showed that SWVI are systematically denied of equal access to involvement and participation in campus-based extracurricular and non-academic activities (Streeter, 2007; Labonté *et al.,* 2011; Kimoga, Anaku, Irama, Hiisa, Kudit, Masika, & Otwal, 2015). These studies generally disclosed that these students faced exclusion from these key activities that are normally available for other sighted students, and

which could play significant roles for building interaction and relationships. In particular, the study conducted by Streeter (2007) showed that SWVI are disengaged in major activities like clubs that can create opportunities to develop relationships and friendships. In addition, the synthesis of relevant social inclusion literatures conducted by Dimitrova-Radojichikj (2018) showed that students with chronic visual impairments were outsiders and often left out from the social-cultural activities commonly available for the sighted peers in the institutions. Moreover, Beteinaki (2019) founded that visually impaired students practically remain shut-out, left behind in most campus life activities that are highly valued by their age mates in their universities.

Generally speaking, the reviews of the intensive research studies discussed above apparently uncovered that the denial of equal opportunities for SWVI to participate in different extracurricular activities can be manifested in the form of poor participation, or underrepresentation, or non-existent of participation, which is miss-representation. In the first instance, the review showed that the SWVI are poorly engaged in most extracurricular activities where they are underrepresented in the activities (Labonté *et al.*, 2011). In the second instance, studies disclosed that the SWVI mostly remain non-participant in campus-based extracurricular activities, where the SWVI are miss-represented in the key and normal activities (Ntombela & Soobrayen, 2013; Alhammadi, 2014 Biniam, 2016). In other words, Dimitrova-Radojichikj (2018) noted that such exclusion involves detachment and physical segregation of these students from the activities that are normatively prescribed in the education setting.

2.12. Challengin Experiences Related to Social Exclusion among Students with Visual Impairment in Higher Education Settings

It has been discussed in section 2.10.2.2 above that the SMD is the most notable theoretical perspective that would give peculiar milieus for scrutinizing the challenging experiences tha are closely related to social exclusion. It specifically illustrates that the failure of social and physical environments and organizational or architectural structures to adjust to the needs and aspirations of PWDs cause their oppressive life experiences such as social exclusion (Mattews, 2009; Oliver, 2013; Shakespeare, 2014). In other words, the challenges that create conditions to reinforce social exclusion are barriers, or constraints to the social inclusion of SWVI (Hall, 2010). Thus, it is important to better identify and describe three domains of challenges close to the anguished experience of social exclusion (Subrayen, 2011). In this vein, Beteinaki (2019) showed that there are structural (institutional), physical and attitudinal (social) barriers to social

inclusion of adolescent SWVI. Other researchers also noted that most barriers to the equality, just and inclusion of SWDs are mostly emanated from the social, physical and organizational environments of HEIs (Tugli, Klu & Morwe, 2014). In this sense, the paradigms of SMD emphasized on analyzing different factors external of the PWDs inherently produce conditions for the social exclusion of the individual (s). This verdict has been reported by popular researchers that the phenomenon of social exclusion happens for reasons that are beyond the control of those subject to it (Levitas *et al.,* 2007). Accordingly, the theoretical perspective of SMD asserted that an individual is not the cause of his/her own social exclusion. Instead, the society and his/her immediate physical or institutional environments are attributed most as the source of socially oppressive events (Shakespeare, & Watson, 2002; Subrayen, 2011; Hollomotz, 2012). Up on the conviction of this theoretical spectrum, the most common challenging experiences of PWDs are social challenges, physical challenges, and institutional challenges. The following sections comprised of discussion of social exclusion-provoking challenges that have been identified through reviewing literatures and studies.

2.12.1. Social Challenges Contributed to Social Exclusion

Based on the discussion held by Shakespeare (2014) the social challenges are socio-culturally rooted myths, wrong perceptions and stereotypical thinking. Undeniably, these social challenges linked to social exclusion are also social (attitudinal) barriers to social inclusion (Subrayen, 2011). Nowadays, concepts like inclusion or social inclusion are a question of attitudes among students and teachers in mainstream education settings (Heyder *et al.,* 2020). So, previous studies showed that the victims of social exclusion have the history of socially threatening experiences like prejudices, stereotyping, discriminatory practices, and stigmatization at least once in their lifetimes (Farnicka, 2015).

More specifically, the social challenges responsible for the social exclusionary experiences of SWVI can be categorized as peer-group related challenges and teacher-related challenges (Lewis, 2009; Subrayen (2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013; David & Kuyini, 2012; Alhammadi, 2014; Morris, 2014; Lourens, 2015; Getachew, 2018). In that light, the subsequent sections involve the discussion of peer-group related and teacher-related challenges of social exclusion in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms at higher education contexts.

2.12.1.1. Peer-Group-Related Challenges

Through synthesizing literatures and research studies, it is emanated that numerous peer-group-related social challenges such as stereotyping, and prejudices immensely contributed to the social exclusion of SWVI. These challenges are highlighted in the following fewer paragraphs:

Stereotyping: Stereotypes are generalized views, preconceived ideas or judgments by which PWDs are arbitrarily assigned to peculiar characteristics, behaviors or roles (Fishbein, 2002). According to Fishbein, such views involves faulty pictures, inflexible generalizations, wrong beliefs and opinions that comes to mind when thinking about a particular individual or groups with disabilities. In other words, stereotype (s) involves a mistaken idea or views that are already ingrained (embedded) in someone's mind about the other individual or group (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2012). Alternatively, it refers to a deep-seated belief or ingrained misconceptions some individuals or groups have toward the other individual or group (Papadaki & Tzvetkova-arsova, 2013; Dare & Nowicki, 2018). Their explanation indicates that stereotypes resembles as putting certain individuals or groups with visual impairment into *a box* that reelect negative outlooks, or images, but which can't reflect them and their disability. Another review on stereotypes about blindness and people with visual impairments generally showed that stereotypes indicates the social representation of the day-to-day activities, actions, behaviors, abilities and potential of individuals with visual impairments (Daniela, 2019). For instance, the stereotypical view of students toward their peers with disabilities involves set of rigid and overgeneralized belief (i.e., positive or negative) about the characteristics or attributes of an individual or specific groups with disabilities (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2012). Such thinking mostly resulted from lack of awareness and knowledge about disabilities (Kite & Whitley, 2016).

Therefore, stereotypic view and behavior indicate the negative imagery, or myths that are not justifiable with reasons or that are unrealistic, but easily generalized in the specific socio-cultural context about PWDs (Fraser, Beeman, Southall, Wittich, 2019). In particular, Daniela (2019) mentioned certain instances of exaggerated images by which individuals with visual impairments are mentally symbolized as eternally unhappy, superheroes, or those with superpowers, weak, helpless, worthy to admire, and they are endowed with a range of mystical abilities mainly because they lacked information regarding the real potentials, abilities, characteristic of the victims (p. p.234). In addition, Papadaki and Tzvetkova-arsova (2013)

identified the sighted individuals' common believes toward individuals with total vision loss as beggars, evil or blinded because of punishment, possess extra-powers and abilities such as such as better sense of things, especially of hearing, sixth sense or better judgment abilities (p.481). In most cases, individuals with visual impairment are often stereotyped and negatively labeled by the sighted people that have intense influence on their social acceptance and integration of into societal life (Papadaki & Tzvetkova-arsova, 2013). Their explanation also showed that the stereotypical believe can disqualify individuals from relationships, participation in social life, separate and finally can isolate. Other studies also produced that stereotypes about blindness certainly affect the social inclusion of the individuals. For instance, a recent study conducted by Fraser et al. (2019) showed that stereotyping attached to blind-person is one of the most serious barriers to their social participation, and thereby contributed for the social exclusion to happen in the social setting. In education settings, various studies also indicated that students' with visual impairment are the most stereotyped individuals that can exacerbate their experience of being excluded from participation, and relationships (Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013).

Based on the study conducted by Daniela (2019), the sighted students often reflect negative imageries and overgeneralizations about their blind peers on the basis of how they look on the outside as, for instance, brave, courageous, totally incapable or have extraordinary non-visual senses, and the like, which may be untrue, unusual or uncommon, incorrect, unjustified and atypical. Instead, these are hasty generalizations that imply the mythical understandings; faulty thinking or misunderstanding, unfavorable or unacceptable believes of the sighted peers about visual impairment (Daniela, 2019). Nevertheless, the oversimplified and socio-culturally deep-rooted wrong believes and attached images to the SWVI undoubtedly affect their relationships, participation and equal opportunities as compared to the sighted peers (Streeter, 2007; Daniela, 2019; Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Alhammadi, 2014).

As a final point, it can be deduced that stereotypes can be grown to prejudices (WHO, 2011). The reason behind is that overgeneralized names carries negative implications and deconstructing ideas which can create further prejudices or negative attitudes (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2012; Dare & Nowicki, 2018).

Peers' prejudices: De Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2012) defined the concept of attitudes in the context of disability, and described that it generally indicates an individuals' viewpoints or

disposition toward a particular object, individuals or groups. On the other hand, Kite and Whitley (2016) explicated that attitude is a negative or positive evaluation of an object or the behavior or action of individuals or groups. According to them, it is a constructed or learned predisposition to respond in either favorable (i.e., positive attitude) or unfavorable (i.e., negative attitude) manner toward people's actions or behavior. For example, the students' attitudes toward peers with disabilities in the inclusive education settings may be positive, negative or neutral (Matlosa & Matobo, 2007). In this vein, de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2012) noted that there are three types of attitudes: Positive, negative and neutral. In the first place, positive attitudes imply positive or joyful thinking and outlook toward others and it involves a contributing factor for students' success and social integration.

Contrarily, a negative attitude refers to prejudices or painful feelings toward others, and it is not optimistic anyways. It can severely affect the social interaction, relationships and participation of peers with disabilities (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2012). Finally, neutral attitude indicates the attitude which is not expressed, implied or felt in favorable or unfavorable manner. Nonetheless, researchers gave more focus discussing on the topic of prejudices as it is one of the social (attitudinal) challenges that affect social interactions and relationships. In this vein, Kite and Whitley (2016) noted that prejudice involves the attitude, which is often negative toward other individuals or groups. According to them, prejudices involve an irrational, unjustified or biased thinking against a group of people or individuals mainly because of membership in a particular social group. However, attitudinal barriers (prejudices) can be intentional and unintentional. While intentional attitudinal barriers include deliberate instances of showing negative actions or behaviors, biased opinion, feeling, and prejudgment about the individual or a group with disability, unintentional attitudinal barriers mostly happened due to lack of knowledge and understanding toward disability and persons with disabilities (Fishbein, 2002).

In brief, a prejudiced attitude is a negative thought, hate, tendency, or action toward someone or some group members for being members (Pivik, Mccomas & Laflamme, 2002). These authors also added that there are different variables that contribute to the negative attitudes of an individual or group toward the other. Other authors also noted that negative social attitudes involve prejudices developed from stereotypical views that include hate of the non-disabled individuals (Matlosa & Matobo, 2007; Papadaki & Tzvetkova-arsova, 2013). Based on these

authors, prejudices or negative attitudes are the socially constructed understandings some individuals have toward the other. In most instances, such attitudinal barriers are stemmed from lack of awareness, knowledge or understanding about disability (Beatriz, Noelia, Victor, & Dolores, 2016). In this regard, disability is commonly understood with misconceptions in society that have negative impact on PWDs in multifaceted ways particularly in interaction and relationships, and can fuel the phenomenon of social exclusion (WHO, 2011).

However, too often, prejudiced attitude toward peers with disabilities discourages interaction, interdependence and relationships, and finally precipitate social exclusion (Harrist & Bradley, 2002; McCaughey, 2009). In particular, the study conducted by Anderson (2006) revealed that while learning together the sighted peers often construct the conception that the SWDs are "others" and hence, not "one of us" in the same classroom. In addition, the study conducted by Beauchamp - Pryor (2013) at HEIs showed that the sighted peers have a socially constructed discriminatory attitude toward the SWVI which affected their peer integration, involvement and participation in group activities.

2.12.1.2. Teacher-Related Challenges

The teacher-related challenges identified through reviewing existing literatures and empirical evidences as having contributed to the social exclusion of university students with visual impairments includes teacher's ignorance, lack of caring, valuing and responsibility and teachers' lowered expectations. These challenges are discussed in the following paragraphs:

Teacher's ignorance: The knowledge and skill of teachers regarding methods of teaching, and instructional adaptations plays significant roles to mainstream social inclusion of SWDs in the classrooms (Lewis, 2009). Nowadays, the inclusive education approach has brought about a new challenge in relation to teaching both students with and without disabilities together at the same instructional pace (Lamport *et al.,* 2012). In this particular instance, Alemayehu (2018) explained that inclusive classroom teaching has made teacher's work beyond difficulty as they have little knowledge and awareness about inclusive education and how it should be practiced in the contexts of SWDs and other students without disabilities. Prior research studies also noted that most of the classroom teachers who teach SWDs find it difficult to accommodate their students' diverse classroom needs and interests, which may be attributed to lack of sufficient trainings, knowledge of adapting their instructions, and experiences regarding teaching SWDs together

with other students without disabilities (Lewis, 2009). Particularly, his study showed that most of the SWDs in the classroom contexts are marginalized because classroom teachers lack the necessary skills on how to adapt or modify their teaching methods for their students with disabilities. Another study conducted by Lamport et al. (2012) reflected that teachers' lack of sufficient training and skill of planning to teach their SWDs together with other students unquestionably result marginalization of their SWDs in the classroom settings.

As argued before, teachers' difficulty of practicing inclusive teaching through modifying their teaching methods and lack of sufficient understanding of the peculiar classroom needs of learners with disabilities result the denial of equal access to classroom learning opportunities for their students (Alhammadi, 2014; Lourens, 2015). As the final instance, the study conducted by Subrayen (2011) and Kasiram and Subrayen (2013) revealed that teachers' ignorance in terms of adapting their instruction and unawareness of disability-specific classroom needs can result academic exclusion of SWVI. Thus, extensive training of instructor is inevitably required in the areas of inclusive education including the knowledge of policy, legislation, and funding frameworks to promote the social inclusion of the SWDs in the classroom settings and outside of the classrooms (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Lewis, 2009; Lamport *et al.*, 2012).

Lack of caring, valuing and responsibility: The study conducted by Kearney (2009) showed that some instructors did not take responsibility for their SWDs. Thus, special emphasis is often needed to provide equal opportunities in the classroom teaching-learning process (Alhammadi, 2014). In addition, the study conducted at HEIs by Lourense (2015) revealed that some lecturers feel uncomfortable and are unwilling to have SWVI in their classes, and rarely use insensitive language when they talk to them. Similarly, other studies also revealed that lack of caring, valuing, and responsibility by the university staff including teachers may act to exclude the SWVI from curriculum access (Corbett, 2001). In other words, it often appears that unless the SWDs are equally valued in the classroom, it is more likely for them to be marginalized in the classroom, and inclusive education is unlikely to be realized or practiced, then (Slee, 2007). Finally, lack of caring, valuing and responsibility of classroom teachers for their SWDs is mostly accompanied by their reluctance to adapt the instruction, or to comply with reasonable instructional accommodation to mitigate their students' academic needs (Joseph, 2010).

Teachers' lowered expectations: In most cases, some of the classroom teachers set low expectation bar to their SWDs in comparison to other classmates without disabilities (Shevlin *et al.*, 2002; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Kearney, 2009). Precisely, the study conducted by Shevlin et al. (2002) showed that they did not equally value their SWVI as other sighted student and mostly have negative outlooks for the academic performances and classroom participation of their SWVI. Nevertheless, this is one of the discriminatory or restrictive thought that excludes the students from involvement and participation in classroom-related activities and equal access to the curriculum (Shevlin *et al.,* 2002). Also, the popular authors in the field of inclusive education, Booth and Ainscow (2002) noticed that some teachers do not have positive attitudes towards inclusive education; believes that reasonable instructional accommodation is not needed for SWDs, and at most thought that the SWDs are not equally important as other sighted students. Particularly, Kearney (2009) reported that classroom teachers' low expectation toward their SWDs led them to classroom marginalization and denial of equal access to classroom learning opportunities, and finally resulted marginalization during the teaching-learning process.

2.12.2. Institutional Challenges Contributed to Social Exclusion

The institutional challenges are organization-based barriers to social inclusion that involves factors closely related to the attributes of the built-in-institution such as infrastructures, systems, laws, structures and services, organizational culture and administrations found within the context of the particular organization (Mattews, 2009; Shakespeare, 2014). Research studies revealed that different attributes related to the organization contributed a lot for the social exclusion of their SWDs. At higher education settings, the institutional-level (systemic) factors, or hindrances that render the social exclusion of SWDs includes inflexible procedures, inaccessibility of transportation services, and discriminatory institutional programs and practices; the built-in physical environment (the structural and architectural aspect), media and communication systems (Lewis, 2009); lack of legal, policy and procedures in the organization where the individuals normally conduct life, or work with others (Low, 2009); inaccessible format available such as inaccessible notice-boards (Moore, 2009); segregated services (Alhammadi, 2014); lack of appropriate funding, or student loan (Kearney, 2009); policy-related barriers like lack of specific policies and provisions (Yared, 2008); lack of unifying systems, or socialization programs (Wadegaonkar *et al.*, 2015); lack of formal social support system (Hewett *et al.*, 2015); and lack of structured support systems (Haihambo, 2010; Yohannes, 2015; Getachew, 2018).

2.12.3. Physical Challenges Contributed to Social Exclusion

As vividly affirmed in the SMD, the environmental domain makes up the physical environmental factors like natural and human-made environmental features including the inaccessibility of the physical layout of spaces, locations, as well as climate and terrain (WHO, 2001). Thus, the physical challenges are physical barriers to social inclusion, which includes inaccessibility of the physical conditions of the environment like terrain, weather conditions, and the like (Mattews, 2009; Shakespeare, 2014). For instance, it is confirmed through local and international studies conducted at HEIs that the SWVI have no equal opportunity to free and independent movement from place to place for different social and academic purposes because of the inaccessibility of most of the physical environment of the campuses (Hinchcliffe, 2010; Abu-Hamour, 2013; Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016).

Predominantly, studies conducted abroad also uncovered that the physical inaccessibility of HEIs has tremendous effect on the social interaction, and participation SWDs (Alhammadi, 2014; Lourense, 2015). In relation to this, Subrayen (2011) reported that the campus life of the SWVI is confined so that they have isolated living experiences due to the unwelcoming and unfriendly nature of the physical environment. At this point, her study showed that it is unlikely to the sighted peers that the SWVI could not meet their professors for different academic purposes. Likewise, the local study conducted by Biniam (2016) about the experience of SWVI in higher education in Ethiopia revealed that unlike the sighted students, the SWVIs have problems to have contact with their instructors because of the physical barriers to get access to their offices, and resultantly majority of them were forced to miss important consultation hours with their teachers (p.18). Moreover, Beauchamp and Anderson (2010) uncovered that the SWVI have had no meaningful interaction and relationships with other university community mainly because of the inaccessibility of the built in physical environment such as badly designed administrative buildings and offices that have no stairs, ramp and lift; and inaccessible physical spaces such as roads, walkways, lecture rooms, meeting halls, and the like.

To this end, the study conducted by Alhammadi (2014) reported that the SWVI who learn at HEIs remained as outsiders from peer relationships and social activities, and become disconnected from the existing social networks on a daily basis mainly due to the inaccessibility of the campus environment. As a whole, the above discussion clearly showed that the SWVI are

highly vulnerable to being socially excluded from relationships and participation due to the inaccessibility of physical environments.

2.13. Strategies to Address Social Exclusion and Promote Social Inclusion in Higher Education Settings

As said before, social exclusion is multidimensional, and each dimension is interlinked in that one dimension may lead to another dimension (Levitas *et al.,* 2007; Silver, 2007). This makes the problem more devastating in the lives of those who experience it (Jehoel-Gijsbers & Vrooman, 2007; Omtzigt, 2009). In education contexts, studies showed that the social exclusion experiences of SWVI have immense impacts on their academic and social lives. For instance, the study conducted by Subrayen (2011) showed that this phenomenon has tendency to lead to absence from classrooms, being alone, and dropouts that represents massive forms of social exclusions. This implies that the experience in social exclusion can be progressed into further states of exclusion such as marginalization, social isolation and loneliness (Morgan *et al.,* 2007; Ziyauddin & Kasi, 2009). Moreover, other research studies revealed that social exclusion generally hinders the socialization, quality of life, academic and social outcomes, and psychological well-being of these students (Kasiram & Subrayen, 2011; Beteinaki, 2019).

Notably, it is elaborated in section 2.7.3 above that being excluded is a threat not only for efficaciousness of social inclusion, but also for achieving inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Sayeed, 2002; Sherlaw & Hudebine, 2015; Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). Therefore, it is not doubtable that paying special attention is desirable for different strategies to decrease its impact and increase the social inclusion of SWDs in all spheres of university-campus life. For this purpose, most of the literatures and research studies reviewed in this dissertation portrayed that there are a number of ways or strategies. As an instance, the report delivered by UNESCO showed that social exclusion can be reduced through following inclusive approaches at different levels where it occurs (UNESCO, 2009). Over again, researchers like Kabeer (2005) and Islam (2015) suggested that following human-rights-based approach is vital to improve large-scale inclusionary practices.

Correspondingly, other researchers affirmed that independent social inclusion policies or legislative frameworks are needed at national and institutional levels to eradicate exclusion and promote social inclusion (Obiozor, Onu, & Ugwoegbu, 2010). Evidently, the SMD and AOP

claim rights-based approach to reduce social exclusion and develop promising inclusionary practices in the education settings. In this vein, the sub-sections below showed as much in detail as possible the discussion on paradigmatic guidance of proposing strategies to address social exclusion and thereby promote social inclusion:

2.13.1. Strategies Informed by the Anti-Oppressive Theory

As mentioned before, social exclusion is an oppressive human experience (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002; Shera, 2003; Subrayen, 2011). In this vein, the theoretical perspective of AOT emphasizes on providing directions on how to address different types of oppressive human experiences where social exclusion is one of them (Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013). As discussed herein, the review of this part of the literatures provided important points: First of all, the paradigm of AOT basically gives paramount importance attention in the ways to the re-integration of the marginalized and improvements of the inclusion of the excluded (Dominelli, 2002). Relatedly, it entirely depends on promoting Anti-Oppressive Practices (AOPs) within the framework of equality, social justice and human right to reduce and eliminate oppressive social experiences like social exclusion (Subrayen, 2011). In this particular vein, the AOT provides specific directions and proactive responses to prevent, or eradicate oppressive social and environmental conditions, threats (adversities) and acknowledges the role of inclusive practices at the social or education settings (Dominelli, 2002; Shera, 2003).

Finally, following anti-oppressive paradigm is pertinently required to build inclusive excellence. Regarding this, the study conducted by Subrayen (2011) showed that following anti-oppressive paradigm is very important to promote the academic and social transformation and ultimately the social inclusion of SWVI. She specifically stated as: *"Anti-Oppressive Practices embrace [help to plan] holistic interventions by taking cognizance of the oppressed persons social and university context"* (p.16). [Emphasis added]. More importantly, Subrayen believed that anti-oppressive practices can be developed on the basis of the voices of the oppressed (p.5). Broadly speaking, the claims provided in AOT shows that overcoming socially oppressive experiences requires designing alternative strategies of overcoming the oppressive practices in the first hand (Dominelli, 2002; Shera, 2003; Subrayen, 2011). Therefore, the AOT provides directions of promoting inclusive practices through creating meaningful social relationships and non-discriminatory or welcoming institutional and physical environment for all (Dominelli,

2002). In the context of disability, it is described above that the AOT asserts the social inclusion of individuals alongside three fundamental concerns: Social justice, equality and human rights (Edeh, 2012; Diker & Türkün, 2013). Initially, the framework of social justice generally implies fairness among IWDs in social environment that focuses more on the effective promotion of equity, and meaningful inclusion (Edeh, 2012). Secondly, equality implies equal opportunity and access to participation for these individuals (Diker & Türkün, 2013).

On the other hand, the agenda of human right involves rights, social privileges, and freedoms that are inherently entitled to all human beings regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, disability, or any other status (Edeh, 2012). This framework connotes that all PWDs have the same human right as other individuals without disabilities (UNESCO, 2009). Practically, the theoretical framework of AOT primarily is used to promoting Anti-Oppressive Practices for PWDs in education or social settings (Subrayen, 2011). For example, in the classrooms, anti-oppressive pedagogical practice is needed to promote the inclusion of SWDs and see the fruition of inclusive pedagogy (Beckett, 2015). In general, the reviews made on the overall essence of AOT indicate two related strategies that are vigorously vital to curb exclusionary experiences and promote inclusive excellence in education settings: Creating Anti-Oppressive Practices (AOPs) and widening inclusive practices. The following sections briefly demonstrated the main issues under these core ideas:

2.13.1.1. Creating Anti-Oppressive Practices

As discussed under the sub-section 2.10.2.1.1 above, AOP is an interdisciplinary approach primarily rooted within the practice of social work that mainly emphasized on curbing any forms of oppression (s) in an attempt to delivering services, resources, and facilities in an inclusive manner (Shera, 2003). It is an approach wished-for creating welcoming, free-from barriers, and harmonic relationship practices among students with and without disabilities in education settings (Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram and Subrayen, 2013). Specifically, the AOP is vital to promote equality, social justice and human rights in the contexts of inclusive education (Diker & Türkün, 2013; Blanco, 2008; Subrayen, 2011). Thus, it is principally aimed at creating inclusive practices that are free from oppressive experiences and/or practices (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Contrarily, oppressive practices are experiences that are unwelcoming, chaotic, and full of barriers or challenges (Baines, 2011). For example, teachers' oppressive or inaccessible

teaching-methods, oppressive classroom interactions and relationships, differential treatments, etcetera involve examples of oppressive practices that are discriminatory for SWDs as these can't respond to their needs and can't transform their academic and social lives (Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013). Therefore, doing anti-oppressive practices such as developing healthier relationships and interactions, providing equal access to services and facilities, creating welcoming classroom atmosphere, and applying anti-oppressive teaching methods (e.g., accessible and reasonably modified) plays fundamental roles for the enhancement of equalization of opportunities for SWDs who are most vulnerable to oppression in many instances in comparison to students without disabilities (Subrayen, 2011).

2.13.1.2. Widening Inclusive Practices

Based on the explanation given by Booth and Ainscow (2002) developing, and widening inclusive practices in the classrooms and educational environments plays great roles to overcome social exclusionary experiences of SWDs. In particular, inclusive teaching practices (ITPs) are required to ensure equal learning opportunity in higher education, which can be realized through well-planned inclusive practices in the classroom settings (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Sarkar, 2016; Kurt *et al*., 2016). Different writers have proposed promising inclusive practices. For example, Holmes (2011) and Lourese (2015) deduced that cooperative teaching and learning methods are most recommended inclusive pedagogical strategies that are vital to meaningfully promote the social inclusion of SWVI and help to make inclusive education a reality, as well. In this vein, Acevedo (2014) deduced that inclusive instructional strategies such as interactive and collaborative learning strategies can help maintain social inclusivity for students with disabilities in the classroom settings (p.23).

Also, Morris (2014) suggested that providing equal classroom learning opportunities through different classroom pedagogic techniques such as teachers' verbal interaction and communication during instructional process, movement and embodiment (i.e., the representation or expression of something in a tangible or visible form) are important classroom inclusive practices. Thus, promoting inclusive teaching practices requires planning and implementing teaching strategies that truly value social justice and human rights paradigms SWDs (Subrayen, 2011; Pantić & Florian, 2015). For instance, the study conducted by Ball (2017) disclosed that bridge-building is an important inclusive practice that involves opening opportunities for

establishing new relationships between individuals with and without disabilities. Finally, Holmes (2011) found out that establishing formal befriending (e.g., peers' support) networks are vital inclusive practices to buffer the harmful effects of social exclusion in the classroom settings, or outside. In this vein, education institutions have to formally organize bridge-builders and peers support network groups who serve voluntarily or on paid basis that boost harmonic and long-lasting interpersonal relationships with peers without disabilities (Holmes, 2011; Ball, 2017).

In summary, the discussion held above highlighted that widening, or building inclusive practices and creating AOP are features of AOT which are required for building positive social environment, promoting the equalization of opportunities, encouraging genuine participation and active involvement of SWDs in education contexts. Thus, education institutions and professionals working in the institutions shall better follow AOT frameworks to minimize all the social, institutional and environmental oppressions, and to promote anti-oppressive experiences on the basis of equality, human rights and social justice paradigms (Newman-Stille, 2013).

2.13.2. Strategies Informed by the Social Model of Disability

Basically, disability is a social-cultural issue (Coe & Wapling, 2010). Thus, the SMD hopes to assure that PWDs can properly function, learn, and participate on an equal basis with other non-disabled members in every spheres of life (Tugli, Klu & Morwe, 2014). At the present time, the social model perspective turns the attention of professionals in identifying, modifying, removing and prevention of physical environmental, organizational (contextual) and socio-cultural barriers and promoting enabling, positive and welcoming atmosphere for PWDs (Shakespeer & Watson, 2002; Mattews, 2009; Oliver, 2013). These writers noted that this theoretical perspective requires restructuring the challenges, or barriers that mostly found in the social, environmental and institutional domains. Therefore, this model of disability asserts to overriding the worst effects of social exclusion through addressing the barriers, or challenges related to the exacerbation of social exclusionary experiences of PWDs (Newman-Stille, 2013). In other words, this model aims at ensuring social inclusion, and awakening hope in the lives of PWDs (Mattews, 2009).

As a whole, the SMD recognizes the usefulness of rights-based approach as a mechanism to dismantle barriers to social inclusion or to minimize challenges related to social exclusion (Oliver, 2013). Based on the claims provided by SMD, more has to be done in the grassroots level focusing on the identification of organizational, attitudinal, and environmental barriers to

result change in the lives of PWDs. On the basis of surveyed literatures, it is roughly discussed below that trainings and policy formation are themes that are highly informed by the SMD as strategies of addressing social exclusion and promoting social inclusion in education settings.

2.13.2.1. Providing Trainings

As noted above, PWDs faces numerous challenges in their day-to-day life experiences. In the realm of the SMD, trainings programs are means of capacity building, social care, and empowerment for these people to at least minimize the challenges they face in their everyday lives (Walker, 2019). In this vein, this perspective chiefly gives directions to provide training interventions as strategies of promoting personal development, well-beings and in an effort to realize aspirations in the life for these individuals (Oliver, 2013). In education settings, the SWDs may take different trainings related to their academic and social lives. For example, as argued by different researchers, what is important for SWVI for their social development is social skills trainings (Ishmael, 2015; Wadegaonkar *et al.,* 2015**;** Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Beteinaki, 2019). In this vein, Tugli, Klu & Morwe (2014) noted that the SMD has tendency to provide options available to them to alleviate the barriers to their participation, relationships and opportunities to different resources, materials and facilities. Equally important, their study clearly showed that this model of disability has a gigantic implication to just, equality and inclusion of SWDs at HEIs. In other words, it is mentioned earlier that the major problems encountered by PWDs is the attitudes of non-disabled people, which progressively reinforce social exclusion (Walker, 2019). According to him, it is the social environment that deprives the independence and liberation of these people.

Therefore, training activities are vital to result change in the cognizance and sentiments of society about PWDs (Coe & Wapling, 2010). Therefore, the perspective of SMD is important to enlighten thematic areas of disability discourses, and trainings activities for persons without disabilities in an attempt to promote positive attitudes and non-discriminatory practices in the general public (Walker, 2019). He furthered his idea that SMD advocates disability equality trainings (DET) for the non-disabled persons. For instance, disability equality staff training programs can be cascaded based on a SMD (Walker, 2019). Again, Kuno (2012) has further expounded that DET take disability as a social issue of rights, discrimination and equality rather than the person's individual functional issues such as abilities, or capabilities, and the like. In this

sense, DET firmly advocated more by the premises of SMD than the MMD (Kuno, 2012). According to him, DET involves training packages in two core categories. Primarily, it has a potential to be used as a *disability education* for non-disabled people. This component of DET is a new paradigm for changing negative attitudes of the community in education and non-education settings (Roth e*t al.*, 2018). In this vein, the SMD can be applied in the field practice in promoting and implementing DET, which mainly aims at creating awareness for non-disabled section of society about the challenges, distorted views and orthodoxy traditional practices that affect the health, life and well-being of PWDs (Walker, 2019). In other words, this category may involve different training programs. For example, Roth, Pure, Rabinowitz and Kaufman-Scarborough, (2018) markedly noted that *disability awareness training* is one of the unique training programs in DET.

Presently, disability awareness training programs have immense contribution to change society's negative outlooks, and to enable them accept, welcome and equally recognize PWDs (Roth *et al.,* 2018). For instance, at HEIs settings non-disabled members of the faculty, staff and students without disabilities should be involved in disability awareness training program to primarily raise their awareness about SWDs (Roth *et al.,* 2018). Therefore, in the framework of SMD the ultimate goal of DET is to contribute to change the attitudes, wrong perceptions and practices of the non-disabled member toward just, equal and inclusive thinking, where full participation and equality of disabled people are assured (Kuno, 2012). Secondly, DET is used as an empowerment process for disabled people. In this vein, it is described above that DET provides logical framework to promote the lives of PWDs through engaging them in various forms of trainings that are vital for self-advocacy and empowerment (Roth *et al.,* 2018; Walker, 2019). On the other hand, Kuno (2012) described that the DET is a training approach that can be disseminated in participatory learning approach through taking into account the interests of PWDs. According to Kuno, the main objective of DET involves the following: In one hand, it stimulates members of the non-disabled to have a different view and alternative thinking about PWDs. This is vital, therefore, to develop positive thinking.

On the other hand, such approach of training is also important to help non-disabled persons to prevent the challenges, or barriers that affect the full participation, relationships, and opportunities of PWDs. This greatly facilitates the social inclusion of these individuals into the

life and functioning of their non-disabled counter parts (Roth *et al.,* 2018; Walk, 2019). Above all, the SMD value the worth of trainings and provide general assertion that DET involves the element of awareness creation programs that are desirable to modifying social, organizational, or institutional barriers that affect the equality, justice, inclusion of PWDs.

2.13.2.2. Policy Formation

Most importantly, the SMD largely give policy related directions in the following ways: Primarily, it importantly reflects that policy responses are needed to alleviate the challenges related to everyday life of PWDs. For example, based on this approach, it can be claimed that anti-discriminatory or ant-social exclusion policy is required to responsibly abolish social exclusionary processes at higher education campuses and classrooms (Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013). Thus, it informs pathways for formulation and development of evidence-based policies in the light of social, environmental and institutional challenges that affect the participation, relationship and well-beings of PWDs in their everyday lives (Mattews, 2009; Oliver, 2013). In this regard, the model appears to directly affect policy and legislative formulation in an effort to promote equalization of opportunities for persons with and without disabilities (Subrayen, 2011).

More precisely, disability-based anti-exclusionary policies can be developed at the national and organizational level. For instance, at the national level, formulating government based exclusionary laws, policies, directives and provisions are vital to minimize obstacles for inclusion (MoLSA, 2010). Similarly, Ball (2017) exposed an idea that institution-based legal requirements and legislative actions are required for promoting the equalization of students with and without disabilities in the mainstream education settings. Strengthening the idea mentioned above, Beauchamp-Pryor (2013) and Alhammadi, 2014) forwarded that legal standards against the exclusionary practices can be used to effectively address social exclusion at the micro-level of higher education settings. Secondly, such a remedial approach promotes the effective enforcement of disability-right laws, policy documents, conventions, or frameworks to alleviate disability-related environmental, social and contextual barriers and fight against discriminatory practices that subsequently lead to social exclusion in the contexts of PWDs (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). Therefore, it is advisable for institutions to formulate specific policy frameworks against the exclusionary practices.

2.14. Chapter Summary

The prime purpose of reviewing scholarly literatures and empirical studies was to gaining understanding of the research problem under study. The task of the review of the related literature was carried out on the basis of two steps: Initial literature reviews and exploratory literature reviews. The initial literature review was made to: (a) generally understand the overall essence of the study problem; and (b) draw general considerations about the research methodology, and design. Then, exploratory literature review was made on the basis of the objectives and/or research questions of the study. To search literatures and research studies, I mostly employed electronic search methods. This sincerely helped me to identify useful resources for my study. The Google searching process was accomplished on the basis of the study objectives, and key points around the topic of the study. In doing so, search terms like phenomenology, social inclusion, social exclusion, disability, students with disabilities, blind students' inclusion and exclusion, and the like were used. In addition, manual searches were utilized as a supplemental search strategy in the literature review process. Thus, books about disability-related issues and studies that that are relevant to the current study were used. As a final step, literatures and empirical evidences were collected, and then the whole review was made through synthesizing and summarizing key points in scientific literatures in the field, published and unpublished research findings. More specifically, attempts have been made to organize the review around the specific objectives of the study. Thus, the review entirely focused on the study problem, and pertinent theories that crucially help to understand the problem. Resultantly, clarification was made on the phenomena of social inclusion and exclusion under study including the method of studying these phenomena.

On the other hand, when recapping all the reviews held in this chapter, the following research gaps and inconsistencies were identified in the literature and research studies: Firstly, there is scarcity of separate research studies conducted on the social inclusionary and exclusionary experiences of SWVIs at HEIs of Ethiopia. Due to this, there is an insufficient source of knowledge and documented data about these phenomena. Therefore, this study is hopped to address these noted gaps through investigating the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students at two public HEI settings in Ethiopia. Secondly, it is found that inconsistencies still exist in disability legal and policy issues and practical implementation. That is, the reviews in multiple literatures and empirical findings indicated that there are countless

international and national conventions, covenants, and agreements about the full and real social inclusion of SWDs together with other able-bodied peers in the education settings. These students are found in apparently inclusive conditions in education settings. Despite this, local and international researchers evidently made it known that these learners are still facing exclusionary experiences even after entry in inclusive education settings. This shows that disability-related legal and policy issues are not properly implemented as planned.

The next chapter typically discusses the research methodology including paradigms, my philosophical claims, and research approaches considered in the study including the research design and methods that have been employed to investigate the topic being studied.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1.Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide detail explanation of how the study was accomplished to achieve its desired outcomes. Accordingly, the sub-sequent sections outline the description of research paradigm, philosophical assumptions, research approach and design, my roles in the research process, study areas, participants of the study including sampling strategies, methods and procedures of data collection, method of data analysis, ethical considerations in the study and strategies of enhancing trustworthiness and/or credibility. Further, the chapter briefly shows the summary of the discussion of the research methodology.

3.2. Research Paradigm

In the realm of research studies, a paradigm is a research philosophy or a theoretical perspective within which the research under study is undertaken (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Other writers also noted that research paradigm represent a worldview that create fertile grounds for the researcher to determine a general logical framework (philosophical, or theoretical) on his/her believe(s) about the world around him/her/self (Mertens, 2012). In that light, Cooper and White (2012) illustrated that paradigms in research determine the researcher's theoretical or philosophical assumptions in their own research investigation. Thus, those who are conducting a research study need to determine a certain type of paradigms to examine the surrounding world (Žukauskas, Vveinhardt & Andriukaitienė, 2018). Basically, there are four grand types of research paradigms that are vital to create philosophical frameworks to our investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). These are positivism, interperetivism, constructivism and pragmatism. These are major theoretical perspectives in research that give theoretical lens to the research methodology that one is planning to adopt to study a phenomenon (Crotty, 2003; Creswell, 2007)

Positivism is a theoretical perspective mostly utilized in quantitative research approach with a belief or assumption that there is a single and objective (i.e., observable, and external to the researcher) reality that needs to be quantified through employing quantitative research methods such as measurement and calculation (Crotty, 2003; Cooper & White, 2012). Secondly, constructivism is a theoretical perspective often used in qualitative research approach with a

belief or assumption that there are multiple and subjective reality, or knowledge that need to be constructed, reconstructed and known through employing qualitative research methods (Crotty, 2003). According to Crotty, constructivism paradigm claims that knowledge is varied and/or multiple as it is heavily influenced by the research participants' social, cultural, historical and physical backgrounds or contexts. Again, Creswell (2007) added that knowledge is subjective as it is to be cognitively constructed and/or reconstructed by participants of the study in the particular contexts in which they live. The explanation given by Cretty (2003) and Creswell (2007) showed that each participant is the creator or constructor of the multiple, varied and subjective knowledge in relation to the phenomenon under study. For example, researchers noted that most of the experiences (phenomena) of PWDs are socially constructed (Oliver, 2013; Damaj, 2008). In this vein, it is deeply discussed in Chapter Two of the dissertation (see further in section 2.10.2.3) that disability and its related problems are discussed, understood and considered as a particular type of social problems simply because these are socially constructed (Newman-Stille, 2013). This makes a sense to me that the constructivist paradigm influences researchers' philosophical assumptions in many disability studies. Further, interpretivism is a theoretical perspective in qualitative research approach with an assumption that reality depends on the meaning and interpretation made by the researcher (Crotty, 2003). Finally, pragmatism is a theoretical perspective in mixed methods research approach with an assumption that reality (whether single or multiple; objective or subjective) is what is needed to be constantly negotiated, debated, and interpreted employing the combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Creswell, Plano-Clark, 2011).

On the other hand, it is a much discussed topic by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) that a research paradigm potentially influences the nature of being, existence or reality (ontology), the interaction between what is known, the knower, and from whom it is known (epistemology), and the methods and procedures in which the research knowledge is gained (methodology). This shows that each of the research paradigms discussed above can be further discussed through examining its underlying ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Žukauskas *et al.,* 2018, p.126). For example, the ontological, epistemological and methodological orientations of a constructivist research paradigm will be described in detail in section 3.3 below. As mentioned above, authors acclaimed that a researcher need to have a philosophical assumption, or believe about his/her research study, which is vital to decide on the

best research paradigm to be employed in his/her research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Mertens, 2012; Cooper & White, 2012; Žukauskas *et al.*, 2018). With this in mind, I have had the following three sets of believes in the study: Firstly, the knowledge about social inclusion and exclusion at the selected HEIs is multiple, varied and subjectively exist in the consciousness (minds) of my participants. Secondly, the participants' perspectives on their own experiences of social inclusion and exclusion will firmly shape my understanding on the topic understudy. In elaboration, the knowledge about the phenomena being studied depends on their accounts on their experiences as a result of their interactions with the physical, cultural and social and institutional contexts in the HEIs. Thirdly, I need to have close interaction with participants to achieve the intended objectives of the study. Alternatively, my close interaction with them is one of the requisites to deeply explicate what they have (re)constructed, and understand how they have (re) constructed the knowledge about the phenomena. In relation to this, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argued that researcher (knower) and the participants (researched) need to come together to collaboratively create the understanding of the phenomenon. Of course, the nature of my interaction with participants will be described as much in detail as possible in the researcher's role below (see also section 3.5). Up on this, Cooper and White (2012) affirmed that qualitative researchers depend on the social-constructed knowledge, and the contextual influence on the knowledge that can be examined through interaction between the researcher and the participants. These authors specifically stated that most researchers are more concerned in finding answers to their research questions that mainly emphasis on the *"social construction of experience and how meaning [knowledged about it] is created"* (p. 15). [Emphasis added].

Based on the above contention given by Cooper and White (2012), my research questions that request as "What are the experiences of social inclusion among blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan University?"; "What are the experiences of social exclusion among blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan University?" and "How do blind students experience social exclusion in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan University?" signified the social construction of the experience of social inclusion and exclusion as provided by blind students themselves. In addition, the influences of certain contexts as barriers to social inclusion, or as challenges related to social exclusion were examined to determine how the research participants experience social exclusion. As a whole, the typical assumptions discussed above

derived me to determine that constructivism is a preferred theoretical perspective to guide the whole research process in this study. In addition to this, the principal objective of the current study, which is describing and exploring the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion of blind students at the higher education contexts, strengthened my paradigmatic decision in that the study is most likely tilted to constructivism. This shows that the final research outcome will reflect the social constructed knowledge about the blind students' lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion at the higher education campuses, and classrooms.

Generally speaking, my constructivist instance in this research can assert that the multiple and subjective knowledge about the topic under investigation can be acquired through the construction, or reconstruction of the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion of blind students. The following section briefly highlighted why and how this paradigm is aligned in my study to serve as a general framework of the research design and methodology.

3.2.1. Rationale for the Choice of Constructivism as a Research Paradigm

As explained above, my research belongs to a constructivism research paradigm. This paradigm can give theoretical lens, or perspective for the research study (Creswell, 2007). It is also the means of explaining the fundamental assumption and beliefs I have set in section 3.2 above. In that instance, the world view of constructivism is found appropriate to guide the entire research process due to the following reasons: Firstly, it helped me to have a good understanding of the research problem under investigation taking into account the perspectives of participants. Regarding this, Cooper and White (2012) ascribed that constructivist research paradigm lead researchers to gain an in-depth knowledge, truth or meaningful reality of the issue (problem) under study as constructed or reconstructed by the research participants. Adding to this, Creswell (2007) noted that the constructivist paradigm is paramount importance to promote researchers' understanding of the phenomenon, which exists largely within their research participants' cognizance. Therefore, the constructivism research paradigm helped me to recognize that knowledge about the phenomena understudy is what my participants have cognitively constructed in the specific contexts of universities.

Secondly, this paradigm encouraged me to undergo close and collaborative interaction with the research participants. Regarding this, different writers commended that those who stood on the constructivism research paradigm need to have close interaction to deeply study the

phenomenon, and make clear about the truth of the phenomena that the researcher envisioned to attain in his/her research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Cooper & White, 2012). Thirdly, it helped me to pass different methodological decisions (e.g., research approach, design and methods including data collection and analysis tasks) in my endeavor to conduct the study. Regarding this, Crotty (2003) argued that constructivist paradigm is vital to decide the way in which the problem will be investigated. Cooper and White (2012) also described that this paradigm is mainly utilized to provide methodological frameworks to the whole research process. Likewise, the constructivist research paradigm has guided my action and roles on what to do and how to do in the research project to achieve the intended research objectives.

More specifically, the constructivist perspective assisted me in the following ways: On the one hand, it derived me to determine that a qualitative research approach is deemed appropriate in the study simply because constructivism is one of the theoretical perspectives in such research approach with a preconceived believe that there is multiple and subjective knowledge constructed, or reconstructed (Cresswell, 2007; Cooper & White, 2012; Žukauskas *et al.,* 2018). On the other hand, it abetted me to determine that the descriptive phenomenological research design is preferential to deeply explore and describe the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion common among blind students. Moreover, this paradigm provided me plenty of ideas to decide that the interview guide is an important data collection instrument as I want to explore the phenomena on the basis of the participants' own viewpoints, or perspectives. In this vein, Creswell (2007) noted that interview guide is the most preferred instrument of data collection for researchers who need the participants' perspectives on the phenomenon.

As a final instance, the constructivist paradigm guided my data analysis task, and generally shaped how the interview data were analyzed following the research questions. As said above, the participants' perspectives on the phenomena play predominant roles for the construction of knowledge. In this sense, phenomenological studies should strictly value the participants' perspectives (Phillips-Pula, Strunk, & Pickler, 2011). The best analytic strategy that can achieve this purpose is Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological analysis framework (Suryani, Welch & Cox, 2016; Morrow, Rodriguez & King, 2015). Thus, I determined this analysis method is a favored phenomenological analysis strategy to effectively analyze my participants' views, or perspectives, emotions or feelings on their experiences of social inclusion

and exclusion. The constructivist research paradigm fixed in this study was also vital to determine my ontological, epistemological and methodological philosophical assumptions regarding the knowledge gained in this study. These research claims are discussed below in conjunction with the theoretical perspective of constructivism:

3.3. Philosophical Assumptions: Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

The philosophical assumptions are generally claims, or system of beliefs that determine the ways in which the researchers collected and analyzed data about the topic being studied to develop and/or produce knowledge or reality in the field of the study (Žukauskas *et al.,* 2018). According to them, philosophical assumptions consist of the researcher's claim about the source and nature of knowledge, or reality in the particular field. In that sense, philosophical assumptions give more emphasis to what researchers are doing when conducting the study to arrive on the desired research objective (s) and thereby produce knowledge, or reality (Žukauskas *et al.,* 2018). In other words, philosophical assumptions are vital to decide the nature of existence or reality (*ontology*), the nature of knowledge and how it can be produced (*epistemology*), and the research methods (data collection and analysis strategies) by which the knowledge, or reality is gained (*methodology*) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Thus, it can be sufficiently noted here that each of the philosophical assumptions are interlinked each other and one can derive the other. Regarding this, Cooper and White (2012) expounded that the researchers' ontological and epistemological beliefs usually drive the methodological preferences that the researcher is planning to employ in his/or research process.

In the most general sense, each of the fundamental research paradigms (positivism, constructivism, interpretivism and pragmatism) outlined in section 3.2 above can be further analyzed in detail on the basis of the underlying ontological, epistemological and methodological philosophical assumptions that a researcher is claiming in his/her study (Crotty, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Žukauskas *et al.,* 2018). Due to limitation in space, the philosophical assumptions of each of the research paradigms can't be highlighted in this dissertation. Nonetheless, my ontological, epistemological and methodological positions alongside the constructivists' research paradigm (employed in this study) are discussed in certain level of depth in the subsequent sections:

3.3.1. Ontological Assumptions

Ontology is a philosophical stance that mainly focuses on the nature of existence (being) or reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Based on their explanations, ontological assumption involves the researchers' claims about social or cultural reality. Thus, it is more concerned with questions like "what is being, or existence?"; "What is reality?"; "How reality is acquired?" and the like (Creswell, 2007). However, the researchers' claims may vary with the research approach and paradigms, too (Crotty, 2003). For instance, in quantitative research (i.e., positivists' paradigm) reality is objective (that can be understood objectively), and there is an absolute, or a single reality that actually exists independent of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). In qualitative research (i.e., constructivism, or interpretivism paradigms) reality is non-objective, or subjective and multiple (Patton, 2002; Žukauskas *et al.,* 2018).

It has been suggested above that the current study adopted constructivists' research paradigm. Thus, my ontological position involves the claim that there are multiple and subjective realities on the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion. Precisely, I do have the following presumptions of reality in my study: Firstly, the ontological truth of being (i.e., becoming included and excluded) in higher education classrooms and campuses is multiple because the participants' experience varies with the physical, socio-cultural and institutional contexts in their day-to-day life. Secondly, such reality (existence or state of being included and excluded) is subjective because the participants' experience of social inclusion and exclusion depends on their consciousness (e.g., awareness, perspectives, or opinions).

3.3.2. Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge to be generated via the study (Crotty, 2003). It is more concerned with questions like "what it means to know"; "How can we know it" "how we know what we know" and the like (Creswell, 2007). Thus, it is more concerned about the knowledge that the researcher is supposed to contribute including the process (ways) through which he/she has arrived at that knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In brief, epistemology is a knowledge claim about the type and nature of knowledge and how that knowledge is adequately and reasonably ensured (Crotty, 2003). To this end, Crotty summarized that epistemology is "*a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know"* (p.3). Nevertheless, the knowledge (epistemological) claim the researchers make including the nature of knowledge and

ways of knowing may greatly vary with the research approach and paradigm they customarily adopted in their studies (Crotty, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007). For example, in quantitative research (i.e., positivists' paradigm), knowledge is objective, and it is understood through measuring or quantifying the phenomenon studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this vein, there is an objective knowledge that can be understood universally (Creswell, 2007). In qualitative research (i.e., interpretivism, or constructivism paradigms) knowledge is either interpreted by the researcher (interpretivism paradigm), or socially constructed by the research participants (constructivism paradigm) (Crotty, 2003; Creswell, 2007).

In this particular study, I set the constructivism paradigm to inform all the processes of the study. Hence, my epistemological claims involve the following: Firstly, I have a supposition that knowledge about the phenomena of social inclusion and exclusion in the study is subjective because it is grounded on the social construction of the phenomena that predominantly basis on the participants' feelings, thoughts and/or perspectives that appears in their mind (s) due to their interaction with the physical, institutional, academic or socio-cultural environments of HEIs. Epistemologically, therefore, they are the prime source of knowledge in the study, and in that way, the knowledge about the phenomenon being studied basically depends on their subjective perspectives. Secondly, the knowledge to be produced in this study is varied and multiple because it is assumed that the knowledge might vary with the participants' day-to-day experiences and the environmental, socio-cultural and institutional contexts of higher education settings where they were pursuing their undergraduate studies.

Bearing the above discussion in mind, my epistemological claim in this study can determine the methodological assumption (e.g., what data is required to conduct the study, how the data could be collected and analyzed) of studying the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students. Regarding this, Crotty (2003) illustrated that epistemological research claim informs not only what we know, but also how we know that we know (p.3).

3.3.3. Methodological Assumptions

A methodological assumption involves philosophical underpinnings to the researcher's research methods (e.g., methods of data collection, and analysis) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this vein, the methodological assumption made by the researcher is vital to determine the data needed, and methods best suited to attain the desired research objectives (Creswell, 2007). In practicality, the

methodological assumptions vary with the type of research approaches and paradigms. For instance, in quantitative (i.e., positivism paradigm) research the methodological assumptions concerning methods of data collection typically include quantitative methods such as survey and experimental methods that are vital to predict, explain and measure the phenomenon under study (Žukauskas *et al.,* 2018), and the analysis methods involves statistical (quantitative) strategies that are vital to ensure generalizability, or other purposes, accordingly (Crotty, 2003). Once more, in qualitative (i.e., interpretivism and constructivism paradigms) research the methodological assumptions regarding the method of data collection mostly include qualitative methods such as observation, interviews, and focus groups that are helpful to explore, describe, or interprete the phenomenon through close interaction of the participants and the researcher (Patton, 2002), and the analysis methods involves non-statistical strategies such as content analysis, thematic analysis, discourse analysis, and the like that are vital to undergo detail, or deep exploration of the phenomenon in context-bounded settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

As mentioned above, the current study adopted a constructivists' research paradigm. Thus, my methodological assumption involves the following: Primarily, semi-structured interview seems to be the appropriate method of data collection to conduct the study. This method of data collection is crucial to encourage researcher-participant interaction, which opens rooms for the researcher to deeply look into the phenomenon understudy (Ra'heim *et al.,* 2016). In this study, the interview data were collected in a face-to-face manner following an inductive logic by which data collected from the participants were translated, transcribed and converted into short and summary format (Creswell, 2007). Secondly, the interview data were analyzed via a phenomenological data analysis method. Specifically, I employed Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological analysis strategy to deeply make sense of the interview data.

3.4. Research Approach and Design

As mentioned in sub-section 3.2.1 above, the current study is congruent with constructivists' research instances. It is briefly highlighted in the subsequent sections that this world view helped me to determine the research approach and design to conduct the study.

3.4.1. Research Approach

Research approach is a general plan of research to methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation as informed by the principal research paradigms, philosophical stances, or

assumptions (Creswell, 2007; 2014; Mertens, 2012). These writers collectively noticed that research approach can be determined on the basis of the world views and philosophical traditions set in the study. In this particular sense, Creswell (2007) reminded that it is very important to determine the typical research paradigm before the research approach and design are developed. Again, Mertens (2012) examined literatures and research studies to determine what comes first: Is it paradigm or the approach? She finally concluded that research approaches are mostly derived on the basis of the philosophical foundations (paradigmatic assumptions, or philosophical instances) utilized for the entire research process. In light of this, it also make sense to me in agreement to Mertens (2012) that one has to properly understand the world views, theoretical perspectives and philosophical assumptions before dealing with research approaches.

Basically, there are three fundamental research approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2014). Creswell noted that the selection of appropriate research approach is a preliminary consideration of researchers in their research process (p.30). Regarding the selection process, Creswell (2014) advised researchers to consider theoretical perspectives and philosophical assumptions; and the overall nature of the research study. Particularly, he stated the following: "*Decisions about choice of an approach are further influenced by the research problem or issue being studied, the personal experiences of the researcher, and the audience for whom the researcher writes*." (p. 21). His explanation showed that the decision in the selection of approaches depend on the guiding research questions posed in the study, the researchers' research expertise, and the nature of the topic being studied. In this particular study, the selection process of the research approach follows the guidance given by Creswell (2014). This involves the following:

Primarily, the constructivism research paradigm adopted in the study, and my ontological, epistemological and methodological standpoints helped me decide that a qualitative line of enquiry is deemed appropriate as the approach of the current study. Other prior studies also acknowledge that unlike quantitative or mixed methods approach, qualitative research approach is best suited to undergo deep investigation of human behavior, experiences and social problems in their own particular situations and settings where they live (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Such a study approach emphasizes more on how the participants make sense of that world (Patten, 2002; Creswell, 2007). Additionally, unlike the quantitative researchers, who distance themselves from

the participants, a qualitative research is participatory and help researchers become more close to the participants, data and research questions at large (Merriam, 2009). Hence, the qualitative research approach was preferable for me to be more close to the research questions, participants and the data to deeply understanding the phenomenon being studied. Secondly, the nature of the research problem being studied and guiding research questions also informed my decision that a qualitative research approach is needed most to arrive at desired research objective. For instance, the topic under study is the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students at HEIs. It seeks exploring these students' lived experiences as constructed by the students themselves. In this vein, the best research approach that guides the exploration of their experiences is only qualitative research approach (Cuthill, 2002). Thirdly, the guiding research questions in the study require the following: (a) the exploration of the experience of social inclusion; (b) exploration of the experience of social exclusion, and (c) identification of the challenges related to the participants' experience of social exclusion. Just then, a qualitative approach is more conveniently fit in the study to achieve these objectives than other types of research approaches.

On the other hand, prominent researchers also noted that decision on the proper research approach is extremely important to determine the research design in the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007). In this sense, the research design I subscribe for this qualitative research approach is briefly discussed below.

3.4.2. Research Design

Research design is the blue print, or master plan of a particular study that is utilized to provide specific directions for research methods either in qualitative, quantitative mixed methods approaches (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, Creswell explained that research design is the researcher's overall research plan, or strategy of addressing the research questions through proceeding in the research process. As repeatedly mentioned in different parts of this dissertation, the ultimate purpose of the current study is to gain deep understanding of the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students. To reliably meet this aspiration, I decided to employ a descriptive phenomenological research design. It is one of the designs in qualitative research studies in which the researcher deeply describes the lived experiences of individuals on a definite phenomenon as described by the participants' themselves

(Giorgi, 2009). Certainly, Paul F. Colaizzi's (1938-2010) perspective on a descriptive phenomenology was central to this study's design as discussed by different authors (Shosha, 2012; Morrow *et al.,* 2015; Abalos *et al.,* 2016; Suryani, 2016; Wirihana *et al.,* 2018).

In sum, I decided to employ qualitative research approach that specifically applies a descriptive phenomenological research design to conduct the study. The following sub-sections briefly present descriptive phenomenology in research practices, and how descriptive phenomenological research design is particularly preferred to contribute to the current study.

3.4.3. Descriptive Phenomenology: Brief Overview

As a research method, phenomenology has multiple types, or forms that are initially derived from two major approaches (Giorgi, 2009): Descriptive phenomenology (it is alternatively termed as pure phenomenology, traditional phenomenology or simply phenomenology) and hermeneutic phenomenology (it is otherwise called interpretative phenomenology). These two distinct phenomenological research methods have different applications, and employ various research methods and procedures to exploring the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2007). Descriptive phenomenology (descriptive, general, or pure) is one of the qualitative research methodologies employed to obtain a more holistic view and deep understanding of experiences under investigation as lived by research participants and expressed by themselves (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 2009; Shosha, 2012). This phenomenological type primarily focuses on purely describing and highlighting the participants' lived experiences without attempting to give meaning, or interpretation to it (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In this vein, it is named as pure phenomenology since it essentially seeks to describe a phenomenon in a very detailed manner as it routinely exists, and unveiled by research participants (Lauwers, 2013). Conversely, hermeneutic phenomenology is principally aimed at understanding what it is like for the research participant to experience the phenomenon, or what meanings they make from what they experienced (Giorgi, 2008a, 2009). Hence, hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the interpretation of the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2007).

Remarkably, descriptive phenomenological research design is one of the most frequently used qualitative phenomenological research designs in educational and social science research (Giorgi, 2008a). It is also one of the frequently employed qualitative research designs in the field of special needs education to gain an in-depth and detail understanding of everyday personal

insights and lived experiences of PWDs (Barrow, 2017). Therefore, a descriptive phenomenological research design was utilized in this study to answer the principal research question I stated as: *What is the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?* For that reason, all the decisions I made in all phases of the study in an attempt to gain deeper insights and understanding of blind students' experiences were accomplished based on the fundamental premises of descriptive phenomenological research design. Further reasons for a choice of this research design are explicated below:

3.4.4. Rationale for the Choice of Descriptive Phenomenological Research Design

As above-mentioned, a descriptive phenomenological study was used as a good fit to explore and describe the lived experience of social inclusion and exclusion among participants. In this study, it is set as preferred research design for the following reasons: Firstly, it is best-suited in creating familiarity to a subject of the phenomenon (Cuthill, 2002). In this sense, it provides first-hand insight into the complexity of the experiences of those who have lived it (Giorgi, 2009). Especially, it is highly valuable to deeply uncover lived experiences of individuals where there is little prior existing research studies on the topic, or when little research has been done on it (Wojnar, & Swanson, 2007; Morrow *et al.*, 2015; Wirihana *et al.*, 2018). It can be noted from the discussion in Chapter One of this dissertation that to the best effort of my search, I am hardly able to get any specific research study or documented empirical data about the social inclusion and social exclusion experiences of blind students in the higher education set ups in the country. Instead, I understood that these social experiences were not properly conceptualized thus far, or not effectively explored and understood in the education spheres in Ethiopia. Due to this, little is yet known about these phenomena under investigation. In this vein, this design is foremost-suited to creating best acquaintance to a new phenomenon which is not properly conceptualized in prior studies, and where there is scarcity of knowledge in the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2014; Morrow *et al.*, 2015; Suryani *et al.*, 2016; Wirihana *et al.*, 2018).

Secondly, descriptive phenomenological research design can facilitate the detail understanding of a range of experiences of participants from their insider (emic), or subjective perspective with the intention of in-depth exploration into their lived experiences as it is felt and thought by the participants themselves (Colaizzi, 1978, as cited in Phillips-Pula *et al.*, 2011). In

this regard, it has been mentioned above that the participants of my study were the predominant source of knowledge for the phenomena studied in this research. Thirdly, descriptive phenomenological research design is vital to facilitate the researcher's interactive dialogue with the participants (Creswell, 2007). Thus, this design helped me to experience intensive interaction with my participants, which facilitated the detail exploration of the phenomenon under study on the basis of their stories, opinions or feelings. Fourthly, descriptive phenomenological research design has methodological importance in that it is the notable research typology to provide evidence for later investigation and courses of actions (Cuthill, 2002). According to Cuthill, such a design can create facilitative grounds for other potential researchers to conduct further empirical studies on the phenomena in the other time. Luckily, this design can provide opportunities for other researchers to conduct additional research studies on the phenomena of social inclusion and exclusion of blind students at HEIs, later. Consequently, the limitations specified in this study pertaining to thematic limitations and generalizability issues can be curbed in the future through this design.

3.5. Description of the Study Areas

The present study was conducted within two university campuses and classrooms: Addis Ababa University (Sidist Kilo Campus- main campus) and Debre Berhan University (Debre Berhan Campus)**.** I have had the following rationale behind the selection of these universities as the sites for the current study: The first reason involves the accessibility and convenience of these sites to me. In one hand, Addis Ababa University (main campus) is where I am pursuing my doctoral study and I knew that all participants are found in the main campus. On the other hand, Debre Berhan University is found in the town of my birth place, where I was living during the process of the research project. I have also a good understanding of the university environment so that it helped me to get additional opportunity to have an easy access to the research participants. It is widely known in phenomenological study that the task of data collection and analysis go hand-in-hand, and that data collection is not a one-time process (Merriam, 2009). Rather, it should be steadily collected in every analysis parts of the study (Creswell, 2007). Thus, accessibility of the sites played huge roles to repetitively collect an explorative data and then analyze it simultaneously (Patton, 2002). It also allowed me to build trusting relationships with the participants that helped me to frequently meet them personally and to fetch plenty of the data needed for the study. At most, the accessibility of these sites promoted the answerability of the

research questions and played great roles for the success of the study. Secondly, I understood that the sampled universities are experienced in admitting blind students with sighted ones at the undergraduate regular education programs. In particular, Addis Ababa University (Sidist Kilo Campus) has rich experience, and oldest history of enrollment of SWVI than other universities in the country (Teferi, 2016). Similarly, Debre Berhan University has experience of admission of these students in undergraduate programs with other able-bodied peers (Debre Berhan University Special Edition, 2017). Thirdly, I have chosen the research sites that are located at different geographical locations since I become eager to explore common experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among participants within these two discrete universities. Of course, both of these learning institutions are academic settings at higher education level in Ethiopia and they are administered by MOSHE. It can be noted that these institutions may have almost the same set up of the academic and social environments, and have commonalities themselves in certain academic, physical and social characteristics. Regardless of the similarities, it is clear that they may perhaps have disparity in geographical settings and physical environment (see their brief description below). In addition, they have differences in terms of historical background as they have different tertiary education histories in Ethiopia. To this end, they may have also different trends and experiences of enrolling and admitting blind students. However, the current study did not aim at exploring, or comparing the experience of social inclusion and exclusion of these students across each university. Rather, it was aimed at detail investigation of the phenomenon of social inclusion and exclusion that are common for participants in two institutions. In this sense, Colaizzi (1978 as cited in Tufanaru, 2013) has recommended that it is a good opportunity to select participants from heterogamous backgrounds including different age levels, gender, social backgrounds and areas of residence because the existing heterogeneity allows researcher to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon which is common for all of the participants.

On the basis of Colaizzi's commandments, the selection of two institutions allowed me a rich mix and diversity of participants in terms of their sex, social background, educational background, and current learning environment. This helped me to develop greater understanding of the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion. Nonetheless, any variations in the accounts of these experiences across the study settings were not elucidated because the ultimate goal of the study was to describe the phenomenon commonly experienced by all participants irrespective

of the differences in research sites. The following sections depicted the description of each of the study areas as much in detail as possible.

3.5.1. Addis Ababa University, Sidist Kilo Campus

Addis Ababa University, Main Campus is the oldest institution established in 1950, which is a pioneer and the largest higher education institution in Ethiopia to date. The University is situated in the largest capital city of Addis Ababa, which means "New Flower." At the time of this research project, the data gained from the University's Office of the Registrar showed that the university is organized into 13 campuses, 10 colleges, 11 research and teaching institutes, and several schools and departments. Among other campuses, Sidist Kilo (Main Campus) is one of the oldest of all other campuses, and it is the largest higher learning and research institution in Ethiopia both in its establishment and admission of students with different disabilities in the country. Since its inception, it marked the pioneering of Addis Ababa University as one of the elite, and research intensive Ethiopian universities.

The campus is located in Sidist Kilo at foothills of the Entoto area, and it houses 4 colleges, 2 institutes, 2 schools and 1 academy, and runs several academic programs at the bachelor, master, doctorate degrees. In 2018/19 academic years, the undergraduate enrollment statistics showed that the Main Campus had a total student body of 4,052 (1,350 females and 2,702 males) at regular undergraduate programs out of which 335 consisted of students with disabilities (That is, 82 females and 253 males). Moreover, the campus has a very well established disability resource center called Special Needs Support Centre (SNSC), which is opened in 2006. The centre zealously envisions creating an inclusive education environment at Addis Ababa University, realizing meaningful inclusion of all SWDs. In particular, the SWVIs including those with total vision loss are highly concentrated at this campus (Tirusew *et al.,* 2014). Presently, the data gained from SNSC showed that the center is serving 56 students with physical disabilities (Females = 8, and males = 48); 156 students with hearing impairment (females = 43, and males = 113 males), and 123 students with visual impairments (SWVI) (31 females and 92 males including both blind and low vision).

More specifically, it can be noted on the basis of the description of the university that blind students are included in the campus and classrooms. Additionally, it is apparently described that all SWVI including those with total blindness are members of the SNSC that

availls in the main campus. However, this study aspires to look into the lived experiences of both social inclusion and exclusion of blind students who are already in the inclusive conditions.

3.5.2. Debre Berhan University, Debre Berhan Campus

Debre Berhan University is one of the second youngest generation universities in the country, which was officially established in 2007 in the 600 years oldest and well-known historical town of Debre Berhan, founded by Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434 -1468) , the then King of the Kingdom of Shoa. The town of Debre Berhan (the name implies "the light of peace" that was established in response to a miraculous light openly seen in the sky at the time) is a city located in the North Showa Zone of the Amhara Region. Being located in the town, Debre Berhan University is situated 130 kilo meters far away from the capital, Addis Ababa, in northeastern Shoa. Like Addis Ababa University, Debre Berhan University is one of the research-driven universities in the country. Currently, the university is undertaking massive organizational activities in terms of human resource development, institutional capacity building, conducting problem solving research and offering community services.

At the time of this research project, Debre Berhan University was comprised of 11 colleges and 2 institutes and run programs at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In the academic year of 2018-2019, the university's enrollment has significantly increased to a total of nearly 10626 students (3952 females and 6674 males) at regular undergraduate programs out of which the total number of SWDs consisted of 69 in which 55 of them are SWVI (34 males and 21 females including both low vision and blind) and 14 of them are students with physical impairment (3 females 11 males). Similar to Addis Ababa University, Sidist Kilo Campus, Debre Berhan University has a resource center, named as Centre for Disability Support and Care (CDSC), which is a special education component in the university. The center was established in 2015 with aiming at providing support and care for SWDs through providing services such as library services, material services, and internet services in an attempt to best accommodate the academic needs of SWDs.

Debre Berhan University has special provision on inclusive education and support to maintain the rights and access of students with physical, hearing and visual impairments (Debre Berhan University Senate legislation, 2012). Based on the legislation, the special provision on inclusive education has provided tremendous opportunities for SWDs in the university.

3.6. My Role in the Research Process

To achieve the objectives of my study, I was involved in every step of the research process. For straightforwardness, my substantial roles in the research can be described in terms of the following categories: Data collection, facilitating the interviewing process, acting as part of the data collection tool, maintaining healthy researcher-researched interaction, protecting and safeguarding participants. First and for most, I was actively engaged as data collector. The task of collecting the research data was entirely accomplished by me. Above all, the interview data were collected when I undergo all the interview sessions. In this manner, I frequently contacted them. Also, I was engaged as the facilitator during the face-to-face interviews with participants. My facilitation role helped me to gain easy access to their perspectives (thoughts and feelings) on the phenomena under study. In doing so, I genuinely shared the purpose of my study to my participants. This helped me to get their clarity about what to do with the data collected. I also introduced my personal experiences (e.g., my name, education, work, and the like) in a way to help me get their insights and reflections. I also exerted all my efforts to make them relaxed through having, for example, free dialogue on the topic of inquiry, and meeting them as they favor (i.e., through negotiations). Moreover, I acknowledged whatever their view points and expressed my sincere appreciations in every interview sessions. This encouraged them to be open to share their own personal experiences.

Secondly, I can say that I was functioning as part of the data collection tool in the study. Regarding this, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) indicated that the qualitative researcher is often considered as an instrument of data collection. To fulfill this role, I primarily created welcoming and conducive environment that can make them feel free to describe their experiences in confidence. To do so, I gave them room and time to express whatever their feelings without fear. Nonetheless, my role as part of the data collection instrument was as etic (That is, from an outside view, more of an objective viewer) as I was not collecting the data considering myself as member of the participants. Instead, I was asking the probing questions to help them answer interview questions, listening to them, and providing more probing questions again and again to get to deeper levels of understanding of the phenomena being studied. By contrast, my participants' role in the study is emic (That is, an insider, who is a full participant in the data collection process on the phenomenon). Regarding the role of participants, Cresswell (2007) explained that they are primary stakeholder of the phenomenological research study. Thirdly, I

was thoroughly engaged in maintaining healthy researcher-researched relationships in a sympathetic manner. To achieve this, I was closely interacting with the participants. This helped me to look into their complex views on the phenomena being studied. Regarding the researcher-researched relationships, authors such as Ra'heim et al. (2016) noted that qualitative researchers should maintain anti-authoritarian relationships with their interviewees in the interview process. Their explanation shows that the relationship between researchers and their research participants or informants plays pivotal role for the quality of the research output. Hence, it should not be hierarchical or inferior-superior type of relationships (Ra'heim *et al.,* 2016). With this in mind, I executed the following tasks to establish positive or anti-hierarchical relationships between me and my participants: In one hand, I made reciprocities in certain interaction manners like greeting through hand shaking, and having coffee-and-tea together (sometimes) as our routines. This helped me to soften our relationships, which later become more intimate and personal type of interactions. Then, I ensured that I have had friendly and familial type of relationships with each of them. On the other hand, I helped them difficult features while going; and reading handouts and exams (during mid and final examinations). I also used to visit them through phone, and asking them, for example, about their exams, families, and the like. These tasks were important to promote close interactions, sustain our relationships, and develop deep level of trust in participants.

Fundamentally, the Participants' Information Sheet and Consent Forms I gave them were integral to establish trust in the research participants regarding our relationships including the purposes of the interviews and how the data they provided will be used. In general, I have had close and collaborative relationships with them as we were working together for the successful achievement of the desired research objectives. In that light, Cooper and White (2012) noted that there should be close interaction between the knower (researcher) and the known (experiencers) since knowledge or reality in the study entirely depends on the interaction between them. Lastly, during data collection process, I gave prior responsibility to protect and safeguard the rights of participants. Part of the protection of participants was maintaining the concealment of the interview data. In this regard, I was responsible to mask the interview data collected for the study. It is well explained in the Participants' Information Sheet and ethical issues and considerations, as well that the data that consisted of any of the personal identities were not

divulged to anyone else other than me. To achieve this, I followed the ethical issues and considerations provided in section 3.10.

3.7. Research Participants and Sampling Techniques

3.7.1. Research Participants

In phenomenological study, the research participants are individuals who have significant and meaningful experiences with the particular phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2014). In the realm of phenomenological research, experience refers to participants' description of a concept or phenomena (e.g., social inclusion and exclusion) under study, which they have in common as they have consciously realized it (Cresswell, 2007; Giorgi, 2008a). Likewise, participants (experiencers) in Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological study are those individuals who have common experiences, and shared understanding on the specific experience (s) (Phillips-Pula *et al.*, 2011). In this sense, I considered that blind students are the participants of the current study. Nonetheless, it is described in the inclusion criteria below that the study did not consider the low vision category or other disability types. Specifically, I gave more concentration and weight to the category of a severe visual impairment (i.e., total vision loss). Therefore, blind students who are attending undergraduate course works at these universities were drawn as the research participants of my study.

3.7.1.1. Gaining Access to Participants

To gain access to participants from the two universities, a formal letter of research permission and cooperation (see the letter in Appendix A) was written from the Department of Special Needs Education, Addis Ababa University. The letter was vitally utilized to grant me permission to conduct the study with blind students at each university. Additionally, the letter helped me to comply with the ethical procedures. In line with this, it was employed as one of the preliminary procedure to collect the interview data for my phenomenological study. In doing so, I submitted a copy of the letter to the Universities' Academic and Research Vice-President Offices. The Offices sent it to the respective Disability Support/Resource Centers (i.e., to SNSC the case of Addis Ababa University and CDSC the case of Debre Berhan University), where blind students are the members, and get specialized support services.

As a whole, the letter helped me to initially contact the coordinators of the centers for further processing. From the centers, I obtained participant-related information including their

year of study, departments, and other necessary information such as cell phone numbers and dormitory addresses. Thus, I took all the information from the centers, and this helped me to proceed to the subsequent steps of the recruitment of the research participants.

3.7.2. Sampling Techniques

In order to answer the research questions in phenomenological studies, researchers often utilize purposeful sampling techniques (Creswell, 2007). Such sampling technique takes the form of criterion-based selection strategy to make participants eligible for the research (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I have selected the participants of my study principally applying purposeful sampling technique by which they were selected deliberately from the pool of blind students in the target universities. In the other vein, Colaizzi has reminded researchers that descriptive phenomenological approach requires a relatively small number of participants for detail and in-depth investigation of the phenomenon under study (Morrow *et al.*, 2015). At this point, Polkinghorne (1989, as cited in Creswell, 2007) recommended that in any qualitative research methodologies including phenomenological studies the number of participants may range from 5 to 25. In most instances, this number recognized as an acceptable sample size (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Merriam, 2009). In line with this idea, it seems to me that I am ought to draw a small number of participants as I planned to collect data in detail through consecutive interviews for considerably a long period of time.

Therefore, the number of samples (participants) consisted of 8 blind students (4 females and 4 males). Accordingly, 2 males and 2 females were selected from Addis Ababa University, and the other 2 males and 2 females were selected from Debre Berhan University. All of them were willing to take part in the study. However, it is described in the inclusion criteria (i.e., criteria of purpose) mentioned below that all of them were from senior batches because it is likely for them that the more senior they become, the more they would have the experience on social inclusion and exclusion and the more they might have the knowledge of these phenomena under study. In addition, I followed the guidance given by Creswell (2007) to increase the number of participants and to select the most oratory expressive ones. According to Creswell, this process of expanding the number of participants is called purposeful maximal sampling. In brief, I executed the purposeful maximal sampling technique in the following ways: Primarily, the students who were already agreed to take part in the study were interviewed for the first time.

Initially, three of them (two females and a male) were not that much oratory speaking. Then, I asked them to recommend other students who were volunteers to participate in the study and who could meet the inclusion criterion listed below. Additionally, two of the female students told me that they fear being interviewed. In the same way, I politely requested them to nominate other blind students. Of course, this process continued until I got 8 of the potential participants who were fully volunteering to participate in the study, and who were as much fluent as possible to describe their personal experiences of inclusion and exclusion. In other words, it has been described above that phenomenological research participants can purposefully be selected on basis of eligibility criterion such as ability to express and understanding the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Thus, I have set the following inclusion criteria to purposefully select the participants:

3.7.2.1. Inclusion Criteria

To be recruited, all participants have to be fitted with the following inclusion criteria I set to make them eligible in this particular study:

- All participants can be either male or female.
- All participants should have total vision loss and with no any other additional disabilities such as low vision, deaf-blindness, physical and hearing impairment.
- All participants have the onset of vision loss either congenitally or adventitiously.
- All participants had to be able to understand and speak Amharic language.
- At the time of the research, all participants should be senior students (i.e., 2nd year and above) and should attend classroom learning at the undergraduate regular programs.

3.8. Research Methods

Research methods include specific research techniques, and procedures used to gather and analyze the data needed (Meriam, 2009). Relatedly, Creswell (2014) reflected that research methods are elements in the study that involves the ways the researchers utilize to collect the data, analyze and interpret the data to achieve the research objective (s). In this regard, the following sub-sections highlighted the methods of data collection, procedures of data collection and methods of data analysis I employed in the current descriptive phenomenological study:

3.8.1. Method of Data Collection

In Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological approach, interview is a tool to gain in-depth understanding of participants' views, or perspectives (Patton, 2002). Thus, a face-to-face in-depth interview with open-ended questions is a common data collection instrument to explore the inside perspectives, and feelings of participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Morrow *et al.*, 2015). Other researchers also noted that in most instances, the typical method of data collection for phenomenological studies is an in-depth, open ended one-on-one interview (Seidman, 2006). Consistent with this notion, I employed in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews as a principal data gathering tool to sufficiently explore the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among participants. The interviews were more exploratory, and centered more on the research questions. More specifically, the interview questions covered issues around the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion, challenges that create conditions reinforcing social exclusion and addressing social exclusion in higher education campuses and classrooms.

As highlighted below, the interview data were collected on the basis of the interview guide. I utilized it to listen to the participants' voices and carefully look into account their perspectives, stories, and believe on their lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion.

3.8.1.1. Preparation of an Interview Guide

I was entirely responsible for developing the interview guide and the interview questions, too. The guide starts with introduction that involves description of the aim of the study in general and the purpose of the interview in particular. Then, it consisted of four parts (see Appendix D): Part one represents background information and previous life history of participants. It specifically involves their general or demographic information such as gender, age, date and place of birth, the onset of blindness, year of study and department and also their home-related environments, previous life-history, early childhood life and pre-tertiary schooling experiences. Part two focuses on the description of their previous inclusionary and exclusionary experience at home-environment and schools. Part three consists of the main part of the guide. It involves series of key semi-structured interview questions that were organized on the basis of the research questions. In particular, this component of the guide involves open-ended interview questions representing core themes in the study (experience of social inclusion, experience of social

exclusion, challenges related to social exclusion and strategies of addressing social exclusion). The following is a sample set of questions I asked the participants:

- After entry here, how do you feel? (*Introductory question*)
- Could you mention some inclusive practices within the classrooms and outside of the classrooms? (*Experience of social inclusion*)
- Being physically placed in the same classrooms with other sighted classmates; do you think that you are equally included in all classroom matters as the sighted classmates? (*Experience of social exclusion*)
- Could you please tell me specific circumstances that affected you from making friendships, relationships and participation in social activities (*Challenging experiences contributed to social exclusion*)
- What do you think can be done to promote your equal opportunities in comparison to sighted peers? (*Strategies of addressing social exclusion*)

The last part is the closure and exit of the interview session that requests the participants to provide additional thoughts, or comments about the interview session. They were asked the following question to close the interview sessions: Is there anything else you would like to add and share before we close? Do you have additional issues you would like to talk about? At this stage, I provided thanks and appreciations for taking part in the interviews.

As a whole, the guide was primarily prepared on the basis of the basic research questions. Additionally, I modified it in line with literatures reviewed in the study. After developing it in English language, I have handed it over to a Ph.D scholar who is pursuing his study at Punjabi University, Chandigarh, India. He has provided fruitful comments on the relevance, appropriateness, number and length of interview questions for the study. On the basis of the commentary ideas, I improved it and become certain that the guide was developed in a way to help participants to describe their experiences. Further, I confirmed that the interview questions are exploratory and can give possibilities for probing to further clarification of the key interview questions, and ponder the participants' ideas to collect adequate data. Through probing, I was able to go further into a topic through expanding on the thoughts or feelings of participants. Afterwards, I translated the guide written in English language into Amharic language (see Appendix E). Also, it was given to another Ph.D. scholar in the Department of Amharic language

at Addis Ababa University. She provided as many areas of improvements as possible focusing on the translations of the interview guide prepared in English into Amharic. At the end, I utilized the Amharic interview guide for interviewing because as set in the inclusion criterion, I ensured that the participants properly understand this language in terms of speaking, reading, listening and writing. This helped me to avoid language barrier between me and the interviewees. In the study, the data collection process culminates when the interview data become saturated. According to Seidman (2006), data saturation is the maximum possible point in which no additional or new information is reported from the research participants (p. 55). Thus, I winded-up the process of data collection after I determined that no new interview data were gained from the participants, or when repetition of the narratives of participants comes. Almost 4-5 interviews were conducted for each participant in round 1 and round 2, as well). However, I strictly followed the guide throughout the interviewing process to ask each of the participants the same set of interview questions in the same manner.

As a whole, the interview was time-tabled for over six months in two rounds. Round one of the interviews was held from October, 2018 - December, 2018. It was held for about 3 consecutive months. Additionally, round two of the interview was held from February, 2019 - April, 2019. It was held for additional 3 months, again. The guide generally took about 50-60 minutes for each interviewee. This process of scheduling interviews was accomplished in collaboration with participants. By default, all the components of the interviews were started at Addis Ababa University. Fortunately, the interview held at one institution was used as a base for further interviewing process in the other institution.

3.8.2. Procedures of Data Collection

While collecting the interview data, I carefully followed the steps listed hereunder. Of course, these were executed sequentially.

1. Initially, I contacted each of the participants in person for the first time through their cell phone number. The main aim of this initial meeting was twofold: The first one is to seek their consent to participate in the study. During this step, I attempted to introduce myself including my roles as an interviewer to each of the participant. I also made known to them the Participants' Information Sheet, and then I requested their oral consent through reading the informed consent form. In particular, the issue of confidentiality was clarified

to maintain their discretion, or privacy in the study. The second aim of this introductory meeting was to give them access to set time and place for the actual interviewing. We decided the time and place of interviewing together. Fortunately, all interview sessions were set in their recess just out of their normal class time at different places on the campus such as dormitories, cafeteria and around the dormitory corridors.

2. Then, I set another time prior to the actual interviews to cordially invite them to choose a pseudonym for themselves on the agreeable basis. They were in favor of using different names instead of their real names to particularly preserve privacy and confidentiality during the development of verbatim transcriptions. Throughout the interviews, they were identified through their pseudonyms. Besides, each of them was also talked some general ice-breaking issues concerning life in the campus, and academic issues in conversational manner. This generally facilitated conditions for the next meetings.
3. At the beginning of the first interviews, each of the participants gets a warm welcome with great thanks for coming and for their cherished time, indeed. The first few minutes were spent putting each of the participants at ease. This time, they were oriented that they can respond to the interview questions as they feel and understand. Also, they were told that there is no time limit to complete the interviews. At this stage, the actual interviews started with each of the participants.
4. Upon the completion of each interview sessions, I provided heartfelt thanks and appreciation for their time and cooperation, and reminded if they will be asked to come back for other interview sessions. This continued till the interview is saturated.
5. In all sessions, I kept notes of the participants' interview responses on my notepad, and recorded using audio-recorder.
6. Soon after I collected the data from each of them, I performed translation and verbatim transcription (see how I went it about below), and proceeded to the analysis of the data.

3.8.3. Data Transcription and Translation Processes

Prior to the beginning of the data analysis process, I translated and transcribed the interview data. According to Johnson and Christensen (2014), transcription is the process by which the researcher transforms data that are in the form of audio-recording or interview notes into typed texts on formats provided for the transcription (p.769). In this study, the interview data were in two forms: audio recordings and interview notes. Hence, the transcription involved typing the

handwritten text that was kept in the note book, or the audio recorded verbatim into a word processing file (text form) on the data transcription sheet (see the Sample Data Transcription Sheet I utilized in Appendix F). On the other hand, data translation implies converting a research text written in one form of language into another form of language (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). In my case, it involves translating the Amharic narratives into English narratives. To do so, I reviewed the original transcripts in Amharic language, and carefully translated each words, phrases and sentences into English language. I found that the process of transcribing and translating is the most tedious part and very time-consuming because the interviews were conducted in Amharic language and transcribed using Amharic language, and then translated into an English language by myself, which required me great attention to maintain accuracy of the process because the quality of data (e.g., precision and correctness) translation and transcription can influence the validity of the research and its report (Suryani *et al.,* 2016). I also understood that erroneous translation and transcriptions has a direct impact of misrepresenting the actual lived experiences of participants.

Therefore, the final approval of the transcription and translation was given to other professionals. I gave the transcripts to one of my colleagues in the English language department in Woldia University (my sponsoring organization) who is competent in the language and has been teaching the language for the last 15 years. The teacher linguistically checks the translations (e.g. grammar and spelling), proofread the transcripts and gave me plenty of feedbacks on my initial English transcripts. Then, these appeared to be ready for the next analysis process.

3.8.4. Method of Data Analysis

Colaizzi's framework of thematic analytical procedures

Phenomenological researchers need to have practical rationale for their analytic steps taken to analyze their phenomenological data (Phillips-Pula *et al.,* 2011). In the other vein, Giorgi (2008a) recommended that to analyze a phenomenological data, a researcher has to choose one methodologist and stick with the logic proposed by the methodologist. Accordingly, this study employed thematic method of data analysis through applying Colaizzi's framework of analytical procedures to establish common themes and sub-themes of the participants' experiences. Many writers who employed Colaizzi's procedural steps of descriptive phenomenological data analysis announced that it offers a thematic approach to analyzing the interview data, and satisfies a

scientific method in the realm of phenomenological investigation (Spinelli, 2005; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007; Englander, 2012; Shosha, 2012; Wirihana *et al.,* 2018). In particular, Colaizzi's analytical strategy is the best fit in analyzing phenomenological data that provide a thematic focus to reliably proceed into deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and to easily ensure the credibility and the trustworthiness of the study findings (Morrow *et al.,* 2015). In this vein, Morrow et al. (2015) attested that this phenomenological data analysis provides thematic representation of study findings. Based on the above convictions, I found myself much more consonant with Colaizzi's phenomenological data analytic strategy due to the following reasons: Firstly, it is quite flexible, very easy to apply that novice researchers' can adapt it to serve their research purposes (Morrow *et al.,* 2015; Wirihana *et al.,* 2018). Secondly, it particularly gives room for validating the research outcomes. At this point, Colaizzi's approach to data analysis obliged the investigator to return to his/her participants to discuss the findings of the study with them, take their feedbacks and commentary ideas in a way to validating the findings (Shosha, 2012; Englander, 2012; Wirihana *et al.,* 2018). Thirdly, I understood that Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological study is the most scholarly recommended and widely employed method of data analysis in journal articles; master's thesis and doctoral dissertation works to yield a fuller understanding of the experiences in detailed manner. For instance, Barrow (2017) conducted a doctoral dissertation about the lived experiences of parents of young children with autism receiving special education services applying Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological research approach to analyze data and finally confirmed that Colaizz's approach of phenomenological data analysis strategy is most preferred to achieve rigor and credibility in the research outcomes. Similarly, Cabbeh, Villafuerte, Ruiz and Adanza (2015) employed Colaizzi's approach to data analysis to study the lived experiences of parents of children with intellectual disability, and proved that it is the most valuable method in phenomenological approach to research to deepening the understanding of the phenomenon.

Moreover, a typical research was conducted using Colaizzi's method of data analysis to explore the experiences of nurse academics teaching on satellite campuses by Wirihana et al. (2018) and finally they showed that it is the method of analysis that ensures the trustworthiness of the findings of the study, and potentially enable new knowledge to be emerged. In addition, prior research studies also ensured that Colaizzi's step-wise approach of data analysis is practical and effective method in the identification of common themes and sub-themes to describe the

phenomenon at a more in-depth level (Morrow *et al.,* 2015; Abalos *et al.,* 2016). Therefore, the current research project employed thematic data analysis technique in accordance with the guidelines proposed by Colaizz's seven step analytic process (please see the steps in Figure 3.1 below). Such a thematic analysis closely aligns with an epistemological constructivist research paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As discussed in section 3.2.1 above, epistemological constructivist paradigm is adopted in the current study to guide the whole process of the study. In this particular sense, the paradigm assisted the data analysis process of the current study in the following ways: Primarily, it informed my study that the findings of the study entail socially constructed experiences of social inclusion, exclusion and the challenges related to social exclusion of participants. Secondly, it guided my action and roles during the analysis that I should entirely depend on the participants' inside perspectives to reveal their experiences and finally report as the outcomes of the study.

In general, I directly adapted Colaizzi's (1978:59-61) distinctive 7 step procedural analysis strategy as used in Spinelli (2005); Wojnar and Swanson (2007); Phillips-Pula et al. (2011); Englander (2012) ; Shosha (2012) ; Morrow et al. (2014) ; Morrison et al. (2015) ; Suryani et al. (2016) ; Abalos et al. (2016) , and Wirihana et al. (2018) to guide my phenomenological data analysis in my effort to identifying common themes and sub-themes. The steps are depicted in the following figure:

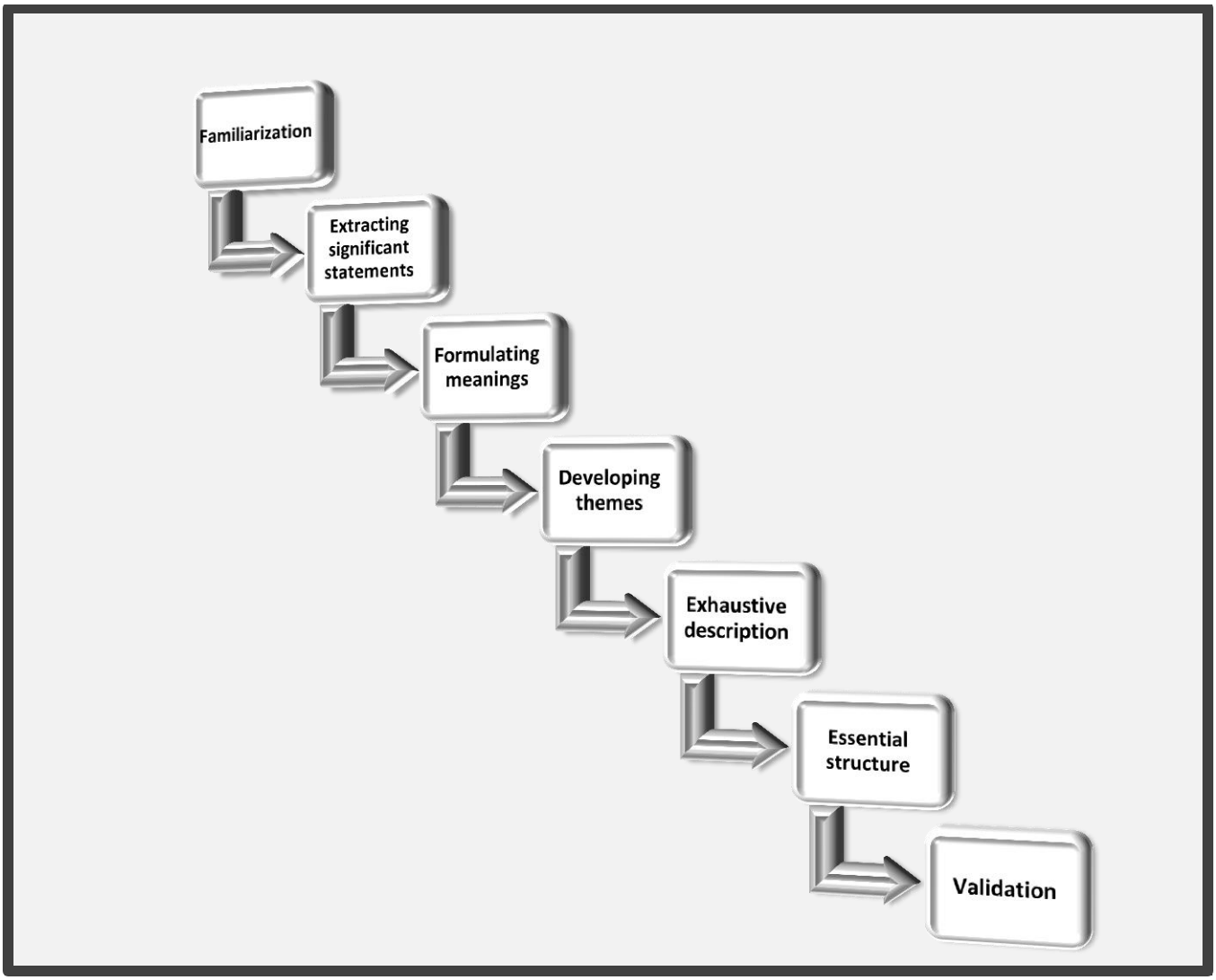

Figure 3.1: Colaizzi's Sequential Steps of Phenomenological Data Analysis.

The section beneath outlined the succinct description of Colaizz's thematic phenomenological data analysis including how each step was thoroughly utilized in the study:

Step 1: Familiarization

This is an initial step in the data analysis by which the researcher familiarizes him/herself with the data by reading through all the participant accounts of experiences several times (Morrow *et al.*, 2015). In doing so, the researcher should undergo a phenomenological reading (Creswell, 2007). With this in mind, I intensively read and re-read each of the participants' written verbatim transcripts line by line in a number of times in order to understand the entire content of the interview data collected. In addition, I made notes of particular expressions, phrases, or sentences

that can directly shed light on the research questions. Indeed, this can help researchers for a deeper engagement and total immersion with the interview data set (Shosha, 2012).

Step 2: Extracting Significant Statements

This step involves identifying sentences, words or phrases that particularly pertain to the research questions, or that have direct relevance to the phenomenon being studied (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p.597). At this step, I made list of the significant statements that directly pertain to the research questions posed to explore the phenomenon under study. By doing this, the significant phrases or statements identified by the researcher must be recorded on a separate sheet and coded based on the transcript page, and line numbers (Shosha, 2012, p.33). Accordingly, after identifying the recurring significant statements, I copied them and pasted on to another page in a sequential order noting the page and line number of the significant statement(s) in the original transcription. Similar procedures were consciously followed for all transcripts of the interviews to identify the significant statements for each research question.

Step 3: Formulating Meanings, or Meaning Units from Significant Statements

At this step, the researcher creates direct or explicit interpretive meanings, or meaning units from each significant statement identified in step 2, and that represent the formulated meanings (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). To formulate the meanings that are inherent in each significant statement, I entirely depend on the interview data and carefully considered the significant statements. In anyways, I did not go beyond participants' narratives to formulate meaning units. Consequently, the possible formulated meanings for each of the significant statements were kept in the right margin beside the significant statements. Here, I also attempted to make sure that I did not change the original intent of the narratives of the participants. In this vein, Colaizzi himself noted that the formulated meanings need to reflect the statements without distorting the original description as given by the participants (Giorgi, 2008a). At this step, Colaizzi's approach does not encourage researchers to be involved in the interpretation of the whole phenomenon investigated in the study (Shosha, 2012; Abalos *et al.*, 2016). Rather, this step encourages researchers to slightly engage in making simple meanings of each of the significant statements already identified, which is different from making meanings to the investigated phenomenon

(Suryani *et al.*, 2016). Later, I ordered the meaning units and grouped together on the basis of the research questions and then saved in the other separate word document.

Step 4: Identifying Themes

This stage involves organizing the formulated meanings into cluster of themes on the basis of conceptual similarities (Suryani *et al.,* 2016; Abalos *et al.,* 2016). Following this, I reviewed the formulated meaning units and then grouped them together to form theme clusters that were used to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of participants. I have used a table to sort into cluster of themes, which are vital for thematic explication of their common experiences (Shosha, 2012; Abalos *et al.,* 2016). Later, each of the themes and sub-themes that are common across all the eight participants were presented with an exhaustive description in Chapter 4, and further discussed in Chapter 5 vis-à-vis scientific literature and previously reported studies.

Step 5: Writing an Exhaustive Description

Based on Colaizzi, providing an exhaustive description of a phenomenon under investigation involves a write up that consisted of an overall description of the themes and sub-themes identified in step 4 (Suryani *et al.,* 2016). The purpose of an exhaustively describing the themes or sub-themes is to describe the depth of the participants' experiences through integrating all information related to the phenomenon (Morrow *et al.,* 2015; Suryani *et al.,* 2016). In line with the suggestion given by these researchers, I reviewed the significant statements, formulated (interpreted) meanings and the constructed theme clusters to develop and compose a full, an in-depth and comprehensive description of the account of the participants' experiences on the basis of the themes or sub-themes, which are presented as the final findings of the study in Chapter 4. As shown in Appendix G, I developed the exhaustive description of the phenomena studied through integrating the emergent themes and sub-themes derived from the significant statements and formulated meanings (see the fifth step in Colaizzi's method of analysis in Appendix G).

Step 6: Identifying the Essential Structure of the Phenomenon

In Colaizzi's approach, the typical finding of the phenomenological study should not be presented for each individual participant. Rather it is described structurally (as a single finding for all of them) as it is shared by the entire participant that involves the aggregate description of

the phenomenon studied (Giorgi, 2008a). Hence, when the researcher presents the findings in his/her own words, it is called structural description that represents the essential or fundamental structure of the finding of the study (Giorgi, 2008a). At this step, the essential (fundamental) structure of the phenomenon of the experiences of the current participants was formulated through developing a composite description of the essence of the experiences for all of the individuals that consisted of the description of "what they have experienced" and "how they have experienced it" (Moustakas, 1994 as cited in Creswell, 2007). At this point, I made all possible efforts to condense the exhaustive description developed earlier down to a short, dense and unequivocal statement that captures the "what are the experiences of social inclusion for participants" (*research question 1*); "what are the experiences of social exclusion for participants" (*research question 2*) and "how the participants experience social exclusion" (*research question 3*). To this end, the essential structure of the phenomenon that involves the "what" and "how" aspects of participants' experiences was presented in the form of paragraphs that is deemed to be the final essence of the phenomenon. It is outlined in Appendix H that I created the fundamental structure of the phenomena by condensing the exhaustive description into a concise statement that encompasses the essence of social inclusion and exclusion this study investigated (see the sixth step in Colaizzi's method of analysis in Appendix H).

Step 7: Returning to Participants for Validation

This is the final step that involves returning to participants with either the significant statements, themes and sub-themes identified, or the fundamental structure that capture the participants' experiences to ensure final validation and verification, or to establish rigor (Morrison *et al.*, 2015; Morrow *et al.* 2015; Abalos *et al.,* 2016). Hence, both the researcher and the participants become privileged to meet in-person and discuss on the findings (Shosha, 2012). In Colaizzi's analytic framework, it is often termed as member checking by which the researcher compares his/her descriptive results with the participants lived experiences and in that way it predominantly provides a sense of trustworthiness and authenticity to the findings of the study (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2005). Similarly, it provides great honors and access to each participant to verify their own insights, experiences, or feelings that consisted of their own lived experiences of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2008a). In this particular research, I returned to each participant with a copy of the findings (themes and sub-themes) in their own respective university in order to

validate the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. This provided them the opportunity to check whether the finding of the study is the same as their original experiences they described to me during the data collection phase. To accomplish member checking, I have done the following tasks: I primarily held a follow-up appointment with each participant, and then returned back to each of them with the table that involves the themes and sub-themes of the study that were prepared in response to each research question. Actually, each table was used for the analysis task in Chapter 4. Secondly, on the basis of the tables, I asked the participants to confirm whether the themes and sub-themes represent their experiences they were living through. This also allowed them to evaluate, confirm and provide commentary ideas on the findings of the study. At this stage, I reviewed in Tufanaru's (2013) work that P. F. Colaizzi has suggested validating the findings by asking the participants the following questions (Colaizzi, 1978, p.62): "What aspects of your experience have I omitted?" I also provided this question to my research participants including extra-questions like: Can the themes/sub-themes represent your experiences of *social inclusion*, *exclusion* and the *challenges.* To do so, I orally read to them the findings presented in the each table that encompasses the analysis results of research question 1, 2 and 3, respectively. Resultantly, majority of the participants affirmed their satisfaction toward these results and ensured that that the themes and sub-themes are congruent with their lived experiences studied. However, one of the participants has given a different opinion on the challenges related to his social exclusion. According to him, it is only his blindness that causes his experiences of exclusion, and added that his exclusion comes just solely since he is blind. Resultantly, he disregarded all other themes and sub-themes that influence their experiences of social exclusion.

As a whole, an explicit description of themes and sub-themes of the experiences of participants was held to best understand and contextualize the experiences studied in the campuses and classrooms of the selected HEIs. In doing so, I organized the themes and sub-themes under each research question. Accordingly, the first research question demanded the participants to abundantly discuss their stories of the experience of social inclusion in their classrooms and outside the classrooms. Conversely, the second research question requested them to describe their experiences of social exclusion in their own classrooms and campuses. The third research question focused on illustrating the challenges that placed them at the risk of social exclusion. This part of the research question necessitated them to mention the barriers to their

social inclusion at their respective higher education settings. Finally, the fourth research question requested them to describe the suggestions they claimed to use to reduce and eliminate their experiences of social exclusion in their classrooms and outside of the classrooms. While presenting the findings, I attempted to reveal their experiences as expressed by themselves by using long and direct quotes that can provide a clear picture of the phenomena without reducing what they have said in a more descriptive way in italics forms. I think this may help readers of my dissertation to provide a better sense of participants' experiences of the phenomena studied.

3.9. Ethical Issues and Considerations in the Study

I took the following ethical issues and considerations to mainly care and protect participants in the study: Consent, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and participants' right, most of which are provided in the informed consent form (see the Research Participants' Informed Consent Form Annexed in Appendix C).

3.9.1. Consent

The fullest consent of the participants is needed to involve them in any of the research studies (Allen & Wiles, 2015, p.3). Particularly, the subject of social exclusion is enormously sensitive and pressing issue (Levitas *et al.,* 2007). Thus, prior to conducting the interviews for the main study, I requested consent from each participant to seek their oral permission to participate in my study. As described above, the informed consent was provided formally through preparing an informed consent form. The consent form was read aloud to each participant. Resultantly, they told me that they understood the purpose of the study and gave oral permission (consent) to participate in the present study. I have done this a week prior to the actual interviews.

3.9.2. Anonymity

Anonymity is the manner when any of the personal characteristics (information) and privacy of each of the participants that reveals the individuals identities are hidden from the researcher, to the public or any other parties (Creswell, 2014; Allen & Wiles, 2015).Simply put, anonymity is achieved when any of the identifying characteristics of participants are not disclosed to the researcher or to other individuals, or organization. In most instances in research projects, it is maintained through replacing the participants' real names by pseudonyms (i.e., fictious, or given names). Throughout the current study, the real names of the participants and the study sites were replaced with a pseudonym so that no identifying information will be divulged and/or known to

the researcher or to any other third party. In this vein, the participants need to choose their own pseudonyms for the research to confer anonymity (Allen & Wiles, 2015, p.3). Thus, different pseudonyms were assigned to describe the real names of the participants on the basis of the agreement with them. While appointing the pseudonyms, I made attempts to relate the assumed names to their socio-cultural backgrounds from where they come. The changed names were also used during the data transcription process and denoted throughout the dissertation to refer to them. In other words, codes were randomly assigned to the study sites without any criterion. In this regard, each of the university is coded as University 1 and University 2 while presenting the findings. This is to carefully maintain the organizational identity and concealment of the data related to each of the institution.

3.9.3. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the manner when *the research data* is not linked to any of the participants' personal/identifiable characteristics (Creswell, 2014). Thus, it is the secrecy of the participants' identifiable characteristics by which the research (interview) data is not linked to their personal characteristics, or privacy. To ensure this, the data can be explained in the analysis part just anonymously (Flick, 2007). Thus, maintaining anonymity is a necessary suffice to maintaining confidentiality in the research process (Allen & Wiles, 2015). In this particular research project, any of the components of the research data, or report were not linked to any of the identities of the partcipants or the universities selected for the study in any ways and means.

In this study, confidentiality was maintained through the following techniques: Firstly, they were clearly told through the Participants' Information Sheet (see the Research Participants' Information Sheet in Appendix B) that their personal or identifiable characteristics are not connected any of the research data. Additionally, they were informed that the information they provided during the interview sessions would be kept highly confidential. I also informed to them that no one other than the researcher knows the source of the data, and that only I would have the access to the interview data, and that the interview data (e.g., the interview notes recorded through notebooks, the audio recordings and the copy of the transcribed interview) they gave me will be destroyed forever after completion of my doctoral study. Secondly, while reporting the portion or whole of the findings of the study or segments of the data orally, in written form, or in any other means, it was strictly forbidden to share any of their personal

identities, identifying characteristics, or information related to their privacy to any third party. Instead, it will be withheld from others. This was also informed for them.

3.9.4. The Rights of Participants

In this study, the following rights of participants were be guaranteed, which were explained to them on the basis of the participants' information sheet prior to their participation in the study: Of all, they were told that participation in the study is completely voluntary. No participant was involved without his/her own decision and will. To help them to decide to participate or not, the participants' information was provided for them and read to them orally before conducting the interview. Thus, they have the right to participate, to stop or withdraw from the study at any time they wish without any penalty during the process of data collection, or not to totally take part in the study at all. In this vein, all the data collection process was held under conditions in which the participants were comfortable to participate in the study. Fortunately, all of the participants were agreed to be actively engaged in the lengthy semi-structured interviews.

3.10. Strategies of Ensuring Trustworthiness in the Study

In this research study, the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions I set; the data collection and analysis techniques used; and the delimitation of the study may raise questions on the trustworthiness of the study. For example, I may not totally be objective (neutral) when describing the participants' experiences of inclusion and exclusion. This means that my prior understanding of the phenomena studied, and my pre-conceived view on each phenomenon may create bias to the real description of participants' experiences as they originally reported. That is why most qualitative researchers and authors reflected their assertion that qualitative research studies and results are affected by the researcher's bias, or subjectivity (Patton, 2002; Gay *et al.,* 2006; Creswell, 2014). However, it is outlined below that I utilized some strategies to ensure that the descriptions of the findings of this study are as free as possible from my subjective points of views on the phenomena being studied.

Different authors suggested that there are certain strategies of increasing trustworthiness in qualitative research studies. For example, Creswell (2014) identified 8 primary strategies for evaluating the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study (p.251-252). These are: Triangulating, use member checking, use a rich and thick description, clarifying bias, presenting negative or discrepant information, spend prolonged time, use peer debriefing, and use external

auditor. Creswell (2014) has set these strategies as evaluation criteria of qualitative research studies. He recommended to researchers to utilize one or more strategies to check the accuracy of their empirical findings. In this study, I followed Creswell's recommendation, but I emphasized more on three of the strategies identified by him: Member checking, triangulating and rich and thick description. The reason behind the selection of these strategies includes: (a) these are easily implementable and applicable to the current study, and (b) these helped me develop confidence in the truthfulness or plausibility of my findings. The following sub-sections briefly present the discussion of how I used these strategies to demonstrate the evidences of trustworthiness and/or credibility of the findings.

3.11.1. Member Checking

As mentioned before, Colaizzi's stepwise method of data analysis ensures the credibility and trustworthiness of its results (Wonjar & Swanson, 2007; Morrow *et al.*, 2015; Wirihana *et al.,* 2018). This technique represents participant debriefing where the researcher returns to them and check whether the findings reflect their own meaningful experiences or not (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p.597). It also involves conducting follow-up interviews with the research participants (Creswell, 2014). This strategy is vital for checking authentication in that the research results are believable and that the data speak to the findings (Gay *et al.*, 2006). Upon the completion of the study, I provided an opportunity for participants to comment on the findings. To do so, I returned back to each of the 8 participants to receive their feedback and comments on the themes and sub-themes emerged, and to confirm their experiences as true.

Simply put, the 7th step of Colaizzi's method of data analysis helped me return back with the findings to the research participants to collect evidences to particularly ensure credibility and trust on the findings of the study and to authenticate whether the themes and sub-themes are developed as described by participants. Thus, up on the completion of the data collection and analysis, I have communicated the findings through orally reading a copy of the table that encompasses the themes and sub-themes of the study and I let them debrief, then. To accomplish this task, I asked specific set of questions (see the 7th step of Colaizzi's analysis discussed above). They gave me commentary ideas and feedbacks whether the themes and sub-themes represent what they have narrated during the interview sessions. In summary, the strategy of member-checking can increase the confirmability (degree of objectivity, or neutrality) and

truthfulness of data that can be achieved when the findings reflect the insights of participants than the researcher's preconceived ideas (Creswell, 2014).

3.11.2. Triangulating

The data sources used in the current study involves participants of the study and evidences from different literatures and research studies. These are triangulated in the research study to add value on the accuracy of this qualitative phenomenological research finding. In this regard, Gay et al. (2006) made a note that using different data sources can promote the credibility of a research study (findings). In one hand, I used various local and international literatures and empirical studies as sources of information to describe the themes and sub-themes identified in the study, and thereby ensure their credibility. On the other hand, I tried to collect authentic information from the current participants about their experiences on the phenomena under study to further triangulate their viewpoints with the themes and sub-themes in other extrant literatures and research studies. For this, Colaizzi's analytical steps of data analysis helped me to become fully dependent on the emic perspectives on the phenomena studied. For example, I have embedded the most potent verbatim related to the emerged themes and sub-themes in the discussion part of the study. To do so, I strictly followed the procedures listed under section 3.9.1, and I thoroughly applied the ethical issues and considerations outlined in section 3.10 above throught the study.

In summary, I gave saliency to the emic perspectives to build logical description of the themes and subsequent sub-themes developed on the basis of the perspectives of participants. Then, the results were evidently argued for and against the existing local and international literatures and empirical evidences.

3.11.3. Rich and Thick Description

The detailed description of the research processes including the design, paradigms, study sites and participants, data collection methods, procedures and analysis through a thorough review of literatures is vital to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Additionally, an explicit and detail report of the findings of the study through important reviews of research reports also can help researchers to ensure the objectivity of the study findings (Creswell, 2007). Thus, I employed the strategy of deep and rich description in three ways: Primarily, I tried to intensively review important scientific literatures

and research reports to provide rich and thick descriptions to ascertain transparency, rigor and validity of methodological aspects of the study in this chapter. Secondly, the core themes and sub-themes were sufficiently described through the participants' narratives. In this vein, Chapter Four of the dissertation consisted of the presentation of the results of the study solely on the basis of their narratives. Thirdly, Chapter Five of the dissertation involves the discussion of each of the themes and sub-themes through extensively reviewing recent empirical reviews and prior research studies, scientific literatures and other unpublished masters' and doctoral research reports. This helped me to ascertain the believability of the findings of this descriptive phenomenological study in the discussion part in Chapter Five.

3.11. Chapter Summary

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide the description of how the study was conducted to attain the intended objective of the dissertation. Accordingly, attempts have been made to highlight as much clearly as possible different elements of the research methodology that inform one another. More specifically, the chapter presented the research paradigms employed in the study including the description of constructivism as a research theoretical perspective; ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, research approach selected and design used. Next, study sites, participants, sampling techniques and eligibility criterion, method of data gathering, the procedures how the data were collected and methods of analysis were discussed thoroughly. Additionally, ethical considerations emphasized in the study were emphasized. Finally, the strategies to ensuring the issues of trustworthiness were dealt.

In Chapter 4 of this dissertation, I presented the findings of this qualitative phenomenological study conducted on the basis of the research plan outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.1.Chapter Overview

In the current study, a qualitative phenomenological research approach was employed to explore and describe the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion amongst blind students at two public universities in Ethiopia, henceforth, coded as University 1 and University 2. In this endeavor, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the experiences of social inclusion for blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?
2. What are the experiences of social exclusion for blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?
3. How do blind students experience social exclusion in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?
4. What strategies can be proposed toward addressing social exclusion and thereby improving social inclusion at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?

Hence, this chapter is organized into the following three sections: The first section vividly denoted the description of participants' individual profiles and unique demographic characteristics that provide specific, more explicit and separate details on their previous social experiences and early childhood years that range mainly from home, neighborhood and school environment to the period of transition to their respective universities. The second section briefly highlighted their general profile that specifically elucidated my general observations of their background information. The third section steadily underscored the description of participants' response that substantially addresses the research questions re-stated above. Shortly, it constituted the presentation of key findings of the study that were accentuated through their direct interview narrations in italics forms without reducing what they have said.

Alternatively, this section was sub-divided into sub-parts that are organized based on the specific objectives of the study. The first sub-part contained the description of lived experiences of social inclusion among participants. The second sub-part is the description of their lived experience of social exclusion. In other words, these sub-parts provided empirical evidences how

the participant have described their own social inclusion and exclusion in their own classrooms an outside of the classrooms. The third sub-part is vital to deepen understandings about how they were socially excluded, or to ascertain ways by which social exclusion occurred in the participants' learning institutions. Particularly, this component of the dissertation is essential to identify specific challenges related to social exclusion. Alternatively, this sub-research question was helpful to identify barriers to social inclusion amongst students engaged in the study. Finally, the last sub-part outlined important strategies commended in overcoming social exclusion and building on the existing social inclusion of participants in the universities selected for the study.

4.2. Description of Participants' Individual Profile

The demographic information gathered from each of the research participant was summarized in the table below and I presented it further down.

Table 4.1: Summary of the Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=8)

Name	Sex	Age	Onset of Blindness	Field of Study	Year of Study	Elementary School Type	Current Institution
Aster	F	23	After birth	SLGG	UG 4th year	Boarding school	University 1
Agumase	M	22	After birth	SLGG	UG 3rd year	Boarding school	University 1
Sunny	F	20	At birth	SNE	UG 2nd year	Boarding school	University 1
Aliyu	M	21	After birth	English	UG 2nd year	Boarding school	University 1
Belew	M	22	After birth	CEE	UG 2nd year	Non-boarding schools	University 2
Shibire	F	23	After birth	Sociology	UG 2nd year	Non-boarding schools	University 2
Yimer	M	23	At birth	SLGG	UG 4th year	Boarding school	University 2
Achenefech	F	20	After birth	CEE	UG 2nd year	Boarding school	University 2

*Source***:** Researcher's own.

Note:

- All of the names used to represent the participants are pseudonyms.
- The names used to represent the institutions are code-names.
- F- Female, M- Male, SNE- Special Needs Education, CEE- Civic an Ethical Education, SLGG- School of Law and Good Governance, UG- Undergraduate

4.2.1. Aster

Aster is a 23 year old. She was born at Mekele town in Tigray region. The interview data provided by her revealed that she lost her eye sight after completed her primary and junior school at the age of 15 due to accident in the playground. After serious hospitalization, it was hardly possible to cure her eyes. Aster informed me that she has had very pleasant early childhood time at home and neighborhood environment. She spoke that every sighted individual was too much pro-social for her in these settings. She completed her elementary school at Yemane Berhan primary school at Mekele town. Later, she transferred to Sebeta town (the town around the capital of Addis Ababa) to learn basic skills like computer, mobility, orientation and Brail at Sebeta school for the blind, a known boarding school. Her social isolation began when she detached from her family members after going to this boarding school. As noted above, Aster told me that she knew both the bright and dark scary world and this seriously hampered her campus life. Additionally, she shared me her social experience in the boarding school that she spent most of her time with other students with blindness. Presently, she is a 4th year student at the department of Law and Good Governance at University 1. Aster's personal experience showed to me that she has had both inclusionary and exclusionary experiences.

4.2.2. Agumase

Agumase is a 22 year old born at Azezo-Gonder in Amhara region. He informed me that he was not born blind, but his vision started to fade at age of 7 due to an infectious disease, locally called "Gudif" or "Ankelis" (That is, measles). Based on his reflection, he has had good interaction and relationships with siblings, family members and other sighted individuals at neighborhood. Interestingly, he stated the social situation at home-level as: *"... all of my family members and neighbors have respect for me in the name of God!"* He accomplished his elementary school at Gonder Kidus Rufael Catholic School for the Blind, and his secondary and preparatory school at Azezo general comprehensive and preparatory school. At the school level,

he was so sociable and he could not remember any social challenges. *"I have had no problem at either of my secondary or preparatory schools. Even I did not remember my blindness,"* he said. This shows that the social life in his school and even in the home environment was enjoyable. He attempted to mention that the religiousness of the family members and other individuals around him was the contributing factors for his social success and inclusionary practices. Like Aster, he joined the School of Law and Good Governance at University 1. By now, he is a 3rd year student at this department. Regarding the social experience at university level, Agumase concisely reminded the situation saying as: *"... all matters here made me to remember my blindness and its emotional pain."* His explanation showed that he faced the biggest social challenge in his current higher learning institution. As noted in his viewpoints, Agumase has tempted to describe both inclusionary and exclusionary experiential situations in the environment outside of this university. He also pinpointed that social life at this university is too much threatening for him.

4.2.3. Sunny

Sunny is a 20 year old girl. She was born in Addis Ababa. She is congenitally impaired with reasons still unknown. Sunny explained that she has urban childhood experiences, and her parents are working in the office of governmental organization. She informed me that her interaction and relationships with her family members and neighbors was seriously oppressed. She conveyed that she has attended her 1 - 6 of her elementary school grades at Shashemene boarding School for the Blind to acquire Brail, computer, mobility and orientation skills, and 7-8 grades at Atse Libine Dingle Junior School, Addis Ababa. Again, she completed her secondary school at Kechene Debre Selam Secondary School at Addis. At the elementary school level, her relationship with other sighted peers was totally at distance since she was at the boarding school, and consequently she has had very limited relationships with the sighted individuals in the family members and neighbors, too. *"...staying at boarding school has tremendously affected my personal behavior and social life"* she said. She has attended her preparatory school at Woizero Kelemework (11th grade) and Minilik II preparatory school (12th grade). Presently, Sunny is a 2nd year student at the department of Special Needs Education at University 1. She reported that she faced ups and downs in her current higher learning institution. In a general sense, Sunny has described the social situation at her own university in her own words as: *"... the most chronic social challenge is here in the university."* As recounted by her, she often tended to be alienated

from the sighted individuals, and consequently, she spends most of her time alone, or in isolation from the sighted peers.

4.2.4. Aliyu

Aliyu is a 22 year old male student. He was born in Hararge in Oromia region. His blindness came about three years after birth due to measles. He explained that he was grown up in the rural area of Hararge, and that his families are living in farming and livestock production. Based on his explanation, he couldn't remember the problems related to his blindness at the home-environment and neighborhood during his early childhood years. Rather, he discussed that his early childhood time was, indeed, pleasant. Aliyu has accomplished his elementary school at Shashemene boarding school for the blind, which is one of the schools to follow his primary school education (1 - 6 grades). Like Aster and Sunny, he reported that the reason for his placement at this school is to learn Braille, Computer, Mobility and Orientation trainings and other academic issues, as well. Later, he attended his junior (7 -8 grades) school at German Church School in Addis Ababa. At this school, Aliyu has developed good social skills and networks via the support of his sighted peers. After completing his elementary and junior schools, he was placed at Mekane' Yesus Secondary School in Addis Ababa, where he was fully integrated with sighted peers. Again, he attended his preparatory school at Minilik II with other sighted peers. Regarding his socialization at schools, Aliyu breathtakingly stated the following:

> *I kept my personal neatness, and was well dressed so that sighted students need me most. I attempted to look personally humble, and modest. I was academically brave and outshining, unlike today. Hence, I remember that they most frequently wanted me to do something together before I wanted them. This has empowered me for many things….*

It can be depicted from Aliyu's narration that being smart and nifty enough can help to become sociable for blind individuals. These qualities enhanced his social net-works and acceptance while he was in secondary and preparatory schools. In 2017, he joined University 1 at the department of English Language and Literature. Yet, his clarification showed that the social situation at the university was completely unlikely to his earlier socialization in regular schools. He stressed this expressing: *"…everything here is strange and weird for me, for the most part, when I was at the freshman!"* He has stressed that he has faced negative social experiences at this setting.

4.2.5. Belew

Belew is a 22 year old student born at Bahir Dar town, Amhara Region. He became blind after 7 years old due to measles. His parents are wholesalers and lived through merchandizing in Bahir Dar town. Again, they are from the highly esteemed religious backgrounds. When he explains his social status quo at home, he stated: *"My parents never remember my blindness and me too."* Based on his explanation, his family members have already accepted the fact that their child is already given from their God. Based on his information, he accomplished his primary school education at Bahir Dar Dona Berber Elementary School, secondary school at Fasilo Secondary School, and his preparatory school at Bahir Dar Preparatory School. Unlike Aster, Suny, Agumase and Aliyu, he was not sent to boarding school, but he has resounded that he developed the introductory Braille, mobility and orientation skills through training in the segregated class within the general elementary school. Similar to Aliyu and Agumase, he did not recall any social challenges in the schools. Instead, he mentioned that the sighted individuals around him were helpful so that he has had supportive relationships with them. Regarding this, he summarized the following ideas stating as: *"My school life was as my home life…."* Belew has said that he joined University 2 in 2017, and now he is a second year student at the department of Civics and Ethical Education. Eventually, Belew reported that he faced dozen of life challenge here in the university! Particularly, he found that his social life was much suppressive.

4.2.6. Shibire

Shibire is a 23 year old girl born at Amba Giorgis in Gonder, Amhara region. She specified that she became blind after three years old due to measles. As she informed, her families are farmers, and have three brothers and four sisters. Based on her description, her parents believed that her blindness was a problem caused due to Satan, which was demonic and symptom of hell or devil. Shibire mentioned that her experience of social exclusion began at family and neighboring environments. She has regretted in an amazingly eye-opening story as:

> *Ummm, nobody was considering me as a normal child at home. I could not engage in cultural ceremonies, for example. At our own home, me and other sighted siblings were not treated equally. I remember, I never been outside of our home as my parents worried about their social status for matrimonial relationships in society. Later, when the government enforced them to send children to school, I started schooling, but too late.*

Shibire's elucidated that her home-related social oppression was pervasive and pernicious. She revealed that her parents believed that having a child with blindness is a big misfortune and accompanied by abandonment by community around. Astonishingly, there was a practice of seclusion by which she was prevented from being outside of their homes as her parents become anxious of their relationships with members of the community. Subsequently, she did not get the chance to go to school early and rather she was kept at home, and become hidden away from the eyes of the public. In addition to this, Shibire described saddly that she was restricted in participation in household activities, which was entirely different from that of her sighted sisters and brothers. In this, she said, *"...as my mother allowed my sister to bake Enjera, she prevented me from doing this."* she recounted. Shibire's point of view showed that her mother prohibited her from baking Enjere, a local Ethiopian kind of bread and stable food made of Teff; because, the mother suspected that she might fire the house if she does the baking simply because she can't see. Anyhow, she attended her elementary and junior school (1-8 grades) at Amba Giorgis regular elementary school, and her secondary and preparatory school education (9-10, and 11 - 12 grades) at Amba Giorgis Secondary and Preparatory Schools.

As Belew, Shibire did not attend her regular schools at boarding schools. She reported that she attained Brail, mobility and orientation trainings in specially segregated classes within the mainstream school settings. She also reported that her social experience with sighted peers at these schools was not pleasurable since she was neglected from friendships and school-related participation. Nevertheless, Shibire describes herself as a religious person, as a follower of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church. This gave her internal strength and wisdom to withstand many ups and downs. Currently, she is a second year at the department of Sociology at University 2. She also reported that she is still facing tremendous nuisances from the sighted peers and teachers in the university campus.

4.2.7. Yimer

Yimer is a 23 years old male student born at Meket, North Wollo Zone, and Amhara region. He became blind at birth with unknown reason. At home, he has a sister and two brothers. His mother and father were alive, and are traders and lead their lives through private business. However, similar to Shibire's parents, Yimer noted that his father and mother have wrong beliefs regarding blindness. He was in grief when explaining that his parents anticipated his blindness as

a result of sin or curse. In the other vein, he stated his feeling of living with blindness as: *"Ohm, for me blindness is being valueless, what matter you are educated or uneducated. I hate myself when I remember my blindness."* According to him, being blind is being lowered, dehumanized and being under the control of sighted individuals. Yimer communicated that he accomplished his primary school education at Bakko School for the Blind, which is a boarding school. At the time of the interview, Yimer described that his experience of isolation from sighted family members, siblings, friends and neighbors started when he went into Bakko to learn basic expertise like computer, Brail, mobility and orientation including accomplishing academic requirements. However, he has blatantly noted that his experience of socialization at this school was much gratifying. In relation to this, *"... at the boarding school, all of us were blind and there was no difference among us,"* he said. Yimer reported that he completed his secondary school at Entoto Amba Secondary School, and his preparatory school at Yekatit 12 in Addis Ababa. Nevertheless, he has the courage to notice that his social experience at the boarding school was apparently unlike to his school and university experiences, and it undesirably affected his current social status. By now, he is 4th year at the School of Law and Good Governance at University 2. Eventually, he reflected that he faced tremendous social challenges after joining the current higher education institution.

4.2.8. Achenefech

Achenefech is a 20 year old female student born in Eastern Gojam, Geme Woreda (district) in Amhara region. She became blind after 6 years old due to measles. She said that she has three brothers and five sisters. Her families are agrarians and habitually lead their lives through farming lands. At home, her experience of exclusion was brutally happened. She started ascribing her own tale as: *"Hoch! I do not want to remember the situation happened at home."* Later, she informed me that she was by far not allowed to go out of their household alone because her parents thought that she could not manage moving independently. This is almost similar to the home-experiences of Shibire. Besides, she continued reporting that her parents believed that she was a gift of sin from God, since they have done some spiritually wrong things. She also annotated that her severe home-related social experience was primarily rooted from her parents since they are peasants in the remote country side where there is no information about disability (blindness). She added to the situation about the home environment reflecting that she

was not equally valued and cared by her own parents as other children without disabilities. Achenefech has provided additional information that she was not able to play ordinary games with neighborhood peers. Regarding this, she noted the following: *"…the sighted neighborhood peers were insulting me as squeezed eye, eyeless, titled eye, and they distanced themselves from me."* Regarding her school journeys, she told me that she accomplished her elementary and junior school (1-8 grades), at Wolaita Sodo School for the Blind (a boarding school) and her high and preparatory school at Wolaita Sodo Higher and Comprehensive Preparatory School (9-12 grades). At boarding school, her experience is as Yimer. At the general secondary school, she encountered serious social challenges and was utterly influenced by sighted peers. In 2017, she joined University 2, and by now she is a 2nd year student at the department of Civics and Ethical Education. Like most participants, Achenefech feels vulnerable to various social, academic and psychological vagaries after her entry into the current university. Regarding this, she regrettably explained as: *"…I encountered different changes in this university, particularly the sighted peers' behavior, the environment, etc. Everything is not conducive for me…."* This shows that being in the inclusion condition in her respective university, she is still facing chronic challenges. She further strengthened her feeling as: *"… the sighted students often attempt to apply all the blindness-related misconceptions and wrong believes to us [blind students] here*."

4.3. Description of Participants' General Profile

In addition to the specific individual profile of each participant, the following general profile can be drawn on the basis of my observations and the interview data, as well: Firstly, it can be understood from their personal experiences at home, neighborhood and school environments that they were endured with both inclusionary and exclusionary experiences. Relatedly, they also divulged particular contexts where and how their experiences occurred. Secondly, as set in the inclusion criteria of the study, the visual category of all participants has to be total blind. Resultantly, all of them have no visual perception to read and write. All of them use Brail to accomplish academic activities, and also the white cane is their assistance while walking from place to place. Some participants were unsure about the etiologies of their blindness, but majority of them were able to identify that *Gudif* or *Ankelis* (means measles) was the prime causes of their complete blindness. Thirdly, the age of participants slightly represented narrower ranges (i.e., 20 to 23), and this helped me to explore their experiences social inclusion and exclusion easily since their ages fall almost in the same category. Fourthly, as stipulated in the recruitment criteria, they

can be either male or female. Interestingly, the involvement equal proportion of male and female participants helped me to explore values, feelings and interests, and common experiences of both sexes. Fifthly, the participants came from different parts of Ethiopia to attend their higher education with other hundreds of thousands students. In addition, as predetermined through the inclusion criteria, all of the volunteer participants proficiently speak, and are oratory expressive in Amharic, which is the official language in the country. This helped me to explore their experiences in the language they prominently speak, write, listen to and read. Again, it can be noted from the interviews that participants have accomplished their pre-tertiary schools at both boarding and non-boarding school settings. Six of them have attended their early primary education (1-8 grades) at different boarding schools. However, two of them did not go to the boarding schools and rather attended their elementary and junior school education at the mainstream school settings with other fully sighted students.

Finally, it was found from their explanation that their transition from mainstream school environments to higher education settings marked both a change and a challenge as it has the following two faces: In one hand, their separation from their parents was tragic because they experienced stressful life events in establishing interactions and relationships with others, and leading independence after they transferred to the present higher learning environment. It is also fortunate for them in that after successfully passing the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Examination, they joined their campuses, which represented one of their endeavors and integral part of their lives.

4.4. Description of Participants' Response

The next consecutive sections and sub-sections encompass key findings of the analysis of interview data in each of the research questions (RQs). Accordingly, the subsequent findings of the study are organized around core themes and sub-themes, and presented in accordance with the participants' verbatim.

4.4.1. Results to Answer Research Question 1

The first research question requests: *What are the experiences of social inclusion for blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?* This question is intended to explore the experience of social inclusion for the participants. As revealed through the descriptive phenomenological analysis, the lived experience of social inclusion is

different for each participant, but the table below illustrates two major themes and three sub-themes that are anchored as common experiences of social inclusion among participants.

Table 4.2: Emergent Themes and Sub-themes Related to Research Question One

Experiences of Social Inclusion Among Participants		
Theme	**Sub-theme (s)**	**Description of the Theme**
Access to basic student services and facilities	❖ Uniqueness being recognized	This theme entails that participants have equal access to campus-based student services and facilities like dining, library, and dormitory in segregated settings. It shows that their blindness was recognized by their respective university.
Access to personalized support services	❖ Feeling valued (respected) ❖ Access to physical interaction	This theme shows that participants get ample peer support services, which provoked their feeling of being respected, and it also provided them the access to physical interaction.

As seen in the table, the analysis of the interview data gathered to answer research question 1 yielded 2 major themes and three sub-themes pertaining to the experiences of social inclusion that are common among participants. The consecutive sections present the description of these findings as supported through the direct quotes from their interview excerpts.

4.4.1.1. Access to Basic Student Services and Facilities

In the preliminary conversations, the participants purportedly reported that they have the same opportunity as sighted students in basic residential (campus-based) services and facilities such as dining services, library and ICT facilities, and dormitory services. However, they deeply noticed that these services and facilities are delivered in segregated settings within their university campuses. To begin with, Belew, a 22-year-old participant expounded as follows:

> *Fortunately, our university set computer lab, dormitory, dining and library to us as these are commonly avail to all students. We have all these to the best of our desires as the sighted peers. However, these services are provided for us in isolated places within the campus environment. For example, our library is physically segregated from the library of the non-disabled peers. Our dormitory is also separated from them. Unlike the sighted*

> *peers, we are often placed at the ground floor. The case is the same in dining services. We have our own separated places in the dining room.* (University 2, 2nd year)

Similar to Belew, other participants also mentioned similar perspectives focusing that they were being delivered the same facilities and services specific to library, dining, ICT and dormitory as their sighted peers in their university campuses. In the first instance, they enormously disclosed that they obtained equal access to dormitory services in separate block-floor. The best narrations were generally given by Yimer and Aster as follows. Initially, Yimer, a 4th year and 23 year old participant in University 2 said:

> *We have dormitories and even blocks, which are physically separated from sighted peers'. Our blocks are in proximity to classrooms, cafeteria, student lounges, libraries and dining halls. We are as much as possible assigned in blocks that are located nearby these commonplaces. This helped us get these places easily and reduced the challenges of movement. This helped us lead easy residential life.*

On top of Yimer, Aster, a 23 year-old-participant from University 1 mentioned as follows:

> *Our dormitory placement is based on our quest. If we are assigned together with them, it may not be good for our personal safety because some may steal our properties, and some may see our private parts. Practically, it is reported that sighted peers have stolen blind students' materials. Resultantly, all the blind are assigned in the same dormitories. While studying, we never need, for example, bulbs. But sighted peers need bulbs. We also use JAWS to study, which can speak aloud. This may not give comfort for them. Thus, we feel comfortable in our dormitory placement because being placed in isolated places [dormitories] is to the best of our satisfaction. We know the university has made it as a program to treat and help us.* (4th year, female)

Likewise, majority of the current participants (6 of 8) have fully acknowledged their current dormitory placement. However, the rest two participants namely, Agumase and Belew have expressed the disadvantages of being placed in separate dormitories. According to them, dormitory life can be used as a place to develop close peer relationships. Inversely, separated placement deteriorates relationships with peers. In this vein, Agumase, a 22-year-old male participant in University 1 explained the following two narrations:

> *…our dormitory is deliberately isolated from the dormitories of sighted peers. The ground floor is for us and they [sighted peers] are assigned at the upper floors of buildings. Hence we have no shared dormitory life with them. The university might think it positively, but it has a negative impact on our relationships and interactions with*

> *sighted peers. For me, this has created distance between blind and sighted students. By now, it is difficult to conduct discussions on academic issues in the dormitories because we are here and they are there so that I preferred to live together with them.*

> *It [our dormitory life] also confined our campus life. All of us are, in part, found in our dormitories. Utmost, I felt awfully alone and isolated because I am assigned in physically segregated dormitory. I have no open access to get to know other peers of my age mates. Then, it has tendencies to create physical, psychological and social distance between sighted students, and those with blindness, too.*

Similarly, Belew, a 23-year-old participant and 2nd year student in University 2 reflected as:

> *Our placement in separate dormitories denied our access to meet and develop relationships with sighted peers. This affected our social lives because dormitories are best places that open rooms to establish and maintain new relationships. In the ground floor of the block, only the blind are placed and there are no other sighted students, but there are sighted students in the building just in other floors. It also affected our opportunity for discussing academic or social issues at the dormitory settings.*

Based on Agumase's and Belew's description, it seems to me that the participants' dormitory placement has both advantages and disadvantages. In the second instance, the participants reported that they have equal access to dining services such as breakfast, lunch, and dinner with fixed time schedule on regular basis as their sighted peers. Nevertheless, this service is provided in separate place in the dining hall. The following excerpts showed the situation in dining rooms. For example, Sunny, a 20-year-old participant and 2nd year student in University 1 explicated as: "*We all get the dining services as the sighted peers, but in separated areas within the hall. Our entry and seat in the room is separated from sighted ones.*" In the same fashion, Yimer, a 23 year-old participant reported as:

> *The gate for the entry to the big dining hall for blind and the sighted ones is different. When the sighted peers make a long queue for their breakfast, lunch or dinner, we are not necessarily to make line. After we get in the room, our sitting area is separated. This helped us ease of access. Once we sit, other waiters/waitresses bring us food or water or other services that are available for the sighted peers as we want.* (Male, 2nd year)

Finally, they expounded that they have adequate access to library and ICT facilities in separate reading rooms. Regarding this, Achenefech, 20 year-old participants recounted the following excerpt:

> *…we have our own reading room. It has computer facilities with books scanned and loaded on computers. We can use wireless network access, and internet ports in the library. We use tape recorders to study and listen to lectures. All these are not possible in the main library. Thus, our segregated library service is quite important. However, there are no Brail-books in the form of hard copies.* (Female, 2nd year, University2)

At the end, Aliyu, a 21-year-old interviewee from University 1 brought the following views:

> *Our reading room is set for us in separated place. We saw it positively because we study through audio using JAWS that make sound. When we move around, we may push chairs and tables. Our white cane is also noisy. All these may disturb the sighted ones. To reduce sound disturbances, the university has separated our library from those students without sight problems. The library has computer facility to study. We can download materials, listen to video lectures. However, it is surprising that you may never get hardcopies of books prepared in Brail in the library.* (Male, 2nd year)

The above narrations revealed that the current participants equally share all available services and facilities as their sighted peers in their respective universities. Resultantly, it has been discussed below that their uniqueness or difference as blind student was recognized in their respective learning institution:

4.4.1.1.1. Uniqueness Being Recognized

In relation to the provision of basic residential services and facilities in physically segregated settings within the campus environment, the interviewees of this descriptive phenomenological study were probed how they felt being treated in this way. Collectively, they understood that their uniqueness (difference as blind student) was recognized in the university. This means that being blind, they are not treated differently, or they are not entitled to different services and facilities. In this regard, all of them reported that they obtain the same services and facilities as their age mates. For example, Aliyu, a 21-year-old participant at University 1 discussed, "*…services and facilities that are availed to sighted peers in segregation from them seems discrimination, but it is not! Instead, it is positive discrimination, which indicates more respect and recognition to us because the segregation is for us!"* Here, Aliyu acknowledged that the delivery of service or facility in physically separated settings is one of the forms of positive discrimination in the campus.

Likewise, other participants also reflected similar feelings regarding the provision of the above services and facilities in separate places. This gave them a sense that their university has

properly recognized them as blind student. Importantly, Belew, a 22-year-old interviewee in University 2 said, *"… my feeling is positive. I felt that I am part of campus life of sighted peers because I got the same services and facilities afforded to them."* In addition to this, Sunny, a 20-year-old female participant and 2nd year student in University 1 exclaimed as:

> *Really, I am proud of being in this university. It is one of my successes. My placement here helped me a lot to understand more about students' campus life in general. I understand that the university has accepted and recognized me as one of its students, though I sometimes felt cold comfort in the campus due to many challenges to my learning. However, thanks to God I am here to be with sighted students and I often get what they get. I felt no difference between me and sighted peers.*

In the same manner, Shibire, 23-year-old participant at University 2 displayed as, "*I often feel like I am the same as the sighted peers in the dining room, libraries, or dormitories because I adequately get all the services and facilities as sighted peers."* In other words, Aster, a 23-year-old participant from University 1 annotated the following: *"… I felt that I am being seen as similar as other sighted individuals because I am reasonably eligible to all the services and facilities in separate places*." Similarly, other participants also reflected similar ideas. Generally speaking, the analysis of semi-structured interview transcript showed that the participants felt that their uniqueness (difference as blind students) was recognized by their university. They felt it when they get basic student services and facilities equivalent to the sighted ones.

4.4.1.2. Access to Personalized Support Services

The current participants have continuously mirrored that they have had an open access to obtain personalized support services (PSS), which are informal and provisional. More precisely, it has been understood from the semi-structured interviews that they mostly received need-based support services from the sighted individuals (e.g., peers). For instance, Sunny, a 20 year participant from University 1 start discussing as: "*They are eager to voluntarily do many things for me when they thought that I need their hand, and that when asked them for help"* Sunny's explanation showed that the sighted peers are willing to help her when she asks help, or when they think that she needs critical support, which is more of personalized, therefore. The other best example of such practice was quoted by Shibire, a 23-year-old participant in University 2 as:

> *Some sighted peers provideme over treatment. The support seems real and from their heart. I recall, in the first semester of year one that a guy was attempting to give me*

> *personal assistance when I went alone through the main gate. There was an obstacle in front of me [may be a gorge]. He immediately run towards me, and carried me with my white cane including my bag [laugh]. It was very astonishing for me. He told me as I couldn't move on my own unless he carried me. Then, I laughted a bit because this can't be applied in real-like situation for others in normal circumstance.*

As seen above, Shibire's described that she received care and treatment by the man. However, she hesitated because she was offered it in a manner different from the usual one. As well, Aliyu, a 21-year-old male student from University 1 continued explicating as,

> *There is Charity Club in the campus to provide volunteer-based services for us. They wash our clothes; bring us food from the dining rooms, and the like. Mostly, they perceive that providing support for us is morally correct and accepted by God!*

In this regard, Yimer, a 22-year-old male participant from University 2 also affirmed that some sighted peers showed supportive behavior in an extra-polite manner. He said,

> *… they provided me all the supports I need, because they are 'submitted to God.' They like to be kind considering me as one who needs concrete care and support. It is obvious to hear them saying, 'it is difficult for you. Let me do this for you' and the like. However, their support is not as a result of friendliness or that it is not due to our true peer interaction or relationships.* (2nd year)

Yimer's descriptions show that some of his peers consider blind students as care-demanding individuals. However, the support provided by sighted peers is not sourced from true sense of friendliness, or interactions. Like Aliyu and Yimer, all of the 6 interviewees reflected similar views that the sighted peers provided PSS because they believe that providing support for those with total vision loss is acknowledged as a morally right and justifiable action. Particularly, Yimer disclosed his feeling that some of the sighted peers are more caring and showed him a responsible behavior because they presumed that being altruistic has spiritual values.

On the other hand, I probed them to tell me the type of support they received from the fellow sighted peers. They conveyed that they often extensively provide to them practical services which are natural, or spontaneous such as guiding difficult roads, obstacles and movements, showing directions; providing information, and academic support such as reading exams, and reading handouts and recording sounds for later study. This generally shows that they

most likely get a range of peer-oriented support that can facilitate their mobility and academic needs. In line with this, Achenefech, one of a 2nd year interviewees in University 2 said as:

> *They [sighted peers] are humble. They ask questions like this: What can I help you? Where do you want to go, and the like. When they see me going alone, they approached me to ask me what I need. They also provided me information related to our classes, grades and so on and so forth. Without their volunteer support, how can I stand here?*

Additionally, Aster, a 23-year-old female participant who learned at University 1 has provided the following data that they received support that can particularly help them move from place to place on the campus, and in other places external of the campus.

> *Surely, they are cooperative to provide assistance as I want. Truly, they are from their heart to help me. I am familiar that they guided me to go to places where I need because some places and physical locations are difficult to move independently so I need someone to wonder from place to place in the campus. Again, unless they are not volunteering us to do many things for us, we can't academically survive here at all. For example, what can we do during exams? The university does not have exam-taking accommodation for us. Unless we find readers/examiners, we can't take any of the examinations.*

Finally, the above description was summarized by Shibire, a 23-year-old female participant from University 1 saying, "*…it is crazy not to acknowledge sighted peers because they are helpful for us in many respects of our campus life."*

In accordance with the above narrations, it can be generally deduced that most of the sighted peers have cooperative behavior to the current participants. However, the source of such response/behavior is not based on real sense of friendliness, or interactions. Instead, I understood that sighted peers provided the support to get emotional/spiritual benefits.

4.4.1.2.1. Feeling Respected

The current participants opportunely expressed that they felt respected or valued by their own sighted peers. They felt this when they obtain personalized support services on the basis of their quests and interests. In the first instance, Sunny, a 20-year-old participant who is at University 1 articulated: "*Some of the peers in the campus are more helpful for us, and are too kind that often showed us great courtesy or civility*." Other participants have also added that the sighted peers were extra polite, careful and conscious when providing the support. This has contributed a lot for them to feel respected. As an example, Aliyu, a 21-year-old male participant said the above

idea as follows, *"…the treatment of some of the sighted peers is too much respectful and welcoming. In some ways, I feel I am truly part of them."* Agumase, a 22-year-old participant and 3rd year student at University 1 also explicated the general situation as:

> *I am thankful to my classmates. They did not show me objection to help me on the basis of my blindness. In the classrooms, the front seats are reserved for us! It helped us hear when the teacher gives lectures and follow his teaching contents, and easily move out of the classroom when class is over. The classmates do not want to seat on chairs in front of the classrooms because they know that these are out seats. This made me feel respected.*

In other words, Aster, a 23-year-old participant strengthened the above idea that some of the sighted peers are in a sense of compassion and empathy while providing help and support for participants who are blind. She discussed as the condition as follows: *"…some of the sighted peers felt sorrow and suck their lips when they see me with my white cane!"* In this vein, most of the participants (7 of the participants) agreed the particular situation where sighted peers suck their lips to demonstrate their sympathetic behavior while providing support. Nevertheless, Belew, a 22-year-old participant is opposing such lip sucking behavior. He contrarily reflected as,

> *It can be heard many times that some sighted individuals suck their lips while providing help, and even while they pass by the side of me. But it is baseless and pointless for me because the problem is already with me. For me it is simply their tongue-in-check behavior. They can help me just without making a lip sucking sound. I really hate it and often feel maltreated and embezzled.*

Except Belew, other interviewees' acknowledged that sighted peers showed unselfish behavior while providing support and this made them feel respected. In sum, the participants' recitation above showed that their peers are willing, respectful and compassionate to provide personalized support for participants. This made them feel respected in their university.

4.4.1.2.2. Access to Physical Interaction

The participants reported that they have access to close physical interaction (contact) with sighted peers during support. This resulted a positive feeling for them as it has relational values to (a) increase intimacy (physical/psychological/emotional), and (b) initiate them to further develop relationships and interactions with sighted peers who provide the support. An exemplar account was given by Achenefech, a 20-year-old participant from University 2 said, *"When they*

provided me support, they hold me either my arm, or armpit. Then, we contact each other and reduced physical distance. This time, I felt that they need me, and estimated that they are interested in me." Her accounts showed that she felt wanted during peer-contact. Another description was given by Sunny, a 20-year-old participant at University 2, as,

> *I understand that the sighted peers do not hate me of who I am. Instead, they provided me help during difficulties. For me, this created good opportunities to know them. I have some individuals who are close to me in this way. I also anticipate being wanted for a relationship and interaction whilst the support is provided by them.*

Moreover, Yimer, a 23-year-old male participant and 2nd year student at University 2 has ardently reported the following: *"… all of my classmates are helpful. We often go to class being side by side in close physical contact. This created opportunity for me to identify their tone and personal style."* Lastly, Agumase, a 22-year-old male interviewee at University 1 told me as:

> *When they contact me during support, I become satisfied because they are not far away from me because of my blindness. Again, it helped me to generally recognize what they are doing including their behaviors, and made me feel that they wanted me.*

In this way, I drew from Yimer's and Agumas's interview narrations that their close personal (physical) contact with classmates opens opportunities for them to get to know sighted individuals. Equally important is the reflection given by the rest participants (5 of the participants) that they have had physical contact during peer-support, and this created the opportunities of proximity (intimacy), close personal relationships, and interactions between students with and without visual impairments.

Recapping the descriptions given above, the analysis of the interview data collected to answer research question 1 revealed the lived experience of social inclusion from subjective perspectives of participants with severe visual impairments. From this descriptive phenomenological analysis, it seems to me that the current participants' experience of social inclusion in their universities is not encouraging because relatively limited number of themes and sub-themes are emerged in the analysis of the data. It is further exhibited in the analysis of the interview data pertaining to research question 2 that though they are in the condition of physical placement in the classrooms and campuses of HEIs selected for this study, they are still encountering tremendous experiences of social exclusion.

4.4.2. Results to Answer Research Question 2

The second research question asks as: *What are the experiences of social exclusion for blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?* This research question was principally aimed at exploring the lived experience of social exclusion for participants. The experience of social exclusion is different for each research participant, but after listening to their stories I categorized their common exclusionary experiences into 6 thought-provoking themes and 7 sub-themes:

Table 4.3: Emergent Themes and Sub-themes Related to Research Question Two

Experience of Social Exclusion among Participants		
Theme	**Sub-theme (s)**	**Description of the Theme**
Isolated campus living experience		The theme shows that participants were leading isolated campus life.
Limited access to friendships	-	This theme highlights participants' experiences of friendships formation, and shows that they lack full access to friendships with the fully sighted peers.
Being ignored	-	This theme explicates participants' experience of being ignored by peers.
Non-participation in extracurricular activities	❖ Exclusion from clubs ❖ Exclusion from sports and recreations	This theme makes clear that participants' were severely blot-out of clubs, sports and recreations.
Being Othered	❖ Complaint ❖ Aggressive in nature ❖ Aacademically weak	This theme clarified that participants were perceived as different from sighted peers. This means that the participants were treated as different in certain instances.
	❖ Sidelining during teaching-learning ❖ Favoritized classroom interaction	The theme contemplates the participants' experiences of classroom marginalization during teaching-learning process.

The table outlines relevant themes and the subsidiaries that are emerged from the analysis in relation to the experience of social exclusion among participants in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms at two HEIs. Herein, the sub-sections comprised of the presentation of the findings in a more descriptive way alongside the directly quoted verbatim from participants:

4.4.2.1. Isolated Campus Living Experience

It is found from the semi-structured interviews that the participants have socially isolated campus living conditions (experiences). This was manifested in two instances: On the one hand, their verbatim description showed that they have poor social (peer) networks with fully sighted individuals. On the other hand, it has been described below that they have limited socialization opportunities on their campus environments. Initially, they were asked about their social interaction and relationships with sighted individuals (faculty members/staff) around them. Their responses showed that they have limited interaction, relationships and they did not recall significant number of individuals who are fairly close to them. This description closely aligns with what Sunny, a 20-year-old participant from University 1 said. She discussed the following focusing on the number of sighted individuals (peers) around her, "*I do not know. I can't count the number of individuals whom I know. Some of them feel frightened and worried to be with me!"* As Sunny, Yimer, a 23-year-old participant at University 2 also expressed the following long narration focusing on his interaction and relationship with sighted peers:

> *There is no one that can talk to me issues other than academics, and even they are not free to discuss non-academic issues. When they talk each other, I know that they discuss everything including personal or private issues. As to me, I often understand that our interaction is just merely external like community or neighbor interactions. I think most of them did not want to be seen with me. I do not know the reason behind! May be we have no common topic to talk about.*

Yimer's narration showed that his relationship with sighted peers is not meaningful. As Sunny and Yimer other interviewees reflected similar idea that they have weak social networking in the university and yet infrequent interactions with sighted students.

Secondly, the participants narrated that they have limited access to socialization with other fully sighted university members including students. For instance, Aster, a 23-year-old participant and 4th year student at University 1 stated that she has had insufficient access to socialize herself with sighted peers: *"Unlike the sighted peers, we have no way to freely interact*

with sighted individuals. We are confined, here. The some of the places are not reachable for us because of accessibility problem." Similarly, Aliyu, a 21-year-old participant at University 1 said, *"Unluckily, our university has no planned socializing or unifying systems, or programs. Of course, there are different clubs, sport activities and recreations, but I am not a member at all."* Aliyu's opinions are further resonated below that the participants were non-participant in most of the extracurricular activities normally available in the universities. On the other hand, it is uncovered from the semi-structured interview transcript in this phenomenological study that the participants' acquaintanceship is with other students with visual impairment. In this vein, they dared to speak to me that they particularly spent more of their campus time and socialize themselves with other blind students than with the sighted peers. The most exemplar narration was given by Agumase; a 22-year-old interviewee at University 1, which is stated,

> *As I tell you before, there is no dormitory life with sighted peers, and there is no common thing to share with them. Rather, we [blind students] are placed in isolated dormitories. This impacted my friendship development with them. This principally made me spend more time and develop friendship interaction with only blind students.*

Agumase's verbatim description indicates that he spend much time with other students with visual impairment. His description also shows that his friendliness is with other blind students. On top of Agumase, Belew, a 22-year-old male participant from University 2 on his part posited an idea that they spend most of their time with blind students. He said,

> *I spend majority of my campus life with other blind students because we have many things in common. We have strong friendship networks to each other. For instance, I know all blind students in this campus including their names, departments, cell phone and the like. We feel free and welcomed when we met each other.*

Similarly, Achenefech, a 20-year-old female participant from University 1 adduced the following idea that indicates limited interaction and relationships with sighted peers, *"I may have a social problem. I do not know. I am not that much courageous to meet and have free conversations with them. I often feel content to be alone!"* This shows that she is not able to competently interact with her sighted peers.

Finally, it is found that the participants of this phenomenological study are either content to be alone or to affiliate themselves with other blind students with whom the share common interests and behavioral characteristics. Thus, it can summarize on the basis of the interviews that

the participants led isolated campus life. This implies that they have poor social networks around them, they lack friendship relationship with the sighted peers and that they were not actively involved in the social lives of majority of sighted peers.

4.4.2.2. Limited Access to Friendships

It has been described in the interviews above that the participants have, indeed, no significant friendship interaction with sighted peers. In relation to this, they were asked to tell the number of sighted friends they know on the campus, but most of them hesitated to determine the number of sighed peers close to them. Instead, all of them reported similar idea that they lack real friendship with sighted peers. This indicates that they have limited access to peer-friendship-groups. The following narratives unveiled their unfriendliness with sighted peers. For example, Shibire a 23 year-old participant prominently connoted as:

> *By now, I understood that most of my sighted classmates did not prefer me to be their friend and they have no interest at me. I felt so scared and worried. I did not spend any considerable time with them at recess. In case, they may spend very brief time with me. It is completely unlikely to the sighted peers.*

Shibire's ascriptions showed that she was not preferred by the sighted peers for any close personal relationship in the classrooms or on the campus. Also, Aliyu, a 21-year-old participant from University 1 spoke more clearly via providing the following lengthy idea that the sighted peers did not want to establish friendship interactions with him.

> *Regarding peer friendships, the access is already closed! There is no possibility of finding true friends in any ways. They did not consider me as one of their friends. To your surprise, I have had no experience of siting together in the cafeteria, or students' lounge to have coffee and tea together with them throughout my social life here. I did not remember any time they have contacted me in a sense of friendliness.*

As seen above, the stories told by Aliyu showed that he had no significant relationship with sighted peers. In the other vein, Sunny a 20-year-old female participant at University 1 has reverberated Aliyu's feelings as follows: "*Indeed, they physically approach me only for providing me assistance. Otherwise, there is no close interaction other matters. I often tend to call my mother through phone than finding to talk a friend here [laugh].*"

At the end, Yimer, a 23-year-old anxiously worded the following about the non-existence of true friendships with sighted peers as: "*I have no obedient sighted friend here. I have no*

friendship formation agenda with them because I know that they do not want me for this purpose." In addition to this, the current participants have expounded that they have inadequate shared experiences and reciprocity with the sighted peers. For instance, Agumase, a 22-year-old interviewee and 3rd year student at University 1 recounted,

> *Unfortunately, I have had no opportunity to have picnic with them [sighted peers] and to have free dialogue with them. I am not normally involved in majority of their customary life instances. We were not engaged in common things like sports, or recreations. But I rarely went to the students' lounge with them. We did not sit together in dining room because we have our own seating area in the hall.*

In the same way, Aster, a 23-year-old interviewee provided a supplementary idea to this description as: "*The sighted peers have no common thing to share with us. I did not have reciprocal interaction with them. Even, the way they interact with me is quite different from their interaction with other sighted individuals."* Aster's explanation showed that she has had insufficient reciprocal interaction with sighted peers. Similarly, other participants have discussed that they have had limited access to reciprocate and involve in social activities where their age mates are found. In this regard, Achenefech, a 20-year-old participant provided a lengthened report as:

> *Honestly speaking, I have no real sighted friend here. Unlike this, I know the sighted peers have many friends from the classrooms, and from other departments and faculties, too. As to me, I have no critical companion at all in this classroom, or in the university in total to share personal issues and spend important times. They need to become close to me when they think that I am in need of support. Otherwise, they do not want me to make friendship as they often do with sighted peers.*

Achenefech's narrations showed that she has had limited access to reciprocate, and has insignificant shared experience with the sighted peers. On the other hand, it is discussed above that the current participants obtain personalized support services mainly from sighted students. However, it is generally indicated in the narrations below that the support is not provided on the basis of true friendliness, or real personal relationships. This description was rightly connoted by Aster, a 23-year-old and 4th year student at University 1 stated, *"…it is quite known that they come to me only to provide me support, and they have no other business."* Her description showed that the sighted peers were not normally interacting with her, and instead they contacted her to provide support. This shows that the assistance the participants gained from the sighted

peers was not most likely grounded on meaningful sense of companionships. Likewise, Agumase, a 22 year-old young participant expressed his feeling as follows:

> *Some of my peers want to come around me only to help me. They have no friendship agenda or other concern at all! Even, the support they provided is not initiated from real sense of friendliness. You may see one or two of them with me, but only to help me. They do not really want to come close to me to normally talk, or play with me. They consider it as doing something good and humanely action. In case, if the sighted individual is seen with me, h/she appears to me may be to guide me.*

Based on the above narrations, it is found out that participants were not truly accepted as true friendship groups by the sighted peers. This also shows that their interaction with sighted peers is not real, and meaningful, and establishing and maintaining friendliness with sighted peers is found not an easy task for them. It is also described in section 4.4.2.1 above that most of their socialization and friendship interaction is with other students with visual impairments.

4.4.2.3. Being Ignored

I was able to typically organize the interview data that the participants' encountered being ignored from sighted peers, which is closely related to their day-to-day campus life situations. This phenomenon was exhibited in more passive ways that took place when they were overlooked, disregarded or unnoticed in the peer contexts, which involves the following related instances: Firstly, they were being ignored when they were totally shut-up by sighted peers. Specifically, this condition happens when they were not given attention (mind) by their own sighted peers, when the sighted peers were totally unresponsive when asked, for example, for help, or when they were not greeted, and when they were not talked at all. Secondly, their peer ignoring experience was also occurred when they were paid little or insignificant attention during ordinary conversation, or when their ideas are not properly listened to, and when they lack valued recognition during free dialogue. As discussed herein, the participants' narrations showed that being ignored by sighted peers has made their relationships awkward and uncomfortable. Upon this, a good example of the interview transcript was demonstrated by Aliyu, a 21 year-old male participant described below

> *One day, I sat together with one of my peers. I attempted to talk to him calling him by name, but he remained silent and vacated me. Rather, he hid himself when I want him, but I know that he is around me. In the other day, I was going to the University's main*

> *gate with one of the sighted classmates. Two of them were coming in front of us, and they called the one who was with me by name, and gave him a very warm greeting, but they never consider me as one of them. It was painful for me! From that on, I doubted that the sighted peers never like me.*

Aliyu's descriptions showed that he was given a *cold shoulder* by his sighted peers. He also reflected that being ignored by peers is too emotionally painful and this affected his trusting relationship with sighted peers. Similarly, Agumase, a 22-year-old male participant from University 1 utterly recalled his experiences of being disregarded by his own sighted peer through the following statements:

> *Once, the rain was coming while I was with three of my classmates on the campus compound but they did not tell me about the rain, and they left me alone and run away to their dormitories. They told me nothing, but simply left me behind! They did not consider me as one of their classmates. They totally forgot me! They disregarded me.*

Besides, Achenefech, a 20-year-old participant from University 2, posited,

> *Being together with them in the same classrooms, they sometimes unnoticed me! Surely, I often feel like I am being forgotten. In one instance, I was forgotten in the classroom when I was in year one. This is the case: We are 65 in a classroom, where I am the only blind student. After completing the teacher's lecture, they never told me to get out of classes together. I remained sitting, while everyone-else was outside. I waited for half an hour till I hear somebody's voices outside of the classroom to help me go to my dormitory. I do not forget this torment ever.*

As seen above, Achenefech's perspective showed that she frequently faced being disregarded by sighted peers. She also unreservedly expounded her feelings of being forgotten is menacing. Similarly, Shibire, a 23 year old girl shared the instances of being overlooked by classmates as:

> *We were waiting our teacher under the building. When the teacher comes, they did not tell me. Rather, they left me alone and have gone to class. I waited for almost 40 minutes. Finally, I heard students' voices, and asked them 'did the teacher come? Shall we go to our class?' No body spoke to me, but one of them told me that they have attended and finished the class. This was very threatening for me.*

It can be stipulated from Shibire's narration that she was totally unnoticed by her own classmates. Similarly, Aster recalled her experience of being ignored as follows,

> *One day, I sat at the side of three of the sighted classmates in the classroom. They were close to me so that I heard of them that they were discussing about family issues. I knew that they did not allow me to participate in their dialogue, but I have also my own family issue to share to them if they invite me. When I attempt to talk to them, they regularly disregarded my intention. They did not care about my feelings, and interests. I learned somehow that they did not give me attention. I thought that they quarreled with me because they shunned me out. Reversely, they were loudly shouting, talking, some were laughing, and enjoying. They forgot my existence with them. Anyways, not being talked about is really worse to me. Their behavior made me feel left out!*

Finally, Belew, a 22-year-old participant from University 2 had the following to reflect:

> *When our classmates meet, most of them kiss, and hug each other. Sometimes, they joke each other, but all things are unfortunate for me. They never remember me in this regard. During ordinary chat, some of them did not hear me. They paid no attention to me. I remember that one of the sighted peers who knew me very well has voicelessly passed me at the back. I recognized that someone is passing without making his voices heard. He thought that if I knew that he is passing beside me, I may call his name for help…this is what he did not want!*

Generally speaking, the interview data delineated above elucidated that the participants were frequently facing the challenge of being ignored by their own sighted peers, and it is documented here as one of their pervasive experiences they encountered in their campus lives. In other words, this experience was recorded as a form of passive rejection they faced in the classrooms and outside very tacitly, or covertly just in most micro-forms without applying any of physical, or verbal actions or behaviors.

4.4.2.4. Non-participation in Extracurricular Activities

The participants construed that they were encountered adversities in the involvement and participation in campus-based extracurricular or non-academic activities, which freely avail to other sighted classmates. This shows that they were systematically prevented from equal access to participation in these activities where able-bodied students are found as members, representatives and valued contributors. Based on their reports, they are totally detached from activities such as clubs, organized sports, recreational and leisure time activities (e.g., hobbies, special day and occasional events) where most sighted students meet, know each other, enjoy campus-life together and maintain lasting relationships on their university. In my effort to map out extracurricular activities in University 1 and University 2, I identified that there are various

clubs, sport activities, recreational and leisure time events. At each learning institution, all matters and concerns of these activities are generally launched and responsibly headed by the Students' Union (Counsel) – a formal student organization duly recognized by their university. Nonetheless, interviews revealed that exclusion of participants started from this organization. Their report uncovered that all of them were miss-represented in the Union. By way of example, Agumase, a 22-year-old male participant and 3rd year student at University 1 verbalized the following excerpts focusing on their non-representation in their university's Union.

> *On the campus, there is a formal students' organization called Student Union, which has the mandate to formally organize, administer and run different student-related clubs, activities, and social events. We are not members in the Union, let alone in other activities. All the leadership positions ad memberships are fully occupied by non-disabled peers. Even, we lack access to select our own representatives in the union just to make our voices heard to the university!*

At this point, Agumase's views showed that there is truancy of blind students to be members of the student union, compared to the sighted counter parts. Correspondingly, Belew, a 22-year-old male participant stated their non-involvement in the Union,

> *Actually, my exclusion begins when I join this university, just at the gate. I remember that the University's Student Union prepared a warm ceremonial reception for fresh students, but I was not included in the welcoming ceremony because the Union did not consider my needs and presence as one of the students in the campus.* (2nd year, University 2)

In the same fashion, Aster, a 23-year-old female participant echoed the above view point as:

> *What we really lack is not ability, but opportunity…! No-body encouraged us to take part in the activities with them. We know that there is student union here. We know it by name. We are not represented and we are not members at all because we are often understood that we are incapable of being a representative of the union. Thus, we had no opportunity to be elected as, for example, the president of the union, or in any other positions in its structure. Even, any of us were not chosen as a candidate to compete for the representativeness in the union because the sighted peers though that we are can't accomplish activities of the Union. It is fully occupied by the students without disabilities.*

Broadly speaking, it can be affirmed from the above narration that the participants were invisible or "were not seen" in the Union as they were systematically denied of equal access to be elected to occupy leadership positions, membership, or representation in the Union. In

particular, the reports of participants that consisted of data concerning their non-participation and non-representation in extracurricular/non-academic activities were organized into the following sub-themes: Exclusion from clubs, exclusion from sports and recreational (leisure time) activities. These will be accentuated herein through their direct interview narrations:

4.4.2.4.1. Exclusion from Clubs

Precisely, the data gained from the interviewees uncovered that they were put aside from involvement and participation in different clubs (e.g., HIV/AIDS club, charity club, discover your country club, and ethics and anti-corruption club) where a great majority of students without disabilities would like to participate, engage, feel like they belong, and that can play essential roles for peer integration and friendship development on the university campuses. More importantly, their description depicted that their opportunity to be registered as members and to partake in such clubs is extremely limited, and it can be said as non-existent. A worthy example of the above description was given by a 22-year-old male interviewee from University 2 as,

> *I was not involved in clubs. I did not really know about clubs here because I was not part of this. Unlike this, the sighted peers have open opportunities to be registered as members in clubs. For the most part, the calls for registration or memberships in clubs are informed through notice boards, which is not accessible for us.*

Succinctly, Belew has stressed in his explanation that they have no equal access to actively participate in clubs. As a final best narration, Shibire, a 23-year-old female participant, added as:

> *I can say that I am prevented from participating in clubs by virtue of my blindness as there is no access for me to do so. Even, I do not know anything about the existence of clubs here. I have no interest at all, because I know…it may not give sense to me. From the very beginning I was never invited, or encouraged to be members in clubs. There is no information for me about these clubs. As usual, information in relation to these clubs is posted via notice-boards, which are not reachable for us.*

Other participants (6 of the participants) also reflected similar ideas that they lack the access to be enrolled as members and participate in clubs together with other sighted students.

4.4.2.4.2. Exclusion from Sports and Recreations

The study participants reported that they are outsiders from campus-based sporting activities and games and other recreational/leisure time activities (e.g., special day social happenings, occasional events, or sporadically occurring campus-based ceremonial programs like color day,

water day, tie day, culture day and crazy day) that are informally organized by the University's Student Union at least once in the academic year. As stipulated through the interview data, these activities consisted of social avenues where majority of sighted students come to enjoy life together during their spare time on their campus environment. These are also highly valued activities by students on their campus at recess. However, it was unhidden from the interview responses that participants had no opportunity to participate in such activities, which are vehicles for achieving social relationships, and thereby social inclusion. With this understanding, a peculiar example of narrations about exclusion from sports was given by Yimer and Aster as follows: At the beginning, Yimer, a 23-year-old participant stated,

> *We have no opportunity to be involved in sporting events and activities like inter-departmental competitions. I think we may not be eligible to do so by virtue of our blindness. For example, we can't play football with sighted peers in the playground. But the university can buy a ball for the blind that has sound. If it is fulfilled, we can have equal access to play football as other sighted individuals.*

In conformity with the above narration, Aster, a 23-year-old participant and a 4th year student at University 1 posited her views as: "I *already accepted my non-attendance from such activities. I know I have no way to equally playing basketball as sighted students. No opportunity at all. I acknowledged it that I am already excluded!"* In more specific terms, sports and other play activities are what the current participants were excluded the most. Such exclusion also involves physical segregation from activities, and places where the activities are accomplished. In the same vein, it was revealed from the interview data below that the current participants were systematically denied of full access to involvement and participation in the recreational/leisure time activities where the sighted peers feel interested, and enjoy campus-life together. This description was supported through their narrations below: For instance, Shibire, a 23-year-old female participant and 2nd year students at University 2 typically remembered the situation and specified her views as follows: *"I remember! I did not participate in Water Day, a powerful means of entertainment. The sighted classmates said to me that the game is difficult for me, and told me that I am not able to accomplish such duty."* On top of Shibire's expressions, Sunny, a 20 year-old girl and 2nd year student at University 1 narrated,

> *Unfortunately, I have no opportunity to attend ceremonies, or special festivals that are normally available for sighted students on campus. Once, students celebrated the crazy*

> *day by which they play acting as much a mad person as possible. In this event, all sighted peers of my departments were acting, and enjoying the program, but I was not invited, and hence not included in such an episode…it was very menacing for me.*

In the same manner, Aliyu, a 21-year-old male participant sincerely voiced the following:

> *On this campus, there are various campus-based yearly, or semi-annually special day events or parties such as 'get together'. We are not invited to be involved in such scenes. Let me tell you one example. We are three in our class. There was a photo program for all students during get together. The sighted peers did not want to have photographs with us. They never told us about this program. They did not tell us and they had the photo program without including us! It is a very irritating moment!*

At the end, Agumase, a 22-year-old male participant also articulated the following interview data set regarding his non-participation in leisure or recess time activities in his university, "*I am, deprived in many areas in the course of my social lives here. In reality, I did not partake in recreation or leisure time activities in this university."* In the most general sense, it can be summarized that the research participants are less likely than their sighted peers to be enrolled as members and participate in campus-based socializing avenues that are typically available for their sighted counter parts. As discussed in section 4.4.3 below, there are certain challenges contributed to this experience. In this regard, the discussion held above helped me to deduce that the participants have had no equal access to involvement and participation in extracurricular activities compared to the sighted peers.

4.4.2.5. Being Othered

The semi-structured interview data were tantamount to identify "Othering" as the exclusionary practice by which participants were treated, or perceived as different from sighted peers, or considered as outsiders in the same circumstances, or situations. For instance, Aster, a 23-year-old participant from University 1 commenced discussing as: "*… the sighted classmates treated me like an outsider; as to what I am not one of them in a more different way, quite possibly in an unfamiliar and unusual sense*." Similarly, Achenefech, a 20-year-old participant from University 2 said: *"Since I am blind, they often treat me as one who is not one of their types in the classroom, or outside…."* In this study, Otherization (I coined it locally as: **በተለየ ዐይን ማየት፤ ከራስ ዐንጻር የተለየ ማድረግ:** *perceiving some one or a group as different in comparison to oneself*) was identified as an act of excluding participants through perceiving or treating them as

different from majority of their sighted peers of their age in the classrooms and in the campus. As aforesaid, the most specific and common othering practices inferred from the interview data are three: Being considered as often complaints, typified as aggressive in nature, and perceived as academically weak (poor). More specifically, it is deeply considered beneath that these practices are anchored as sub-themes to the main theme of the participants' common experience of Otherness.

4.4.2.5.1. Considered as Often-Complaints

This descriptive phenomenological study uncovered that the participants were often considered as behaviorally complaints or nagging in the classrooms or outside. In this way, they were treated like behaviorally different from their own sighted peers. This situation was rightly explained by Shibire,

> *Most of the time, sighted peers concluded that all of us are often nagging and complaining; arguing for and against on minor things and believed that the blind can never hear what others are saying. Practically, one of my teachers told me to remain outside of his office because I am one of the complaints. This remained as my manifestation! I think they don't feel comfortable while they see me even in the classes since I'm already perceived as complaint so that they become anxious when they meet me and also talk to me. Due to this, the sighted peers often like to consciously distance themselves from me.*

Shibire's verbatim is strengthened by Achenefech as follows,

> *Some sighted peers call us with the nick names, or according to the conditions related to our blindness. Particularly those who come from the country side like to metaphorically express us through linking blindness to negative connotations such as 'the blind are "complaints" or "nagging people". On the surface, these vocabularies describing us are harmful, paralyzing and even killing for us.* (2nd year)

As attempted to be explained by Achenefech, certain typifying (symbolizing) names are often utilized to define the participants in the classrooms or outside in a distinct ways from the sighted peers. Adding to this, Agumase, a 23-year-old male participant from University 1 reflected as: "… *sighted peers have overgeneralized views toward us. We are known to be complaints. They feared us because they already understood we are in criticisms and distressing. It is quite painful since it made me lack confidence while I meet them."* Agumase's description shows that the practice of being typified as complaints has made his peer relationships unpleasant. Finally,

Aliyu, a 21-year-old, and 2nd year student at University 1 recalled the following situation by which peers hastily generalized that blind student are often problematic in every aspect:

> *They alleged that it is us who often creates problems in the classrooms and outside. Let me tell you this tale and imagine how we were wrongly judged: The guy is the president of the student union. He is a sighted student. Almost all of us come to his office to ask him the budget that the MOE [Ministry of Education] allocated for us. Some of us asked certain questions. After listening each of us, he told us the following tale: 'Once upon a time, there was an old woman with blindness. God has told her that tomorrow her blindness will be cured totally, but she quested this: 'How can I spend night?' Your case is like an old woman.' He continued insulting us other things. After wards, we quietly went out of his office. It may make others laugh, but it is still painful.*

As seen in the narration above, the tale was masqueraded as jokes, and also pretended not to be harmful, but it was explained by Aliyu that this has degrading roles and putdowns them. In general, it was identified from the interviews that participants were often referred to as complaints, nagging or trouble makers by their sighted peers. Therefore, being complaint is the common manifestation of all of participants. On the other hand, such names assigned to participants have negative overtones and remained as offensive to them because these are mostly utilized to describe them as different from sighted individuals (peers).

4.4.2.5.2. Typified as Aggressive in Nature

This descriptive phenomenological study uncovered that the participants were considered as behaviorally aggressive, nervous, ferocious or barbarous compared to their sighted peers. In this regard, it is possible to extract from the interviews that they are perceived as behaviorally different from that of their own sighted peers including classmates. For instance, the best narration of that support this description was given by Aster, a 23-year-old female interviewee who is a 4th year student at University 1. She thoroughly bared the following idea:

> *They recognized that we [blind students] are bad-tempered, or arrogant. Once, one of our friends became angry at the Department Secretary. From that on, the sighted peers in our department oversimplified that all of us are intolerant and aggressive. These names obstructed our relationships in the department, and created gaps. Leave alone on this campus, in the community, it is believed that IWBs are with bad temperament, rigid and are with satanic behavior. Due to this, most of the sighted individuals are likely to far away from the existing possible interaction and relationships.*

The other best narration that shows the practice of considering participants as aggressive in nature was asserted by Belew, a 22 year old participant from University 2 that sighted peers perceived them as too courageous who often dare to speak without fear. He said as:

> *Most of them perceived we are emotional as that speak the teachers without fear. When problems arise on campus, they believe that we are to react soon, and appeal to the president office immediately. However, the fact is not this because we are like them. We are not different so far, now and even in the future. We may become emotional depending on particular circumstances, but it is common to all human beings.*

Similarly, Aliyu, a 21-year-old male participant from University 1 explained his taunting experience of being personified as aggressive through the following narrations,

> *I and the other peer with blindness were going together. I heard that 3 students were coming in front of us, and were throwing words referring to us and our blindness. Initially, they were burst out laughing. One of them said: 'Where are they going? Please leave the road.' The other said: 'let us be far…they are hostile they may hit us with their stick [white cane].' The other also continued saying something. They also gossiped many things about us. Now, if it is told by other blind students, I do not care because I know these words are used not to mean something different from them. Since it is said with hatred by sighted peers just wanting to certify that we are different from them, I felt really bad. This bled my mind. Due to this, I felt awkwardness from my own sighted peers, and determined that they are not good people.* (2^{nd} year)

4.4.2.5.3. Perceived as Academically Weak

The semi-structured interview data showed that participants were being considered as academically weak, or incapable in comparison to sighted peers. For example, Agumase's, a 22-year-old male participant at University 1, explanation showed that sighted classmates are doubtful about the participants' intellectual capacity. He said the following:

> *I felt that I can't be valued by my sighted peers. I am seen with their unusual eyes as uniquely different from them. They mistakenly judge me as "weak", "easily brittle or fragile", or "incapable". For example, my sighted classmates viewed me as lazy, as unable to do things by myself, and less contributory in group tasks. They believed as to what I am "help-seeker" or dependent on them and on what they have done. Now, I have no effort to work with them because I knew that they have wrongly judged me as weak. Resultantly, I have no valued recognition in group works and assignments.*

The explanation given by Agumase showed that sighted members considered him as academically less earnest in reference to themselves, and this primarily contributed for denial of

full access to involvement and participation in group-related activities like assignments, project works and the like. In addition, Shibire makes notes on this as,

> *In many instances, we are perceived by sighted peers as academically poor, unproductive and unable to do as they do. For example, all the sighted peers believed that our teachers could favor marks and grades to us as we are blind studnets. Even they perceive that all students with blindness joined this university through support and affirmative actions. During last semester, I scored an A grade on the course, but classmates became hesitated and asked me as: 'Who has done the exam for you?' Further, he believed that somebody [the reader of the exam] has worked out the exam for me.* (2nd year, University 2)

Sunny, a 20-year old female participant and 2nd year student at University 1 has to say the following that some sighted individuals perceived that blindness is meant for inability:

> *The sighted peers are generally less optimistic about us. While I was in second year, somebody come at the side of me and asked me as: 'Good afternoon? Where is the old library?' Soon, he saw me that I am blind; he repeatedly asked for apology? He asked me repetitive excuses as: 'please excuse me, sorry, excuse me'. I did not know the reason why he asked me multiple excuses. He understood that I did not know the library because I am blind. But I know it even I could tell him how to go there! I tolerated his repetitive voices of excuse, but I did not accept it. You see, if I were sighted, he did not ask me such excuses. He saw me as a different guy, just as inferior.*

Hereunder, it was also indicated in the stories of participants that the sighted classmates often invalidate or nullify most of the ideas, performances, or contributions of participants. For example, the narration given by Yimer, a 23-year-old male participant and 4th year student at University 2 evidently showed the invalidations relayed toward a participant with blindness:

> *In fact, most sighted peers do not expect me to be able to do even small academic tasks as them. I remember what one of the peers has done! During group discussion, I attempted to read what I have written through Brail, but he overturned my contribution, and took turns to the other sighted student. I felt that they are expressing their thoughts that they have abilities, skills, or statuses and markedly indicating that they are far better than their peers with blindness. Of course, this made me feel belittled or embezzled.*

At the top of this, Aliyu, 21-year-old participant has given the following ideas regarding the overwhelming belief of sighted peers as: "*In the same circumstance in the classrooms, the sighted peers believed that I have no skill or ability as well as them. You see, this is simply the nullification they have toward me*." In regards to this, Aliyu's explanations also revealed that the sighted peers often fail to acknowledge his academic performances. In the final instance, Aster, a

23-year-old female participant and 4th year student at University 1 generated the following idea by which the sighted peers perceived the current participants as incapable:

> *Once, I and my sighted friend want to see film in the auditorium of the university. There was a student at the entry of the gate of the hall. He is a coordinator of the film watch I think. He asked my friend as you can come in, but does your friend want to see the film? Then, I told him that "yes I can see films. Who told you that the blind can't see films?' That time, I thought he is about to put me down in comparison to my sighted buddy. Then, I become angry, and returned back to my dormitory.*

As specified in Aster's narrations, the sighted person believed that blind individuals are incapable of watching videos or films.

On the other hand, the sub-theme of "perceived as academically weak" confirms the instances by which the current participants were treated as different from the sighted peers in most academic contexts. Thus, it can be supposedly deduced from the interview data that they were often academically treated as belittle that quite possibly sent a clear message of considering them *as academically belittle or inferior* (Locally, I claim to it as: **የበታች ተደረጎ መታየት**) to them, which in turn implies degradation, abjection or devaluation on the parts of participants. In this light, Aliyu, a 23-year-old participant from University 1 described as: *"Often, they assumed themselves as they are academically hegemonic or superior, and perceived us as inferior to themselves in many academic instances, here."* His explanation shows that he has been belittled by his peers in many different circumstances.

Generally, the interview responses stipulated above can be summed up through two points: Firstly, the practices of Otherizing suggested that sighted peers have considered, treated, or perceived the participants as different from them just in the same circumstances and situations. Hence, the participants of this study comprised the most "Othered" groups of students at the target HEIs. Secondly, the participants' experience of Otherness was a pathway to further social exclusionary process as it has exacerbated poor interaction and relationships with Otherers. For instance, Agumase, a 20 year-old male participant from University 1 said: "*Indeed, I am not courageous to establish close interactions with sighted peers because I do not want to let myself be defined by them. Being with them, I do not want to remind them to treat me as different from them!*" Put in another way, it can be noticed from participants' narration that their

relationship with sighted peers was unpleasant and awkward since they were Othered by their own sighted peers. Thirdly, it was shown from the in-depth semi-structures interviews that most of the Otherizing practices were executed by sighted peers, and they took the lions share to play key roles as Otherers in the sampled universities.

4.4.2.6. Marginality within the Classrooms

All of the participants engaged in this study conveniently expressed that they have equal access to physical spaces in the classrooms as their sighted classmates. It is a practical reality in Ethiopian Education system that attempts are being made to provide opportunities for all SWDs to have equal access to classroom learning together with other students without disabilities. Resultantly, they are equally accepted in the classrooms in the same way as other sighted students. As an instance, Aliyu, a 21-year-old interviewee and 2nd year student at University 1 enthusiastically reported the following that he has an access to physical spaces in the classrooms as other sighted student. "*Whilst I was in boarding school in Shashemene, I learn in a classroom where all students are blind as the school is for the blind. Now, I got the access to sit in the same classroom and learn together."* Other participants have also acknowledged that they have the access to physical spaces as their sighted peers. Nevertheless, the discussion below showed that access to physical integration does not guarantee their effective social inclusion in the classroom settings. In this study, the semi-structured interviews showed here that being physically placed in the same classrooms together with other sighted classmates; they did not get equal opportunities to the teachers' teaching contents as their sighted classmates. This description is supported by the ideas given by Yimer, a 23-year-old participant who learns at University 2. He described his classroom presence as: "*Ouch! I often think that I am wasting my time in vein in the classroom as the teachers' teaching is not accessible to me."*

Additionally, Agumase, the other 22-year-old male participant from University 1, on his part, expressed his feeling as, "*I sometimes felt that I am being forgotten in the classrooms because my teacher did not plan his teaching for me, but for the sighted classmates."* In the same fashion, Aster, a 23-year-old-participant and 4th year student at University 1 pointed out as: *"... I felt marginalized in my own classroom while the teacher teaching. Unexpectedly, I am given less attention and fewer opportunities by the classroom teacher compared to the other classmates…."* Other participants also collectively reported that their presence and membership as students in the

classrooms is mostly unpleasant pertaining to the teachers' teaching-learning process. Thus, the compelling narratives presented above showed that the participants have personal experiences of marginality in the classrooms. Accordingly, the interview data gained from participants' showed that their experience of classroom marginality was largely exhibited in terms of two practices. The first practice is sidelining during the teachers' teaching-learning process. It is the instance by which participants were given less attention by the classroom teacher in comparison to sighted classmates. The other practice explored from the interview replies is favoritism in classroom interaction. It is the circumstance whereby classroom teacher tends to interact more with sighted student than participants with blindness. In this sense, it will be mentioned below that their mere classroom physical placement (a) did not guarantee their equal access to classroom learning opportunities in terms of the teachers' teaching-learning process; (b) did not help them foster interactions and relationships with students and teachers.

Therefore, participants have described their experience of classroom marginality using two subordinate themes: Sidelining during the teachers' teaching and favoritisms in classroom teacher-student interactions. Thus, it is found that they suffered from this classroom experience when they are treated unequally without any justifiable reason(s) in the same classrooms in comparison to sighted classmates. The following sub-sections deeply describe the experiences of classroom marginality along with their verbatim transcripts:

4.4.2.6.1. Practice of Sidelining during Teaching

It was revealed from the interview data that participants were marginalized during the teachers' teaching. In this vein, their response showed that they were academically disadvantaged as they were not equally benefited in the teaching-learning processes as their sighted peers in the same classroom setting. This shows that the teachers' method of teaching and style of presentation does not accommodate the classroom learning needs of the current participants. Regarding this, Agumase, a 22-year-old adolescent student at University 1 expounded the following that most of the teachers' methods of teaching are tilted to sighted classmates:

> *In the classroom, all of us are in the same play ground; but we are not able to play the game equally with sighted ones. The teacher did not attempt to create equal access. Often, he gave brief lectures through writing notes on white board, which is not for us, but for the sighted peers. I remember that while teaching in the classroom, some teachers said 'this is'; 'this means'; 'see this;"; 'look at this'; 'this means'; 'you see this*

> *is'…etcetera.. This is meaningless for us because we can't see what they are trying to show. This is accessible only for sighted peers, and not for us.*

As shown above, Agumase's description informs that the teachers' classroom instructional processes has denied him from fair and equal learning opportunities in comparison to the sighted classmates. Like Agumase, the responses of other interviewees showed that their teachers' teaching-learning process is lop-sided toward the sighted students. This description is closely aligned with the ideas reflected by Shibire, a 23-year-old participant from University 2: She said:

> *In the same classrooms, some of our teachers never teach us as if we are students with special needs. They often utilize the same instructional strategy in the classroom that favors most the sighted ones. They do not help us learn what the sighted have learned. At freshman, I was giving an idea about the meaning of "Sociology." I think my English was not good to be understood. When I speak, some students burst with laughter at my English. My teacher said nothing. If I were sighted, he might have to say something that may encourage me. Due to this, I felt that I am not treated equally during his instruction. Instead, I felt that there is no attention paid to the best of my interests.*

Shibire's explanation showed that her teacher did not care for her in the classroom, and she felt being marginalized by her teacher. In addition to this, Sunny, a 22-year-old female participant and 2nd year student at University 1 asserted that the method of teaching in the classroom is mostly leaned toward the sighted peers. According to her, the practice of instructional sidelining exhibited when the teacher was providing lectures. She has reverberated as follows,

> *Usually, teachers utilized power point slides to present their lectures. The sighted classmates often write notes on their note-books, but it is difficult for me to write what the sighted classmates have written or to follow the instruction the teacher is delivering. Everything is inaccessible for me, but still struggling… my presence in the classroom is living, and not learning since I am simply sitting, and remained silent. Even, I felt that I have no opportunity to show my potential in a classroom setting.*

Based on the above verbatim, it seems to the participants that some of their classroom teachers' lectures could not accommodate their learning classroom needs. In a similar account, Belew, another 22-year-old male participant and 2nd year student at University 1 strengthened Sunny's and Shibire's ideas through clarifying his own experiences in his own words as follows:

> *I am there in the class to learn as other sighted classmates. While sighted peers have full privilege to freely follow the teacher's lecture, I am denied. The teacher did not see me*

> *equally as the sighted classmates while imparting teaching. In the other time, I remember! He shows visual materials [it was a chart] in the classroom. I missed this part of learning from this material. I simply remained as passive listener!*

Likewise, Achenefech, a 20 year-old female participant made the following unhidden focusing on denied of equal access during the teacher's classroom lecture. She has complained,

> *To your surprise, my teacher did not know my existence in his classroom. He writes lecture notes on the blackboard. Sighted students can write it from the blackboard, but I can't. I think that he is not teaching me, but he is teaching sighted peers.* (2nd year, University 2)

Achenefch was aware that the classroom sentiment that the teacher's method of teaching was not able to accommodate the diverse learning needs of participants in the classrooms, and the teacher's method of teaching mostly geared toward sighted peers. As shown properly in her verbatim, she felt not included in her teachers teaching mainly due to the inaccessibility of the teachers' teaching methods. In addition to this, Aliyu, a 21-year-old participant replicated as follows that he felt not included in the teaching-learning process in the classrooms:

> *My teachers' style of teaching has given no room for me because the method he used did not give equal access to learning and active participation in the classroom. Rather, it has excluded me. In the classroom settings, the teacher's methods and style of teaching made me feel less profitable in contrast to sighted students*.

In sum, the participants' semi-structured interview transcripts redundantly delineated that the teachers' method of teaching and style of presentation does not support the successful social inclusion of participants within the four walls of the classrooms. In other words, it can be determined that the teachers' method of teaching lacks inclusivity. This shows that the teachers' classroom instructional process is not both accessible for participants, and interactive, as well. In this vein, it is noted many times above that the mere physical placement of blind students in the classroom spaces together with sighted classmates is not a guarantee for their equalization of learning opportunities, classroom socialization and teacher-student interaction. This generally shows that real social inclusion is more than mere physical placement.

Bearing the above description in mind, it can be suggested for classroom teachers that equal treatment of students with and without blindness is needed in the classroom atmosphere. To achieve this, it is recommended in Chapter 6 of the dissertation that specific in-service

trainings are needed for the classroom teachers who teach SWDs together with other studnets without disabilities.

4.4.2.6.2. Practice of Favoritism in Teacher-Student Interaction

The current participants' have boldly showed the nature of teacher-student classroom interaction. From the interview data, it has been understood that most of the patterns of teachers' classroom interactions are skewed toward sighted classmates. This also showed that the classroom interaction between participants and classroom teachers was very much limited. In line with this, Shibire, a 23-year-old female participant from University 2 discerned the following: "… *classroom teachers need to see all students in the same manner, but the reality on the ground is far from this. When I get the opportunity to answer questions, he showed interest on their replies."* Shibire's narration showed that the classroom teacher is more often lopsided to sighted peers in the same classroom climate. This has affected their classroom participation and discussion. On top of this, Agumase, a 22-year-old participant at University 1 talked the discomfort he experienced in the classroom as,

> *Few teachers normally inclined to the sighted peers in the same classrooms. The way the teacher interacts with me and with the sighted students is not the same. Usually, he interacts with the sighted peers more often than with me. My teacher often prefers to have discussion, question and answers with the sighted peers but I suppose that he is doing this unintentionally, and he might not think to discriminate me.*

Agumase's description showed that he remained hidden in the social environment of the classroom, and that there is an apparent difference in the pattern of teachers' interaction with him and the sighted peers. In the other vein, Belew, a 22-year-old male participant and 2nd year learner at University 2 claimed the following about the classroom interaction as:

> *… in the classroom, I have no equal access to ask and answer classroom questions. The sighted classmates surpass us in many things in the same classroom. As to me, I was too much eager to participate in the classrooms, but eventually I stopped now because when I raise my hand to ask or answer questions, my teacher is failing to give me chance rather, he gave more opportunities for the sighted peer. It is clear that the teacher called the sighted peers by name. But he did not called me by name!*

Belew's narrations showed that the classroom teacher has interacted more frequently with the sighted peers than the students with blindness. At the top of this, Achenefech, a 23-year-old

participant echoed the above narration focusing on the nature of teacher-student interaction as, "*… my teacher gave me very short and precise answers. He never gave me further elaboration up on the questions I asked. Contrarily, he spent more time and has detail and long-ranged discussion with sighted classmates."* Based on Achenefech's narrations, it seems to me that some classroom teachers gave more time and energy to sighted peers than the current participants. Similarly, other participants communicated that despite their classroom presence; most of their teachers' classroom instruction is deemed different and sloped toward the sighted peers in the same classroom contexts. This description was further strengthened by Aster, a 23-year-old-female participant and 4th year student at University 1 as, *"The relationship of teachers with us and with sighted peers is not the same. My teacher gave more attention to sighted peers. When he communicated with them, it was very attractive, lengthier and satisfying. With us, it is very short."* Still, she has narrated that there is difference in the patters and focus of teachers' classroom interactions with blind students and the rest of students.

Generally, as revealed above, it may not be often the case, and even not surprising that the classroom teachers were interacting with the sighted peers more often than the participants. This also shows that there was unjustifiabnle reason for the favoured classroom interaction among classroom teachers and the 8 studnets participated in this study.

4.4.3. Results to Answer Research Question 3

The third research question requested as: *How do blind students experience social exclusion in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?* Mainly, this research question is aimed at identifying the challenging experiences of participants that created conditions reinforcing the risk of social exclusion explored in the results descrivbed to answer research question 2 above. In doing so, the challenging experience were explored and described as having contributed to their lived experience social exclusion both in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms of University 1 and University 2.

Accordingly, the responses of the current phenomenological research participants is summarized in Table 4.4 below, which shows the summaries of interview responses related to the challenges experienced by participants that are commonly identified during the descriprive phonological analysis process.

Table 4.4: Emergent Themes and Sub-themes Related to Research Question Three

Challenging Experiences Among Participants		
Theme (s)	**Sub-theme (s)**	**Description of the Theme**
Social challenges	❖ Stereotypes, prejudices, and reluctance	This theme denotes the experiences of participants on peer-group and teacher-related challenges linked to their social exclusion.
Physical challenges	❖ Unfriendly physical spaces and inaccessible buildings	This theme contains participants' experiences on physical challenges that created conditions reinforcing their experience of social exclusion.
Institution-related challenges	❖ Inaccessible visual (ink-print) information	This theme outlines participants' experiences on challenges related to procedures and practices of their own universities that unfairly discriminate them from involvement and participation in extracurricular activities.

It is summed-up in the table that the major challenges related to social exclusion are found in three core themes: Social, physical and institutional challenges. The table also shows other specific challenges categorized under each core theme as having contributed to their experiences of social exclusion. In other words, the challenges represented in the themes and sub-themes are identified as barriers to social inclusion of the research participants in their own classrooms and campus. Herein, the sub-sections underlined the discussion of each of the challenges experienced by participants' vis-à-vis their narratives.

4.4.3.1. Social Challenges

As discussed below, the social challenges related to social exclusion as experienced by participants includes both teacher-related and peer-group risk factors. In one hand, among different peer-group risk factors listed in the interview data, the current participants' distinct viewpoints revealed that prejudices and stereotypical views are commonly experienced as challenges related to their social exclusion. On the other hand, it is found from participants' repetitive interview responses that some of their teachers who were teaching them together with

other sighted students were reluctant to comply with instructional (curriculum) accommodations. They reported this challenge as related to their classroom marginality.

4.4.3.1.1. Peers Stereotypes

The participants of my research expounded that their sighted peers have stereotypic thinking and behavior (I denoted it in local language as**:** **ሞፈረጅ**) toward their peers with vision loss. It is also disclosed in the interview data that their sighted peers' stereotypes are mostly rooted from their misconceptions, or wrong believes about visual impairment. Due to this, the sighted peers viewed the current participants mostly negatively through utilizing different terms or language while describing their particular characteristics, abilities, actions and day-to-day activities. In brief, it was found out from the interview replies that the participants were categorized, or exemplified in specific and marked names such as aggressive, courageous, sensitive, emotional, academically weak or easily fragile, and complaints that gave them a different look in contrast to their own sighted peers. Nevertheless, these discernable names assigned to participants are not factual or realistic because these are exaggerated, and atypical, inaccurate generalizations that give mythical images about the participants. For instance, Belew, a 22-year-old male participant and one of the 2nd year students at University 2 has produced the following narrations: *"Some peers believe blindness as a diseases and persons with blindness as patient. I felt shame, and it made me bend my neck down."* Ever more, Achenefech a 20-year-old participant further expanded Belew's perspectives. She has stated unequivocally focusing on the trickiest questions she was asked by a sighted peer as follows:

> *… some peers have biased or distorted perceptions about our blindness. They consider me as a patient who is dysfunctional. One of the sighted peers asked me the following series of awkward questions [laugh]: How do you sleep? How do you dress and undress your clothes? How do you use toilets and how do you wipe? Who is helping you to groom yourself? For me, these questions were amazing because my friend believed that all the blind are dysfunctional due to the existence of blindness. This is how he understands blindness and a person with blindness.*

In the same vein, Aliyu, a 21-year-old male participant from University 1 noted the following about sighted peers' misconception and subsequent stereotypical views as,

> *Astonishingly, some of them considered my blindness as a disease that comes due to night blindness. For example, some of them do not want to occupy dormitories in the ground*

> *floors where we are mostly accommodated at because they perceived it through a nick name as "darken ground, or block" [ጨለማ ዋሻ] and think that their sightedness may become affected if they are placed in these dormitories. Additionally, few of sighted peers become frightened to personally contact me.*

In most general sense, other participants have also noted that some of the sighted peers have mythical understanding about blindness and concurrent characteristics. Due to this, they deliberately created negative (pejorative) images and oversimplified views to participants through expressing the personal characteristics, abilities or potential of blind students that perpetuate inaccurate labels. Consequently, they intentionally assigned names to participants this as "weak, or easily fragile"; "aggressive or courageous" and "complaint, or trouble-maker." This seriously heightened participants' experience of Otherness discussed in the analysis of RQ2 (see section 4.4.2.5 above) through which they were thought-out as different from the sighted peers.

In the first instance, participants' explicated that the sighted peers often exaggerate their social behavior as normally aggressive, and complaints! Among others, the best of the existing narrations that shows the instances of being considered as aggressive were utterly reported by Yimer, Shibire and Aliyu as follows: At first, Yimer, a 23-year-old and 2nd year student at University 2 reported as,

> *Let me tell you this embarrassing thing. If one of the blind students drunk alcohol the previous day, amazingly it can be deduced in the campus that "all the blind were intoxicated." Then, our names remain as "the alcoholic or the drunkers" If one of the blind students shouted at someone or behaves inappropriately, it is known that sighted peers believe that the blind are nervous; and that their behavior is not compatible with others. Of course, there are circumstances that I become angry. I may give up on things, and then, my feelings will evaporate very shortly, but it is a human nature!*

Besides, Shibire, a 23-year-old female participant and 2nd year student at University 2 shared the above narration expressing as, "*They define us as dangerous, nervy or fearless without any ground. But this can't represent us."* Also, Aliyu a 21-year-old male participant at University 1 shined light on Yimer's and Shibire's accounts as follows. He said, "*They conclude that we are with annoying characteristics and considering us as unimportant in comparison to themselves. They firmly believed that we speak bitterly and angrily. In this way, they saw us as different from themselves."* Other participants also reflected similar ideas that the sighted peers often perceived them as aggressive that can be irritated on easy things. In the other vein,

the semi-structured interview transcript also portrayed that sighted peers most frequently describe the social behavior of their blind peers who participated in this phenomenological study as complaints, nagging or trouble-makers. All participants reflected similar ideas on this instance. However, the best narration was given by, Agumas, a 22-year-old participant and 3rd year student at University 1. He was particularly fascinated to report the general situation as follows, "*…to your surprise, there is no praise for us. I think no one can acknowledge our behavior because we are known as behaviorally difficult, bad-tempered and nagging on minor matters."* In this vein, the participants' narrations indicated that they were treated as trouble-makers, or nagging either in the classrooms or campuses.

Finally, the participants have described their overgeneralized names about their academic abilities and potentials. As routinely stipulated through the interview responses most sighted peers attached negative connotations and all-encompassing descriptors to participants as they are academically weak, dependent, help-seeker, easily brittle and not competent enough. In this fashion, they hastily oversimplified participants in a different way presuming them as academically different and inferior to themselves. For example, Aster, a 23-year-old participant at University 1 apparently annotated as, *"…they think that we are academically deemed dependent on their shoulder in every context, and for them we are academically weak."* On top of Aster's accounts, Sunny, a 20-year-old interviewee and 2nd year student at University 1 make notes as:

> *It is habitual on this campus that 'help-seekers' is our name. It is also remained as a trend even outside of the campus. But they believed that we are academically dependent on them. In most instances, they ignored the good qualities we have and pay attention to the bad things that may not reflect us. They believed that the blind can't accomplish ordinary activities, and undermine or underestimate us. They believe that we often depend on others to finalize course works, and perceived that we are academically poor.*

Meanwhile, Achenefech has given an account as follows,

> *Umm, I knew that they did not have trust in me, and they are not interested when I am their group members. I remember in the group work that they have done the work themselves, and finally told me that they have done it. They never trust my contribution to the group's tasks. Undoubtedly, my uniqueness from them is undeniable and inescapable because they are sighted, but I am blind. This created big differences between us. Due to this, they often think that I am academically unworthy*.

Indeed, the interview transcripts provided above showed that majority of sighted peers have incorrect or mistaken views toward participants on the basis of how they look on the outside. Resultantly, the participants were arbitrarily seen through a stereotypical lens that encompass their own sighted peers' exaggerated opinions, or over-generalized mythical understandings.

The aforementioned discussion can be summed up as follows: First, sighted peers' stereotypical views are inextricably linked to the participants' experiences of Otherness. Second, problem of stereotypes is stemmed from lack sufficient information about visual impairment, or blindness. Therefore, this finding implies that more effort is needed toward sensitization and awareness creation to sighted students who learn together with blind students.

4.4.3.1.2. Peers' Prejudices

During the interview process, I have asked participants' to reflect on how their sighted peers' react toward them and what their attitude is like. Then, it is found from their interviews that most of the sighted peers have negative attitudes (prejudices) toward the behaviors, actions and abilities of participants who are totally blind based simply on membership, for example, in the classrooms or outside of the classroom. For the most part, the peers' prejudices are parts of the sighted peers' intentional attitudinal barriers. More specifically, the structured interviews showed that the prejudice of sighted peers toward the current participants was mainly demonstrated in two manifestations: (a) when the fully sighted peers display negative reactions toward participants, and (b) when they are not needed for friendship relationship.

On the one hand, participants perceived that their sighted peers showed negative reactions to their peers with visual impairment. In this regard, the interview data revealed that fully sighted peers sometimes use offensive expressions and inflammatory words to express their negative reactions. As an instance, Aliyu, a 21-year-old male participant at University 1 told a story about emotional reactivity he faced from his peers, "*Some of my classmates reflect their negative feelings through expelling their hostility when they interact with me."* Similarly, Belew, a 22-year-old interviewee at University 2 spoke as:

> *There are peers that frequently react negatively toward me. Some of them have shouted and insulted me. They reacted to me mostly condescendingly in a way to show superior attitudes. For example, I know that they often believe that the blind are not clean, and hence lack hygiene. They sometimes speak very arrogant words and aggressively*

> *ventilate their emotions. Once upon a time, I heard the sighted peers saying this: 'is there any blind here? Where are the blind?' From that on, I do not want to come nearby the sighted peers. Presently, I prefer to be far from my sighted peers. To compensate this, I spend my time with blind students.*

To this end, Sunny, a 20-year-old female participant from University 1 said as, *"…they purposely demonstrate their anger, and become easily annoyed to me. This oppressed me and made me feel like unwelcome."* The description given by Aliyu, Belew and Sunny showed that some of their fully sighted students lack courteousness, and sometimes become impolite to them. This emotional reactivity has affected their healthy interaction and relationships. In similar fashion, Aster, a 23-year-old female participant and 4th year student at University 1 expanded the idea that her peers were impolite as they show undisciplined behavior to her. She explained as:

> *My classmates mostly behave inappropriately toward me. I remember one of the moments at dining room. A sighted student said 'let us go slowly. The eyeless are here we may push them. If we do this, they will accuse us soon. The time is for them!' By this, I understand that they are expelling their prejudices toward me. After this, my attitude toward them changed seriously and learned that they are not good people. (*4th year)

Nonetheless, it has been discussed below that the negative reaction of sighted peers toward participants denied the participants' access to close interaction and meaningful relationships in their university campuses. Resultantly, they were highly vulnerable to be easily ignored (ostracized) by their own sighted peers. Increasingly, Agumase, a 22-year-old interviewee from University 1 stated as, *"…I can't comprehend visual things and manners of interactions so that they don't want me. Instead, they frequently overlooked me."* In addition, Sibire, a 23-year-old and 2nd year student at University 2 narrated as, *"… they never want to be close with me. Thus, I know that I am already ignored. For example, I do not know how they look, including their dressing style, their mannerisms. I am not able to gather visual information about them to know well about them."* Other participants also disclosed that the sighted peers negative feelings and outlooks toward them affected their trusting interactions and normal relationships.

In the other vein, the negative attitude of sighted peers was demonstrated when the participants were not preferred for normal friendship interactions. In this sense, the following narrations illustrated that the participants were not needed for close friendships. As an example, Yimer, a 23-year-old participant and 4th year student at University 2 has to say the following

stressing that he was not able to make friendships as: "… *they [sighted peer] did not want me as their friendliness. Who do you think wants the blind as a friend?"* Yimer has assured that the lack of sight has affected his initiation to develop and sustain close interactions relationships, but he stressed more on the impact of peers' negative attitude on friendship development. In addition to Yimer, Sunny, a 20-year-old participant from University 1 has explicated the following giving more emphasis on difficulty of establishing friendships with sighted peers:

> *First and foremost, there are some sighted female peers who felt humiliated while they are being together with me. They do not want to be seen with me, and perceived that I can't fit for friendliness in the peer (social) group.*

Also, Belew, a 22-year-old participant bitterly said the following about the prejudiced behavior of sighted peers that eventually result unfriendliness he encountered in the peer settings:

> *With no doubt, my blindness made me an easy target for them to develop negative attitudes toward me, and ultimately being unwanted as a friend for them. If I were not blind, I could equally act and behave as them, and I could not have been excluded so far from friendships. Due to my blindness, they often perceived I am not neat or tidy enough, and as with serious problem of hygiene comparing to themselves.*

Moreover, Agumase, a 22-year-old male participant has reflected the following regarding the challenges of peers' prejudices, and the subsequent difficulty of friendliness with them as:

> *I think they mostly alleged that I am unequal to them. Due to this, they could not accept me as their close friend. I know that to get acceptance, promoting some level of sameness is very much needed. I am sightless, but they are fully sighted, and that I am not alike them. Being accepted as a true friend is one of the dead ends for me.*

Agumase's explanation showed that to get recognition, acceptance, fulfill the expectation of others and thereby develop close relationships shared commonality and reciprocity is required. Upon this explanation, Shibire, a 23-year-old participant and 2nd year student at University 2 has the following to say, *"As to me, I did not remember any instance when I have had reciprocal and close relationship at all. For example, my classmates knew my name, but they did not dare to call me through my name."* Finally, Achenefech, a 20-year old participant has to mention the following about peers' prejudices as an underlying reason for exclusion from friendship circles,

> *Ah! I perceived that I already lost my attractiveness due to my blindness [laugh]. I already told you that I have no sighted friend here. As it can be seen outside, my eye-ball*

is outside of my eye-lid so that everybody can see it. It is red and too big and made classmates become hesitated to contact me. They many times turned off from me, let alone close friendships. So, how can they prefer me as one of their friends? Instead, I can say that it is due to my blindness that the sighted peers triggered to developed prejudices to me.

In summary, it can be profoundly affirmed from participants' narrations that the fully sighted peers have exclusionary attitude toward their blind peers for simply being members and without any legitimate reason (s). In other words, it is exhaustively ascertained from the interview responses that the participants have had prejudiced memberships in their classrooms and other settings outside of the classrooms. This adversely affected their interaction and relationship. Specifically, it has been identified via participants' stories that sighted peers' negative attitude is the major contributor to their experience of peer ignoring. Additionally, all of the current participants have generally reported that it is a barrier to establishment and development of friendships in the participants' learning institutions.

4.4.3.1.3. Teachers' Reluctance

As a general claim, the interview data showed that some of the classroom teachers who taught the current participants were reluctant to comply with reasonable curriculum (instructional) adaptations. This does mean that some of the classroom teachers who taught the participants were less likely to show efforts, or commitment to provide equal learning opportunities as other fully sighted classmates. In this regard, all of the participants have spelled out that the classroom instructional process was not implemented in accordance with the participants' best learning needs and interests. Eventually, it was portrayed in the interviews that participants faced the exclusionary practices of sidelining and favoritism during teaching-learning process. Therefore, it was unconcealed from the discussion below that the teachers' reluctance in the classroom was manifested through their negligence (carelessness), unpreparedness or lack of enthusiasm to modify the instruction to accommodate the specific-learning needs of their blind students. Importantly, the participants brought up different viewpoints about their experiences on teachers' reluctance as follows: At the beginning, Belew, a 22-year-old participant has clarified as,

…some of our teachers are not responsible for us. They do not care whether we learn or not. They simply come in the class and write short notes on the blackboard. They really do not know whether we learn or not. I think they did not take ample training on how to teach us. As I think, they believed that we are not equally important in comparison to as

> *sighted classmates. So that their interaction with some of the sighted classmates is completely unlikely to the interaction they have with us.*

On top of this, Sunny, the other 20-year-old female participant from University 2 enlightened the following idea that some instructors are unwilling to help their blind students. She stated as,

> *We are three in the classroom out of 42 students. Unexpectedly, we are given less attention and less opportunity by the classroom teacher compared to the other classmates. Once upon a time, I asked my teacher to give me soft copies of what he taught in the classroom, but he was angry and what he told me is threatening. He said to me as: 'Ask your God for your blindness. What can I do for you? I told you many times that you can get the handout from your friends. It was very harmful.*

Agumase, a 22-year-old male participant and 3rd year student at University 1 produced the following viewpoints stressing more on his classroom teachers' unpreparedness as,

> *Some of my teachers seem unprepared to teach me. I can recall one of my course instructors that the teaching method he used was not to my interest. We often debate each other that our teachers are not psychologically and academically ready to help us and deal with our problems, and to teach us along other sighted peers. In my case, I can speak that my teachers used lecture method of teaching, and few of them did not really speak softly while giving their oral lecture, and that I could not listen the lecture sufficiently. Unlike me, the sighted classmates followed the lecture.*

Agumase's views indicated that his teachers were uncaring to accommodate his learning needs including making the classroom instructional process more accessible for him. This exacerbated denial of equal access to his teachers' teaching methods, and ultimately sidelined him during the teaching-learning process. In this sense, Aster, a 23-year-old female participant added as,

> *Very often, some of my instructors did not like to give soft copy of the handout with which they utilized to teach in the classroom. I remember that the teacher gave handouts to the sighted peers; he did not provide me a soft copy of the handout. I asked him the material, but he said 'I have no soft copy of the material. I have given the material to the class monitor. You can take from him.' It was heart bleeding. Due to this, I mostly felt discriminated in the classroom*.

Likewise, Aliyu, a 21-year-old male participant who learns at University 1 claimed as: "*most teachers have one way of doing their teaching. Often, they teach through writing notes on the whiteboard. This suspended me and did not include me because while sighted classmates write*

the lecture notes, I remain simply sitting and sidelined." With an extension of Aliyu's ideas, Shibire, a 23-year-old and 2nd year female student at University 2 generally connotes as,

> *Unless modified, I can't be equally benefited from the teachers teaching method. Some classroom teachers did not consider an alternative method, or compensatory arrangements such as soft copies of the curriculum materials, and to be equally benefited from his lecture and compensate what the sighted students have consumed in the classroom. Few of them are familiar to say 'do not worry about it; I will see it for you in a special way; and the like'. For instance, last semester, I asked my teacher to give me the soft copy of the notes of power point through flash disk, but he said '... do not worry this part will not appear on your final exam' It was terrible. It is a vivid indication of refusal to provide the material to me. How can a responsible teacher say this?*

The data given by Shibire uncovered that her teacher was negligent in that he lacked interest to provide the teaching resource freely accessible for other students in the same classroom settings. To this end, Aster, a 23-year-old participant and 4th year student at University 1 reflected her views about classroom instructors' unwillingness to academically accommodate her. She said, "*It appeared to me that my teachers are not ready to teach or help me. They do not really care for me! They come to classes without preparing to teach me."* Aster's perspectives showed that there was lack of classroom teachers' preparation and readiness to meet her special needs.

More generally, it can be stipulated from the verbatim outlined above that teaching-learning process was unmodified, and hence it lacks inclusivity as it does not accommodate the diverse learning needs of the current research participants. On the other hand, the participants were probed to give ideas on the sources of teachers' reluctance to adapt or modify their instructional practice in an effort to accommodate their students learning needs. Their ascriptions showed that classroom teachers who taught the participants become reluctant to effectively teach their blind students due mainly to (a) insufficient skills and knowledge (i.e., ignorance) in the areas of reasonable instructional accommodation; and (b) inadequate practical experiences of teaching blind learners with other fully sighted ones. These reasons are discussed in-detail herein utilizing selected narrations: Primarily, it was conversed by majority of the participants that their classroom teachers lack the necessary knowledge of adapting their instructions to the best need of participants in the classrooms settings. This resulted poor accessibility of the classroom instructional methods and in due course contributed to the classroom marginality of participants interviewed for the study. As seen below, the narration provided by Sunny, a 20-year-old female

participant and 2nd year student further elaborates this description. She recounted her hesitation about the instructors' knowledge of the specific instructional strategies for blind students as,

> *I suspect that some of my teachers are not aware about blind students and how to teach us together with other sighted peers. I doubt that they lacked the necessary information. Even, they might not know our presence in the classroom, and did not consider what we need from them, and did not know how best they can handle us, and mostly did not give room. This made my presence in the classroom meant for nothing.*

Suny's explanation noticed that her teacher fails to adapt the requirements of learning to meet her assorted learning needs. Similarly, Achenefech, a 20-year-old interviewee has added up the following opinion about the classroom teachers' insufficient knowledge with respect to adapting their instructional process to support the learning needs of their blind students. She said,

> *My teachers did not know what we really need from them in the classrooms. Honestly speaking, there is little or no attention paid for our learning to the best of our aspirations. Due to this, I felt worthless in the classroom as the teachers teaching methods were not reachable to equally satisfy me as other sighted peers. Even, some of them lack necessary information about blind students. I remember that one of my teachers used unnecessary expressions that can produce significant differences in the classroom. During group formation, my teachers said like this: 'do not forget the blind. Include them in each of your groups.' This immensely bled my heart, and it is unforgettable that I felt different in the classroom.*

Relatedly, the participants interviewed have had the courage to disclose that their teachers lack sufficient experience of working with students with visual impairments. Due to this, they were not able to particularly cater the diverse education (classroom) needs of their blind students. For example, Sunny and Achenefech noticed above that their instructors were unaware about blindness-related classroom needs to gratify their peculiar learning wishes and interests in the contexts of the classrooms where other fully sighted students are also their students. Additionally, Yimer, a 23-year-old interviewee at University 2 said, "*I think my teachers find it difficult to teach us together with sighted students because they mostly teach us in the same way they teach the sighted classmates."* Yimer's views were resounded by Aster, a 23-year-old participant and 4th year student at University 1 that her teachers have insufficient experience of providing equal learning opportunities for blind and sighted students. She stated as follows:

> *I become suspicious that they may not have adequate experience to teach us together with other sighted students in the so called inclusive classroom settings. Their unfamiliarity affected me. In the School of Law, most of my teachers' experience is simply giving oral lectures, and showing power points through slides. These styles of teaching can't favor me, in anyways. In this regard, my teachers are not able to teach me to the most I need.*

Adding to this, Agumase, a 22-year-old male participant has hesitated about his teachers' experience of teaching blind students with other sighted students in the same classroom settings to their best of learning needs as, "*More troublingly, our teachers never contemplate our needs. They are not coming to teach us, but sighted students. The value placed on us is not similar to the value they placed on sighted students, just in the same situations."* In the same manner, the views provided by participants showed that some of the classroom teachers who taught the current participants have inadequate practical experience of working with (teaching) these students together with other sighted learners. This let them become marginalized within the classroom settings during the teaching-learning processes.

In summary, teachers' reluctance is the recurrently uttered risk factor as having contributed to their experience of social exclusion they encountered in terms of classroom marginalization. In the other vein, it is uncovered that lack of skills and knowledge in instructional adaptations and insufficient experience of teaching blind students together with sighted students in the same classroom settings cause teachers' reluctance. This finding evidently points toward the idea that the classroom teaching-learning process where participants engaged lack inclusivity in terms of the delivery of teachers' method or style of teaching and teacher-participant classroom interaction. For this to happen, the current participants have pointed their fingers toward the classroom teachers.

In addition, the interview data narrated above were great help for me to forward that it is highly advisable for teachers to develop adequate knowledge about how to teach blind students in inclusive classroom set ups.

4.4.3.2. Physical Challenges

The participants interviewed in this phenomenological study commonly ascribed that physical challenges that contributed to their experience of social exclusion are inaccessibility of the immediate physical environment of their campus (i.e., buildings and outdoor spaces). These

involved the most deleterious of campus challenges they faced by virtue of their blindness. These specific challenges are described below:

4.4.3.2.1. Unfriendly Physical Spaces

It has been claimed over and over again by participants that the campus physical or built-in environment is unfriendly for them to lead their independent campus-life. Thus, the major factors contributing to their isolated living conditions in their day-to-day life involve the inaccessibility of the physical environment of the campus. Again, most of the participants reported that the inaccessibility of the visual environment of campuses is one of the principal challenges that impede their interactions, relationships, and participation. Thus, majority of them disclosed that the physical inaccessibility of the campus environment caused their isolated living conditions. The best reflection, for example, is given by Aster, a 23-year-old-female participant and 4th year student at University 1 as, *"In fact, the campus's physical environment seems conducive, but is not adequately accessible. It has restricted our independent movement as it is full of obstacles or barriers…"* Other participants also noted that the physical spaces of campuses created mobility barriers for participants, and seriously affected their interests to meet others, and participate in campus-based extracurricular activities such as clubs, sports and recreations. For example, Belew, a 22-year-old participant and 2nd year student at University 2 succinctly stipulated as,

> *I do not take the initiative to participate clubs or other extracurricular activities. I have no motivation to do so. The decision not to participate comes from the inaccessibility of the campus environment. Due to this, I have had no interest at all. As the matter of fact; participation in such activities is based on interest. Nobody can force you to participate. I have not ever thought about it. I may participate if I will like. By now, I have no interest to do so in clubs and sports mainly because the environment may create danger when I move. I do not want to beg my sighted peers to guide me for this purpose….*

Belew's expressions showed that the university campuses inaccessibility has contributed a lot for exclusion from extracurricular and non-academic activities. In this vein, Shibire, a 23-year-old female interviewee and 2nd year student at University 2 vividly disclosed as follows:

> *Participation in clubs is volunteer-based. There are no criteria to get enrolled as membership, but I was many times disinterested to participating in clubs with the sighted peers mainly because the physical environment is not conducive for independent movement. It detached me from most of the social places and peer settings on the campus*

> *environment. Due to an unapproachability of campus environment, I spend most of my time being confined in my dormitory and so that fewer room to meet or contact others.*

Yet again, the participants have discussed about the unfriendliness of the campus physical settings in terms of its inaccessibility to travel to meet others for different purposes and socialize in their university campus. Added to this is the participants' description of the inaccessibility of the physical spaces of their campus in the following fewer paragraphs. To begin with, Agumase, a 22-year-old male participant and 3rd year students at University 1 provided the finest narration as follows, *"…the inaccessibility of the campus's compound's and physical spaces excluded me from most commonplaces such as auditorium, sport grounds, and the like where my sighted peers are frequently found."* Yimer, 23-year-old interviewee continued producing the following excerpts focusing on the inaccessibility of the physical topography of their campus:

> *One of my interests is to independently move around the campus to meet my sighted peers, instructors and other staffs in the faculty, but the environment is not okay for me to navigate and it is full of barriers that restricted my opportunity for movement in social places on the campus settings. I must be helped by someone to move from place to place because some peculiar features obstructed me, and are unsafe to move independently since they can create dangers. For example, I have no access to sidewalks as other sighted students. I could not independently walk around to find classmates, or to enjoy myself in certain events. Some drains are not covered; there are some holes in the ground. There are also bus stops on the pavements, as well. These are dangerous for me to move independently. I will have nowhere to go to places where the sighted peers enjoy and relax because the spaces are not suited to me.*

Yimer's explanation above indicates that the physical space of the campus is not disabled-friendly. This limited his interaction with their peers; and also faced obstacles to participating in daily campus-life events that most sighted peers take for granted such as attending social places to become acquainted with others. Furthermore, Aliyu, a 21-year-old male participant has made the general situation of his respective campus's physical features known as follows:

> *When I was the beginner [first year], I was unfamiliar to the campus compound. I feared and lack confidence to wonder alone. Some places of the compound are not as such conducive for me to move freely. There are bridges, holes or gorges, and broken roads to go to these places to find my classmates or teachers. Seemingly, the roads are a little beat improved. It seems attractive and conducive. Most of the pavements are asphalt roads. Some other roads are made of* cobblestone [paving road made of cobble and stone]. *However, what about the buildings? Who is responsible for the design? The university is*

> *attempting to decorate its compound, but it is not to reconsider our needs and interests. It is for itself… even I think there is no plan to restructure the designs and physical infrastructures of buildings, at least for future students.*

As explained in Aliyu's narrations, the physical spaces of his campus are to some extent conducive for movement. However, he has strong objection because the university has done it for its decoration, or for other purposes, and not to accommodate their needs and interests. In that light, Sunny, a 20 year-old interviewee from University 1 has articulated the following:

> *Some parts of the physical spaces seem attractive. The pedestrian's roads are now days somewhat good. You may see that the roads are flat enough I can freely move where I want, but still our question is this: Is it thinking for the blind that the campus has restructured the compound? Is it to make things accessible for us? I do not think. Rather, the campus makes its compound suitable and attractive for political purposes, but there are still some dangerous and unsafe university environments.*

As Aliyu did, Sunny has reflected her presumption that there are some improvements in physical spaces and compounds of campuses, but she argued that it was not taken for granted to physically accommodate the needs and interests of participants.

In total, the participants explanations excerpted showed that the physical inaccessibility of campus environment systematically impacted their motivation to meet others, participate in activities and generally restrained them from a range of campus-based socializing opportunities.

4.4.3.2.2. Inaccessibility of Buildings

The participants interviewed for this study expounded different ideas about the inaccessibility of buildings, but they generally exclaimed that almost all of the campus-buildings are not disability-friendly. This has impacted their interaction and relationships with other sighted university members. Consistent with this description, Yimer, a 23-year-old male participant said,

> *Most offices and classrooms are situated on the second or third floors of most buildings. They have stairs made of steel that have steps with holes, which are difficult for me to move to go to offices to find my teachers and other administrative or support staff for different purposes.. These are very frightening to move up and down independently. Unless I get someone to help me, I can't move alone.*

Yimer noted that the stairs leading to classrooms and department offices are not blindness-friendly and hence obstructed him to move independently on his wishes and interests. Supporting

Yimer's ideas, Sunny, a 2o-year-old participant continued to enthusiastically mention the following about the inaccessibility of the buildings: She poignantly spoke as,

> *It is such an old university, but the buildings of students' blocks are not designed to accommodate our specific mobility needs. There are no specially designed ramps, stairs or elevators. Hence I could not independently move to other dormitories to find my peers for any academic issues because the steps to move up are not easy for me, and hindered me a lot from relationships with our sighted peers.*

In addition, Belew, a 22-year-old participant and 2nd year student at University 2 construed similar opinion as, "*We are made to live in fear due to inaccessibility of campus buildings. Most upstairs are fearful that surely create danger while moving independently. To be protected, I like to spend most of my campus time in dormitories."* Likewise, other participants also affirmed the same viewpoint that most of their campus buildings are inaccessible, and this seriously resulted isolation form interaction, relationships and participation in campus-related socializing activities. In addition, they have described their worries in terms of the dangers that may happen while independently moving around. Hence, they felt unsecured campus-living conditions, frightened and thereby oppressed. With this in mind, it is reputable here to deduce that the inaccessibility of the buildings have congested socialization opportunities for the current research participants.

4.4.3.3. Institutional Challenges

On the basis of the semi-structured interviews, university-related challenges that are related to their experience of social exclusion include procedures and practices that are linked with the universities' routines, or systems. As described below, the analysis result showed that inaccessibility of ink-print information or notices severely denied the participants' equal access to interaction, relationships and participation in socializing activities. In this vein, the study identified that the institutions (universities) where the current participants were educated were acting as contexts for their experiences of social exclusion.

4.4.3.3.1. Inaccessibility of Visual (Ink-print) Information

Among the university related hindrances, the most commonly identified factor that contributed to the social exclusion of participants was inaccessible visual (ink-print) information or notices. As clearly presented below, they have had no equal access to visual information and notices in contrast to the sighted peers. Agumase, a 22-year-old participant at University 1 started the discussion stating as, *"… we are totally blocked from any visual information and notices that is adequately available for sighted individuals in this university."* As thoroughly presented below,

the inaccessibility of visual information or notices created information barrier that seriously affected many areas of their social lives. For example, Achenefech, a 20-year-old participant and 2nd year student at University 2 resonated as follows that her information need is not still met.

> *Being on the campus, I felt that my privileges to access visual information has been undermined and deprived by my university. Unlike us, sighted peers have every privilege to access any visual information. They can do whatever they need to do. We have no adequate opportunity to access notices and visual information that normally exists for sighted university community and others. We need brail-notice boards, or any other alternative means so that we can equally access the information that avails for them.*

As shown in this narrative, Achenefech has expressed that blind students are denied from equal access to notices that are available for sighted counterparts. She advised her university that Brail notices are needed as a means of compensation for the visual (ink-print) information. As well, Aliyu, a 21-year-old interviewee and 2nd year student at University 1 added the following:

> *Being blind does not mean that we do not really need information. Instead, this is what we need most. I request my university to have alternative information communication system. The university needs to have the notices written in Brail, and posted in permanent place so that we can equally have the access to the information posted for the public. We can't read visual materials posted on notice-boards, but I think the university considered us that we can read it [laugh]. Of course, it has forgotten us. It should know that we need all the information that is accessible for sighted ones. I suppose that the university has truly failed to accommodate our information need. But all of us know the value of information. As a result, I felt a sense that I am not being treated as other sighted students, and rather I felt as different from the majority of the student population.*

Similarly, the following opinion was reverberated by Aster, a 23-year-old and 4th year student at University 1. As Aliyu, she explained that the campus notice-boards are not blind-student-friendly, and that there is no consistent or reliable channel of visual information in an accessible and alternative format in the universities for the participants with total blindness. She said as,

> *Our information need is totally forgotten. The university has no notice-board for us in an accessible format, and this systematically distanced and denied us from opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities like clubs because most of the notices related to these activities are posted on the university-notice-boards through print (papers). These are accessible for the sighted university community, and are not for the blind as these are visual by nature. The truth of this is that our ability to receiving visual information is already prevented through our blindness. Thus, we can't access the notices posted….*

In the same vein, other participants also told me that notice-boards in the campuses are overwhelmingly inaccessible for them and do not consider their information need, and this severely triggered their vulnerability to exclusion participation in extracurricular activities and other part of information related to their academic and social lives in their campus. Belew, a 22-year-old participant and 2nd year student at University 2 also expanded the above description that they are inherently unequal in access to notices as compared to other sighted peers in the same campus-environment. He narrated as, *"All notifications are prepared and posted in paper format here. We can't access any information on ourselves unless told by other volunteers [sighted peers]. Compared to sighted peers, we have no equal access to information services such as notices, registrations and announcements."* Indeed, a general reflection about the inaccessibility of university-notice-boards is ascertained by Sunny, a 20-year-old participant at University 1 as,

> *I never knew the availability of clubs on the campus, because it is often posted on the notice-boards, which is not reachable for us. Once upon a time, our teacher called us for make-up through posting notices around our department. That day, I missed my teacher's class because I have had no information about it. The information was not reachable for me. Similarly, I have no chance to attend ceremonies, special festivals, or students' meetings as my sighted peers because the information about these issues is often announced or posted in notice-boards. I have had no access to information of the time and place of these activities unless I am told by peers, but some of them are careless to share me information.*

As pinpointed in Belew's narrations, he was denied of access to notice-boards that consisted of basic information related to social and academic issues. This primarily exacerbated his non-involvement or non-participation in activities. To this end, Yimer, a 23-year-old male participant and 4th year student at University 2 echoed Belew's ideas as follows: "*I can't access any information posted on notice boards. I had no access to see my course-grades, or exam results from notice-boards. I get campus-related information after some days of notifications."* As repetitively connoted above, Yimer's narrations showed that the inaccessibility of notices further increased the cycle of social exclusionary experiences on their respective campuses.

In Summary, the self-reported interview data uncovered the participants' shared experiences of being relegated from access to visual (ink-print) information posted on notice-boards. Thus, it seems to me that university-notice-boards are not inclusive as the participants have no equal access to academic and social information, and that inaccessibility of notice-

boards is considered as a legitimate reason for systematic prevention of participants from participation in campus-based extracurricular activities.

4.4.4. Results to Answer Research Question 4

The forth and last research question asks as: *What strategies can be proposed toward addressing social exclusion and thereby improving social inclusion at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?* Most importantly, the useful strategies that are proposed in this study are focused on two avenues or areas: The first area focuses on hearing on a voice of participants regarding reducing and eliminating social exclusion (reported in results to answer RQ2) and eventually improving the existing social inclusion status of participants in the classrooms and campus settings. Additionally, the insights I gained from their experience of social exclusion also offered useful strategies that are helpful to abolish the torment experience of social exclusion.

Shortly, therefore, the following table shows strategies of addressing social exclusion as claimed by participants and as gained from insight into their experience of social exclusion:

Table 4.5: Emergent Themes and Sub-themes Related to Research Question Four

Strategies of Addressing the Social Exclusion of Participants		
Theme	**Sub-theme (s)**	**Description of the Theme**
Strategies claimed by participants	• Peers' disability awareness raising ❖ Instructors' in-service training workshops	This theme focuses on depicting participants' voice on addressing social exclusion in their respective university, and thereby building on their existing social inclusion status.
Strategies offered on the basis of the insights gained from participants' experiences	❖ Institutional level accessibility policy ❖ Social skills trainings	This theme signifies strategies of addressing social exclusion as offered by insights gained from participants' lived experience of social exclusion.

As shown in the table, the themes and sub-themes consisting of promising strategies that have to be taken in place to alleviate social exclusion and promote social inclusion are described in separate sections beneath. Nevertheless, more emphasis and detail discussion of the suggested

strategies will be held at a length with important literatures and empirical evidences in Chapter 5. To this end, the proposed strategies will be provided as parts of recommendations in Chapter 6.

4.4.4.1. Strategies Claimed by Participants

Participants of my phenomenological study were asked to suggest possible strategies to alleviate their lived experience of social exclusion. For this purpose, I asked certain questions like: In spite of your physical placement in the classrooms/campuses, what do you think can be done to promote your equalization of opportunities in comparison to sighted peers? How can promoting more social interaction, relationships and participation be possible here? They posited different viewpoints upon these questions, and wished-for different ideas as they have heightened interests toward the improvement in their equalization, and full participation as their peers. In a general sense, their voice showed that the possible intervention to combat social exclusion is working on the source of the problem. For instance, Agumase, a 22-year-old male participant from University 1 concluded as, *"To minimize the problem of social exclusion, the factors causing it have to be minimized."* Agumase's viewpoints show that the specific factors contributing to the risk of social exclusion need to be removed first to ultimately combat this incidence.

Consistent to Agumase, other participants also noted that in addition to the current inclusionary efforts, more has to be done, and actions or measures should be put in place toward improving equalization of opportunities, interaction, relationships, accessibility and full participation as sighted individuals. For instance, Shibire, a 23-year-old participant and 2nd year student at University 2 described as, *"…what avail to our sighted peers should also avail to us!"* Similarly, Yimer, a 23-year-old participant provided a general view as,

> *As other sighted peers, we are eager for many things in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms, as well. We need to be in all matters as the sighted peer. We have the same hopes, desires and dreams as anyone else in this campus. Thus, the university has to do more for us. Classroom teachers also should concern for us. More times than I can count, the sighted peers have everything here. They have every privilege in the university campus and classrooms. They can do whatever they need to do. They can go wherever they want to go, but we are confined and still obstructed.*

Similar to Yimer's reflections, the rest participants reproduced their suggestions that entirely show the need for more actions to build on the existing inclusionary practices and promote

further inclusive excellences. In this regard, the best example of the narrations was given by Belew, a 22-year-old interviewee and 3rd year student at University 2. He communicated as,

> *I could not say I am not included. I am here because I am already included, and even you may not get me here if I were not included. However, more has to be done again and again, more affirmative actions are needed. More positive inclusionary thinking should be here. I generally believe that if full inclusion is needed, we should breathe all the air that sighted peers breath in the classrooms and campuses! For this, everybody is responsible as disability is the issue of all individuals and institutions these days.*

A voice of participants on how to obliterate social exclusion helped me to affirm two specific strategies of addressing social exclusion: peers' disability awareness raising and instructors' in-service training workshops. The forthcoming discussion encompasses these strategies as construed by participants themselves in an attempt to reduce and eliminate their own experience of social exclusion in the classrooms and campus environments:

4.4.4.1.1. Peers' Disability Awareness Raising

It has been explained in results organized to answer RQ3 above that the fully sighted peers' negative attitudes and stereotypic thinking contributed a lot for the social exclusion of participants that were experienced in the form of Otherness, peer ignoring and limited access to friendship interactions. Accordingly, the participants have claimed that disability (blindness) awareness should be raised for their sighted peers with an aim to promote positive attitudes and avoid their misconceptions. In this regard, they talked about the essentiality of awareness creation and sensitization programs (activities) to reduce prejudiced attitudes and stereotypical views and behaviors of sighted peers including classmates. For example, Aster, a 23-year-old male participant and 4th year student at University 1 keenly become cognizant that peers should be give sensitization about blindness or visual impairment. She reported her ambition as follows, *"… at the beginning of the academic year, they need to be given awareness creation about blindness and the issues of inclusion/exclusion.*" Other participants also posited similar idea that disability and social inclusion/exclusion discourses are needed for sighted peers.

As aforesaid, participants claimed that measures have to be taken into action to change exclusionary behaviors and actions of sighted peers that are resulted due to negative attitudes and stereotypes. In this vein, the participants' voice is important to propose an idea that sighted peers' awareness should be raised in relation to disability (blindness) and persons with blindness.

Such awareness creation can play vital roles to minimize peers' prejudices and misconceptions, develop positive attitudes and to prepare themselves for the inclusionary behaviors and actions.

4.4.4.1.2. Instructors' In-service Training Workshops on ITP

In this descriptive phenomenological study, it was found out in RQ2 that classroom teachers who taught the current participants were reluctant to comply with reasonable instructional accommodations, and they were also ignorant in understanding the specific learning needs of their students with blindness. More specifically, the current participants faced denial of equal access to the teachers' teaching methods in comparison the sighted peers. The participants' perceptions showed that the sighted classmates were more liable to the teachers' teaching styles and methods than themselves. Consequently, they faced social exclusion in the contexts of the classrooms. Accordingly, their opinion showed that classroom teachers whose job is teaching blind students together with other sighted learners need to take in-service training workshop as agents' classroom inclusion and realization of inclusive teaching practices (ITP). Thus, short-term training programs are needed to capacitate instructors' inclusive teaching, and to raise their awareness about the classroom learning needs of their blind students and resultantly enable them promotes social inclusion as the final goal. For example, Yimer, a 23-year-old participant has importantly forwarded the following idea as,

> *The teacher has to provide us all things that he provided to other sighted students in the same classroom. We need to be in all matters as the sighted classmates, but some of our teachers' did not bother for us! They should have trainings on how to accommodate our needs and interests and how to teach us together with sighted peers.* (Male, 3rd year)

Clearly, Yimer's narrations showed that his classroom teachers are either showed them little effort to provide equal classroom learning opportunities or they lack proper awareness, or knowledge about how to teach the current participants with other sighted peers in the same classrooms. Likewise, other interviewees' narrations showed that teachers who teach blind students together with sighted classmates need to be trained in specific areas of the core topic related to ITPs (e.g., reasonable curriculum accommodations and instructional adaptation; teaching strategies for blind students) that can facilitate the real social inclusion of these students, and optimize their effort to promote equitable teaching practices in the classrooms. Generally, all of the participants voiced that changes need to be done to resolve the problem of social exclusion they have experienced in the form of classroom marginality.

4.4.4.2. Strategies Offered Through Insights Gained from Participants' Experiences

The insights gained from the lived experience social exclusion of participants helped me make sense of specific strategies that are vital in two specific areas. In one hand, the analysis result of the research data in RQ2 (i.e., participants' experience of peer ignoring, Othering, and limited access to friendship circles) generated to me an important discernment that the social (peer) interaction and relationship experience of participants need to be promoted. For this, it can be recognized that promoting their social and communication skills training can be an alternative solution. At the same time, it can be re-affirmed from the analysis result of research question 3 that the physical environment of the selected universities, and their way of delivering notices is not accessible for participants.

Due mainly to the challenge of inadequate accessibility, it is discussed so far that the participants lack equal opportunities and full participation in socializing activities. Resultantly, they were isolated in most of their campus life, and become non-participant in extracurricular activities. This helped me to suggest that accessibility policy is needed for maintaining environmental modification and changes in the university campuses. The strategies I proposed above are thoroughly discussed below:

4.4.4.2.1. Providing Social Skills Trainings

Whilst discussing the experiences of social exclusion, it is found that they are severely vulnerable to the social misfits of being Othered and being ignored by their own sighted peers. In addition, it has been revealed that they lack real friendship interaction with them. Thus, it is found worthy to forward an idea that improving basic skills of social interaction and communication to prominently reduce Othering practices; combat the hit of ignoring and create grounds for the development of friendship experiences in their classrooms and campus settings. In addition, these skills will help them become well-proficient in the scenes of establish long-lasting interactions and relationships with their peers, and other members of the university staff.

4.4.4.2.2. Formulating Institutional Level Accessibility Policy

As uncovered in the analysis results provided in RQ3, the participants most challenges related to their social exclusion are stemmed from inaccessibility pertaining to visual information, notice, campus physical spaces and buildings. More specifically, these are reported as physical and

information barriers that severely impacted participants' ability and potential to participate in extracurricular and non-academic activities such as clubs, sports and recreations and leisure times. Additionally, it has been reported that the inaccessibility of participants' immediate physical environment led their isolated campus living conditions. This enabled me to propose an idea that institution-based legal ground has to be developed and put in place to improve accessibility and thereby create equal access to opportunities as the sighted peers. In the other vein, it can be suggested herein that enacting a separate institution-level policy context is needed in an attempt to change the accessibility challenges faced by the current participants. Relatedly, I made commendations here that the policy environment that can fulfill accessibility requirements can be developed in accordance with international and national policies pertaining to social inclusion. The upcoming discussion highlighted campus-based policy measures for improving the accessibility of buildings, physical spaces, visual information and notices to at least build the future of other blind students in the institutions of higher education where the study is conducted:

a. Improving the Accessibility of Buildings and Physical Spaces

The current phenomenological study confirmed that the physical environment is too much oppressive for blind students as it is inaccessible to lead their independent campus life. Resultantly, their opportunity to socialization was impacted due, in part, to the inaccessibility of the physical environment of campuses. Thus, a concerted effort is required from the universities to work more on the accessibility of buildings and physical spaces and thereby achieve maximum possible accessibility in an effort to create enabling, barrier-free and responsive campus environment. In view of that, greater emphasis can be given on the formation of institutional policy frameworks, provisions or legislative actions relating to improvement in the design and construction of buildings and modification physical spaces. In addition to formulating policies, the target universities should ensure that architects, engineers and others who are professionally involved in the designing and construction process have adequate information about higher education students with disabilities.

b. Improving the Accessibility of Visual (Ink-print) Information and Notices

As depicted above, the current participants faced an apparent discriminatory practice and unprecedented disparity in access to visual information and notices, a general service normally available for all sighted university community. In this regard, it was revealed that their needs

connect to visual information are not fulfilled yet and the inaccessibility of visual information is worsened when information is posted on notice-boards. However, it can be remembered from the analysis results of RQ3 above that current participants have counseled their university to design alternative information channel to make the visual information on an equal basis with the sighted individuals. For example, Achenefech, a 20-year-old participant and 2nd year student at University 2 resonated as: "*We need brail-notice boards, or any other alternative means so that we can equally access the information that avails for them."* Achenefech's explanation showed that the participants insisted that their universities should fulfill the required information accommodations needed for them.

More specifically, it can be suggested that access to the provision of information service in an alternative and easily accessible channel is an intense need for all participants. In that sense, I articulated here that so much is needed to be worked on information accessibility through boldly enacting separate university-based legal procedures to creating blindness-friendly information access mechanisms. This implies that measure has to be taken in place to improve the accessibility of visual information and notices for participants to meet their specific information need and provide equal access to information and communication services as their sighted peers. Most importantly, the university accessibility policy needs to include best possible alternative channels of accessing information. Additionally, I also acclaimed that the sampled universities have to create format by which blind students want to consume information.

In general, the insight I gained from participants' experiences helped me to propose strategies that are vital to build on their existing social inclusion status. Later, in Chapter 5, these strategies will be discussed and strengthened with pertinent literatures and evidences of research studies related to promoting social inclusion.

4.5. Summary of Important Findings of the Study

The purpose of this summary is preparing myself for the Discussion Part; Chapter 5. Thus, the following list highlighted key findings of the study along with the research questions.

- Research question 1 mainly aimed at exploring the lived experience of social inclusion among participants. It has been found that equal access to basic student services and facilities (e.g., uniqueness being recognized), and access to personalized support services (feeling

respected and access to physical interaction) represent participants' experience of social inclusion.

- Research question 2 principally intended to explore the lived experience of social exclusion among participants. Then, it was found that isolated campus-living condition, being ignored, non-participation in extracurricular activities (e.g., exclusion from clubs and exclusion from sports and recreations), limited access to friendships, being Othered (e.g., typified as aggressive in nature, perceived as often complaints and treated as academically weak), and classroom marginality (e.g., sidelined teaching and favoritism classroom interaction) consisted of the participants' experience of social exclusion.
- Research question 3 focused on exploring the challenging experiences of participants that contributed to social exclusion they faced in the classroom settings and outside of the classroom settings. As a result, it is identified that social challenges (e.g., sighted peers' stereotypes and prejudices, and classroom teachers' reluctance), physical challenges (e.g., unfriendly physical spaces and inaccessible buildings), and institution-related challenge (e.g., inaccessible information and notices) are identified as having contributed to participants' experience of social exclusion.
- The last research question was mainly aimed at providing useful strategies to alleviate the social exclusion of the current participants. Though there are various avenues to do so, the study yielded strategies that included, but not limited to two themes and four sub-themes. These are: (a) strategies claimed by participants themselves (e.g., peers' disability awareness raising and instructors in-service training workshops on ITP), and (b) strategies provided through insights gained from participants' experiences of social exclusion (e.g., institutional level accessibility policy and participants' social skills trainings). Nevertheless, this part of the dissertation was provided as miscellaneous, or additional finding as it is not aimed at exploring the common experiences of participants. Firstly and most importantly, the strategies I proposed here were paramount importance to develop particular recommendations that are presented in Chapter 6 for participants, sighted peers, teachers, the university and other concerned body.

Next, Chapter 5 of the dissertation consisted of a discussion of the results of the present study in relation to relevant literatures, evidences of previous research studies and my own personal and professional reflections.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1. Chapter Overview

The entire purpose of this study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. Specifically, it was intended to (a) explore the experiences of social inclusion; (b) explore the experiences of social exclusion; (c) identify challenging experiences, and (d) provide strategies to possibly address social exclusion and thereby promote social inclusion. Hence, this chapter thoroughly presents the discussion of the major findings in the light of the existing literatures and empirical evidences including my own reflections. Finally, the implications of the findings of the study for policy and practice are conveyed.

5.2. Experiences of Social Inclusion among Blind Students

The first objective of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of social inclusion among 8 blind students at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. Then, it is found that equal access to basic student services and facilities (e.g., difference/uniqueness/ being recognized), and access to personalized support services (e.g., feeling respected and access to physical interaction) represent their experiences of social inclusion. These findings can be glimpsed through Anti-Oppressive Practices (AOP). It is a paradigm of transforming oppressive practices (e.g., denial of access, discriminatory practices, inequalities, deprivation of rights, disentitlement, and the like) into the contexts of anti-oppressive practices (e.g., provision of equal access, entitlements, respect, acceptance, recognition and the like) in specific education, or social settings (Dominelli, 2002; Shera, 2003; Beckett, 2015).

In particular, the theoretical perspective of AOP is vital to ensure equality, social justice and human rights for individuals or groups of people in specific settings (Baines, 2011). Thus, the findings that represent the social inclusion of blind students in higher education settings are informed by AOP in two ways: Primarily, equal access to basic student services and facilities fundamentally signifies anti-oppressive practices because these are means to ensure the rights of blind students. It is one of the practices the universities took to promote the equalization of basic opportunities for blind students that are availed to other fully sighted peers. This also shows that

the university has properly recognized blind students as those of the students without disabilities. In this vein, recognizing someone's uniqueness is accepting, or valuing the individual regardless of his/her disability or any other profile (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Hall, 2009; Subrayen, 2011; Alhammadi, 2014). It is also meant for combating discriminatory practices, which is one of the purposes of AOP (Dominelli, 2002; Subraye, 2011). Secondly, access to personalized support services involves one of the anti-oppressive practice that basically make certain that the recipient of the support service is acknowledged, or accepted by those who provided the support (Matlosa & Matobo, 2007; Gidley *et al.*, 2010; Mbugua, Odini & Chege, 2018). This also reflects respect and anti-hierarchical relationships between individuals or groups of sighted peers and the blind counterparts (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Ra'heim *et al.*, 2016). In this regard, the provision of support services fulfills the requirements of AOP that informs positive, inclusionary and ant-discriminatory practices (Baines, 2011). Relatedly, the feelings revealed as being respected and access to physical interactions notifies that someone is accepted (valued), included by other members around (Alhammadi, 2014). Such practice is also positive and anti-discriminatory which is intensely highlighted by AOP (Dominelli, 2002). As informed by the AOP, the themes and sub-themes that represent the social inclusion of blind students are discussed in the sub-sequent sections:

5.2.1. Equal Access to Basic Student Services and Facilities

It is found in the study that blind students felt socially included when they get equal access to basic campus-based services and facilities (dormitories, library and ICT, and dining) at physically segregated places within the campuses. It is also identified that there are good reasons for the provision of these services and facilities in separated (isolated) manner. Overall, getting access to these services and facilities is justifiable and considered as one of their rights. Thus, it is recognized in this study that blind students are delivered to the aforesaid services and facilities on an equal basis as their fully sighted peers who are found in similar circumstances. Literature and research studies scrutinized that social inclusion is meant for providing equal access to facilities, services and technology that are commonly available for others that are found in similar situation (UNESCO, 2009; Lamport, Graves & Ward, 2012). In this vein, other researchers also noted in general that providing equal access to different opportunities is responding to the question of equity (fairness), equality and inclusion for SWDs (Kurt *et al.*, 2016). Other researchers also annotated that delivering all students an equal opportunity is one

way of the promotion of social inclusion in higher education settings (Dare & Nowicki, 2018). Recently, Apie and Moses (2019) showed that social inclusion of SWDs including blind students in higher education settings involves providing equal access to services or facilities that are available for other students. Alike, this study established that equal access to basic student services and facilities for blind students implies that (a) their rights to obtain basic campus necessities are ensured; (b) the universities have responded to their basic needs on an equal basis as other students without disabilities, and (c) the universities are treating them fairly as their age mates. Finally, it is discussed herein that the provision of dormitories services, dining services, and library and ICT facilities to blind students in segregated settings abetted them feel that their individual difference as blind student was appropriately recognized regardless of their disability.

5.2.1.1. Difference Being Recognized.

As mentioned above, the access to basic student services and facilities in segregated fashion from sighted peers in the sampled universities triggered blind students to feel that their difference or uniqueness as blind individuals was recognized by their universities. Regarding this, one of the interviewees reported as, "*…how we get services and facilities that are availed to sighted peers in segregation from them seems discrimination, but it is not! Instead, it is positive discrimination, which indicates more respect and recognition to us because the segregation is for us!"* Thus, the study set that blind students are socially included when their uniqueness as blind individuals is recognized by their universities.

As indicated in the verbatim description above, their difference as blind individuals is recognized when the basic student services and facilities are affordable for them in isolation from their sighted peers. This is consistent with different studies. For example, Hall (2009) in general identified that recognizing the uniqueness of individuals, or groups is accepting, and thereby including them regardless of their disability, or background. Other researchers also revealed in their studies that recognition of the uniqueness (difference) of SWDs is valuing them, avoiding discriminatory practices, and represents a core aspect of social inclusion in the education settings (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Subrayen, 2011; Alhammadi, 2014). Therefore, I personally reflect here that providing equal and fair services, facilities, or amenities in special arrangements in higher education settings have spectacular roles to realize that blind students are achieving

valued recognition, and that their uniqueness is respected as blind individuals. Unquestionably, this practice can reduce their feelings of being different in comparison to the fully sighted peers around them. In contrast, inadequate, or unfair access to varying services and facilities for students elicits differential treatments that subsequently result the feeling of being devalued by the institutions where they undergo their learning (Kurt *et al.,* 2016). In sum, it is found in the study that blind students did not have devalued recognition in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. Instead, these learning institutions have properly recognized and valued their difference (uniqueness) regardless of their disability (vision loss).

5.2.2. Access to Personalized Support Services

Blind students engaged in this study have the access to personalized support services (PSS) mainly from sighted peers. In this study, PSS takes the form of informal, spontaneous or natural supports mostly provided by the fully sighted peers on two occasions: In one hand, the sighted peers provided the PSS when they understand (e.g., observe) the specific challenges or difficulties of their blind peers. On the other hand, they provided the support on the basis of the unique individual need(s) of blind students. Therefore, PSS is a type of volunteer-based support provided to blind students who strongly require it for multiple purposes. Similarly, Mbugua et al. (2018) described that PSS is the type of support given to someone needing it most. Accordingly, it is found in the study that blind students felt socially included when they get ample PSS due the following reasons: (a) it allowed them to respond their specialized academic needs, and (b) it helped them to access wide-ranging mobility and academic opportunities. This also shows that PSS has multiple advantages for the recipients of the support services (Mbugua *et al.,* 2018).

Principally, it is discussed in section 5.4.2 below that the physical environment of campuses and buildings of the sampled universities is not accessible for blind students. In a reality, these universities do not have specialized mobility accommodations (e.g., guide dog) for their blind students. Accordingly, they were necessarily relying on the fully sighted peers to move from place to place to accomplish different tasks in the campus, or outside of the campus. In this case, the study identified that blind students obtain PSS that includes guiding difficult roads, obstacles and movements, showing directions; providing information, and academic support such as reading exams, and reading handouts and recording sounds for later study. Consistently, it is reflected in local studies that practical support provided by sighted peers

(individuals) has tremendous academic and mobility opportunities. For example, Getachew (2018) reported that the SWDs including those with visual impairment extensively get practical academic support (e.g., caring materials, note taking, and providing materials) and movement (guiding) services and other specific services such as caring food from the cafeteria, and buying goods from the shop (p.10). His study revealed that peer-support services are vital for academic survival. In addition, the study conducted by Beauchamp-Pryer (2013) strengthened the above description that SWVI received peer-specific support services such as providing information and guidance, finding books in the library and taking notes during class time. Other international studies also uncovered that support provided by sighted peers allow blind students access to physical presence (spaces) within the education settings and even outside, which represents the preliminary steps that can lead to more physical and social integration (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Jaeger & Bowman, 2005; Matlosa & Matobo, 2007; Gidley *et al.,* 2010). These studies generally reflected that peer support services facilitated further social inclusionary practices.

As a whole, the current study revealed that blind students have adequate access to PSS. It had the following advantages: First, it allotted them fulfill different academic and movement opportunities. In this vein, it is adequately described in the empirical evidences I reviewed above that the sighted peers were key individuals who played pivotal roles in the campus lives of blind students. I also realize here that PSS is an approach of ensuring blind students' fruition of their campuses life where physical and academic accessibility is limited. Secondly, it is uncovered in the study that PSS is one of the pathways that opens rooms for further social inclusionary opportunities for blind students. In this regard, different studies confirmed that peer-specific support is a facilitator to the successful social inclusion of SWVI (Almog, 2011; Alhammadi, 2014; Beteinaki, 2019). Based on the discussion above, I commend here that formal peer support network need to be organized in the sampled universities to realistically open academic and socialization opportunities, which is a step forward to enhance the social inclusion of blind students. As I ascertained below, two sub-themes (i.e., feeling respected and access to physical contact) are emerged from the core theme of access to PSS discussed above.

5.2.2.1. Feeling Respected

It is found out in the current study that blind students' access to PSS prompted them to feel respected (valued) by their own sighted peers. This finding is consistent with different empirical

evidences. For instance, Cappo (2002) reflected that one is said to be included in social situations when he/she feels respected by others around. Progressively, Alhammadi (2014) showed that being valued by other individuals around is one of the characteristics features of being socially included. In the same fashion, Mbugua et al. (2018) revealed that individuals or groups are meaningfully socially included when they are being respected or valued by other members.

In general, this finding shows that the provision of PSS for blind students has increased their feeling of being valued (respected) by other members around. As I reflected above, strengthening PSS and organizing formal peer support system is important to enhance blind students' feeling of social inclusion in the social/educational institutions.

5.2.2.2. Access to Physical Interaction/Contact

It is disclosed in this study that the PSS allowed blind students to achieve physical contact and interaction with sighted students, which let them get an opportunity to develop further interactions and relationships. For example, one of the interviewees reported this as, "*When they provided me support, they hold me either my arm, or armpit. Then, we contact each other and reduced physical distance. This time, I felt that they need me, and estimated that they are interested in me."* The verbatim description showed that the PSS opens an opportunity to have access to physical intimacy (proximity) with sighted peers. Such support also opens opportunities to fostering relationships in the classrooms or campuses. Consistently, different studies revealed that social (physical) contact of blind students with other individuals without disabilities promoted social (peer) acceptance, relationships and positive attitudes between individuals, or groups (Koster *et al.,* 2009; Scheepstra & Pijl, 2016; Schwab, 2017; Mckay, 2018).

Likewise, other empirical evidences also showed that physical contact (closeness) with typical peers is being part of the peer groups and has a positive impact on the development of inclusive and non-discriminatory thinking (Dare & Nowicki, 2018). In this regard, the prominent Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954, cited in Mckay, 2018) apparently proposed that the prejudices, stereotypical views or misconceptions of persons without disabilities towards peers with disabilities can be decreased as they to get to know and understand the experiences of each other (p.21). At this point, I understand that this theoretical perspective advocates the role of physical integration and/or contact to help students understand each other's actions, behaviors

and day-to-day life situations. Again, Schwab (2017) examined this fundamental theory and posited the following two points: First, the theory proposes that physical contact minimizes prejudices and stereotypical views in the mainstream education settings. Second, organizing meaningful and collaborative contact in the education contexts and classrooms has crucial roles to develop a more positive attitude of students without disabilities toward their peers with disabilities. Thus, a more social (peer) contacts and genuine physical interaction among individuals or groups is likely to promote more likes and positive attitudes toward each other (Mckay, 2018). In this regard, Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory implies to this study that the placement of blind students in an interactive classroom set ups and activities has an immense role to create more access to physical contact among students, which is essential to promote positive attitudes. This is also an integral factor of enhancing inclusionary practices in the classrooms (Beteinaki, 2019). Therefore, I become conscious here that designing and implementing cooperative learning activities (e.g., team works, group works, field works, and the like) can play central roles to promote our blind students' social inclusion in the classrooms. In addition, I do have two important contentions here: In one hand, such classroom activities allow these students to have more collaborative physical interaction with the sighted peers. Their interaction may close-up with love and like among students. This idea is almost consonant with what Koster et al (2009) noted. According to them, involving students with and without disabilities in interactive activities is a promising way of promoting intergroup contact and thereby positive attitude toward each other, and may end up with either liking or disliking. To this end, Dare and Nowicki (2018) reflected that grouping students with and without disabilities together help them to get to know each other, work together and thereby promote positive attitude, and reduce stereotypical thinking, which is vital to promote social inclusion.

On the other hand, cooperative teaching-learning activities inspire students with and without visual impairments to experience a task-related interaction, which is a promising way of promoting intergroup contact and thereby positive attitude toward the students with disabilities (Schwab, 2017). Therefore, the PSS identified in this study has contributed a lot to the physical interaction among students with and without visual impairment in the sampled universities. It is also highlighted above that it has facilitated blind students' further interactions and relationships in the classrooms or campus settings. In this sense, the study conducted by Schwab (2017) about the impact of contact on students' attitudes towards peers with disabilities, highlighted the

following three points: Primarily, students without disabilities developed positive attitudes toward their peers with disabilities when they work together on cooperative learning activities such as project works. Secondly, providing opportunities for genuine contact with students with and without disabilities have a tendency to improve positive attitudes toward peers with disabilities. Finally, superficial physical contacts in the classroom have negative impact in that the able-bodied students may develop hatred, dislike and stereotypes toward their counterparts with disabilities. In this particular study, I confirmed that PSS provided access to peer contact (physical) that provided opportunities for blind students to promote social (peer) interactions and relationships. Nevertheless, the study failed to make known the impact of their physical contact on the attitudes of sighted peers. At this moment, conflicting thoughts are reported in the study. Initially, I have reported above that the PSS provided blind students to access physical contact with sighted peers. Research evidences showed that more physical contacts are likely to promote positive attitudes that are vital to enhance interactions and relationships (Allport, 1954, as cited in Schwab, 2017; Mckay, 2018).

However, I discussed in detail in section 5.4.1.1 below that sighted peers have stereotypical thinking and negative attitudes towards blind students. This may prompt one to raise a pondering question as: How do the sighted peers provide PSS without having a positive attitude toward blind students? In this sense, I need to clarify here that the source of PSS for blind students is not grounded on true sense of friendliness, or real peer relationships. Instead, they unequivocally reported that sighted peers provided PSS for emotional (spiritual) benefits such as being satisfied due to the support, or doing humanly correct thing. Therefore, the sighted peers provided support for blind students because supporting, caring or showing a more responsible behavior (e.g., being polite) to them is morally right and a spiritually justifiable action. Consistently, a local study conducted by Getachew (2018) revealed that the students without disabilities are tended to provide practical support for their peers with disabilities mainly for emotional (e.g., spiritual) benefits.

In summary, section 5.2 above portrayed the lived experience of social inclusion among 8 blind students at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. However, such an experience of participants was not adequately explored. The reasons behind are highlighted in detail in section 5.7 below. However, I need to mention a key reason for the exploration of fewer experiences of

social inclusion in my research journey. That is, blind students were more tended to abundantly report their experience of social exclusion than their experience of social inclusion. This also shows that they still need more opportunities to attain social inclusion than social exclusion (Wadegaonkar *et al.,* 2015). These researchers further explained that the SWVI emphasize to expound more of their negative life experiences and events even in a complaining manner than their positive ones.

Among other life challenges, it is revealed via local and international research studies that their social inclusion need is not successfully accomplished even in the so called inclusive education set up (Anderson, 2006; Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). When I synthesis these research studies, I understood that the students with severe visual impairments who are physically placed in education settings are not meaningfully included yet, and their particular social need is not successfully achieved. Instead, the issue of social inclusion of blind students is concentrated and taken for granted only on their physical integration together with other students without disabilities (Wadegaonkar *et al.,* 2015; Beteinaki, 2019). However, physical placement does not essentially reflect blind students' meaningful social inclusion (de Leeuw, de Boer & Minnaert, 2018; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Jessup *et al.*, 2018). These studies collectively displayed that after transition to higher education settings, these students become more vulnerable to the threat of social exclusion. In this vein, the hottest research study reflected similar ideas as follows: *"… physical inclusion does not automatically lead to social integration"* (Heyder *et al.,* 2020, p.1). This contemporary study showed that despite their physical placement in mainstream education settings, SWVI are still suffering from exclusionary experiences in different patterns, forms and manifestations.

More specifically, local studies conducted at Ethiopian HEIs showed that being physically integrated together with other fully sighted peers, students with profound visual disabilities are still suffered from more systematic and subtle forms of social exclusionary experiences (Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016; Kahisay, 2017; Asmirom, 2019). These local studies clearly showed that after getting the opportunity to access higher education, these students are undoubtedly the sufferers of challenges, or barriers to their socialization, equal access and opportunities. This also shows that despite their physical placement in higher education settings,

their social inclusion is still tricky and problematic. Therefore, it is discussed below that more experience of social exclusion is reported in this study than the experiences of social inclusion.

5.3. Experiences of Social Exclusion among Blind Students

The second objective of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of social exclusion among 8 blind students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. Resultantly, it was found that isolated campus-living condition, being ignored by peers, non-participation in extracurricular activities (e.g., exclusion from clubs and exclusion from sports and recreations), limited access to peer-friendship-groups, being Othered by peers (e.g., typified as aggressive in nature, perceived as often complaints and treated as academically weak), and classroom marginality (e.g., sidelined teaching and favoritism classroom interaction) consisted of their experience of social exclusion. Partly, in congruency with my study, Subrayen (2011) studied the social exclusion experiences of SWVI in a tertiary institution in Kwazulu-Natal University, South Africa. The departure of my study and her study involves the following: Primarily, I focused more on studying the phenomena of social inclusion and exclusion, but Subrayen has chosen the phenomenon of social exclusion. Secondly, I conducted the study with undergraduate students with total vision loss, but she has involved undergraduate students with partial and total vision loss. Thirdly, there is difference in the general objective of the study. While I am emphasized on explicating the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students in two public universities in Ethiopia, Subrayen's (2011) study primarily focused more on the exploration of social exclusionary process in terms of "Otherization", powerlessness, voiceless-ness in Ukzn Edgewood and Howard College Campuses in South Africa.

In common, Subraye's (2011) and the current study explored the challenges related to social exclusion of these students. Again, my study and Subrayen's (2011) empirical investigation revealed the following in similar manner: Firstly, it is revealed in these studies that though physically placed together with sighted peers at tertiary education settings, the participants seriously faced social exclusion due to different challenges. Secondly, both studies revealed that there are specific challenges related to their experiences of social exclusion. Nevertheless, there is difference in the domains of the exploration of the challenges. In my study, I identified that physical, social and institutional-related challenges are closely related to blind students' experience of social exclusion. In Subraye's (2011) study, physical, social and

academic challenges were related to the social exclusion of SWVI. The discussions about the challenges related to social exclusion are highlighted in section 5.4 below. Theoretically, my study and the one studied by Subraye (2011) framed Anti-Oppressive Theory to inform findings related to the social exclusion among participants. Therefore, the themes and sub-themes that represent the experiences of social exclusion among blind students in this study are powerfully informed by the theoretical lens of Anti-Oppressive Theory (AOT).

Most importantly, AOT emphasizes on the identification and description of oppressive practices with a prime aim to promote anti-oppressive practices and/or systems that are relatively free from threats, obstructions, discrimination and oppression (Dominelli, 2002). My analysis of Dominelli's persuasion on AOT shows that it basically signifies the assessment of negative experiences, and oppressive events, challenging situations or suppression in relationship contexts aiming to change such oppressive conditions into anti-oppressive practices that are welcoming and conducive to human life and functioning. Specifically, AOT claims to demonstrate oppressive relationships, experiences or practices that mostly emerge between the perpetrators (excluders) who are more dominant and the victims who are powerless in comparison to the excluders with an intention to transforming them into anti-oppressive practices relationships, or experiences (Baines, 2011). For example, the experience of social exclusion among SWVI is undesirable; negative, and consisted of threatening events burdened on them (Subrayen, 2011). However, this experience should be altered into an anti-oppressive practice such as inclusion, or anti-discriminatory practices on the basis of the paradigms of equality, justice and human rights (Beckett, 2015; Shera, 2003; Blanco, 2008; Diker & Türkün, 2013).

As a whole, all the social exclusionary experiences explored in this study are by nature oppressive, and thus strongly informed by the theoretical underpinning of AOT. For instance, the experiences of Othering, peer ignoring and limited access to peer-group-friendliness indicates that there was an oppressive relationship between sighted students (perpetrators) and blind students (victims). Such form of oppression indicates the supremacy of relationship between individuals or groups that are found in the same circumstances (Subraye, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013). In this vein, I can contemplate here that the sighted peers were acting as dominant groups over the blind students. This also shows that there was an oppressive relationship between sighted peers and blind students in the same classroom and campus settings.

On the other hand, the perspective of AOT indicates impositions in terms of the lack of opportunities or disadvantage indicted on groups or specific individuals over the other (Dominelli, 2002). In this case, the oppression includes unfair treatment, unequal access, systematic denial of opportunities, and restrictions, which are collectively oppressive (Hollomotz, 2012). Therefore, the other experiences of social exclusion among blind students experienced in the form of isolated living, non-participation in activities, and classroom marginality send the following clear messages: Primarily, they were suffered a lot in their day-to-day-real life situations mainly due to the denial of social and academic opportunities. Secondly, these experiences entail that groups or specific individuals become more privileged over the other, who is less privileged in the same circumstances, or situations (Subrayen, 2011). For instance, the finding pertaining to classroom marginality implies that sighted peers were more privileged in the teaching-learning process than blind students. Similarly, the participants experience of isolated living conditions and non-participation implies that sighted peers have had full-fledged opportunity to relationships and participation in extracurricular activities in comparison to blind students who were less privileged. In this vein, the AOT evidently shed important light on the findings of my study. The following sub-sections entail the discussion of themes and sub-themes that represent the experience of social exclusion among blind studnets.

5.3.1. Isolated Campus-living Experiences

Literatures and research studies indicated that isolated living is one of the situations by which the social exclusion of individuals or groups occurs. For example, Burchardt et al. (2002) affirmed that specific individuals or groups of people are socially excluded if they are in the isolated places due to reasons that are beyond their control. On top of this, Kabeer (2000) showed that individuals become socially excluded when they are physically alienated from the participation or relationship contexts as a result of critical factors that can't be mitigated. Likewise, the current study revealed that blind students have socially isolated campus living conditions (experiences) by which they led majority of their campus lives in isolation from the interaction, relationships and social lives of their fully sighted peers due to challenges that are uncontrollable for them. More specifically, their isolation occurs when they (a) have poor social networks around them; (b) lack true friendliness with sighted peers, and (c) were non-participants in most common places socializing activities. In congruence with the current finding, the study conducted by Subrayen (2011) uncovered that the SWVI were leading isolated campus life due to the

inaccessibility of the campus's environment, and this occurs when they lack reciprocal relationships with sighted students. Other studies also revealed that blind students led most of their campus life in isolation and this is manifested when they have limited or no access to freely interact with others around; when they have smaller social networks, and when they are not able to participate in social activities with others (Alhammadi, 2014; Lourense, 2015; Wadegaonkar *et al.*, 2015; Beteinaki, 2019). Noticeably, the study conducted by Halton (2004, as cited in Anderson, 2006) revealed that the students with profound visual impairment are often observed socially isolated from the existing interaction, relationship and participation scenes in the mainstream education settings.

In addition, it is found in this study that blind students were mostly socializing themselves with students with visual impairments. It is manifested when (a) they prefer to interact and form relationships with other students with visual impairments, (b) they spend most of their campus life time with students with visual impairment because they have commonalities and would share the painful parts of their disability (blindness) with their disabled counter parts. Consistently, previous studies in general ensured that blind students are content to socialize themselves with other fellow peers with visual impairment because they feel free from any form of discomfort when they interact and socialize with other SWVI (Anderson, 2006; Salleh & Zainal, 2010; Lourense, 2015; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018).

Generally speaking, this part of the findings of the study indicates that a range of peer interaction and relation opportunities need to be organized in the sampled universities to provide them plentiful access to socialization and thereby to reduce their experience of isolation.

5.3.2. Limited Access to Friendships

It is found in this study that blind students had insufficient access to membership in friendship-circles. This finding was corroborated with other research studies. For example, Anderson (2006) definitely posited a conclusive idea that SWVI have no true and real friendship (companionship) interaction with sighted peers. Again, Beauchamp-Pryor (2013) noted that SWDs including those with visual impairments lack the access to friendship interactions with sighted peers. Moreover, Yohannes (2015), Lourens (2015) and Teferi (2016) displayed similar findings that SWVI have insignificant friendship experiences. In addition, the analysis made by Jessup et al. (2018) asserted that the SWVI have limited opportunity to establish and develop friendships with

sighted peers. Other recent studies also revealed that in spite of the importance of friendships at campus settings, blind students found it an impossible task for friendship formation with non-disabled peers (Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Beteinaki, 2019). These studies revealed that students with severe visual impairments did not have the access to establish true and real friendship with sighted peers. In addition, the current study identified that the students' experience of limited access to friendship groups is manifested when they have insufficient shared experiences and reciprocity with their sighted peers in customarily common social manners such as greeting, sharing private ideas, and studying together. Other studies conducted at tertiary education institutions uncovered similar result. For instance, the study conducted by Beauchamp-Pryor (2013) revealed that these students were not adequately involved in reciprocity with sighted peers such as borrowing things, use of common things, and engaging in similar activities side-by-side. Similarly, Lourense (2015) noted that the SWVI have impoverished reciprocity, and lacked shared experiences with sighted peers in the classroom settings or outside. To this end, insufficient shared experience and lack of reciprocal interaction implies that blind students were not truly mix with their fully sighted peers of their age mates in their campus life courses (Wadegaonkar *et al.,* 2015; Louren, 2015; Beteinaki, 2019).

Another finding found through this descriptive phenomenological study involves the difficulties of blind students in initiating, establishing and developing friendships with sighted peers. Different studies have also uncovered the case in the same way. For instance, Beauchamp-Pryor (2013) noted that SWVI had more difficulties in making friends. In addition to this, Teferi (2016) revealed that SWVI frequently faced difficulty to establish and maintain positive relationships with sighted peers. Finally, the study conducted by Jessup et al. (2018) reflected that friendship development is very challenging and often problematic for SWVI. This helped me to deduce that blind students who were participated in this study were not meaningfully socially fitting-in the social lives of their fully sighted peers. This also shows that the universities need to structure special mechanisms for developing the friendship experiences of blind students. On the other hand, it is revealed in this study that lack of access to friendship formation has tremendous impacts on the socialization experiences of blind students. Specifically, it prevented them from further social (peer) relationships. Similarly, the study conducted by Anderson (2006) showed that lack of friendship for SWVI made them experience greater levels of loneliness and isolation in the inclusive education settings. Lourens (2015) also showed that friendship at the campus

level is a good socializing opportunity, and hence it is vital for squaring the circle of further relationships. Conversely, the existence of limited number of sighted friends with no doubt limited further social networks with others in the social settings (Wadegaonkar *et al.,* 2017). Thus, friendship is a critical aspect of social inclusion for SWVI in specific educational or social settings (Jessup *et al.,* 2018).

In general, as everybody else, blind students have fundamental desire to form and maintaining friendship relationships. Therefore, creating access to friendship formation is indispensable for blind students. To enhance their friendship experiences, studies showed that developing their social interaction and communication skill is a preliminary task (Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Beteinaki, 2019). In this sense, I proposed in section 5.5 that providing social skills training is central to enhance their skills of friendship development.

5.3.3. Being Ignored

In the current study, it was found that blind students have an endured experience of being ignored (ostracized), and it was manifested when (a) they were overlooked, or disregarded; (b) they were being unnoticed, and (c) paid little or no attention by the fully sighted peers. When I look the situations by which they become ignored, it did not involve any form of physical attacks, or verbal threats. Instead, the peer ignoring experience of blind students was accomplished non-verbally using tacit and subtle techniques. Thus, it is established in the study that they faced a passive form of rejection in their own classrooms and campuses. Different studies reported in agreement with this finding. All of the studies reviewed collectively reported that the students with severe visual impairment are more susceptible for ignoring (e.g., being overlooked, and unnoticed) by their own peers (Salleh & Zainal, 2010; Khurshid & Najeeb, 2012; Lourens, 2015). These studies portrayed that SWVI are more sensitive to being ignored because they already lack visual perception to display a give-and-take type of peer interaction and communication. Alternatively, other empirical evidences showed that blind students are at greater risk of being ignored because they already lacked visual reciprocity that helps to demonstrate and receive non-verbal means of communication such as facial expressions, emotions, behaviors, and physical characteristics (Wadegaonkar *et al.,* 2015; Parvin, 2015; Jessup *et al.,* 2018). Most of these empirical evidences reviewed showed that being ignored is mainly resulted due to lack of visual perception. Thus, the studies made it clear that disability

(blindness) is the prime cause that increased the vulnerability of blind students' to ostracism. Additionally, I understood from these studies that blind students are already exposed to peer ignoring by virtue of their vision loss. However, this finding is incongruent to these studies because it disclosed that the factors contributing to ignoring is not related to the existence of vision loss. Instead, it is discussed in section 5.4.1.2 below that sighted peers' negative attitudes particularly determined the peer ignoring experiences of blind students.

Generally, I argued here that the reciprocal interaction of blind students with sighted peers depends on how the sighted peers understand and treat them. Thus, efforts are needed to create awareness for sighted peers about visual impairment, blind students' behaviors, needs and disability profiles to result positive attitudes toward blind peers.

5.3.4. Non-participation in Extracurricular Activities

This study identified that blind students were certainly denied of equal access to participation in campus-based extracurricular or non-academic activities such as clubs, sports and recreational (occasional) activities. Resultantly, they have no membership, representation and access to decision making in these activities. Contrarily, the sampled universities have proclaimed in their legislations that all students have the right to participate, make representation, and make decisions in matters that concern them. For example, Addis Ababa University has the following provision in its legislation, Article 171.1 and sub-article 171.1.11 as, *"… students shall have the right to have representation in decision making organs and committees of the University in accordance with the provisions of this Legislation or the Proclamation"* [Addis Ababa University Senate Legislation, 2019, p.154). Similarly, Debre Berhan University has legislative frames to promote the entitlements of its SWDs to equal opportunities and inclusion in their campus life as sighted peers (Debre Berhan University Senate Legislation, 2012). Nonetheless, it is generally found that blind students were left behind, or detached from clubs, sports and recreational activities that are important avenue for building friendships, interaction and relationships on the campus setting. This shows that there is still a gap in legislative actions and practices in higher education sections in the country. Consistent to the current finding, I was able to locate different local and international empirical evidences. As an instance, conducting a heuristic inquiry about the participation in the extracurricular and non-academic activities from the perspectives of blind students Streeter (2007) revealed that they are systematically denied of

equal opportunity for involvement and participation in non-academic activities. Locally, a recently reviewed research study produced by Asmerom (2019) revealed more significantly that the SWDs including those with visual impairments didn't participate in extra-curricular activities in their campuses (p.135). In the same fashion, other prior studies also reveal that these students mostly become non-participant in campus-based social activities, or events (Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016; Getachew, 2018). Alike this, the synthesis of relevant social inclusion literatures by Dimitrova-Radojichikj (2018) showed that students with chronic visual impairments are often outsiders of common social-cultural activities in education settings. Additionally, the study conducted at a higher education in United Arab Emirates by Alhammadi (2014) showed that the SWVI often found it difficult to move to and actively take part in the social life of the majority of their non-disable age mates in their university (p. 199). Therefore, the extensive studies reviewed showed that blind students are outsiders from extracurricular activities that represent the majority of the social lives of sighted peers in their campuses.

On the other hand, Dimitrova-Radojichikj (2018) noted that most socializing activities are binding factors as they connect SWVI, and open rooms to meet new people and establish relationships with others of the same age. According to her, being excluded from extracurricular activities has immense impact on the socialization of these students. Regarding this, Beteinaki (2019) also reflected that these students are most likely to have poor social (friendship) networks, impoverished social relationships, and finally become isolated. Likewise, this study specified that the non-participation of blind students in extracurricular activities is closely related to their isolated campus life and poor peer relationships. Therefore, blind students' experiences of non-participation in extracurricular activities connotes that there is a need to create adequate accessibility that facilitate their involvement and participation in clubs, recreational and sporting activities that are normally prescribed in the campus environments. For this purpose, the sample universities are advised to adopt specific policy issues to widening the social participation, interaction and relationships of blind students.

5.3.5. Being Othered

The current study found out that blind students were Othered by their own sighted peers that involves the process by which their own sighted peers treated, or perceived them as uniquely different from themselves in the same circumstances in the classrooms and campus settings.

Therefore, the study established the following points: Firstly, "being Othered" is one of the exclusionary experiences of blind students by which they were considered as outsiders of majority of sighted peer groups. Secondly, Othering practices discussed in the sub-sequent sections determined the social exclusionary processes of blind students as these practices distanced sighted peers from interactions and relationships with blind students. Resultantly, blind students experienced limited access to friendship development, and poorly interact with their sighted peers. In this sense, the study also identified that sighted peers were Otherers in which they treat or consider blind students as different from themselves without any justifiable reasons.

In conformity with this finding, the study conducted by Subrayen (2011) revealed the following: In one hand, the SWVI seriously experience Othering practices by which they were being considered, or marked as different from other sighted students in same circumstances. On the other hand, her analysis showed that the experience of Otherness is one of the social exclusionary processes that exacerbated other forms of exclusion including limited access to friendship networks and poor involvement and participation in group activities. In the same fashion, different researchers revealed that SWDs including those with visual impairment faced Othering in higher education classrooms and campuses (Bolt, 2005; Reutlinger, 2015; Saltaga, 2017). In general, it was found in this study that blind students were typified as aggressive in nature, perceived as often complaints, and treated as academically weak in the same classroom, or campus settings. These are recorded in my study as specific Othering practices. More specific discussions on these sub-themes are held below:

5.3.5.1. Typified as Aggressive in Nature or Often Complaints

In the current study, it was established that the sighted peers considered their own blind peers as behaviorally difficult individuals. Specifically, they were treated, or typified as "aggressive" and "complaints." These names are given to blind students to mark them as behaviorally different from sighted peers. In accordance with this result, my trial to examine scientific literatures, or prior studies was failed. However, this description was supported by a wonderful narration provided by one of the participants as, "*They [sighted peers] recognized that we [blind students] are bad-tempered, or arrogant."* This expression shows that sighted peers considered blind peers as aggressive in nature. At the same time, another participant has described as, "*Astonishingly, they alleged that it is us [blind students] who often creates problems in the classrooms and*

outside." This also shows that blind students were made to feel that they were treated as often complaints just in comparison to their sighted counter parts. Additionally, my study disclosed that blind students were not much preferred by sighted peers for friendships, or further interaction and relationships because they often understand their blind peers as behaviorally aggressive and complaints. I finally ascribed that Othering practices identified in this study led additional social exclusionary processes. This is also ensured by other researchers that the practice of Othering is a pathway that further intensifies social exclusionary processes (Subrayen, 2011; Alhammadi, 2014; Saltaga, 2017).

On the other hand, I reflected hereunder emphasizing on the reason behind sighted peers' perception that blind students are behaviorally different from themselves. Firstly, their perception about blind students' aggressiveness or complaining behavior with no doubt come from the socio-culturally ingrained believes of PWDs. For example, Tirusew (2005) overviewed the societal images of disability in Ethiopia and described that PWDs have socio-culturally deep-seated misconceptions and negative attitudes about the behavior of PWDs. According to Tirusew, society negatively constructs disability, and attached stigma and undesirable attitudes, and subsequently misjudged the behaviors, actions and abilities of PWDs. Additionally, Dagnachew (2011) described that the persons without disability have a general tendency to perceive these individuals as weak, helpless; and unable to learn and properly behave and function in society. To this end, Adugna (2015) portrayed that there is a myth that the PWDs are often considered as those with serious behavioral difficulties that made them aggressive, energetic, overactive, and the like. Thus, these local studies reviewed showed that being disabled in most Ethiopian context is having the name of demeaning, devaluation, being seen as unable to work, learn and properly behave. In other words, these local studies commonly delineated their concern that persons without disabilities at the grassroots level have misconceptions and negative attitudes toward the PWDs with no admissible reason.

Therefore, it can be supposedly deduced that the practice of considering blind students as aggressive and complaint is rooted in socio-culturally ingrained misapprehensions that are brought to campuses and classrooms by sighted peers. This implies that awareness creation and sensitization is required to change misconceptions and negative attitudes of sighted peers.

5.3.5.2. Perceived as Academically Weak

In the current study, the participants were perceived by their sighted peers as academically weak, or incapable. By this, they attempted to consider their own blind peers as different from themselves in terms of the academic performances. This finding was supported by other research studies conducted at tertiary education settings. For instance, Subrayen (2011) showed that the SWVI were assumed to be less capable than others in the classroom settings. Her study also showed that such practice prompted the students to becoming poorly involved in group-activities (assignments). In this vein, Subrayen (2011) ensured that Othering represents social exclusionary processes, which further worsened poor participation, and/or exclusion from involvement and participation in group-related activities. Also, Alhammadi (2014) noted that the sighted group members often consider the SWVI as academically less worthy. Moreover, the study conducted by Lourense (2015) showed that the SWVI are frequently considered as academically weak in the same classroom environment.

On the other hand, when the sighted peers treat their blind peers as academically weak, it has a clear message that they were belittling, or considering their blind peers as inferior in comparison to themselves. Consistently, it is found in the study conducted by Subrayen (2011) that the SWVI were treated as academically inferior to the sighted peers, and the sighted ones consider themselves as hegemonic, powerful or dominant in terms of academic successes. In the same fashion, Almog (2011) showed that SWVI were considered as academically poor, but sighted ones as more powerful, energetic, resourceful and far better than the SWVI. On the other hand, the practice of being considered as belittled or academically inferior heightened differences between sighted and blind students, and open extra exclusionary rooms to treat the later as outsiders, or not as part of the peer groups (Almog, 2011).

Generally speaking, the discussion above showed that the phenomenon of Othering indicates socially constructed differences among sighted and blind students in the same classroom or compass circumstances without any legitimate reasons (Bolt, 2005; Subrayen, 2011; Reutlinger, 2015). Nevertheless, these students should not be treated as different from their own sighted students of the same age in the same circumstances. This practice has implication for social intervention in that more has to be done on the awareness and attitudes of the Otherers (sighted peers) to: (a) help them restructure their thinking that peers with blindness are normally

individuals as themselves, and (b) inculcate the idea that there is no difference between students with and without vision loss. In this vein, I have discussed in detail in section 5.5.1.1 below that sighted peers' disability awareness raising programs are needed in the sampled universities.

5.3.6. Marginality Within the Classrooms

The analysis results in the current study depicted that blind students suffered from classroom marginality when: (a) they are denied of equal access to the teaching-learning process in comparison to the sighted peers; and (b) the pattern of teacher-student classroom interaction is more lopsided to sighted peers in the same classrooms. These experiences showed that there is discriminatory (differential) treatment of blind students in the classroom settings. Congruently, similar findings were reported by different researchers. For example, Florian, (2014) analyzed the situations when SWDs faced marginalization in the classroom settings. He finally reached to conclusion that this phenomenon occurs in the classrooms when some students are treated differently than other students. In particular, Florian (2014) stated that classroom marginalization: *"… occur when some students are treated differently"* (p. 289). It is also described above that blind students participated in this particular study experienced classroom marginalization when they were treated differently by their own teachers during the teaching-learning process. A local study conducted by Yohannes (2015) also revealed that the classroom marginality of SWVI in the university classrooms implies that they have no equal classroom learning opportunities and interactions as their sighted peers. Another study conducted by Biniam (2016) noted that these students faced classroom marginalization and it is manifested when they lack equal access to classroom interactions.

In addition, an international study conducted by de Leeuw et al. (2018) reported that SWVI are more tended to be marginalized within the inclusive classroom settings. Similarly, after conducting a social exclusion research with SWVI at a HEI setting in South Africa, Subrayen (2011) and Kasiram and Subrayen (2013) demonstrated the theme of *academic exclusion* as the form of social exclusion in the classrooms. According to them, academic exclusion of these students occurs when: (a) they are disengaged in the teaching-learning process as a result of the inaccessibility of the teachers' method of teaching, and lack of adequate reasonable instructional accommodations; (b) they poorly participate in group activities (e.g., assignments), and (c) there is poor student-student and teacher-student classroom interactions.

Collectively, other empirical evidences revealed that blind students become marginalized in the classrooms when they are denied from access to the curriculum pertaining to the teaching learning process (Corbett, 2001; Kearney, 2009; Lourense, 2015; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Luque, Brandão, Kira & Brandão, 2018).

As a whole, the discussion held above can be summarized through the following two points: Firstly, blind students felt marginalized in their own classrooms when: (a) the teaching-learning process is most geared toward the sighted classmates, and (b) there is difference in the pattern of teachers' classroom interactions. More specifically, it is discussed herein as much in-detail as possible that they faced classroom marginalization when their classroom teachers' have sidelined teaching practices, and favouritized interaction with the sighted peers in the same classroom settings and circumstances. This shows that blind students' experience of social exclusion is not limited only outside of the classroom contexts and that there are serious social exclusionary experiences inside of the four wall of the classroom (Harrist & Bradley, 2002).

5.3.6.1. Practice of Sidelining during Teaching

This study disclosed that the teachers' teaching methods and styles of instruction were not equally reachable for blind students as compared to the sighted peers. This has resulted sidelining within the classroom setting that occurs in the following instances: Primarily, it happens when blind students lacked equal access to the teachers' teaching methods as sighted classmates. It is displayed in the study that they remain marginal during the teachers' classroom presentation. This also shows that the classroom teachers' strategy of instruction was not accessible, or lacked reasonable instructional accommodation. Secondly, the classroom teachers did not recognize the specific learning needs and interests of their students. This also shows that they were not preparing their teaching to respond to their students' classroom learning needs. This was thoroughly demonstrated by participants. For example, one of them had adduced as *"Unexpectedly, I am given less attention and fewer opportunities by the classroom teacher compared to the other classmates…."* This simply shows that the classroom teachers failed to reasonably accommodate the classroom needs of their blind students. Hence, it is established in this study that blind students were not equally benefited from their teacher's instructional components like classroom discussion, question-and-answering, and classroom participation. This finding is revealed by different local and international researchers. As an instance, the study conducted by

Subrayen (2011), and Kasiram and Subrayen (2013) showed that the SWVI were sidelined in the classrooms when their teachers were not able to provide equal learning opportunities during the teaching-learning processes. Their studies showed that classroom teachers gave more chances to asking and answering classroom questions to the sighted peers. Some teachers also give more attention, appreciation and acknowledgement to the classroom participation of sighted peers than that of blind students (Alhammadi, 2014).

Equally, a local study conducted by Biniam (2016) noted that plenty of the teaching-learning activities, lectures and presentations are provided through visual means such as blackboards, white boards, transparencies and power point slides that let them academically underprivileged, and marginalized compared to the learning opportunities of the sighted peers in the classroom settings (p.1). A contemporarily reported study conducted at HEIs in Ethiopia also uncovered that the teachers' method of teaching did not provide equal opportunities in the classroom learning, and consequently they become sidelined in their own classrooms (Asmeron, 2019). On the contrary, inclusive teaching involves providing equal learning opportunities for all learners in the same classroom settings (Haihambo, 2010; Floria, 2014; Kadun & Gadkar, 2014; Galaterou, 2017). On top of this, a very recent study reviewed assured that inclusive teaching should incorporate "… *[equal] access and opportunity for success within the classroom and curriculum"* (Sanger, 2020, p.33). [Emphasis added]. This most recent research evidence shows that inclusive pedagogy (teaching-learning) involves providing equal access and opportunity for all students regardless of their backgrounds, disabilities. This also shows that classroom teachers are central to the success of their students' inclusionary practices in the particular classroom contexts (Kearney, 2009; Beauchamp-Pryor 2013; Lourens & Swartz, 2016).

As a final point, the social inclusion of SWVI in the classroom is only effective if they are provided equal learning opportunities as their sighted age peers (Apie & Moses, 2019). However, it is discussed above that blind students were suffered from denial of equal access to classroom learning opportunities that are commonly available for sighted classmates and which can play integral roles for relationships and interactions with sighted peers, and classroom teacher, too. This implies that the classroom teachers were not able to specifically respond to the learning needs of their students. Therefore, teachers whose career is teaching blind students should be trained in the areas of inclusive pedagogical skills and practices.

5.3.6.2. Practice of Favoritism in Teacher-Student Interaction

The study revealed that there is difference in the pattern of teachers' classroom interactions with blind students and the sighted students. In this vein, it is found that the classroom teachers mostly gave more priority, attention and time to the sighted peers than the blind students. This indicates that classroom teachers have had limited classroom interactions with blind students. Nonetheless, this finding is contrary to legislative statements of the universities selected for this study. For instance, Addis Ababa University senate legislation has proclaimed that classroom teacher-student relationship should be non-discriminatory. In its legislation, Chapter 2, Article 171 and sub-article 171.1.4, it states as: *"... students shall have the right to be entitled to fair treatment in all respects of the teacher-student relationship and to an environment conducive to stimulate learning"* (Addis Ababa University Senate Legislation, 2019, p.154). In the same fashion, the senate legislation of Debre Berhan University showed that all SWDs should be treated fairly and equally to achieve inclusionary practices in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms (Debre Berhan University Senate Legislation, 2012).

However, it is above-said that teacher's classroom interaction with their blind students was bigoted, and more inclined toward the sighted classmates. In this vein, blind students encountered social exclusion in the classroom contexts when there is limited teacher-student interaction. This can be supported by the following powerful verbatim provided by a female participant as: "… *classroom teachers need to see all students in one eye, but the reality on the ground is far from this."* This should not happen in real situations by professional teachers, but I understand that the teachers gave more propensities to the sighted peers in the classroom due the following: In one hand, they were reluctance to teaching blind students with other sighted students in the same classroom settings. The part of the teacher-related challenge will be described in detail in section 5.4.1.3 below.

On the other hand, I need to posit my contention that such skewed teacher-student classroom interaction happen mainly due to the teachers' implicit bias that they have in classroom interactions with students without disabilities and those with visual impairments. However, my personal reflection needs further scrutinizing to establish empirical evidences on teachers' implicit bias in the classrooms. Unfortunately, none of the international empirical evidences reviewed for the purpose of this study is in agreement with the findings that

specifically reflect teachers' favoritism classroom interaction. I thought here that the inconsistency occurs mainly due to the discrepancy in the general objectives of the empirical studies reviewed and the current study. For example, the study conducted by David and Kuyini (2012) was principally aimed at exploring the role of teachers as facilitators of peer acceptance and social inclusion in the classroom contexts, and they revealed two important findings: (a) the teacher-student interaction has significant impact on promoting social inclusion in the classroom; and (b) teachers are prime stakeholders and facilitators of peer acceptance and classroom level social inclusion. However, their study did not reveal the favouritized nature of teacher-student classroom interactions. In other words, some local studies revealed that there is a limited teacher-student classroom interaction (Yohanes, 2015; Teferi, 2016; Kahsay, 2017). Collectively, these empirical evidences proved that there is limited interaction between instructors and SWVI in the classroom instances and outside of the classrooms.

Similarly, the current study disclosed that teachers' who taught blind students have fewer classroom interactions with blind students than with the sighted classmates. Nevertheless, the local studies cited above did not reveal the favoritized nature of teacher-student classroom interaction and relationships. Still, the reason lies on the discrepancy in the objectives of these studies and the current study. In other words, various local and international studies prominently showed that classroom marginality experience of students has enormous consequences on students' learning and socialization. For example Lewise (2009) displayed that the SWDs including those with visual impairments were at risk of being discouraged and unmotivated during their teachers' teaching. Other studies also revealed that SWVI felt unequal and become academically underprivileged in the classrooms due to lack of equal access to their classroom teachers' teaching and presentation (Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Beauchamp-Pryor 2013; Lourens, 2015; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Biniam, 2016).

Nonetheless, this particular study failed to look into the consequences of social exclusion or classroom marginality of blind students' on their academic performance, and psychosocial lives due mainly to the scope and general objectives of the study. This important area of study is suggested in this dissertation as avenue for further research study in the future. Generally speaking, the discussion held under section 5.3.6 above shows the classroom marginality experiences of blind students. This experience represented their experiences of

social exclusion in the classroom level. On the basis of the discussion, I come up with the following sum-ups: First, blind students were not truly socially included in the classrooms of the sampled universities. This connotes an idea that the physical placement of blind students in the same classroom with other sighted classmates is not a guarantee for their meaningful social inclusion within the four walls of the classrooms. In this vein, Heyder et al. (2020) stated as: "*... physical inclusion does not automatically lead to social integration"* (p.1). This newest research evidence showed that true social inclusion of blind students in the classroom set up can't be effectively realized through allowing them physical access in the classrooms. Secondly, teachers' teaching style and methods were not blind student-friendly mainly because it was not responsive to their specific classroom learning needs. This has instructional implication that to maximally promote their social inclusion, utilizing modified and accessible teaching methods is firmly recommended for teachers (Lourense, 2015; Harris, 2017). This calls that so much should be done to help classroom teachers to enable them reasonably adapt their instruction to provide equal access to classroom learning opportunity.

Therefore, I proposed that in-service teacher's training is needed in the areas of inclusive teaching practices (ITPs) with a prime aim to curb the challenges of addressing the peculiar learning needs of blind students, to treat them as sighted classmates, and finally promote teacher-student interaction. This is especially discussed in section 5.5.1.2 below.

5.4. Challenging Experiences Faced by Blind Students

The third objective of this qualitative phenomenological study is to identify challenges related to the social exclusion among blind students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. The challenges related to social exclusion are different conditions, or circumstances that have potential to increase blind students' likelihood of the risk of social exclusion at the individual, or group level (Subrayen, 2011). Alternatively, these constitute specific instances that create constraints or barriers to their social inclusion (Hall, 2010).

As pinpointed in section 5.3 above, this part of the study is closely related to the research study conducted by Subrayen (2011). In her study, it is identified that the academic challenges (e.g., lack of reasonable curriculum accommodations and assessment practices, and teacher related factors such as lack of adequate knowledge and experience); physical challenges (inaccessibility of physical environment) and social challenges (e.g., attitudinal barriers) ware

identified as having contributed to the social exclusion of SWVI in Kwazulu-Natal University, South Africa. On my part, it is identified that social challenges (e.g., stereotypes and prejudices, and teachers reluctance); physical challenges (e.g., unfriendly physical spaces and inaccessible buildings) and institution-related challenges (e.g., e.g., inaccessible notice-boards) were contributing to the exclusionary experiences of blind students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. On the other hand, it can be observed here that mine and Subrayen's (2011) analysis have similarities and differences in thematic identification pertaining to the challenges experienced by students: My study did not look into the impacts of academic challenges on blind students' exclusionary processes. However, it is suggested in this dissertation as one of the important possibilities of future research studies. On the other hand, Subrayen (2011) has examined institutional challenges as one of the types of physical (environmental features related to the learning institution) challenges. Communally, our study confirmed that the challenges (constraints) related to the social exclusion of students with visual disabilities are barriers to their social inclusion. In the same way, these studies framed the theoretical underpinning of Social Model of Disability (SMD) as a method of identification and description of a range of barriers, or challenges related to social exclusion.

In this particular study, the tenet of SMD has shed explanatory light on the exploration and description of major themes (social, physical and institutional challenges) and subsequent sub-themes representing the challenges linked to social exclusion among blind students in the sampled universities. The following sections represent the discussion of how these challenges impacted these students to unnecessarily become socially excluded in their own classrooms and campus environments.

5.4.1. Social Challenges

In this particular study, the social challenges related to social exclusion among blind students include peer-group related challenges (stereotypes and prejudices) and teacher-related challenges (reluctance to comply with instructional adaptation). By and large, these are identified in the study as social barriers to the social inclusion of these students. The following sub-sections outlined the discussion of these specific challenges:

5.4.1.1. Peers' Stereotypes

It has been found that some of the sighted peers have stereotypic behaviors and views toward their blind peers. Accordingly, blind students who were arbitrarily assigned collective and exaggerated names such as complaints, aggressive, and weak, which subsequently gave them a different look to their behaviors, actions, or day-to-day activities. Put simply, such stereotypical thinking of sighted peers made blind students become easily vulnerable to Otherness that gradually deteriorated their interactions and relationships. This finding is supported by different empirical evidences. For example, Anderson (2006) studied the inclusion and interdependence of SWDs including those with visual impairments in the regular classroom settings and uncovered the following: (a) students without disabilities meaninglessly attached generalized names (e.g., dependent, or help-seekers) to SWDs, which prompted the experience of Othering; (b) the stereotypes attached to SWDs subsequently gave a different picture to them and discouraged their interaction and interdependence with their peers without disabilities in the classrooms. In addition, the study conducted by Subrayen (2011) showed that the sighted peers utilized negative undertones such as unstable to SWVI to describe their behaviors, or actions that has a tendency to make them stay away from the sighted peers. Alhammadi (2014) also conjectured a general idea that sighted peers have negatively label their peers with visual impairments as being different from themselves, and this weakened their interactions and relationships.

Strengthening the above discussion, Daniela (2019) conducted a study at higher education setting at "Dunărea de Jos" University in Romania, and uncovered that the sighted students build exaggerated (stereotypical) mental images like helpless, dependent, totally incapable to represent and define SWVI. Finally, Daniela affirmed that the stereotypes linked to the SWVIs contributed to their experience of Otherness as to what they were perceived as different from their own sighted peers in the same circumstances in classroom/education settings. This also obstructed the interaction and relationships of sighted peers with SWVI (Daniela, 2019). On the other hand, the current study identified that the stereotypical thinking of sighted peers toward their blind peers is deeply rooted in their mythical understandings or misconceptions about visual impairment, and individuals living with visual impairments. Consistently, different local and international empirical studies generally noted that the stereotypes individuals toward PWDs are deeply stemmed from socio-culturally entrenched wrong (negative) believes, or misconceptions linked to disabilities (Almaz, 2011; Dagnachew,

2011; de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2012; Adugna, 2015; Dare & Nowicki, 2018; Daniela, 2019). Scrutinizing these studies, I understood that stereotypical thinking can develop to prejudices toward individuals or groups with disabilities. Then, it becomes clear to me that the negative attitude of sighted peers toward blind students discussed below is developed from the pre-existing stereotypical views and behaviors of sighted peers. In summary, this study revealed that most sighted peers quickly draw negative mental images, or stereotypical conclusions such as behaviorally difficult people (i.e., aggressive and complaints) and academically weak to their blind peers. The reason behind such overgeneralizations includes sighted peers myths and misconceptions about disability (e.g., visual impairment). This also indicates that they lack certain information in regards to the real behaviors, abilities and potential of blind students. Therefore, tailored efforts are required to reduce the misconception of the sighted peers. In this sense, I routinely presented in section 5.5.1.1 below that disability awareness creation is needed for the sighted peers with an aim to minimize their stereotypical views and behaviors and eventually negative attitudes toward blind students.

5.4.1.2. Peers' Prejudices

This study unearthed that sighted peers have negative attitudes (prejudices) toward their blind peers, which caused the experience of peer ignoring and limited access to peer-friendship-groups. Most similarly, the study outcome revealed by Yohannes (2015) identified that sighted students and the university community at large have negative attitudes toward the students with visual impairment, and this was a barrier to interaction and relationships of SWVI with other sighted university members. Additionally, this finding is substantiated by other local research studies (Biniam, 2016; Kahsay, 2017; Mulugeta & Mekuriaw, 2017; Tilahun, 2017). These local studies generally showed that sighted peers have prejudiced relationships with their peers with visual impairments. International studies also reported that the prejudice of sighted individuals affect the social interaction, relationships, and participation of peers with disabilities (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2012; Prabavathy, 2016; Jessup *et al.*, 2018). These studies mostly showed that most of the faculty members including non-disabled peers have negative attitudes that affect the positive relationships, participation and learning of SWVI.

More specifically, it is described that blind students faced being ignored by their fully sighted peers due to the peers' negative attitudes. However, this finding was inconsistent with prior research studies. As discussed in section 5.3.3 above, most of the research studies showed

that blind individuals are suffered from peer ignoring experiences primarily by virtue of their loss of vision (Khurshid & Najeeb, 2012; Lourens, 2015; Wadegaonkar *et al.*, 2015; Parvin, 2015; Tobias & Mukhopadhyay, 2017; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Jessup *et al.,* 2018). Oppositely, my study showed that the sighted peers' negative attitudes is linked with blind students' experience of peer ignoring/rejection. I also personally argued here that either the students or their vision loss should not be blamed for such negative social life experiences. I avowed this idea on the basis of the SMD, which claims that only the social and environmental factors are more responsible for disability-related challenges (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002; Bolt, 2005). Thus, the SMD asserts that disability (e.g., being blind) and problems related to disability are not the issue of the individual or his/her disability (Mattews, 2009; Shakespeare, 2014). However, I stipulated that the presence of vision loss undoubtedly generated grounds for the development of sighted peers' negative attitudes that heighten specific relational difficulties like peer ignoring. On the other hand, this study revealed that the prejudiced attitudes of sighted peers influenced peer acceptance and friendship developments of blind students. Different studies were consistently reported. As an instance, de Boer et al. (2012) reported that sighted peers negative attitudes resulted low social acceptance and few friendships for SWVI (p. 380). In addition, other studies revealed that the prejudicial attitudes of sighted students affected the social (peer) acceptance and relationships of SWVI in classroom or campus settings (Jessup *et al.,* 2018).

In general, the current study has proven that the sighted peers in the sampled universities have negative attitudes toward blind peers. This has impacted peer interactions, relationship and friendship formation among sighted and blind students in these learning institutions. This finding has implication that sighted peers' prejudices should be combatted with an aim to promote their relationships with blind students. With this in mind, I proposed a strategy discussed in section 5.5.1.1 below that disability awareness creation is needed in the sampled universities.

5.4.1.3. Teachers' Reluctance

This study showed that some of the classroom teachers who taught blind students were reluctant to comply with the reasonable instructional accommodations to teach SWVI together with other fully sighted peers. This was manifested when they were unprepared, lacked commitment and unwilling to adapt their instruction to facilitate blind students' classroom learning. As a result,

blind students were denied of equal access to classroom learning opportunities, and also the teacher-student interaction becomes disproportionate in the same classroom settings. Finally, it is documented in this study that the classroom teachers' reluctance is one of the social challenges more blamable to blind students' marginality in the classroom settings. Different local studies conducted at higher education settings revealed that absence of reasonable instructional accommodation systematically denied students' with visual impairments equal access to classroom learning opportunities and finally led the exclusionary experiences in the classroom level (Teferi, 2016; Kahsay, 2017; Getachew, 2018; Asmerom, 2019). The summary of these empirical reviews yielded that the unresponsiveness of the teachers' teaching methods to the needs of their students is more responsible for the denial of equal access to teaching, learning and other academic opportunities in the classrooms. I also understood from these studies that academic challenges pertaining to inaccessibility of instructional strategies contributed to the practice of sidelining during the teaching-learning process. Nevertheless, the findings of these studies contradicted to the current finding because the studies reviewed failed to reveal what specific teacher-related factors are contributing to the denial of equal access to students' classroom learning opportunities. In this vein, my study is different as I precisely examined specific teacher-related factors as essentially related to blind students' experiences of sidelining during teaching and favouritized interaction with their teachers.

Fortunately, the study conducted by Yohannes (2015) and Zelalem (2018) were congruent with my finding in two ways: Firstly, they reported the specific teacher-related factors such as lack of commitment (effort) to modify their teaching methods is related to the denial of equal access to classroom learning opportunities. Secondly, they also showed that most teachers were unprepared to support the classroom learning of their SWVI and respond to their students' learning needs, accordingly. International studies also revealed similar findings. For instance, studying the experiences of college graduates with visual impairment, Joseph (2010) found that professors who taught SWVI were too reluctant to comply with reasonable curriculum (academic) adaptations to satisfy their learners' needs.

Subsequently, the students were denied of equal access to the teaching-learning processes in comparison to sighted classmates (Joseph, 2010). Other studies also showed that classroom teachers were either unwilling or unprepared to fulfill adequate reasonable instructional

accommodation for their SWVI (Subrayen, 2011; Mwakyeja, 2013; Alhammadi, 2014; Lourense, 2015). Equally, these studies showed that refusal to conform to the reasonable instructional accommodations denied equal access to classroom learning opportunities, which subsequently affected the success of inclusionary practices. In the other vein, the current study renowned that the classroom teacher who taught blind students had more favored classroom interactions with sighted peers than their blind students. Inconveniently, I was not able to identify a single research study that specifically demonstrates what particularly results teachers' favouritized classroom interactions. My reflection here is that the classroom teachers' discriminatory classroom interaction was unconsciously (unintentionally) happened and it manifests their implicit classroom behavior. In this vein, I pointedly suggested in section 5.3.6.2 above that further research is required to arrive on a conclusive idea. However, Alemayehu (2018) commended that teacher-student interactions showed not be biased, and oppressive, as well. Regarding the nature of teacher-student classroom interactions, Alemayehu was encouraged to state as: **"መምህሩ ከተማሪዎቹ ጋር የሚኖረዉ ግንኙነትም አስፈሪ መሆን የለበትም። በኣካቶ ትምህት ዉስጥ መምህሩ ተማሪዎቹን የሚወድና አዎንታዊ አመለካከት ያለዉ… [መሆን አለበት]"** (ገጽ 75)። **[ለትኩረት የተጨመረ]**። [*"The teacher-student interaction should not terrify their students. In the inclusive educational context, a more loving behavior and positive attitude… [are expected from teachers]"]* (p.75). [Emphasis added]. His explanation generally shows that teachers' classroom interaction with their students with and without disabilities should be anti-discriminatory. To achieve this, all teachers who teach SWDs should have impartial attitudes and classroom behaviors (Alemayehu, 2018).

On the other hand, it is explored in the study that the sources of the teachers' reluctance to comply with reasonable instructional (curriculum) accommodation is lack of adequate skills and knowledge pertaining to reasonable instructional accommodation that are vital to teach blind students together with sighted studnets. Likewise, literatures and empirical works presented the reasons behind the classroom teachers' lack of commitment to comply with the required instructional accommodations. For instance, Alemayehu (2018) stated that most classroom teachers found it difficult to compel them to instructional adaptations/modifications to meet their students' educational needs. He has stated his hesitation as: "**…ስርዐተ-ትምህርቱን አመቻችቶ ማቅረብ ምናልባትም ለትምህርት ባለሙያዎችና ለመምህራን ትልቁ ተግዳሮት ሳይሆን**

አይቀርም" (**ገጽ** 73) ። [*"…Curriculum adaptation and modification to accommodate the learners' specific classroom needs is seemingly one of the bottlenecks for education stakeholders and teachers"]* (p.73). According to Alemayehu most teachers who teach both students with and without disabilities in the same classrooms often face difficulties of modifying, and/or adapting their instructional processes to the best interests of their learners. In this particular sense, lemayehu (2018) made it clear that most teachers lacked skills and knowledge of instructional adaptation and modification to make their teaching accessible for their students (p.75). Correspondingly, prior studies portrayed that classroom teachers' lack of knowledge and skills of adapt teaching methods for a more diverse learners certainly render the vulnerability of students to exclusionary practices in the classroom settings (Lewis, 2009, p.19). Nevertheless, there is a minor discrepancy between my study and Lewis's. In one hand, this study was conducted at HEIs, but Lewis's study was conducted at secondary school settings in Ethiopia and Rwanda. Other studies conducted at HEIs also added that lack of classroom teachers' knowledge related to inclusion, students special learning needs, technical knowledge about strategies and procedures of teaching, and skills related to instructional modification unquestionably result marginality in the classroom contexts (Lamport *et al.,* 2012; Lourense, 2015). At this point, Alemayehu (2018) summarized that classroom inclusion can be real when classroom teachers have (a) positive attitude about SWDs and inclusion of these students in general; (b) sufficient pre-requisite knowledge and a range of learning needs of their students, and (c) skill of adapting and/or modifying his/her instruction

Generally, the aforementioned discussion shows that classroom teachers play integral roles to facilitate their students' inclusionary experiences. In this vein studies attested that teachers are the agents of promoting inclusionary experiences in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms (David & Kuyini, 2012; Tirusew, *et al.,* 2014; Suárez-Orozco, Casanova, Martin, Katsiaficas, Cuellar, Smith, & Dias, 2015). Therefore, the teacher-related factors producing classroom marginality needs to be eradicated through involving them in instructional skills capacity building trainings. The training quite possibly help them to be careful, responsible for their blind students and value all students similarly; accommodate the diverse learning needs of their students and modify their classroom teaching behaviors (Slee, 2007; Lewis, 2009; Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Mwakyeja, 2013). As part of this, it is proposed in

section 5.5.1.2 below that the instructors who teach blind students in the sampled universities need in-service trainings in the areas of inclusive instructional practices (ITPs).

5.4.2. Physical Challenges

In this study, the inaccessible of buildings and unfriendly physical spaces affected blind students' opportunities to socialization in the campus environments in the sampled universities. Specifically, it is found in the study that these challenges are related to their isolated campus living conditions, and non-participation in extracurricular activities that are described in terms of exclusion from clubs, sports and recreations. In congruent to these findings, local studies revealed in abundance that the inaccessible physical environment of HEIs in the country vastly affected social interactions, relationships and participation in social activities and events (Yohannes, 2015; Teferi, 2016; Biniam, 2016; Tilahun, 2017; Getachew, 2018; Muzemil, 2018). In addition, a recently reported study conducted by Asmerom (2019) about the experience of SWDs in some selected HEIs in Ethiopia showed that the physical environment of Ethiopian HEIs including buildings and compounds are inaccessible, and due to this the students displayed undesirable social and academic experiences such as exclusion and marginalization.

Scrutinizing these local studies, I recognized the following two points: Firstly, most of the HEIs in Ethiopia are not barrier-free, and are unfriendly and unwelcoming for blind students. Thus, most of the campus environments of HEIs in Ethiopia are not accessible for their academic and social lives. Regarding this, Getachew (2018) and Asmerom (2018) confirmed that the physical environments these institutions elicited the feelings of discomfort, insecurity, and restriction on the lives of these students. Secondly, inaccessibility of the physical environment of HEIs seriously influenced the socialization opportunities of blind students such as meeting instructors, sighted peers, and active involvement and participation in activities such as clubs and other socializing events.

In general, the competing evidences in local and international studies showed that the inaccessibility of immediate physical environments extremely influenced the capability and opportunity of SWVI to participate in activities, and form interactions and relationships with others around. In this particular study, the inaccessibility of buildings and the unfriendliness of physical spaces were identified as environmental challenges that are related to blind students'

experience of social exclusion. Conversely, it is discussed herein that these challenges are recognized in the study as physical barriers to the successful social inclusion of these students:

5.4.2.1. Unfriendly Physical Spaces

This study disclosed that physical spaces (i.e., physical layouts, features of the ground, walkways or road) of the sampled HEIs were not accessible for blind students to freely and independently move from place to place and to form relationships with sighted individuals, and participate in clubs, sports and recreations. Resultantly, they become denied from access to socialization, and remain mostly isolated from interactions, relationships and participation. Consistent with this, a local study conducted by Biniam (2016) at Addis Ababa University revealed that some spaces and physical grounds of the university are full of obstacles, which hindered SWVI from independently moving from place to place for different purposes. Biniam's study has revealed that the inaccessibility of physical spaces contributed to these students' feelings of being pushed at the side of activities and relationships. On top of this, Getachew' (2018) studied the provision of support services for SWDs in 7 HEIs (Bahir Dar, Gondar, Wollo, Debre Markos, Debre Berhan, Debre Tabor and Woldia Universities) found in Amhara regional state-Ethiopia, and disclosed that the physical spaces of these HEIs are unsafe and full of dangers that affected students' interactions, relationships and participation. Finally, Getachew concluded that these institutions are not disability-friendly and welcoming as they can't accommodate these students' needs. Further, the findings of this study are consistent with other international studies conducted at HEIs. For example, Subrayen (2011) confirmed that SWVI have confined and isolated campus-life mainly due to the inaccessibility of physical grounds of the campuses.

On the other hand, the current study established that blind students lacked motivation to partake in most relationships contexts and activities in the campus environment because of the unfriendliness of physical environment of their respective campuses. Consistent to this finding was reported by Streeter (2007) in that the students with total vision loss had no motivation to register as members and participate in extracurricular and non-academic activities on their campuses mainly because of physical adjustment problems. His study added that the inaccessibility of campus physical spaces made them feel oppressed, unsecured, and obstructed their desires to independently move to commonplaces in their campuses. As a whole, it is likely to understand from the discussion above that Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities lacked

accessibility in terms of the physical spaces of campuses. Therefore, I suggested in this study in section 5.5.2.2 below that a policy environment is needed to improve the accessibility of the physical environment of these HEIs for blind students

5.4.2.2. Inaccessibility of Buildings

This study has made unhidden that the buildings of the sampled HEIs were not blind-students-friendly. This shows that these physical features of HEIs were not accessible for them to freely and independently move from one office, or classrooms or to the other similar place. This affected their interaction and relationships with teachers, other faculty and department staff members and sighted peers, and contributed to their isolation from memberships, participation and relationships. Consistently, the study conducted by Biniam (2016) showed that unlike the sighted students, the students with visual impairments have limited access to gain consultation, guidance and counseling services from their teachers because of the physical barriers to get access to their offices (p.18). According to Biniam, the built up physical environment of these institutions is inaccessible which immensely affected the interpersonal relationships and participation of SWVI. Up on this, other local studies also uncovered that the buildings of most of the Ethiopian HEIs lacked the necessary infrastructures such as stairs and elevators to accommodate mobility needs of blind students (Tirusew *et al.*, 2014; Getachew, 2018; Muzemil, 2018). These local studies generally conveyed that the buildings of HEIs have architectural and infrastructural problems (e.g., unavailability of ramps, absence of steps, poor stairs, no elevators and lack of accessible building entrances) that influenced their movement for different academic and social purposes. Recently, the study conducted by Asmerom (2019) added evidences to the above studies that the buildings of HEIs are not barrier-free and thus impeded the academic and social lives of the blind students participated in this study.

Similarly, other international studies reported consistent outcome that the inaccessibility of the built-in environment of HEIs (e.g., absence of reasonable physical environmental accommodations such as ramps, stairs and distance between blocks) with no question can result isolation of SWVI and inhibit their social interaction, relationships and participation (Beauchamp & Anderson, 2010; Lourens, 2015). Still, these researchers revealed that the inaccessibility of buildings of HEIs is a physical barrier to interactions, relationships and participation of SWVI. The finding discussed above implies that the buildings of HEIs in Ethiopia are inappropriately

designed in relation to the needs and interests of blind students. I also understand that the design and construction of the buildings of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan universities is non-compliant with Ethiopian Building Proclamation No.624/2009, which is announced by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Council of Ministers (FDRE, 2011). This shows that national and institution-based actions and measures are needed improve the accessibility of the buildings of these institutions. Nonetheless, this may not be an easy task, but I proposed in section 5.5.2.2 below that institution-based accessibility policy should be formulated and implemented accordingly with a basic aim to cater blind students' interests of independent movement and thereby achieving their socialization needs.

5.4.3. Institutional Challenges

The institution (university-based) challenges that contributed a lot to the social exclusion of blind students interviewed in this study include the inaccessible visual (ink-print) information and/or notices. These challenges are also identified as institutional barriers to the successful social inclusion of blind students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. The following section briefly highlighted the influence of the inaccessibility of visual information and notices on the social inclusion of blind students at HEIs selected for this study:

5.4.3.1. Inaccessibility of Visual (Ink-print) Information

This study identified that the notice-boards in the sample universities lacked inclusiveness for blind students. Due to this, they were systematically denied from access to any of the visual (ink-print) information, or notices related to the social or academic information posted on the university notice-boards. It is also reported in the study that lack of access to notices posted on the university notice-boards contributed a lot for most of the blind students' non-participation in extracurricular activities. On the other hand, it has been described in the background part of this dissertation that the universities selected for this study count their legislation as a means of ensuring equal opportunities for their SWDs.

Nevertheless, this finding is contrarily reported against the legislatively proclaimed rights of these students. For example, Article 171 and sub-article 171.4.8 of Addis Ababa University stated as the following: *"... students shall have the right to receive information on regular basis on matters that concern them from the University"* (Addis Ababa University Senate Legislation, 2019, p.154). Likewise, Debre Berhan University has proclaimed that all students shall have

access to different opportunities including academic and social information in the campus on an equal basis as that of the students without disabilities (Debre Berhan University Senate Legislation, 2012). This shows that the universities have lawfully declared provisions in their legislations focusing on equal access to opportunities for SWDs in all student-related concerns. However, the current finding is unrelated to what the sampled universities have set as provisions because their blind students are still denied of equal access to ink-print information posted on the notice-boards. This simply indicates that more emphasis is not given yet, and there is still a problem of effectively realizing legislative actions, policies and provisions related to SWDs at HEIs (Yared, 2008). Other researchers also showed that there is inconsistency in proclaimed disability policies, laws or provisions and actual implementations in education settings in country (Belay *et al*., 2015; Zelalem, 2018). For this reason, I need to articulate an idea that more *praxis* is needed in our education system that involves a process by which the institutional policies and provisions are properly implemented and converted into an established practice. In other words, the finding in the current study is congruently reported by Appiah Ms (2017) in a higher education in Ghana. According to Appiah Ms blind individuals are also called ink-print disability because they often experience difficulties in accessing visual (ink-print) information and notices.

Other studies also steadily reported that lack of access to a wide-range of notices posted in the form of ink-prints results exclusion from social participation (i.e., participation in extracurricular and non-academic activities) and marginalization of SWVI in education setting (Kahsay, 2017; Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2018; Jessup *et al.*, 2018). These studies mutually showed that inaccessibility of visual (ink-print) information or notices produces information barriers to social inclusion among SWVI. In addition, recent research evidences delivered by Asmerom (2019) and Bruno and do Nascimento (2019) revealed that the inaccessibility of access to notices about extracurricular activities like clubs, and related social activities indisputably led most of the social exclusionary experiences of students with profound visual impairments in their campus lives. They generally noted that lack of compensatory and alternative access to information in higher education settings seriously impacted the socialization of students with severe visual loss.

On the other hand, the current descriptive phenomenological study uncovered that the sample universities were not able to provide equal access to ink-print notices to these students as

compared to other sighted individuals. In this vein, all the forms and types of information posted on the university notice-boards were not properly formatted to be accessible for blind students. This is strengthened through the following verbatim provided by a student interviewed as: "*All notifications are prepared and posted in paper format here. We can't access any information on ourselves unless told by other volunteers [sighted individuals]*. This narration exhibited that any of the print information posted on the notice-boards is not reachable for them unless told by sighted students. This shows that the sampled universities have forgotten the information needs of their students with sever visual impairments. However, providing adequate information in accessible formats is one of the responsibilities of these institutions.

Finally, I deduced that in spite of the efforts of promoting the social inclusion of blind students; the sampled universities played roles as agents of exclusionary experiences of these students. As aforesaid, the reason behind most of the exclusion of blind students from non-academic activities is related to the universities' system (practice) of addressing notifications, which is discriminatory. Congruently, this finding was increasingly supported by previous studies that universities are arbiters of social change that have the potential to promote social unity and disarray, but may act in some ways as places of social exclusion of their own studnets (Beaucham-Pryor, 2013; Mutswanga & Mapuranga, 2014; Ambati, 2015). Other empirical studies also added that most HEIs are risk pools and sources of oppression that systematically deprive equalization of opportunities for their students with severe visual impairments (Alhammadi, 2014). Most notably, other empirical evidences also reflected that despite acting as facilitators of social inclusion, equality and building socio-cultural assets, universities played roles as agents for the social exclusion of their students due to discriminatory practices (Parvin, 2015; Lourense, 2015; Prabavathy, 2016). These researchers disclosed that there are situations when institutions create conditions reinforcing exclusion for their SWDs. To this end, the latest evidence reviewed showed that despite the attempt to promote inclusion, equality and diversity, HEIs are also avenues for exclusionary trajectories (Sanger, 2020).

Generally, blind students were denied from access to ink-print information posted on the notice-boards in their respective campuses. This implies that the notice-boards were inaccessible and lacked inclusivity as a whole for these students. Resultantly, they couldn't access information in an ordinary way from notice-boards. This is completely contrasting to our

information age. Thus, efforts have to be taken in place to promote the inclusiveness of information services and notice-boards for blind students. I have proposed in section 5.5.2.2 that accessibility policy is required to improve the campus-based information access mechanisms, notification practices, and systems for blind students to appropriately ensure their information needs.

5.5. Strategies of Addressing the Social Exclusion of Blind Students

The last objective of this qualitative phenomenological study is providing useful strategies to address social exclusionary experiences of blind students and thereby to improve their social inclusion. Though there are various avenues to reduce and eliminate social exclusion, the current study generated strategies that included, but not limited to two major themes. These are: (a) strategies claimed by blind students themselves (e.g., sighted peers' disability awareness raising and instructors in-service training on ITP), and (b) strategies provided through insights gained from blind students' experiences of social exclusion (e.g., institutional level accessibility policy and students' social skills trainings). These strategies are proposed in the study to be tailored in the sampled universities to create a positive, welcoming and accepting social, academic and physical environment that facilitate the *holistic* inclusion of blind students both in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms.

Empirical evidences reviewed in this part of the study made it clear that addressing social exclusion requires alleviating the challenges related to it (Hills, Le Grand & Pichaud, 2002; Daly, 2006; Kearney, 2009; McCaughey, 2009; Subrayen, 2011). Consistently, other qualitative evidences also revealed that identifying and describing specific factors of the risk of social exclusion is needed to abolish social exclusion and result change in the enhancement of inclusionary practices (Mutuku, 2011; Dauti, 2015). These researchers have reflected that a systematic survey of the risk factors contributing to social exclusion is the initial step forward for overcoming social exclusion and in that way ascertaining promising ways to mitigate barriers to social inclusion. Therefore, working on the real challenges of social exclusion is a step forward to reduce its multifaceted impact (Subrayen, 2011; Moriña, 2015).

On the other hand, the theoretical frameworks of SMD and AOT are set as guidance and reference to propose strategies of addressing the unpleasant experience (i.e., social exclusion and the challenges related to it) in the sampled universities. These theoretical underpinnings are

employed in most studies to create a social and physical environment which is anti-oppressive and emancipatory for individuals or groups who experienced difficult situations (Dominelli, 2002; Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). With this in mind, it is discussed below that this study is envisioned to propose strategies to eradicate exclusionary experiences and promote social inclusionary practices at higher education campuses and classrooms.

5.5.1. Strategies Claimed by Blind Students

Empirical evidences disclosed that listening to a voice of the victims who are suffering from social exclusion is the most preferable way to plan strategies to address social exclusion (Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Mutuku, 2011). Similarly, Subrayen (2011) made notes on this issue that hearing the voices, inner feelings and emotions and perspectives of those who experienced the phenomenon is much relevant to alleviate their social exclusionary experiences (p.5). Strengthening this, other researchers also described that listening and structuring the voices of those who fall in problem is a vital strategy to address barriers to social inclusion (Moriña, 2015; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Saltaga, 2017). Based on the explanations of these researchers, the best alternative approach for developing strategies of inclusion is analyzing the perspectives of SWDs. Thus, the voices of research participants should be heard to result evidence-based strategies of enhancing inclusionary practices in the classrooms and campuses of higher education settings (Dare & Nowicki, 2018). In this regard, it is worthy that the sampled universities should consider blind students voice for designing strategies of promoting inclusive university environment. Therefore, disability awareness raising and instructors training on inclusive pedagogical skills are strategies I proposed on the basis of the viewpoints of blind students. As can be seen below, these strategies are offered in the study as suggestive of the possible ways of alleviating social exclusion in the classrooms and campuses of the HEIs.

5.5.1.1. Peers' Disability Awareness Raising

It is discussed above that sighted peers' stereotypical thinking and prejudices contributed to blind students' experience of peer ignoring, Othering and lack of access to friendships. This shows that sighted peers were agents of blind students' social exclusionary experiences. It is also identified that they lack the proper knowledge and understanding of disability in general and visual impairment in particular. Accordingly, blind students adduced that their sighted peers should be given awareness creation trainings to abolish their experience of social exclusion, and to further

maximize their inclusion in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms. In the paradigm of SMD, trainings play enormous roles in the removal of social or attitudinal barriers (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). This theoretical perspective informs to professionals and educationalists that providing training is vital to create as much barrier-free social and environmental environment as possible (Mattews, 2009). In this vein, Kuno (2012) redirected that trainings on disability topical issues (e.g., disability rights awareness, disability awareness creation, and the like) on the basis of the SMD is a transformative pathway to promote successful disability inclusion and build inclusive organizational culture, too. In general, trainings in the tenet of the SMD are highly valuable to produce anti-discriminatory practices.

More specifically, the importance of disability awareness creation proposed in this study as a strategy of promoting blind students' inclusion is also suggested through various empirical evidences. For instance, de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2012) described that raising disability awareness is a new paradigm to break social barriers such as negative attitudes and stereotypes and increase social accessibility. These authors noted that positive attitudes of students can be developed as they have knowledge about disability and experience with peers with disabilities. Adding to this, Dauti (2015) reminded that continuous awareness creation on disability issues, sensitization programs and disability discourses for the perpetrators of social exclusion is vital to struggle exclusionary practices at the grassroots level. Other empirical studies added more on the necessity of disability awareness creation and sensitization to reducing the misconceptions or wrong understanding about disability (blindness) and to promote their positive attitudes (Lindsay & McPherson, 2011; Kuyini *et al.,* 2015). More recently, the study conducted by Daniela (2019) explained that awareness creation about visual impairment is crucial to dispel (dismiss) sighted peers' misconceptions, exaggerated images, prejudices from their minds. In general, I commended on the basis of blind students' perspectives that sighted peers need to be sensitized and alerted about the issues of visual impairment with a prime intention to change their misconceptions and promote positive attitudes toward their blind peers.

5.5.1.2. Instructors In-service Training Workshops on ITP

It is deeply discussed in this chapter that some of classroom teachers' whose career is teaching blind students together with sighted classmates were reluctant to comply with reasonable instructional adaptation. Also, it has been added that such problem is mainly rooted due to lack

of adequate knowledge and skills necessary to promote inclusive teaching strategies. Resultantly, it is documented that their students were marginalized in the classrooms. However, blind students claimed that their instructors should be trained in basic pedagogical areas. Their suggestions helped me to propose that their teachers require trainings in the areas of Inclusive Teaching Practices (ITPs) to primarily address the problem of classroom marginalization. Basically, the framework of AOT informs that training of teachers is preparing them for more anti-oppressive classroom practices that can promote social inclusion (Dominelli, 2002; Beckett, 2015). Thus, the training of teachers must be grounded on the anti-oppressive paradigms in an effort to create equal classroom learning opportunities for the SWVI as the sighted classmates (Subrayen, 2011). Her explanation showed that classroom teachers need to be trained for enhancing anti-oppressive pedagogical practice, which is vital to improve the social inclusion of learners with visual impairment. In this vein, researchers recounted that teachers are the prime stakeholders and role models for equity, equality and social inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Javakshishvili, 2012; Kuyini *et al.*, 2015). These researchers signified that teachers' training is a remedial suggestion to address the problem of classroom marginality, and to properly realize inclusive teaching practices. Particularly, Pantić and Florian (2015) stated that classroom teachers are "agents of change" for promoting social inclusion and social justice in the classroom contexts (p.333). According to them, preparing classroom teachers as real agents of inclusion requires the following activities: (1) nurturing commitment in their professionalism, (2) developing basic competencies in inclusive pedagogy, and (4) promoting teachers' reflexivity involving their ability to reflect on their own teaching practice.

In brief, the explanation given by Pantić and Florian (2015) generally indicates that teachers' who teach SWDs together with other students without disabilities in the inclusive classroom set up needs continuous professional updates and trainings on how to implement the principles of inclusive education. Other previous studies also advocated teachers' training for promoting inclusive classroom practices. For example, the research study conducted by Dare and Nowicki (2018) showed that classroom teachers need to be trained on areas of inclusive teaching strategies that are vital to help students to feel more included and welcomed in the classroom settings (p.248). The indispensability of teachers training is further strengthened by Alemayehu (2018). According to him, teachers' training is one of the prerequisites to make inclusion a reality in the classroom settings. He particularly stated this idea as: "**አካቶን [በክፍል ውስጥ]**

እውን ለማድረግ የማስተማር ዘዴዉ ዘርፈብዙና ለስኬት የሚያበቃ መሆን አለበት፡፡ ለዚህ አፈፃጸም ደግሞ… በጥራት የሰለጠኑ መምህራን መኖር ወሳኝ ነዉ" (ገጽ 79)፡፡ [ለትኩረት የተጨመረ]፡፡ ["*To make inclusion [in the classroom setting] a reality, diverse methods of teaching are needed. To effectively accomplish this, classroom teachers' training is crucial."]* (p.79). [Emphasis added]. Therefore, Alemayehu's conviction shows that teacher's training in the areas of inclusive education is reliably vital to the fruition of inclusive practices. More recently, other researchers also suggested that classroom teachers whose job is linked with teaching SWDs with other non-disabled peers should be trained on an ongoing basis to maximize the realization of social inclusion and inclusive education in the classroom settings (Heyder *et al.,* 2020). These authors have forwarded that teachers' training contributes to them to develop enthusiasm to teach learners with disabilities and develop basic pedagogical skills required of teaching students with special needs (p.1). In the same manner, another most up-to-date information on inclusive pedagogy shows that teachers need to be trained to use variety of teaching methods that can promote inclusive pedagogy and to enhance social inclusion in higher education classrooms (Sanger, 2020). I also explicitly understood that the classroom teachers are key individuals to the social inclusion of blind students in their classrooms. Thus, I proposed in this study that ITP is vitally needed for the teachers of blind students to help them (a) provide equal access to classroom learning opportunities; (c) respond the learning needs of their students, and finally (d) raise the social status of their students in the classroom settings and outside, too.

5.5.2. Strategies Offered Through Insights Gained from Blind Students' Experiences

Encouragingly, the insights gained from blind students' experiences of social exclusion and challenges in reference to it provided insights to propose strategies for policy changes, skill development and environmental modifications. Thus, on the basis of the lessons I learned from their experiences, I anticipated that social skills trainings and accessibility policy are pertinent strategies to address social exclusion and promote social inclusion in the sampled HEIs.

5.5.2.1. Providing Social Skills Training

It is discussed thus far that blind students faced difficulties in initiating, developing and sustaining reciprocal relationships and friendship interactions with sighted peers. Thus, the following findings are revealed and discoursed above: (a) they were easily ignored by their own sighted peers; (b) they spend most of their campus life in isolation from sighted peers, and (c)

they were vulnerable to Othering practices. In response to these challenges, I proposed that social skill training is needed for these students. Hopefully, the training may help them to develop good interaction, relationships and communication skills. In line with my conviction, researchers acknowledged that that those with profound visual impairments must be taught other compensatory social skills to help them increase their abilities to perform key social behaviors and social roles (Parvin, 2015; Lourens, 2015). According to them, environmentally appropriate social and communication skills training is needed for these students mainly because they are unable to develop visual perception due to the severity of the vision loss.

On top of the fundamental necessity of social skills trainings for blind students, Dimitrova-Radojichikj (2018) explained that these students should be trained social competence from an early age because they are unable to acquire socialization behaviors, basic communicative and visual cues or optical inputs by virtue of their vision loss. Therefore, the training is vital to improve their interaction, relationships and participation (Bruno & do Nascimento, 2019). Finally, Beteinaki (2019) forwarded a convincing idea that social skills training for blind students are vital not only to broaden their socializing, but also these can be used as a source of their personal development and empowerment. I finally resonated based on this study that the sampled universities can provide such trainings on a regular basis (e.g., in the classrooms) or through scheduled training programs.

5.5.2.2. Formulating Institutional Level Accessibility Policy

It is discussed above that blind students participated in the study faced the challenges related to inaccessibility of physical environment and notice-boards. This denied their socialization experiences in their respective campuses. Thus, I proposed in this study that institution-based legal ground is required to lessen and/or eliminate social exclusion and thereby examine inclusionary solutions. My current proposition can be informed by the SMD. Obviously, this theoretical tenet advocates policy related directions (responses) to alleviate environmental challenges and oppressive practices that affect the well-beings and day-to-day lives of PWDs (Mattews, 2009; Subrayen, 2011; Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013; Oliver, 2013). Based on these authors, the SMD informs the development of evidence-based policies in response to social, environmental and institutional barriers to interactions, relationships and participation. From this stand point, I proposed that accessibility policy is required to alleviate the accessibility

challenges and thereby promote the equalization of opportunities for blind students involved in this study. Other researchers also robustly suggested that typical policy contexts are required in HEIs to create adequate accessibility that can widen students' equalization of opportunities (Kuyini *et al.,* 2015). These researchers showed in their studies that universities are more responsible for creating inclusive practices and culture. In particular, Moriña (2015) concluded stating as: *"... in order to become inclusive, the university must commit to adopting proactive measures that eliminate the barriers preventing these students from learning and from participating fully*" (p.669). This explanation indicates that HEIs play front roles to end barriers to social inclusion and further promote inclusive excellence.

Other research evidences strengthened the above ideas that legislative and policy measures have to be put in place by the institution to mainstream the issue of disability inclusion (Nasiforo, 2015; Yohannes, 2015; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Appiah Ms, 2017). Overall, these studies suggested that disability related inclusive policy should be formulated at institutional level to widening participation; promote equal rights and opportunities for SWDs. Specifically, a recent study conducted by Bruno and do Nascimento (2019) revealed that education institutions should formulate and effectively utilize accessibility policy for students with severe visual disabilities. According to them, such policy frameworks are components of social inclusion policy to mainly create welcoming and responsive physical environments. In this particular instance, the study conducted by Asmerom (2019) advocated that specific inclusive policy or legislative actions are needed at institutional level to fulfill the accessibility requirements and to promote the equalization, and successful inclusion in the whole student body at each of the HEIs.

Improvement of physical accessibility: It is discussed above that the inaccessibility of the physical environment of sampled HEIs seriously impacted the social exclusion of blind students. Thus, it is proposed in this study that institutional policies are needed in the improvement in the accessibility of buildings and physical spaces. In this particular vein, other researchers have suggested that favorable policy environment that focuses on improvement in physical accessibility of buildings and spaces, infrastructural and architectural activities is needed to enhance equalization of opportunities in the education settings (Nimmo, 2008; Ball, 2017). In the first hand, it can be argued on the basis of the findings that the design and construction of the buildings of the sampled institutions is not compliant with Ethiopian Building Proclamation

No.624/2009. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Council of Ministers decreed a regulation concerning the design and construction of public buildings including academic institutions (FDRE, 2011). The proclamation specified that buildings and infrastructures shall be accessible to PWDs. For example, it is stated that any building design shall take "lifts" into consideration, and shall be equitable for all users including persons with disabilities (p.5910). Most importantly, under Part 5, Article 34, the building proclamation provided the following 4 peculiar facilities for disabled persons as (p.5911): (1) Any public building or a part thereof shall not prevent or hinder the movement of disabled person; (2) Manufacturing buildings shall fulfill suitable dressing rooms, bathrooms and other facilities for persons with disabilities; (3) Suitability for persons with disabilities shall be one of the criteria to be considered in given an occupancy permit for partially completed public building, and (4) In any public buildings, international standard signs shall be posted at junctions to keep persons with disabilities from any obstacles and indicate parking lots allocated for them. In addition, the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation No.650/2009, Article 40 (1) states that building designs, campus physical landscapes and other infrastructures of institutions shall take into account the interests of physically challenged students (FDRE, 2009, p.5005).

Nevertheless, the current study identified that the sampled HEIs buildings do not fulfill the requirements of regulations declared in the country. Thus, it is suggestible here that university-based policy grounds should be formulated on the basis of Ethiopian Building Proclamation No.624/2009. Thus, policies are rudimentary to improve design and construction of the buildings of the target HEIs. Further, such policy contexts will be vital to check the design and construction of buildings, and monitor their qualities, too.

Improvement of information accessibility: I proposed in this study that specialized information access mechanism is required to meet blind students' information need. In actuality, specific policy context is required to improve the accessibility of information that exists in any type and form. Importantly, my suggestion agrees with what was proposed by Subrayen (2011) that university-based legislative measures or policies are needed to improve the adequacy and accessibility of visual (print) information and notices in the university campuses. In this vein, researchers supposedly suggested different alternative ways of addressing the information needs of blind students. For example, Nasiforo (2015) found out that the use of tactile method (e.g.,

Brail map) is one of the methods to compensate for the loss of visual stimuli for blind students. In this sense, one of the blind students interviewed in the study reminded to his university as: "*We need brail-notice boards, or any other alternative means so that we can equally access the information that avails for them [sighted students]."* This indicates that compensatory means of accessing environmental information is needed to create equal opportunities for blind students as other users. Moreover, Mbugua et al. (2018) suggested that utilizing assistive technology (AT) is crucial to improve information accessibility for blind students. Upon this, a recent study conducted by Bruno and do Nascimento (2019) noted that AT is needed to facilitate the access to information for those who are totally blind. According to them, AT has an immense impact on the inclusion of individuals with severe visual impairment. The use and application of AT increase the social inclusion process of blind students as they provide better access to information (Alemayehu, 2018; Mbugua *et al.*, 2018; Bruno & do Nascimento, 2019). Therefore, it can be suggested in this study that compensation of all forms of notices posted on the university notice-boards is compulsory for blind studnets. As explained above, the right path for alternative information access mechanisms can be created on the basis of information technology (IT) and advanced assistive devices (Mbugua *et al.,* 2018).

In summary, the discussion held under sub-section 5.5 above shows that improving the effectiveness of the social inclusionary practices of blind students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan University campuses and classrooms requires concerted efforts of these institutions.

5.6. Implications of the Study for Policy and Practice

In the discussion part of this dissertation, detail implications of the findings of the study are specified across each of the themes and sub-themes. As highlighted below, more general implications of this study for instructional practices and policy formulations are identified:

5.6.1. Implications for Policy

What is presented in this section involves the policy implications of the findings of the study:

- It is explored in the study that though blind students' are physically placed at higher education classrooms and campuses together with fully sighted peers; they are still vulnerable to social exclusion due to physical, social and institutional challenges. This indicates that there is a need to formulate institutional policy that ensures the equal

socialization opportunities for blind students both in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms.

- This study identified that blind students are denied of full access to ink-print (visual) information posted on the university notice-boards. Due to this, they were denied from different academic and social opportunities that have fundamental roles for interaction, relationships and participation. This shows that there is a pressing need to develop university specific policy measures, or guidelines that particularly focus on the provision of visual information, or notices in a compensatory format. The aim is to safeguard reliable information flow for these students. Further, linking the measures developed in this priority area into practices is also needed.

5.6.2. Implications for Practice

The implications of the findings of the study for educational practice are presented herein:

- It is explored in the study that blind students are vulnerable to classroom marginality due mainly to their teachers' reluctance to comply with reasonable instructional accommodations. This reflects that classroom teachers need to be seriously encouraged to change the existing practice of teaching. For this, attention needs to be brought toward classroom teachers' trainings to promote their inclusive teaching skills and knowledge.
- As explored in the study, blind students experienced peer ignoring, Othering and limited access to friendship groups mainly due to the prejudices and stereotypical thinking of their own sighted peers. This implies that there is a strong and more important need for sighted peers' awareness creation and sensitization about visual impairment to eventually promote positive attitudes toward their peers with severe visual impairment.
- It is deeply described in the study that blind students have difficulty to initiate, establish and develop friendship interactions, and peer relationships in the classrooms and campus settings. This indicates that tailored efforts are needed to promote blind students' social interaction and communication skills training with a prime aim to help them to develop good socialization skills and behaviors. This training may help them to curb peer-group related exclusionary behaviors and relational impediments at least to the minimal level.

Lastly, next chapter highlights the summary of the whole dissertation study, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for future research avenues.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Chapter Overview

This final chapter highlighted the summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations. In addition, the strength and contributions of the study and the limitations of the study are made known. At the end, suggestions for future research avenues are also forwarded.

6.2. Summary of the Study

This study was mainly aimed at exploring and describing the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion as experienced by blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. For this reason, the following specific research questions were raised in the study:

1. What are the experiences of social inclusion for blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?
2. What are the experiences of social exclusion for blind students in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?
3. How do blind students experience social exclusion in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?
4. What strategies can be proposed toward addressing social exclusion and thereby improving social inclusion at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities?

As a whole, the dissertation is structured into six chapters. Chapter 1 opens the overall context of the dissertation. Chapter 2 highlighted review of empirical works and extant literatures. Chapter 3 elaborated the description of the research methodology and design adopted in the study. Accordingly, a descriptive phenomenology was the design deemed suited in the study. To this endeavor, a total of 8 blind students, aged between 20 and 23 years old were interviewed. They were carefully chosen utilizing purposive sampling technique. To gather the necessary data, a face-to-face semi-structured interview was utilized. To analyze the interview data, Colazzi's data analysis framework was employed. Following this, Chapter 4 presented the major findings of the study organized on the basis of the research questions (RQs): The analysis of the research data collected to answer RQ1 portrayed that equal access to basic student services and facilities (e.g.,

uniqueness being recognized), and access to personalized support services (feeling respected and access to physical interaction/contacts) represent blind students' experiences of social inclusion. On the basis of the efforts made to answer RQ2, it is found that isolated campus-living condition, being ignored, non-participation in extracurricular activities (e.g., exclusion from clubs, sports and recreations), limited access to friendships, being Othered (e.g., typified as aggressive in nature, perceived as often complaints and treated as academically weak), and classroom marginality (e.g., sidelined teaching and favoritism classroom interaction) consisted of the participants' experience of social exclusion. From the key findings organized to answer RQ3, social challenges (e.g., sighted peers' stereotypes and prejudices, and classroom teachers' reluctance), physical challenges (e.g., unfriendly physical spaces and inaccessible buildings), and institution-related challenge (e.g., inaccessible ink-print information and notices) are identified as challenging experiences of participants that contributed to social exclusion they faced in their classrooms and outside of the classrooms.

Finally, the analysis of interview data gathered under RQ4 provided useful strategies to alleviate social exclusion in two areas: (a) strategies claimed by participants (e.g., peers' disability awareness raising and instructors in-service training workshops on ITP), and (b) strategies provided through insights gained from participants' experiences (e.g., institutional level accessibility policy and social skills trainings). Chapter 5 of the dissertation accomplishes the task of the discussion of findings of the study with empirical evidences, scientific literatures including my own reflections. The last chapter is the culmination of the dissertation process. It particularly involves the summary of the study, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for future research avenues.

6.3. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following four conclusions can be drawn to the specific contexts and participants selected for the study: First, blind students faced complex and interlinked social challenges (peers negative attitudes and stereotypes), physical challenges (inaccessibility of buildings and spaces) and institutional challenges (inaccessibility of notice-boards) in their day-to-day lives in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. These challenges seriously denied their equal access to academic and socialization opportunities that are openly availed to the sighted peers, and which can play fundamental roles for interactions,

relationships and participation. From this stand point, I concluded that Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan University campuses and classrooms where the current participants learn are not barrier-free and fully welcoming for blind students who were participated in this phenomenological study. Secondly, blind students are physiscally placed at these institutions. However, they are still suffering from social exclusionary experiences such as exclusion from extracurricular activities, limited access to peer-friendship-groups, being Othered, and classroom marginality. This could lead to posit three concluding remarks: In one hand, Addis Ababa and Debre Birhan Universities' where the current participants learn are not social exclusion free learning environments. On the other hand, the status of social inclusion of blind students who pursuing their studies at the classrooms and campuses of these institutions is not properly achieved and it is still being threatened at these settings. Finally, physical access to the classrooms and campuses of these institutions does not eventually result true and meaningful social inclusion for the current participants with total visual impairments.

Thirdly, blind students who were pursuing their undergraduate studies at the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities with the fully sighted peers suffered a lot from peer ignoring and Otherization by their sighted peers. Also, they were not preferred for friendship interactions. This helped me to forward an idea that blind students interviewed in this phenomenological study are not truly accepted for real peer integration by their fully sighted peers in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. Fourthly, blind students who were participated in this qualitative phenomenological study were denied of equal access to learning opportunities in the classrooms in terms of the teachers teaching, and teacher-student interaction. For example, it is revealed in this study that their teachers have had more favored classroom interaction with sighted peers than blind students. Again, their teaching-learning methodologies did not accommodate blind students' learning needs. Resultantly, they suffered from the experience of classroom marginality. At the end, this initated me to conclude that the teaching-learning activities of classroom teachers who taught 8 students with severe vision loss in the classrooms of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities lacked inclusivity.

As noted above, the conclusions drawn can't be generalized /transferred/ to other similar settings and to the larger population at large. The reason behind is that the findings in qualitative

enquiries including the findings phenomenological studies can't be easly generalized into other similar research sites or larger research participants. By and large, the conclusions made in this study are hopped to be workable only to the specific classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan universities and to the 8 blind students (research participants) who were undergoing their studies at these university campues and classrooms.

6.4. Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, aforementioned discussion, and conclusions made, I suggested the following points to MOSHE, the sampled universities and classroom teachers. In addition, participant-specific recommendations are also forwarded.

6.4.1. Recommendations to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education

The Federal Ministry of Science and Higher Education is advised to:

1. understand the following hard facts generated based on the findings of the study and evidences from existing literatures, local and international empirical works: The physical placement of blind students in the education settings *per se* did not provide meaningful social inclusion. Being physically present, they are still vulnerable to social exclusion within the classrooms and campus environment in the sampled HEIs. Thus, the Ministry has to necessarily (a) revisit the national special needs education strategy; (b) monitor the social inclusion status of these students in the sampled universities, and (b) take serious measures to promote true and effective social inclusion for these students.
2. assist the sampled universities to prepare specific inclusion policy frameworks that, first and foremost, stand for the ultimate equalization of opportunities for blind students in comparison to the fully sighted students.
3. insist the sampled universities to design and construct buildings in accordance with the Ethiopian Building Proclamation No.624/2009.
4. continually undergo supervisory tasks, provide feedbacks and evaluative comments on the accessibility of buildings and physical spaces of the sampled universities.

6.4.2. Recommendations to the Sampled Higher Education Institutions

The universities selected for the current study have to:

1. provide practical trainings for classroom teachers who teach blind students in the key areas of inclusive teaching strategies. Expectantly, the training will help teachers to

develop awareness and knowledge on the specific classroom needs of their students, instructional modifications and finally to seek out ways on how to comply with reasonable instructional accommodations while teaching blind students together with other fully sighted students.

2. prepare and deliver training packages for blind students on the topical issues of social skills. The training is a basic condition to potentially enhance their skills of social interaction and communication and thereby to provide better knowledge on how to initiate, develop and sustain relationships with the sighted peers, and others, too.

3. plan and implement awareness creation and sensitization workshop for sighted studnets about disability (blindness), social inclusion and exclusion issues during their first year studies. This is quite possibly to result change in the negative attitudes and stereotypic views and behaviors of sighted peers toward their blind peers.

4. develop separate accessibility policy contexts embedding the concerns of equalization of opportunities for blind students in all situations comparable to that of the sighted peers and to decidedly combat the challenges related to inadequate accessibility in terms of the physical environment. In turn, this will help blind students to lead an independent and dignified campus-life, and to be fully included in the social lives of their sighted peers and the university communities at large.

5. mainstream all the issues of blind students in their quarterly, annual, semi-annual, yearly and strategic plans and courses of actions. This helps the universities to give more concern and weight regarding the social inclusion and equalization of these students.

6. design specialized and compensatory information access mechanism for blind students. In this vein, information centers can be developed and equipped accordingly with assistive technology to particularly cater their information needs in all campus-matters.

6.4.3. Recommendations to the Classroom Teachers

The students participated in this study mostly suffered from marginality within the classrooms. Thus, the classroom teachers whose career is teaching blind students together with other fully sighted students shall better to:

1. enrich their students' equal classroom learning opportunities through modifying their instructional process in accordance with their students' learning needs and interests. They should seek best ways in which the classroom needs of students can be satisfied. For example, they need to simultaneously speak or read out while writing on the board. Doing this, they can make sure that they are implementing inclusive practices in all components of their teaching-learning processes in their classrooms.
2. see all students as much equal as possible in their classrooms. Thus, they should establish the same pattern of interaction to all students in the same classroom level.
3. have to be supportive and facilitative in the process of social inclusion within their classrooms and even outside of the classroom. In this respect, it is advisable for teachers to utilize cooperative instructional (learning) strategies that can help to maintain meaningful peer-to-peer and teacher-student classroom ties.
4. take initial responsibility to combat discriminatory practices against blind students, and to make their social inclusion more visible in the classrooms and campus environments.

6.4.4. Recommendations to Blind Students

The blind students who were engaged in the current study need to:

1. acknowledge their identity as blind individuals so that they can confidently interact with the sighted peers, build self-esteem for themselves which may help them feel comfortable to become actively involved in social (peer) relationships and socializing activities together with their sighted peers.

2. be self-empowered in the best light possible through displaying maximum possible academic potentials and unique skills in the classroom settings and outside. This may help them to: (a) get acceptance by teachers in the classroom settings, which is vital to receive equal classroom treatments; (b) get peer acceptance, and change peers' negative attitudes and stereotypes and to possibly avert being Othered, rejected or ignored.

3. reduce dependency on the sighted peers. It has been confirmed in the study that sighted peers often distance themselves from blind students because they perceive that they are academically weak and dependent on their shoulders for every day-to-day activities. Thus, blind students shouldn't witness themselves that they are really help-seekers, or

dependent on the sighted peers. Instead, they are advised to show to the sighted peers that they can stand alone by themselves!

4. take the lead to initiate relationships with sighted individuals. In addition, they have to be eager to participate in different extracurricular activities on their campuses. This doubtlessly enhances their opportunity to meet others, establish friendships and develop long-lasting relationships with the sighted peers, and others, too.

6.5. Strengths and Contribution of the Study

The current study has the following strengths. First, it has well-documented the perspectives and/or voice of blind students. Therefore, the experiences of social inclusion, exclusion and the challenges of social exclusion are revealed as narrated by students themselves. Relatedly, the voices of paticipants are highly valued to build inclusive excellence in the sampled universities. Accordingly, the strategies to buffer social exclusion are partly proposed on the basis of their perspectives. Further, their perspectives are likely to be used as a source of information to design psychosocial intervention strategies in education settings. The other strength of the study includes the sample (participant) composition. It has considered the shared experiences of male and female participants, which were vital to look into the phenomena in terms of the feelings, emotions or perspectives of both sexes. Thus, the study ensured fairness in the exploration and description of the phenomena studied involving equal number of males and females. As a final point, the study made known the phenomena that are commonly experienced by blind students in two distinct universities. Thus, the findings presented in this dissertation are shared experiences among 8 students who were attending their undergraduate studies in Addis Ababa University (4 of the participants) and in Debre Berhan University (the rest 4 of the participants).

On the other hand, the following involves my reflections on the contribution of the study to the field of knowledge: Primarily, it has generated evidences toward understanding social inclusion, social exclusion of blind students, and the challenges linked with their exclusionary experiences on the basis of their perspectives. In this vein, it may fill the gap observed in the local research studies and research-based knowledege concerning these phenomena. Yet again, it is likely to provide insider knowledge (perspective) about the phenomena studied for the special needs education professionals, teachers, inclusive educationalists and policy makers. At this

instant, the phenomena studied may have fundamental contributions to social inclusion and exclusion literatures. Secondly, the detailed description of descriptive phenomenological research processes implemented in this study may lay important lights to develop methodological knowledge for future researchers, reviewers and others interested in the phenomenological research design.

6.6. Limitations of the Study

One may observe a number of limitations in this study. Overwhelmingly, the major limitations in the study include what it did not fulfill. I categorized the limitations of the current study into three types: Methodological limitation, limitation in generalizability (re-applicability) and limitation in theme identification. Methodologically, it should be acknowledged that my study faced two limitations: Firstly, it was conducted entirely adopting the principles of qualitative phenomenology, and hence it was limited in explaining social inclusion and exclusions of participants in quantitative methods of enquiry. Secondly, due to the explorative nature of the study, and the design selected, the study undertook only semi-structured interview guide as a research tool to collect data. However, the interview data were not corroborated with other methods of qualitative data collection such as observation and focused group discussion. This is to briefly mean that the research design has limited itself in the utilization of more than one method of data collection for the purpose of triangulation. However, I took the following attempts to achieve triangulation in the study: (a) Reviewing different scientific literatures and empirical evidences to undergo discussion on the findings of the current study, and (b) giving heightened values for both the etic and emic perspectives while presenting the findings. The study also faced limitation of triangulation in terms of the source of data (from whom the data were collected). In the study, data were collected only from blind students as most phenomenological research studies require the insider perspective in an effort to deeply explore individuals' lived experiences on the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Nevertheless, the study did not consider collecting data from the outsider perspectives such as other SWDs, classroom teachers, administrative body and faculty staff, special needs education resource personnel and center coordinators.

In terms of generalizability, which refers to the applicability of the findings in other contexts, the study confronted with the shortcomings of what is described herein: In one hand, it

did not involve a large and randomly selected sample of participants from varying higher education institutions. It considerably involves only 8 undergraduate blind students that were purposefully selected from two universities. This restricted the generalizability (transferability) of the findings of the study to other higher education settings. Thus, the research outcome in this study is context-specific as it is abundantly focused the exploration and description of the phenomena among blind students in Addis Ababa and Debere Berhan Universities. Hence, it is predominantly defined and understood in the contexts of these HEIs. Also, the findings of the study may not be transferred to other types of SWDs because my participants have their own unique personal experience and disability identity which is different from the personal experience and disability identity of other SWDs. Further, the findings can't be generalized to students without disabilities perhaps for the same reason. On this account, I need to posit an idea that a more comprehensive study can be carried out in the future in statistical way to ensure the generalizability of findings.

The third considerable limitation of the study comes from identification of themes and sub-themes pertaining to blind students' experience of social inclusion. In this dissertation, limited number of themes and sub-themes of social inclusion were emerged from the interview data. Thus, social inclusion was not adequately explored, and reported in the study that blind students' experiences of social inclusion are lesser than their experience of social exclusion in the classrooms and campus settings. Overall, it seems to me that I and my research participants have given more emphasis to explore social exclusion than social inclusion. I mentioned two reasons why we gave considerable priority on social exclusion: Firstly, I took precedence to know their experiences of social exclusion first because I understand that it is a social threat for my participants to succeed in their participation and learning in the sampled HEIs. It also becomes clear to me that their experience of social inclusion can seriously be threatened by their experience of social exclusion. Thus, I was urged and deeply eagered to document their lived experiences of social exclusion. Secondly, the participants were also more likely to reflect their experiences of social exclusion than their experiences in social inclusion in their university life as it is one of their sensitive and painful experiences. This is probably on the following two bases: In one hand, they have had more of the unforgettable memories of their experiences of exclusion than inclusion. This part of my assertion is supported by other researchers. For instance, Wadegaonkar et al. (2015) echoed that individuals with visual impairments have more

chances to remember their experiences of exclusion than inclusion. Other researchers also mirrored that individuals have more memories of being excluded than being included (Nugent *et al.,* 2016). According to them, the experiences of social exclusion are more easily memorable and visible than the experience of inclusion. In relation to this, psychologists concluded that human beings by nature remember more of their negative experiences (e.g., exclusion, rejection, etc.) than positive life experiences (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, Vohs, 2001). These psychologists reminded in their article that *bad is stronger than good* and thus individuals are more likely to remember their negative life events than positive ones. In this vein, I understood that they were not expressly reporting social inclusion because they have taken it as positive and normally existing social manner. However, the research design adopted in this study has methodological advantages in that it allows later investigation and courses of actions for further research (Cuthill, 2002). Accordingly, this part of the limitation can be a motivation for researchers to conduct further study on the social inclusion of blind studnets in similar settings.

6.7. Suggestions for Future Research Avenues

The following research areas are aroused as suggestions for further research to be conducted:

1. The study has focused entirely on exploring the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion, and the challenges related to their social exclusion among blind students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. However, the impact of social exclusion in focus is an unexplored area since it is beyond the scope of this research work. Thus, it is worthwhile to claim that future study might be conducted focusing on the consequence of social exclusion on the educational, social and psychological lives of these students.
2. The current study identified very limited experience of social inclusion among blind students. Then, little is known about this phenomenon as experienced by these students. I suggest here that there is a need to conduct further research to know more about this phenomenon in the classrooms and campus level of the sampled universities.
3. Most importantly, researchers may potentially conduct a study on the strategies the blind students' utilize to cope with the threats of social exclusion. Such study can help to prepare sets of evidence-based training packages of developing effective

coping skills for these students. In addition to this, such training may help to prepare these students for sets of tailored academic and psychosocial positive coping skills that may help them to manage and/or deal socially challenging experiences such as social exclusion, and to promote adjustments in their campus-life.

4. In the future, further explorative study can be conducted on explicating the perspectives of other sighted individuals (e.g. peers, teachers and staff members) focusing on how and why the blind students become socially excluded in the classrooms and campuses of HEIs. Conversely, such a study is extremely important to facilitate, restructure or redesign the requirements of social inclusion.
5. Since this study is qualitative phenomenological type conducted with small number of participants in two public universities in Ethiopia, the extent to which the results found can be applied to other similar universities is not known. Hence, future research can be conducted in different higher education institutions and utilizing quantitative research methodologies and involving a relatively large research sample to sensibly ensure generalizability.
6. In the study, it is identified that teachers' reluctance principally contributed to their students' classroom marginality. However, further research studies are needed to examine other teacher-related risk factors closely linked to the social exclusion of blind students in the classroom level. For example, researchers may analyze teachers' classroom implicit bias and whether it impacts their students' classroom marginality.
7. The study identified that the social, physical and institutional challenges are related to the social exclusion of blind students at the sampled universities. Essentially, the academic challenges for this purpose were not explored in the study. Thus, other researchers may explore academic challenges as related to blind students' experience of social exclusion.
8. Finally, the other research possibility drawn from the current study involves conducting independent studies about the experience of social inclusion and exclusion across female and male blind students. This may somewhat help to design gender-based intervention strategies to combat social exclusion and enhance social inclusion.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Research Permission and Cooperation

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Addis Ababa University
Department of Special Need Education

Ref. No: SNED/061/10/17
Date: December 13, 2017

To Whom It May Concern

Tadesse Beza Gebretsadik ID. **No. GSR/0455/07** is a PhD student at the Department of Special Needs Education, Addis Ababa University. He is engaged in research work for his Dissertation that requires the cooperation of various institutions like yours. Hence, I kindly request your Organization to allow him get access to data and relevant materials for research. I would like to express, in advance, my appreciation and thanks for your good cooperation.

With regards,

Tirussew Teferra (Professor)
Chair, Department of Special Needs Education

☎ 011-1-24 95 13 ✉ 1176 Fax No: - Attention to Special Needs Education 0111242719
መልስ ሊጽፉልን የ ኛን ቁጥርና ቀን ይጥቀሱ
In replying please quote our Ref No

Appendix B: Research Participants' Information Sheet

School of Graduate studies
College of Education and Behavioral Studies

Department of Special Needs Education

Information Sheet to Participants

First of all, thank you very much for your coming. My name is Tadesse Beza, a Ph.D. student at Department of Special Needs Education, Addis Ababa University. My dissertation study is entitled as: *Lived Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Blind Students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities: A Phenomenological Study***.** The overallpurpose of the study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of social inclusion and exclusion of blind students as they learn with other sighted peers within the classroom settings and campuses at Addis Ababa University, Sidist Kilo Campus, and Debre Berhan University, Debre Berhan Campus. I will be conducting this study as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy in Special Needs Education from Addis Ababa University. Therefore, the data needed to achieve this aspiration will be collected from you. To do so, I, the researcher, need to fill out face-to-face semi-structured interviews with you. Before, I request you to participate in the study; I need to provide you the following information related to this study. The information will help you to understand everything concerning the study that I am striving to undertake with you, and to finally pass decisions whether to voluntarily participate in the study or not.

1. This study primarily aimed at exploring your experiences of social inclusion, exclusion and the challenging experiences to your social exclusion (inclusion). You see, the problem is your own concern in many instances. Thus, your participation in my study will contribute a lot for our agenda of social inclusion, which we need most in this era. In particular, your views or perspectives on social exclusion will be contributing a lot for building inclusive university and curbing the challenges that are barriers to your social inclusion, here. Likewise, the information from the research may become vital to your instructors and other stakeholders working in the areas of teaching-learning of students

with disabilities like you to consider better ways of promoting your inclusion. Thus, participation in this study and being part of it is as a fringe benefit itself.

2. I also need to inform you that I have received permission and cooperation to conduct the study from your university mainly because (a) this research will be conducted for the academic purpose only. It is mainly intended to get a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in the field of special needs education from Addis Ababa University, and (b) it is hopefully vital to explore the experience of social exclusion, and the challenges related to it that can potentially affect our effort toward promoting social inclusion.
3. While interviewing, I will use tape-recorder to record your voices and also I may keep all the information you give me through my note-book. The interview will be going on the basis of the interview guide I prepared. Each data collection will probably take 50 - 60 minutes on different days and sessions.
4. All of the sort of information you gave me will be kept safely and locked in private/secretive place, and will be completely destroyed or burned after the final dissemination of my dissertation. Of all, it is only me to have the access to the raw interview data. It is the final aggregate product or findings of the study which will be overtly accessed for others. In the future, the results of the study may be published only for the purpose of my academic career and professionalism.
5. All of the interview data you convey to me and any of your personal identities will be kept confidential in that it will not be divulged to anyone other than me. To respect your privacy and personal identities, your actual (real) names and addresses (e.g., residences, university-campus or department) will not be disclosed in any of the research report. Particularly, you will be given a pseudonym (on agreement between you and me) to be referred in the report at any point where I quote your narratives and personal constructs.
6. As a general instruction for this semi-structured interview, I need to inform you the following: (a) you have the freedom to answer the questions based on your knowledge, feelings, perceptions or experiences; (b) there is no right or wrong answer for the questions, and (c) you can describe and give further elaborations as many points as possible without following order and procedures.

7. There won't be any direct or indirect physical risks such as injuries, or psychological risks such as discomfort, distress or social disadvantages as a result of your participation in the study. If you possibly become anxious, stressed or depressed while sharing difficult exclusionary experiences, you should not worry. We can pause the interview session, and even we can make up another appointment for extra discussion at any of the other suitable time for you. We will set date and time of the interview at your interest. To meet for the interviews, I will call you through the cell phone you have given to me.
8. Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to participate or not. Even you can withdraw from the study at any time you need. If you agree to participate, I will provide you an informed consent form later to know your verbal consent just before conducting the main interviews of the study. At this point, I will read the informed consent statement for you to help you to participate in my study. Indeed, if you are disagreeing, you have the right to leave it without punishment or criticisms.
9. Please do not hesitate to convey any concerns or enquiries about my research. If you are volunteering to participate in my study, I contact you any time convenient to you for further series of one-on-one interview.

Looking forward to meeting you again!

Tadesse Beza
Department of Special Needs Education
College of Education and Behavioral Studies
School of Graduate studies
Addis Ababa University

Appendix C: Research Participants' Informed Consent Form

School of Graduate studies

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

Department of Special Needs Education

Title of Research Project: *Lived Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Blind Students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities: A Phenomenological Study*.

Researcher' Address: Department of Special Needs Education, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Researcher's Name: Tadesse Beza GEBRETSADIK

Dear students,

I am a Ph.D. student at Addis Ababa University, Department of Special Needs Education. As part of the requirements for my doctoral study, I'm doing a research study on the title provided above. The study will be conducted based on the data given by university students like you. However, your participation in this study is totally voluntary. Based on the information I provided you in the other day, you are politely invited to participate in this research study because you are the right sources of information I need for my study. Therefore, it would be my pleasure if I get your consent. I would be glad to comply with ethical procedures mentioned for my research purpose below. I would like to read the following consent statements and describe each as much loud as possible to you. Again, I will answer any questions, or reflect on any of the doubts or comments you may have about the study in general and each consent statements in particular.

Statements by the researcher

In addition to the information I mentioned to you before, I would like to assure you that the following important points will be carefully considered throughout the study:

- The information obtained from you will be used only to achieve the purpose of the study.
- I need to guarantee that no risks are put in a situation where you may be harmed physically or psychologically as a result of your participation.
- I need to ensure you that your privacy will be maintained through the removal of your names during data collection and presentation of the findings. Again, any personal

information that reveals your identities will be kept strictly confidential in that I will not share it to anyone else in anyways. Finally, the answers, views or particular experiences obtained from you will be explained anonymously in that the results of the study will be reported without divulging any identifying characteristics and information. Nevertheless, the results of the study will be reported to the public honestly. Again, the information obtained in this study may be published in academic journals, used for further research works or it may be presented at scientific meetings or research conferences. Additionally, I will keep the data in a secure place such as protecting it in my personal computer.

- As research participants, your rights will be safeguarded. Specifically, participation in the study will be completely voluntary. You have the right not to take part in the study at all. If you want to stop or withdraw during the process of data collection, you can do that at any time you wish without any negative consequence such as penalty.

Thank you for considering my request!

Cell phone: +251926532640

Email: tadbez21@gmail.com

If you have some questions, doubts or comments, please do not hesitate to ask. Otherwise, if you agree to participate, you will finger-print your name at the bottom which will help me to know your informed decision whether you would like to voluntarily participate in my study, or not.

Participants' consent

I, _____, am able to confirm that the researcher has read loudly his own statements that allow me additional information about his study. He also provided me the Participants' Information Sheet above. The following statements are also my own reflections:

- I understand on the basis of the Participants' Information Sheet that the prime purpose of the study is exploring and describe the experiences of social inclusion and exclusion among blind students in higher education in Ethiopia, focusing at Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. Hence, I become aware that the data collected will be entirely used to attain this purpose.
- I understand on the basis of the Information Sheet prepared for this study that data will be collected through in-depth individual interviews which will likely to take 50 - 60 minutes, each. It is also made known to me that the task of data collection through interviews will

be tape/audio recorded. Additionally, I become communicated that I will meet the researcher at any time and place I am comfortable with, solely on my will!

- I am fully informed that the concerns of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the study. I am also told that the information obtained in this study may be published, shared for the third party, used for further research works or presented at scientific meetings.
- My rights, as research participants, have been well explained to me. Of all, it was made clear to me that participation in the study will be completely voluntary. I have full- fledged rights even not to participate in the study at all, to stop or withdraw from the participation at any time I wish without any negative consequence such as penalty.
- I have had opportunities to ask questions, and reflect my doubts, comments, and any questions I asked were answered to my satisfaction so that I agree to participate in his study entitled as: *Lived Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Blind Students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities: A Phenomenological Study*.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Semi-structured Interview Guide (English)

School of Graduate studies

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

Department of Special Needs Education

Interview Questions for Blind Students

Introduction

Dear participant, a very well welcome! This interview guide is prepared to collect data from you to conduct a doctoral study entitled: *Lived Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Blind Students in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities: A Phenomenological Study***.** The guide has four parts. The first part consisted of questions about your background information and previous life history. It represents different sections. The second part is about your previous inclusionary and exclusionary experience at home-environment and schools. The third part includes the central components of the guide that contains series of key open-ended interview questions about your experience of social inclusion/exclusion, how your experience of social exclusion occurs at classroom and campus level, and finally possible strategies of addressing social exclusion in higher education campuses and classrooms. All the interview questions are organized based on the research questions. The final part is closure and exit of the interview session. While replying, be informed that there is no right or wrong answer. You can freely give ideas as you feel and want! Once again, thank you so much for your coming!

The researcher

Part I: Background Information and Previous Life History

Section A: Demographic Information

- Gender of the interviewee: _____ Age: _____
- Where and when were you born?
- What religion do you follow?
- Would you please tell me about your blindness condition? (Probes: Onset, and cause)
- How do you feel about being a person with total vision loss?

Section B: Familial Background

- With whom have you grown up? (Probes: Would you tell me more about your family? How many siblings do you have?)
- Please describe your family living status? (Probes: How is their economic and education condition?)

Section C: Educational Background

- Where did you attend your elementary school? Is it boarding or non-boarding?
- Where did you attend your secondary and preparatory schools?

Section D: University education

- Name of the University: _____ Year of study: _____
- When did you join this University? _____
- Faculty/College:_____ Department and field of study: _____

Part II: Experience of Social inclusion/ Exclusion at Home-environment and Schools

2.1.At home-environment

2.1.1. Tell me the way you brought up in your family?

2.1.2. How was your relationship with family members? (Probe: How the family provide support to you and other siblings?)

2.1.3. Would you please describe the challenges you faced at home environment?

2.1.4. What have you been prevented at the home? Remember.

2.2.At neighborhood environment

2.2.1. How well was your relationship with others in the neighborhood?

2.2.2. Would you recall any instance of relationship challenges you faced in the neighborhood settings, if any?

2.3.At elementary, secondary or preparatory school settings

2.3.1. How was your interaction and relationship with sighted peers around you? (Probe: Did you have equal opportunity to participate in school-based activities as the sighted students? If not, why?)

2.3.2. Can you tell me the number of your sighted friends? (Probe: What prevented you from forming more sighted friends?)

2.3.3. How was your interaction with teachers and other staff members? What factors affected your interaction?

2.3.4. Being a blind student in schools, can you please tell me any difficulty in terms of the relationships with others and participation in activities?

Part III: Main Interview Questions: Social inclusion, exclusion, challenges and Strategies

3.1.General Introduction: Preamble Questions

3.1.1. After entry here, how do you feel? (Probe: Would you please describe how you feel to be a student with sighted peers in the same classrooms/campus?)

3.1.2. Please remember your first, second or third year time: Describe your social relationships with others in the classrooms and outside.

3.1.3. Being a student here, how do you feel about the following: relationship with others, and participation in activities, making friends? How many sighted friends do you have? How much they are fairly close to you?)

3.1.4. For the most part on the campus, could you please share me your experience of involvement and participation in activities and events?

3.1.5. How do you spend your time on the university campus? (Probes: With whom do you spend most of your time? Why?

3.1.6. In general, what is your feeling of being a student here? (Probe: To what do you feel you are belonged to in this campus: Classroom, peer group, etc?)

3.2. Experience of Social Inclusion: Open-ended Interview Questions

3.2.1. Following your transition from general secondary schools to the current university, do you feel socially included in classrooms and campuses?

3.2.2. When do you feel included in the classroom? (Probe: What makes you feel part of the classroom? Outside of the classrooms?

3.2.3. Could you mention some inclusive practices in the contexts within the classrooms? Outside of the classrooms?

3.2.4. Being together with sighted students in this campus, what equal access/opportunity do you have in comparison to sighted peers here?

3.2.5. Once again, could you please share your experiences friendships here? (Probe: Dou you feel accepted by sighted peers?)

3.2.6. Would you describe thephysical access to commonplaces in this campus? If yes, what are these?

3.2.7. I would like to know more about what experience of social inclusion you would like to share. (Probe: For example, do the sighted individuals/peers provide you support? If yes, what type? What is the advantage of getting help from them?)

3.3.Experience of Social Exclusion: Open-ended Interview Questions

3.3.1. After entry to the current HEI, do you feel socially excluded (Probe: When do you feel excluded? What makes you feel excluded or left out?)

3.3.2. Being physically placed in the same classrooms together with other sighted classmates; do you think that you are equally included in all classroom matters as the sighted classmates? (Probe: Please tell me as much trustworthily as possible the discriminatory practices in the classroom settings? Mention the reasons behind for the discriminatory practices in the classroom)

3.3.3. In light of your experiences, what was a situation in which you felt different in the classrooms or outside? (Probe: How do sighted students perceive/treat you in terms of themselves? Give precise example).

3.3.4. In your opinion, how do you describe your relationship with sighted peers teachers and other staff members?

3.3.5. How is your social life with sighted peers? (Probe: Do you have regular contact with them? Do you frequently meet, greet, and socialize with them? If yes, how often? If not, I need you to mention the reason behind).

3.3.6. Can you tell me about your experience of a moment when you participated in a social activities and/or events in your classrooms or outside?

3.4.Challenges Related to Social Exclusion: Open-ended Interview Questions

3.4.1. Would you remember any challenge you faced on the basis of your blindness? (Probe: What are the influences of these challenges? I need to know about it).

3.4.2. Could you please tell me specific circumstances that affected you from making friendships, relationships and participation in social activities?

3.4.3. Would you please mention how save the environment is for you? (Probe: In what circumstances it affected you?)

3.4.4. In your view, what do you think about the sighted people's attitudes about you? (Probe: How do you think they perceive, or treat you? Do you fear being prejudiced, or stereotyped? What type? If yes, please tell me the reasons.)

3.5.Strategies of Addressing Social Exclusion: Open-ended Interview Questions

3.5.1. In spite of your physical placement in the classrooms/campuses, what do you think can be done to promote your equalization of opportunities in comparison to sighted peers?

3.5.2. I need to hear from you how promoting more social interaction, relationships and participation be possible here? (Probe: What could be done to improve your social inclusion in the classroom/outside?)

3.5.3. Please tell me what your university should do differently to prevent social exclusion? (Probe: I need to hear from you about what particular strategies you think should be put in place to prevent social exclusion?)

3.5.4. At the end, what are your aspirations, expectations and hopes regarding the future of university students with visual impairment?

Part IV: Closure and Exit of the Interview Sessions

- I appreciate listening to your thoughts and stories.Your time is, indeed, cherished! Is there anything else you would like to add and share more before we close?
- Do you have additional issues you would like to talk about? If so, please feel free to add before we close.

Thank you so much for your kind cooperation!

Appendix E: Semi-structured Interview Guide (Amharic)

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የተማሪዎች ቃለ መጠይቅ መመሪያ

ወድ የዚህ ቃለ-መጠይቅ ተሳታፊ!

እንኳን በደህና መጣህ/ሽ/፡፡ የዚህ ቃለ-መጠይቅ መመሪያ ዋና ዓላማ በከፍተኛ ትምህርት ተቋማት በተለይም በአዲስ አበባና በደብረ ብርሃን ዩኒቨርስቲዎች የሚማሩ አይነስውራን ተማሪዎች የማህበራዊ አካታችነት (social inclusion) እና የሚያጋጥማቸውን የማህበራዊ መገለል (social exclusion) ልምድን በማሰስ ምርምር በማድረግ የዶክትሬት ድግሪ ማሟያ ፅሁፍ ለማዘጋጀት ነዉ፡፡ መመሪያዉ አራት /4/ ዋና ዋና ክፍሎች አሉት፡፡

የመጀመሪያዉ ክፍል የተማሪዎችን ማህበራዊ ዳራ እና መነሻ መሰረት ያደረገ መረጃ ለማሰባሰብ የተዘጋጀ ነዉ፡፡ ሁለተኛዉ ክፍል ደግሞ በቤትና አካባቢ እንዲሁም ትምህርት ቤት ስለነበረ የማህበራዊ መካተትና መገለል ሁኔታዎች ለማየት መነሻ የሚሆን ነዉ፡፡ሶስተኛዉ ክፍል የዚህ ጥናት ዋና ዋና መረጃዎች የሚሰበስቡበት ሲሆን ይህም ያልተገደቡ (open ended) እና በከፊል የተቀናበሩ (semi-structured) የቃለ መጠይቁን ጥያቄቆችን የሚይዝ ነው፡፡ ይህም የሚከታተሉትን ነጥቦች ይይዛል፡- የማህበራዊ መካተት ልምድ፣ የማህበራዊ መገለል ልምድ፣ ለማህበራዊ መገለል አስተዋፅኦ ያደረጉ ተግዳሮቶች ዊይም አጋላጮች (risk factors) ና ማህበራዊ መገለልን ለማስወገድ መደረግ ያለባቸዉ ተግባራት ናቸዉ፡፡ ጥያቄዎቹ ሲዘጋጅም በምርምሩ መሰራተዊ ጥያቄዎች (basic research questions) መሰረት ነው፡፡

የመመረያው የመጨረሻ ክፍል ደግሞ የቃል መጠይቁ መውጫና መዝጊያ የሚደረግበት አውድ ነው፡፡ ለቃ መጠይቁ መልስ በምትሰጥበት (ጭበት) ጊዜ ትክክል ወይም ስህተት የሚባል መልስ አይኖርም፡፡ የመሰለህን (ሽን) ሀሳብ በነፃነት መስጠት ትችላለህ (ሽ)፡፡

ተመራማዊው!

ክፍል አንድ፡- መነሻና ደራ ሁኔታ

ሀ. ደራ መረጃ

- ዖታ _____
- እድሚ_____
- የት እና መቼ ተወለድክ(ሽ) ?
- ሀይማኖት _____
- የአይነ-ስዉርነት ሁኔታ (የመነሻ ምክንያት፤ ጊዜ)
- ሙሉ በሙሉ አይነ-ስዉር በመሆንህ(ሽ) ምን ይሰማሀል(ሻል) ?

ለ. የቤተሰብ ደራ

- ከማን ጋር እና እንዴት አደግህ(ሽ)?
- ስለ ቤተሰብ ሁኔታ አብራራ(ሪ)፡፡
- የቤተሰብ የትምህርት ደረጃ ምን ይመስላል?
- የቤተሰብ የኢኮኖሚና ማህበራዊ ሁኔታ ምን ይመስላል?

ሐ. የትምህርት ደራ

- የመጀመሪያ ደረጃ ትምህርት የት አጠናቀቅህ(ሽ)?
- ሁለተኛና መሰናዶ ት/ቤቶችን የት አጠናቀቅህ(ሽ)?

መ. የዩንቨርስቲ ትምህርት ሁኔታ

- አሁን ያለህ(ሽ) ዩንቨርስቲ ስም_____ ስንተኛ አመት ተማሪ ነህ(ሽ)?
- መቼ ነዉ ወደ ዚህ ዩንቨርስቲ የገባህዉ(ሽዉ)?
- ምን ትምህርት ክፍል /ፋካሊቲ/ ነህ(ሽ)? የምታጠናው የት/ት ዘርፍ?

ክፍል ሁለት፡- በቤት፤ በአካበቢና በትምህርት ቤቶች የነበረ የማህበራዊ መካተት /መገለል/ ልምድ

2.1. በቤት ዉስጥ

2.1.1. በቤት ዉስጥ የነበረህ(ሽ) የአስተዳደግ ሁኔታ ምን ይመስላል?

2.1.2. ከቤተሰብ አባላት ጋራ የነበረህ ተግባቦትና ግንኙነት ምን ይመስላል?

2.1.3. በቤት ዉስጥ የሚገጥምህ ተግዳሮት ምን ምን ነብር?

2.1.4. በቤት ዉስጥ ከምን ከምን ነገሮች ትከለከላለህ(ሽ)?

2.2. በቤት አካባቢ(ጎረቤት)

2.2.1. በጎረቤት ከሌሎች ጋር የነበረህ ግንኙነት ምን ይመስላል?

2.2.2. በጎረቤቶቻችሁ ከሌሎች አቻዎችህ (ሽ) ና አይናማ ሰዎች ጋር በምን በምን ጉዳይ ግንኙነት ነበረህ (ሽ)?

2.3. በትምህርት ቤት ዉስጥ

2.3.1. ከሌሎች አይናማ ተማሪዎች ጋር ያለህ(ሽ) ግብብነት ምን ይመስል ነበር? (ማብራሪያ፡- በትምህርት ቤት ተጓዳኝ ክበባትና ማህበራዊ ተግባራት ላይ የመሳተፍ እድል ነበረህ(ሽ)?ካልሆነ ለምን?

2.3.2. ስንት ጓደኞች አለህ(ሽ)?(ማብራሪያ፡- በጓደኝነት ምስረታ ላይ ተፅዕኖ የሚያሳድሩ ነገሮች ምን ምን ናቸዉ?)

2.3.3. ከመምህራንና ከሌሎች የስታፍ አባላት ጋር ግንኙነት እንዳይኖርህ(ሽ) አስተዋፅኦ የሚያደርጉ ነገሮች ምን ምን ናቸዉ?

2.3.4. እንደ አንድ አይነ-ስዉር ተማሪ ከግንኙነት ምስረታና ተሳታፊ አኳያ የሚገጥምህ(ሽ) ተግዳሮት ምንድ ነዉ?

ክፍል ሶስት፡- ዋና ዋና ጥያቄዎች፡- ማህበራዊ አካታችነት ፣መገለል ፣የማህበራዊ መገለል ምክንያቶች እና መገለልን ለመቀነስ የሚወሰዱ እርምጃዎች

3.1. አጠቃላዩ የመግቢያ ጥያቄቆች

3.1.1. ወደዚህ ግቢ ከገባህ(ሽ) በኋላ ምን ተሰማህ(ሽ)፡፡

3.1.2. በዚህ ግቢ ተማሪ ሆነህ(ሽ) ሳለ በክፍል ውስጥ እና ከክፍል ውጭ ከሌሎች ጋር ምን አይነት ግንኙነት ነበረህ(ሽ)?

3.1.3. በዚህ ግቢ ተማሪ ሆነህ(ሽ) ሳለ ከሌሎች ጋር ስላለህ (ሽ) ግንኙነትና ማህበራዊ ተሳታፊ ሁኔታ ምን ይሰማሀል(ሻል)? በጓደኝነት ምስረታ ዙሪያ ምን ትላለህ(ሽ)?

3.1.4. በዚህ ግቢ ውስጥ በሌሎች ተማሪዎች ማህበራዊ ህይወት ውስጥ የመግባትና የመሳተፍ ሁኔታህ(ሽ) ምን ይመስላል?

3.1.5. ብዙውን ግዜህን(ሽን) እንዴትና ከማን ጋር ታሳልፋለህ(ሽ)?

3.1.6. በአጠቃላይ በዚህ ግቢ ተማሪ በመሆንህ (ሽ) ምን ይሰማሀል(ሻል)?

3.2. የማህበራዊ ተካታችነት ልምድ

3.2.1.የሁለተኛ ደረጃ ትምህርትህን(ሽን) አጠናቀህ(ሽ) ወደዚህ ግቢ ከመጣህ(ሽ) በኋላ የማህበራዊ መካተት ስሜት አለህ(ሽ)?

3.2.2.የማህበራዊ መካተት ስሜት የሚኖርህ(ሽ) በምን በምን ሁኔታ ነው? (ማብራሪ፡- በክፍል ውስጥና ከክፍል ውጭ ያለውን ሁኔታ አብራራ/ሪ)።

3.2.3.በክፍልና ከክፍል ውጭ የማህበራዊ መካተት ተግባራቶችን አብራራ(ሪ)።

3.2.4.ከሌሎች አይናማ ተማሪዎች አንፃር በምን በምን ጉዳዮች ላይ እኩል ተጠቃሚ ነህ(ሽ)?

3.2.5. ከአይናማ ተማሪዎች ጋር ያለህ(ሽ) የጓደኝነት ልምድ ምንድ ነው?

3.2.6.በዚህ ግቢ ውስጥ በምን በምን ጉዳዮች ላይ በአካል ተገኝተህ(ሽ) ታውቃለህ(ሽ)?

3.2.7.በተጨማሪ በማህበራዊ መካትት ልምድህ(ሽ) ላይ ያለህን(ሽን) ተሞክሮ ማወቅ እፈልጋለሁ። ለምሳሌ፡- አይናማ ተማሪዎች እገዛ ያደርጉልሃል(ሻል)? ምንአይነት? እገዛዉ ለምን ይጠቅማል?

3.3. የማህበራዊ መገለል ልምድ

3.3.1.ወደዚህ ግቢ ከገባህ ጀምሮ የመገለል ስሜት አለህ(ሽ)። (ማብራሪያ፡- መቼ መቼ ነው የመገለል ስሜት የሚኖርህ(ሽ)። ይህ ስሜት እንዲሰማህ(ሽ) ያደረገህ(ሽ) ነገር ምንድነው?

3.3.2.በአንድ ክፍል ውስጥ ከሌሎች ጋር ስትማር(ሪ) በሁሉም ክፍል ነክ በሆኑ ነገሮች ላይ እኩል ተካታች ነህ(ሽ) (ማብራሪያ፡- በክፍል ውሥጥ ያሉ አግላይ ነገሮችን በግልፅ ንገረኝ(ሪኝ))?

3.3.3.ካለህ ልምድ አኳያ በልዩነት የታየህበት(የታየሽበት) ጊዜ አለ ወይ? ከክፍል ዉጭ በምን በምን ሁኔታዎች እንደ ልዩ ሰዉ ትታያለህ(ሽ) በምሳሌ አስረዳ(ጅ)?

3.3.4.በአንተ (በአንቺ) አመለካከት ከአይናማ ተማሪዎች፤መምህራንና ሌሎች የስታፍ አባላት ጋር ያለህ(ሽ) ግንኙነት እንዴት ትገልፀዋለህ(ሽ)?

3.3.5. የማህበራዊ ህይወት ሁኔታህ(ሽ) ምን ይመስላል?(ማብራሪያ፡- ከአቻ ጓደኞችህ(ሽ) ጋር ሁልጊዜ የመገናኘት እድል አለህ(ሽ)?መልሰህ(ሽ) የለኝም ከሆነ ምክንያቱን አብራራ(ሪ)።

3.4. ከማህበራዊ መገለል ጋር የሚገናኙ ተግዳሮቶች

3.4.1. በአይነ-ስውርነትህ(ሽ) የገጠመህ(ሽ) ተግዳሮት ምን ምን ነዉ? የነዚህ ተግዳሮቶች ተፅዕኖ ምን ምን ነዉ?

3.4.2. የአቻ ጓደኛነትን ፣ግንኙነትንና ተሳትፎን የሚገድቡ ተግዳሮቶችን ጥቀስ(ሽ)

3.4.3. የዩንቨርስቲ አካባቢ ምን አይነት ተፅዕኖ አሳድሮብህል(ሻል)?

3.4.4. በአንተ(ቺ) እይታ ሌሎች ሰዎች ለአንተ(ቺ) ያላቸዉ አመለካከት ምን ይመስላል?ጭፍን ጥላቻ አላቸዉ ብለህ(ሽ) ታስባለህ(ሽ)?

3.5. ማህበራዊ መገለልን ለመቀነስ የሚወሰዱ እርምጃዎች

3.5.1. መገለልን ለመቀነስ ውይም ለማቆም ምን ምን እርምጃች መወሰድ አለባቸው ብለህ ታስባለህ(ሽ)? (ማብራሪያ፡- ማህበራዊ ተካታችነትን እንዴት መጨመር ይቻላል?

3.5.2. እስካሁን የተነጋገርነውን መሰረት በማድረግ ማህበራዊ መገለልን ለመቀነስ ይህ ዩንቨርሰቲ ምን ማድረግ አለበት ብለህ(ሽ) ታስባለህ(ሽ)

3.5.3. በተጨማሪም ከሌሎች ጋር በጥሩ ሁኔታ ለመግባባት እና እኩል ተሳታፊ ለማድረግ መወሰድ ያለባቸውን እርምጃዎች ዘርዝሩ(ሪ)

3.5.4. ከተወያየንባቸው ታሪኮችና ልምዶች አንባር ወደፊት በዩኒቨርስቲው ለሚማሩ አይነስውራን ተማሪዎች ምን አይነት ተስፋ አለህ (ሽ) ምንስ ትጠበቃለህ (ሽ)

3.5.5. እንደ አንድ ግለሰብ ከሌሎ ጋር ያለህ ግንኙነት ጤናማ ለማድረግና ለማሳደግ ምን ክህሎት ሊኖርሽ ይገባል ብለህ (ሽ) ታሰቢያለህ (ሽ)፡፡

3.5.6. በመጨረሻም የወደፊት ምኞትህ(ሽ) ምንድን ነው? ሌሎች አይነ ስውር ተማሪዎች ወደፊት በዚህ ዩንቨርስቲ እንዴት ሊማሩ ይችላሉ ትላለህ(ሽ)፡፡

ክፍል አራት፡- የቃለ መጠይቁ መዝጊያና መዉጫ

- እስካሁን ያልተወያየንባቸው ነገሮች ካሉ በነፃነት መወያየት እንችላለን፡፡

ስለነበረን ቆይታና ስለትብብርህ (ሽ) ከልብ አመሰግናለሁ!!

Appendix F: Sample Data Transcription Sheet

Interview Data Transcription		
Participant's Pseudonym	**Interview Thematic Areas**	**Participant's Verbatim Transcripts**
	Experience of social inclusion	
	Experience of social exclusion	
	Challenges related to social exclusion	
	Strategies of addressing social exclusion	

Appendix G: Exhaustive Description of the Phenomena

As shown herein, the 8 participants described their experience of the phenomena with their inside stories, and perspectives from which I extracted significant statements, formulated (interpreted) meanings and emergent theme clusters and themes. On the basis of these extractions, I composed an exhaustive description, which guided me to the discovery of the fundamental structure of the phenomena in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. In this sense, I created the exhaustive description, which is the fifth step in Colaizzi's method of analysis. As highlighted in the subsequent paragraphs, the exhaustive description consists of four parts: blind studnets' experiences of social inclusion, blind studnets' experiences of social exclusion, and blind studnets' challenging experiences as contributed to their social exclusion, and the strategies of reducing social exclusion in the universities selected for the study.

The participants with total vision loss who were engaged in this phenomenological study experienced social inclusion and exclusion in the classrooms and campuses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. In the first hand, equal access to basic student services and facilities and access to personalized support services (PSS) constsits of their lived experience of social inclusion. The access to basic student services and facilities entails that they have equal opportunities to campus-based student services and facilities like dining, library, ICT and dormitory in segregated settings. This also provided the opportunities to help them understand that their differences (uniqueness) as blind studnets was recognized by their respective university-campuses. Relatedly, a wide-ranged access to PSS was vital for them to provoke the feeling of being respected by their fully sighted peers, and to easily achieve physical interactions and/or contacts with the sighted individuals who were providing the PSS on the university campuses. Resultantly, their lived experience of social inclusion represented among the positive social experiences and furtunes in the universities selected for this study.

The current paricipants have tremendously experienced social exclusion, which is one of their negative social experiences they encountered in the classrooms and campuses of the universitiies selected for the study. Accordingly, isolated campus-living condition, being ignored, and non-participation in extracurricular activities, limited access to friendships, being Othered, and classroom marginality consisted of blind studnets' experience of social exclusion. In particular, they were totally excluded from exclusion from clubs, sports and recreations. In addition, they faced Othering practices when they were typified as aggressive in nature,

perceived as often complaints and treated as academically weak. In the classroom settings, they encountered marginality as they were sidelined during the teachers' teaching and when their classroom teachers have favoritized interaction in the same classroom. In either of the classrooms or the cmampus settings, the students lacked full access to friendship formation with the fully sighted peers. Moreover, they frequently suffered from ostracism (being ignored) by their own sighted peers, and in that way they were leading an isolated campus-life.

The studnets interviewed in this phenomenological study faced specific social, physical environmental and institutional challenges that contributed to their experience of social exclusion in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms. In other words, these challenges are the barriers to the social inclusion of 8 studnets with severe visual impairment. More specifically, they were experienced of social challenges like sighted peers' negative attitudes and stereotypes, and teachers' reluctance. These are social barriers to their social inclusionary experiences. The sighted peers' negative attitudes contributed to participants' lack of access to friendship groups, and to be ignored. Additionally, the stereotypic behavior of sighted peers contributed to the Othering practices they faced in the classrooms and campuses of the sampled universities.

Once again, physical challenges such as inaccessible buildings and physical spaces contributed a lot for the denial of equal access to social opportunities for 8 blind studnets. These are also physical barriers to their social inclusion in their universities. In detail, they faced non-participattion in extracurricular activities, and led most of their lives in isolated conditions due to lack of the accessibility of buildings and physical spaces of the universities. Finally, institutional challenges like inaccessibility of ink-print information and notices contributed to their isolation and non-participation in social activities and relationship scenes. These are also institutional barriers to the current participants' social inclusionary practices.

To this end, the social exclusion of blind students in the classrooms and campasses of Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities have to be allievated to properly achieve the concerted efferts of enhancing social inclusion for these learners. For that purpose, it is proposed that sighted peers' awareness creation and sensitization, social skills trainings for blind studnets, teachers' trainings in the areas of special needs education, and devising university-based accessibility policy are strategies to buffer the lived experience of social exclusion to the studnets' involved in this descriptive phenomenological study.

Appendix H: Essential Structure of the Phenomena

I developed the fundamental or essential structure of the phenomena, which is the six step in Colaizzi's method of analysis, by condensing the above exhaustive description into a concise statement that encompasses the essence of social inclusion, exclusion and the challenges that are deeply described in this study as experienced by blind studnets. The following is the structure:

Blind students (4 males and 4 females) have equal access to basic studnets services and facilities, and personalized support services in Addis Ababa and Debre Berhan Universities. Contrarily, they faced isolation, limited access to friendships, being Othered, and ignored, non-participation in extracurricular activities, and marginality within the classrooms mainly due to specific social, physiscal and institutional challenges and/or barriers in these universities.