

# Expert multistakeholder engagement informing content of advanced diploma in visual impairment studies



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**Background:** This study evaluates the interface between expert multistakeholder engagement and the development of Advanced Diploma in Visual Impairment Studies (VIS). Additionally, the study validates the content included in the modules of this training programme for teachers of learners with visual impairment (VI).

**Aim:** The aim of the study was to anchor on one of the objectives of a broader main study, namely to establish a network of experts that could provide input in terms of suitable content to include in the VI qualification.

**Setting:** The study setting was the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

**Methods:** Snowball sampling was used to identify 56 stakeholders from different organisations working in or having interest in visual impairment field. Two-phase Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA)-guided workshops and focus groups were utilised to generate data. Subsequently, member checking was conducted with the stakeholders during a follow-up workshop, validating results.

**Results:** Stakeholder partnerships were identified as a prominent theme. Sub-themes included the identification of potential stakeholders, collaboration and networking, maintaining partnerships, and community outreach.

**Conclusion:** The establishment of networks with key stakeholders was found to be important, however, the necessary care had to be taken to continuously engage stakeholders in content reviews and efforts to accommodate learners with VI through learnerships and entrepreneurial developments.

**Contribution:** Teachers feel ill-equipped to work with learners with VI. This article attempts to highlight the benefit of involving the perspectives of multiple stakeholders when developing a programme informing the learning, teaching and supporting system in schools of learners with VI.

**Keywords:** community of practice; multistakeholder engagement; visual impairment studies; advanced diploma; partnerships.

## Introduction

Stakeholders can play a critical role in informing the development of a postgraduate qualification. In this article, we report on an example of a qualification being developed after receiving the input from expert stakeholders who have a vested interest in the success of a qualification in visual impairment studies (VIS), based on their role in the field. This article aims at anchoring on one of the objectives of a broader main study, to establish a network of experts who could provide input into a visual impairment (VI) qualification. In addition to subsequently developing an Advanced Diploma in VIS as a result of the study we report on, a centre for VIS was established at the institution where the research was undertaken. The discussion in this article is guided by stakeholder theory<sup>1</sup> as a framework and presents one main theme, consisting of four sub-themes, as result.

## Stakeholder theory and expert multistakeholder engagement

Stakeholder theory can be used as a non-traditional business-oriented and management approach, yet also in an institutional education-oriented manner in order to 'blend together central concepts'.<sup>1</sup> The latter was relied on in the study we report on, to inform content

development for a postgraduate qualification in VIS. As such, stakeholder theory is used in this article as a theoretical framework that highlights 'value creation activities' and 'social science understanding of networks',<sup>1</sup> more specifically when developing ideas on the content to be included in the modules of the qualification in VIS. In this example, expert multistakeholder engagement is regarded as an inclusive strategy that has gained increased acceptance globally.

The importance of stakeholders in organisational life is pivotal to the success and development of economic growth. In this regard, stakeholder-driven strategic planning can allow for focused interventions such as those who could be offered through career guidance. In contemporary times, the central tenet of such interventions should be information driven, optimising the 21<sup>st</sup>-century ubiquity of technology. To this end, the disruption of the global wholesale and retail markets by coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has provided a strong indication that the use of technology should be increased if economies are to survive times of uncertainty.<sup>2</sup> In the education sector specifically, the Fifth generation (5G) mobile technologies inception into the African Markets is welcomed, as this can facilitate quick and efficient service provision. In the words of Tin, Nguyen, Tran, Trang and Sevcik:

5G technologies are expected to yield significant consumer benefits (e.g., assisting the disabled, enabling telemedicine), industrial benefits (e.g., automated processes, increased operational efficiencies, data analytics), and economic benefits (e.g., new revenues, new jobs),<sup>3</sup> [thereby opening new career pathways].

Stakeholder theory is considered as a practical theory as it is centred around managing stakeholder relations that focus on the interests and well-being of internal as well as external stakeholders.<sup>4</sup> Stakeholder theory emphasises 'fairness, honesty, and even generosity' in its view of stakeholders and those receiving services.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly:

Internal stakeholders can be situated, for example, in particular departments, geographic locations, at various levels in a hierarchy, etc. External stakeholders include, among others, providers of capital, clients, suppliers, owners, labour unions, and state agencies.<sup>5</sup>

For the purpose of the study reported on in this article, internal stakeholders included students and staff as well as colleagues from across different departments who serve and are being served by the VIS centre and may benefit from the programmes offered. External stakeholders include people external to the centre and its programmes, but who have a vested interest in the services offered by the centre. While this difference between the groups of stakeholders is important, of greater importance are expert multistakeholders whose sustainable engagement could form a critical aspect in terms of the functions performed as a result of the programme that was developed as well as at the visual impairment centre.

## Expert multistakeholder engagement

While a multistakeholder approach enjoys widespread acceptance, mainly in the business world, it has been found to be beneficial beyond this sector. The development of the Advanced Diploma in VIS is no exception. To be more specific, multistakeholder participation and collaboration enhanced the input provided in support of the development of the study programme by identifying blind spots and emphasising other critical areas.<sup>6</sup> As background, the multistakeholder approach demystifies the silo approach and encourages the pooling of resources, especially in limited resourced contexts such as schools for learners with visual impairment in South Africa. This approach is endogenous to the African way of addressing social ills such as flocking.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, flocking allows for multistakeholders to contribute to problem solving in support of the well-being of the members of a community. In most cases, other concepts such as stokvels, which are ubiquitous in local less-resourced contexts, have been found to benefit communities in alleviating poverty and addressing various needs including those related to the schooling of children.<sup>8</sup>

Expert multistakeholder engagement was an intentional and focused strategy we used in our research. In this way, expert inputs could inform the development of suitable content for the Advanced Diploma in VIS. This approach ensured participation of a 'large number and high diversity of expert stakeholders...who have a wide range of interests'.<sup>9</sup> These wide-ranging interests informed the development of the Advanced Diploma, allowing for focused and broadly informed content knowledge that was infused in the modules to be taught in the study programme. In this way, the experiences of the expert stakeholders provided a strong basis for the programme.

## Practitioner experiences as basis for knowledge generation

In our study, multistakeholder engagement represents a melting pot of both expert and non-expert practitioners who offered valuable contributions to the development of the Advanced Diploma in VIS. Practitioner experiences formed a firm foundation that can inform practice, theory, research, and policy and provided a basis of knowledge that informed the content development of the Advanced Diploma in VIS. Practitioners are regarded as valuable stakeholders who brought in a wealth of knowledge and skills based on their experiences in providing services to people with visual impairment. In contexts of scarcity, most practitioners resort to 'practitioner as bricoleur', meaning that their experiences may be based on 'inside' knowledge gained through practice.<sup>10</sup> Practitioner experiences (as stakeholders in the development of the Advanced Diploma in VIS) could be used to guide further research, finalisation of the content knowledge of the modules, and the practice of teaching of learners with visual impairment. This could furthermore present opportunities to enhance practitioners' knowledge and skills in addressing challenges and uncertainties when teaching learners with visual impairment.

## Disability studies as precursor to visual impairment studies

Disability studies in this article is considered a precursor for VIS. As background, Disability studies are viewed as an interdisciplinary field that gained fame from the 1980s onwards with a focus on the meaning that societies ascribe to variations of disabilities.<sup>11</sup> This development in the field lays the foundation for continuously reflecting on societies' understanding and interpretation of disabilities in general. Broadly speaking, disability as a human phenomenon has accompanied many human beings in their journey of life as 'a profoundly relational category'.<sup>12</sup>

Disability is perceived, understood and acted upon differently by members of society, depending on the context. As such, disability studies provide a vehicle to investigate alternative ways of understanding and dealing with disability in its complexity. The complexity of disability defies universal definitions and descriptions, with the more generic attempts at defining disability excluding the necessary attempts to be inclusive. Visual impairment studies can be regarded as one extension of disability studies and is foregrounded in this article, focusing on visual impairment within the context of education.

## Visual impairment studies

Visual impairment studies have been neglected as an independent field of study within the disability discourse. However, given the prevalence of visual impairment, especially in the global South, this article situates visual impairment as possible fully fledged field of study. The rationale for the argument relates to the prevalence of the condition, as summarised by Naipal and Rampersad<sup>13</sup> who state that, 'More than 90% of individuals with VI live in developing countries'. This high percentage of people living with visual impairment aligns with the initiative of and drive by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the European Union (EU) to support the development of the Advanced Diploma in VIS that may equip the teachers of learners with visual impairment.

In the study reported on in this article, the research conducted with stakeholders of whom some were teachers, resulted in a realisation that teachers (as well as other professionals) working with people with visual impairment, do not necessarily possess the necessary specialised knowledge and skills. Furthermore, as no other formal qualification of this nature had been offered in the past in South Africa, the relevance and need for the qualification seem clear. In embarking on the research, the research team was guided by international leaders in the field of VIS, using their work as a benchmark yet being guided by the expert multistakeholders on local ground. The developed qualification was envisioned to be offered under the auspices of the Centre for Visual Impairment Studies (CVIS) at the University of Pretoria. In line with existing work in the field of VIS, the aim is to promote equitable access to education<sup>14</sup> and poverty

reduction,<sup>15</sup> through inclusion of learners with visual impairment as well as transition interventions.<sup>16</sup> To this end, research-based findings on expert stakeholder practitioner experiences formed a firm foundation for the development of the content of the qualification in VIS.

## Visual impairment content

Teachers of learners with visual impairment face various challenges as they need to develop skills and competencies in areas not typically addressed in traditional teacher education programmes.<sup>17</sup> Generally speaking, it makes sense that teaching and assessment strategies as well as related and/or relevant resources should form the core of the content included in a postgraduate qualification in the field. In addition, inclusive teaching can be considered as a cornerstone of the content included in a qualification focusing on visual impairment.

Central to inclusive teaching, emphasis can be placed on the expanded core curriculum, and on visual impairment-specific skills training for teachers of learners with visual impairment. The content could include 'technological pedagogical content knowledge',<sup>18</sup> preceded by pedagogical content knowledge'.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the visual impairment-specific content that is included should preferably be accessible through Braille and other technologies. In this regard, the current transition from Braille to modernised ways of learning should, however, be kept in mind and represented in the content of visual impairment programmes, which rely on a technologically laden learning context. Given this paradigm shift because of the complex nature of visual impairment and the ever-evolving technologies used in teaching and learning, it seems imperative to establish communities of practice to continually inform, monitor and evaluate the relevance of the programme content over time.<sup>20</sup>

## Multistakeholder engagement as communities of practice

Multistakeholder engagement can form the basis of a community of practice, with communities of practice (CoPs) representing '... groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'.<sup>20</sup> In the study reported on in this article, sustainable engagement of a range of stakeholders provided for a monitoring and evaluation tool for the content included in the Advanced Diploma in VIS. As such, CoPs in this article imply multistakeholder engagement in support of the content development for a qualification in visual impairment.

Through the CoPs, teachers of learners with visual impairment are expected to learn how to accommodate these learners when teaching them and how to include them in a more supportive way. Bentley, Browman and Poole identify '... three structural elements of a community of practice, namely domain, practice, and community'.<sup>21</sup> For the purpose of the discussion in this article, visual impairment is

considered as the domain within which teachers need to be trained to be able to teach learners with visual impairment in an inclusive manner. The practice is considered to be the body of knowledge that was shared and co-generated by practitioners of visual impairment, as expert stakeholders. Finally, community is described as '... a set of interpersonal relationships arising out of people's mutual engagement in learning through practice',<sup>21</sup> as could be observed in the research we conducted. As a result of the community of practice implying dynamics and complexity, the necessary methods had to be utilised to identify and carefully select suitable participants.

## Methods

This qualitative study employed a multiple case study design underpinned by participatory reflection and action (PRA) principles. A snowball sampling technique was relied on to identify 56 stakeholders from different organisations working in, or who have an interest in the domain of visual impairment.<sup>22</sup> To be more specific, the research team identified stakeholders that they were acquainted with as a first step and then requested these individuals to suggest additional stakeholders whom they viewed as well-informed in the field. In this way, snowball sampling was used to keep on identifying additional stakeholders and experts in the field, in discussion with those already involved in the study.

Stakeholders came from various sectors in society (e.g. tertiary education, private sector, the school sector, etc.), from all provinces across South Africa. Representation of the stakeholders was thus quite diverse across various fields, institutions and portfolios. The stakeholders who participated included students and academic staff members of higher education institutions, specialists in visual impairment, therapists, principals and teachers of learners with visual impairment in primary and secondary schools, a copyright specialist, and managers of private institutions that deal with visual impairment. The stakeholders remained available for consultation for the duration of the study in order to ensure their continued involvement in informing the development of a scientifically sound qualification in their field of expertise. These stakeholders were invited to meetings, with them attending and participating as their schedules allowed.

Table 1 depicts the backgrounds of the stakeholders who participated.

Two PRA-guided workshops and focus groups were conducted to generate data, with each consisting of two phases that were guided by different prompts for discussion by the expert stakeholder participants. A feedback workshop with the 56 stakeholders followed, in order to validate the results after the initial data generation and analysis process had been completed. Ethics approval and clearance were obtained from the University of Pretoria (reference number UP 17/06/01 Ferreira-003) before commencing with any field work. At the onset of the study, participants were informed about how the study would proceed and also of the purpose of the broader project. They were allowed to ask questions about the study, so that they could consent with a clear understanding of what the study and their involvement would entail. After obtaining informed consent, the field work proceeded.<sup>22</sup>

During the first PRA-guided workshop and focus group discussion, expert stakeholders were requested to share their ideas on suitable content to be included in a postgraduate qualification in the field of visual impairment. During the second workshop and focus group discussion, stakeholders were presented with a broad outline of possible modules that were considered as part of the qualification based on the first round of discussions with them as well as a parallel data generation process focusing on teachers' views of suitable module content and then requested to elaborate on the proposed content. The participants were also requested to reflect on their involvement in the process of programme development.<sup>22</sup>

After further data analysis and refinement of the draft module outline for the Advanced Diploma in VIS, member-checking was performed with the expert stakeholders, with the purpose of verifying and confirming the identified themes and sub-themes. They furthermore had the opportunity to elaborate on the proposed module content of the programme based on their experience and expertise in the field. The series of PRA-guided workshops and discussions, which took the form of colloquiums, allowed the participating stakeholders to first discuss their ideas in small

**TABLE 1:** Expert stakeholders.

Institution	Number of participants	Area of expertise
South African Council for the Blind	7	Experts in serving, supporting and facilitating the prevention of blindness, rehabilitation, community development, training and education of South African people with visual impairment.
Blind South Africa	6	Experts in training and orientation in Braille.
South African Library for the Blind	3	Braille consultants in South Africa, expertise in Braille training and Braille codes.
South African Guide Dog Association	2	An association that enhances the mobility and independence of people who have visual, physical and/or developmental needs.
South African Braille Authority	1	A standard setting body that promotes and advocates Braille and Braille-related matters in South Africa.
Private consultant	1	10 years' experience as a school principal of a school for the Blind and partially sighted.
Teachers at schools for special needs (five schools involved)	13	Teachers at schools for the Blind and partially sighted, with three of these teachers being blind themselves.
University lecturers and professors	10	Academics who hold experience in working with students with visual impairment, with one lecturer being visually impaired himself.

Source: Manis, M. Utilising participatory reflection and action to develop a postgraduate qualification in visual impairment studies. [thesis]. Pretoria: University of Pretoria; 2020.

groups, being guided by prompts for their discussions, after which they presented their ideas to the larger group of expert stakeholders.

Inductive thematic data analysis was conducted during a data analysis retreat by a team of researchers participating in the VIS project. Each team member engaged in an individual independent thematic analysis, after which the results of the analyses were brought together to identify common themes. The team discussed the various possible themes that had been identified to establish consensus and in an attempt to ensure that the results are a true representation of the data shared by the participants. The results were later presented to the stakeholders during a member checking workshop for validation and further refinement. During this occasion, the expert stakeholders engaged with the results and offered another level of validation of the themes presented to them.

### **Ethical considerations**

University of Pretoria ethics committee - UP 17/06/01 Ferreira 17-003.

## **Results**

The results following thematic data analysis yielded 'stakeholder partnerships' as a central theme that emerged. In terms of the related sub-themes, the participants emphasised the importance of identifying potential stakeholders (systems theory) and also of collaboration and networking that could lead to and facilitate entrepreneurial activity, with stakeholders playing a critical role to accommodate learners with visual impairment through learnerships. In addition to these two sub-themes, the participants emphasised the importance of maintaining partnerships as critical for the sustainability of such stakeholder partnerships (Sub-theme 3), and the potential value of community outreach initiatives once networks had been established (Sub-theme 4). These identified sub-themes specifically contributed to the content of one of the modules included in the Advanced Diploma in VIS, focusing on the facilitation of partnerships and stakeholder involvement.

### **Identification of potential stakeholders as a support strategy**

Expert stakeholders indicated that psychosocial support should be included in the content of the modules of the Advanced Diploma in VIS. They recommended that stakeholders who specialise in psychosocial support provision should be identified and a databank on possible service providers be compiled. The majority of the stakeholder participants were of the view that both learners and teachers could benefit from understanding the theory behind psychosocial support and also knowing how to utilise this as a support strategy that could be implemented with learners with visual impairment.

Counselling was similarly identified as an important support strategy that could be included in the module content and

encouraged in practice. Specific emphasis was placed on career counselling for learners with visual impairment because of the stakeholder participants regarding this as a central need of these learners. In the view of the participants, career counselling is generally inaccessible to learners with visual impairment because most of them were not able to afford such services that are usually paid for in a personal capacity.

Expert stakeholders furthermore emphasised the need for schools and teachers to collaborate with parents and suggested that parent collaboration should form part of the module content. In this regard, the participants viewed it as important for teachers of learners with visual impairment to learn how to facilitate collaboration with parents, as a strategy they could rely on in supporting these children. Finally, the participants mentioned the importance of teachers being able to do referrals in order to support learners with visual impairment. As background, they identified the need for teachers to be informed about the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Screening (SIAS) procedures that can be followed when identifying and referring learners with special needs.

### **Collaboration and networking, in support of entrepreneurship**

The expert stakeholder participants identified the lack of sufficient cooperation between current and potential role-players in the lives of learners with visual impairment as important and suggested that this aspect should be included as content in one of the modules of the programme that was being developed. In addition and in further support of this topic to be included as module content, the participants indicated the value of collaboration and networking during the process of identifying suitable content for the modules of the programme, rather than individuals working in silos, which may have resulted – according to them – in content that lacked the necessary richness and depth.

The participants furthermore emphasised the importance of addressing the aspect of collaboration and networking in one of the modules of the programme, in support of the establishment of entrepreneurial engagements and in preparation of learners with visual impairment entering into entrepreneurial activities. The expert stakeholders specifically highlighted the cultivation of collaboration skills, training, communication strategies and using resources/devices available in the context of learning, as important aspects to include in one of the programme's modules. In addition to the importance of collaboration within the immediate environment of a learner with visual impairment they emphasised the importance of collaboration with organisations dealing with visual impairment, in support of these learners and of learning from other countries in this regard.

### **Maintaining partnerships to ensure sustainable involvement**

According to the expert stakeholder participants, the realisation of the importance of collaboration and

partnerships could be regarded as fundamental for maintaining partnerships among stakeholders in the future. The participants encouraged continuous interaction between the research team and expert stakeholders and also between the stakeholders among themselves. They emphasised that continued collaboration implied the possibility of peer learning, in support of maintaining sustainable partnerships. The importance of policies, continued development of skills, and the strengthening of networks was furthermore identified as key to the potential contributions that expert stakeholders may make in future in continuously updating the module content of the Advanced Diploma in VIS.

### Value of community outreach initiatives

The expert stakeholder participants identified the possibility and potential value of community outreach initiatives where stakeholders can, for example, serve as hosts to students who enrol for the qualification that was being developed. Closely related, a strong expression of interest was observed in terms of stakeholders accommodating learners with visual impairment through learnerships or alternative mechanisms to provide them with opportunities for career shadowing. In this regard, the stakeholders who participated expressed the importance of developing and initiating community projects that may address the needs of youth with visual impairment in their own contexts, in support of their functioning in society.

### Discussions

The findings of the study reported on in this article suggest that expert stakeholders can form strategic partners between the visual impairment sector and other multistakeholders, in terms of the development and maintenance of these relationships. This finding aligns with the work of Sarabia-Sanchez and Cerda-Bertomeu.<sup>9</sup> As such, the identification of key stakeholders can be regarded as a priority and a critical exercise for the field of visual impairment, where general and specialised service provision remain scarce. As the field of disability in general faces challenges in terms of access to specialised services for mental health, it can be expected that visual impairment will be no exception. In this regard, the provision of psychosocial support as a strategy of support to both learners and teachers of learners with visual impairment is imperative because of the psychosocial challenges implied by blindness and vision impairment.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the need for learners and teachers to be informed of psychosocial support possibilities, the need for career counselling for learners with visual impairment is highlighted by the findings of the study reported on in this article. To be more specific, limited accessibility to career services in South Africa and other less-resourced countries continues to be a challenge for many learners with visual impairment.<sup>24</sup> Stakeholders could however address this challenge by providing spaces and support for career construction crafted on internships and learnerships. An

effort that has been made to address the challenge of limited accessibility to career services in South Africa can be seen in the DHET's Khetha (choose your career) programme.<sup>25</sup> This programme focuses on knowledge and information sharing and on providing advice to service providers on how best they can present career advice and counselling services to their respective clients, as a 'one-stop-shop' for career-related information, which may in turn also serve as a source of empowerment, for clients to be able to more easily obtain and access information in future.<sup>26</sup>

With regard to learners with visual impairment specifically, the findings of the study reported on in this article suggest the importance of providing these learners with information on different higher education institutions and special education units, where prospective students can be assisted with their applications for admission and manoeuvring their way during their studies. For this purpose, career development practitioners can form part of the platform that can be of assistance to learners with visual impairment, as also proposed by the DHET.<sup>26</sup>

Despite (limited) efforts of this nature, a lot still needs to be performed in support of better accessibility to career services for all. More stakeholders therefore need to come on board to support such initiatives. Career development associations can equally play a more active role in focussing their services on people with disabilities in general and tailor-making certain services for clients who are visually impaired. In this regard, Wolffe advises that students with visual impairment need exposure to visual input, opportunities to work, and the acquisition of compensatory skills, for them to be able to build their careers.<sup>27</sup> It follows that the inclusion of career education in the curriculum for learners with visual impairment can be seen as fundamentally important in preparing these learners for their future.<sup>27</sup>

Career counselling was furthermore recognised by the participants in the study reported on in this article as a stepping stone towards the establishment of collaboration and networking efforts geared towards entrepreneurship. This avenue was found to be one possible way of filling the unemployment gap among people who are visually impaired through the creation of employment, as also proposed by the World Bank.<sup>28</sup> As in most developing countries, learners with disabilities in South Africa often receive technical and vocational training in an attempt to prepare them for entrepreneurial opportunities. In the same way, learners with mild to severe disabilities may be referred to special schools, which can prepare them for entrepreneurship or sheltered employment.<sup>29</sup>

All these efforts may support learners with visual impairment to better plan their future and pursue the options available to them.

In current times, networking has become easy because of technological growth and technologically driven contexts.

As a result, it has become almost easy to network, even with people one has not met. This possibility can be encouraged on several levels; for example, while learners are in school, they can already start networking with potential learnership providers or employers. In addition, opportunities for collaboration towards entrepreneurs could be developed through such networks. In this way, alternative pathways to formal employment may be explored. By including learning content on the way in which teachers and other role-players may address the career and employment needs of learners with visual impairment, the Advanced Diploma that was developed as part of our study may thus make a contribution in addressing the need for accessibility to career guidance of this vulnerable group of learners in South African schools.

## Limitations of the study

One possible limitation of this study was that only two workshops were conducted with the expert stakeholders. Given more engagements with these stakeholders, the study could have further benefitted in terms of them further elaborating on their contributions for the content of the modules to be included in the Advanced Diploma. Another limitation was that only stakeholders who could manage to travel to Pretoria (via land or air) for the stakeholder workshops, could contribute to the study. Even though all attempts were made to ensure the participation of stakeholders from as many sectors as possible, some potential stakeholders may have opted not to attend the workshops because of the travel implied.

## Conclusion

The results of the study reported on in this article support the aim of the study for expert stakeholders to provide suggestions for suitable module content for the Advanced Diploma in VIS. Inputs into the module content were incorporated across the modules that were developed as part of the said qualification. The theme and sub-themes discussed earlier on, address the objective of the main study, related to the establishment of a network of experts for sustainable engagement and for them to inform the development of the Advanced Diploma. In addition to the importance of establishing sound networks with the stakeholders, the necessary care needs to be taken to continue engaging these stakeholders for future content reviews as well as to accommodate and support learners with visual impairment through learnerships and entrepreneurial developments.

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## Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

## Authors' contributions

- M.M.: Project leader, PhD student, co-primary investigator, conceptualisation of article, first draft and revisions. Educational psychologist at the Free State Department of Basic Education.
- M.M.S.: Co-primary investigator, conceptualisation of article, third draft and revisions. Associate professor at the University of Johannesburg.
- R.F.: Project leader, primary investigator, conceptualisation of article, second draft and revisions. Educational psychologist, full professor and Director of the Centre for Visual Impairment Studies at the University of Pretoria.

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## Data availability

Data, in a digital format, is kept safe and confidentially at the University of Pretoria, where the study was undertaken.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions contained in this article are those of the authors and do not reflect the position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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