

ABSTRACT

The social experiences of OVC regarding their education has received a considerable interest in the international community. However, there has been dearth exploration of their social experiences with regards to their inclusion or exclusion from education, especially in Eswatini. This study is an exploration of how the social experiences that OVC encounter in their daily lives impact on their inclusion or exclusion from education.

Utilizing the qualitative approach, this study engaged fifty learner participants who were doing Grade 11 (Form 4) in one high school with the highest number of OVC in Eswatini. Of the learner participants, forty-six out of the fifty learner participants identified as OVC. Furthermore, the study engaged four in-service Guidance and Counselling Teachers who were pursuing studies on inclusive education in one of the local universities in Eswatini. The four Guidance and Counselling teachers were from the four different regions of Eswatini. This means that there was one Guidance and Counselling teacher from each of the four different regions of Eswatini. Through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and a 'message in a bottle' (an approach whereby the participants write a letter to a friend on another 'planet' and inform them about the experiences of OVC), this study brought to the fore the social experiences of OVC and how they impacted on OVC inclusion or exclusion from education.

Through the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, the findings consistently showed that OVC experienced dialectical social experiences of adversity and support which resulted in a binary relationship of inclusion/exclusion from education. The findings highlighted that OVC often encountered social experiences of adversity which weakened their resilience and promoted their exclusion from education. From the findings, it transpired that OVC encountered destitution which led to their inability to access resources need for learning, health services, food and safe accommodation. The findings indicated that OVC had to navigate these adverse circumstances by performing acts of responsibility or working collaboratively with others within their communities. According to the findings, the resources offered by their teachers, members of the community, the state and members of the family enabled often counteracted the adverse situations which OVC usually experienced. The availability of these resources stimulated OVC agency such that they experienced resilience, inclusion and general wellbeing.

Further findings indicated that OVC were aware of their exclusion and were also aware of how they could be better supported such that they experience inclusion in education and in life in general. From these findings, this study makes the contribution that OVC skills and knowledge on matters that pertain to their wellbeing be harnessed and utilized as a foundation on which other intervention strategies that are geared towards ensuring OVC livelihood and inclusion are grounded.

Keywords: OVC, inclusion, exclusion, resilience.