

**The emotional experiences of teachers teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is legislated under the White Paper 6 policy which focuses on special needs education with the aim of addressing the barriers to learning for learners with disabilities. However, research consistently shows that inclusivity has been a slow-moving process and there has been little success in implementation. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed existing inequalities in schools for learners with disabilities. If anything, further inequality was revealed where inadequate provision of resources and curriculum planning was made for learners with disabilities. This study aimed to explore the emotional experiences of teachers teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. I was able to gain insight into the factors that influenced their emotions at this time of upheaval for all in the country.

This study adopted a qualitative narrative style as I wished to get rich in-depth data from the participants. To do this, semi-structured interviews and collages were used where teachers' stories could be heard and centralised. This was in keeping with the critical paradigm which sought to hear the voices of teachers teaching learners with disabilities. Narrative inquiry allowed me to delve deeply into the emotions that teachers encountered when teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven participants were randomly selected in one special school in the King Cetshwayo District. In getting to understand teachers' emotions, Hargreaves' theory of emotions and teaching and learning was used to analyse data that were provided by the participants. The data were analysed both inductively and deductively using thematic analysis.

Findings revealed that teachers teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic encountered mostly negative emotions, revealing that emotions are intricate to teaching. Under broad themes of relationships with colleagues, principals, learners and the school context, findings revealed that relationships were complex and arduous and influenced the emotional well-being of teachers. The overriding concern for teachers was to ensure that learners achieved academically. The findings also revealed that teachers navigated their emotions, drawing on support from family and colleagues. They were resilient and proactive in making decisions about how to ensure the right to education for their learners were assured.

## DECLARATION

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Sinethemba Gugu Ntshangase declare that

- I . The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
  - a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.
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5. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References sections.



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02 April 2024

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my father Leon Musa, and my mother Gcwalisile Msimang, for always believing in me.

A very special dedication to my beautiful, lovely daughter, Lumi. I know I stole our time together in pursuing this journey. You have been incredibly understanding and patient. Mommy loves you nana!

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CASS	Continuous Assessment
EWP6	Education White Paper 6
ICT	Information and Community Technology
SMT	School Management Team
SRPRC	School Recovery Plan in Response to COVID-19
WHO	World Health Organization

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

*“Teaching is an emotional practice, not just a cognitive and intellectual one. It arouses, inflects and engages with the emotions of others, and with teachers’ own emotions too.”* (Hargreaves, 2021, p. 150)

#### 1.1 Introduction

The above quote describes teaching as a complex endeavour filled with multiple emotions that emerge in relationship with all within the field of education. Within schools, teachers encounter emotions when teaching, engaging with learners, colleagues and parents. Studies conducted by Fried (2011) show that managing emotions in the classroom is crucial as emotions may enhance or inhibit learning. Teachers experience positive emotions when they receive gratitude, appreciation and support from colleagues and parents; also, they experience negative emotions when they experience negative emotions when there is great moral distance between them and others—they feel that their purposes have been lost (Hargreaves, 2001).

This introductory chapter provides the focus and purpose and rationale of the study. I also provide the background to the study where I give information about teaching and the complexity of emotions that are involved in the teaching process. Next, the key research questions and the research objectives are presented. This is followed by a brief explanation of the theoretical framework that was used in this study. Further, I present the methodological approach that was used. This study used the narrative inquiry approach and, to centralise the participants, I introduce their short stories that provide an understanding of who the participants are. Finally, I conclude the chapter by providing an outline of the structure of the thesis chapters.

#### 1.2 Focus and purpose of the study

According to Mahaye (2020), the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic, leaving the whole world devastated. Thus, the focus of this study was on the emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it investigated the factors that contributed to the emotions that teachers encountered during the pandemic as well as how teachers navigated those emotions.

### **1.3 Background of the study**

Singhal (2020) indicates that COVID-19 is a severe acute respiratory syndrome caused by the coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The virus is transmitted through direct human-to-human contact. It is also an airborne virus and can also be contracted through contact with a contaminated surface (Umakanthan et al., 2020). In South Africa, the first reported case of corona virus infection was in March 2020. Thereafter, cases started increasing daily. This forced the WHO and South African President Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa to mandate the country to be under lockdown, with strict rules and regulations to be followed. Schools were then identified as sites that may lead to a sharp increase in the number of infection cases (Motshekga, 2020) since they are occupied by a large number of people at the same time. Hence a precaution of closing schools was implemented. Schools were closed with the aim of limiting contact between individuals and hence reducing the transmission of the virus (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2020). However, as time went by, schools were instructed to shift from traditional learning to online learning (Smith, 2020) where learners would still learn even when they were in their homes. When schools re-opened from lockdown, they were instructed not to take all learners, in an effort to contain the spread of the virus.

According to Ramrathan (2021), the Ministry of Education developed a plan of using digital platforms despite being in our own bubble. All of this was something new to the teachers. Change was introduced drastically. This paradigm shift gave rise to different mixed emotions from teachers (Aarnos, 2021). Some schools were able to employ remote learning and some could not, due to their context. This is well explained by Spaul (2013) when he described the South African education system as bimodal, further explaining that 75% of learners do not have access to quality teaching, resources and infrastructure. This greater percentage of learners and their teachers encountered negative learning experiences during the pandemic, that is, they could not employ the new teaching method of remote learning and did not have the required digital technology (Ramrathan, 2021). The other 25% were able to continue with teaching and learning effectively through remote learning. The outbreak of COVID-19 highlighted and emphasised the inequality in South African education that has always been there.

Ineffective teaching and learning during the pandemic was much worse in special schools which are in rural areas (Glessner & Johnson, 2020). Khumalo et al. (2020) state that learners with disabilities are more vulnerable, they need more special attention and special care than learners

with no disabilities. Learners with disabilities are used to having structured learning environments and the outbreak of the pandemic introduced a huge change to that (Glessner & Johnson, 2020). The pandemic also influenced teachers who experienced emotions of uncertainty as it was difficult for them to shift from traditional teaching to remote/online teaching and there were limited resources that could be used in accomplishing the mission (Onyema et al., 2020). According to Haung et al. (2020), the government made little effort in providing resources to schools that cater for learners with special needs. Teachers were not sure of the new teaching methods that were to be employed and whether these were effective for learners with disabilities. These researchers further indicate that remote teaching meant that those who teach learners with disabilities could not give that extra attention and special care to their learners, and that this caused them grave concern. Aarnos (2021) asserts that personal contact is important for the teacher-learner relationship and that distance learning compromised that. This then made teachers question their profession and purpose of their work (Hargreaves, 2021).

Hargreaves (2000) describes teaching as an emotional practice. COVID-19 exacerbated the emotions that teachers experienced (Mseleku, 2020). Adjusting to the 'new normal' was a difficult task for teachers as there were many challenges that they faced. Hence, they encountered negative emotions. According to Hendrix and Morrison (2020), teaching and working with learners with disabilities during such upheaval caused teachers to feel fear, confusion, frustration, uncertainty and stress.

Little attention has been given to how teachers felt about teaching during the pandemic (Aarnos, 2021), what factors contributed to their emotions and how these were navigated. This study was then conducted to fill this gap. It was at this time that a lack of teaching and learning occurred and caused a great deal of concern and uncertainty for the teachers (Mutch, 2021). Kaden (2020) has the same view and adds that caring about the emotional health of teachers is critical as this ensures successful learning outcomes. Therefore, Kaden (2020) called for the Department of Education to prioritise teachers' mental health, nurture their self-confidence, and understand their workload. This therefore means that the mental and emotional health of teachers teaching learners with disabilities must be doubly ensured.

As indicated above, it is evident that more research needs to be conducted around teachers' emotions of teaching during the context of COVID-19. Further, there is also paucity of research

that focuses on teachers teaching learners with disabilities at this time (Aarnos, 2021; Barbour & Reeves, 2009). Thus, this study sought to address the emotions of teachers teaching with disabilities during the time of COVID-19.

#### **1.4 Rationale of the study**

The motivation to conduct this study stems from a personal and professional point of view. On a personal level, when COVID-19 was announced as a potential life-threatening virus, I immediately experienced an overwhelming sense of shock, worry and fear, especially when we received news of the daily infections and deaths. I had never gone through a pandemic like this and, along with the rest of South Africa and the world, was not sure how to cope with and manage life. On a professional level, as a teacher, it was very difficult to adjust to the ‘new normal’. There were rules and regulations that had to be followed. The Department of Education also made changes that had to be implemented in schools. Personally, the relationship I had with my learners was greatly interrupted, and so were the relationships with colleagues and parents. I teach in a mainstream school that is located in a rural area. My school has limited resources which hindered effective teaching and learning during the pandemic and this is because “rural areas are generally remote and relatively underdeveloped” (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019, p. 1). I agree with this comment as my school is definitely underdeveloped, we have insufficient resources, and are often ignored by the Department of Education.

Okongo et al. (2015) state that effective teaching and learning can only be achieved when there are sufficient resource materials; and, when there are not, teachers find teaching less appealing. When added to a lack of support from officials, teachers often see teaching as a demoralising act. During the pandemic, we were instructed that teaching and learning had to continue. However, with a lack of resources and no support, I could not effectively teach in my context. There was less time spent with learners as the Department of Education stipulated that schools adopt their rotational or staggered contact time with learners (Department of Basic Education, 2020). Teachers could not finish the syllabus on time and I felt that teaching and learning were compromised. As a teacher having to teach at this difficult time, it brought about what Hargreaves (2000) refers to as dark emotions like anxiousness, dread, fear and uncertainty. This also made me wonder about the experiences and emotions of teachers who teach learners with disabilities. It is for this reason that I came to the decision to conduct this study.

Within the field of research, much research has been conducted on COVID-19 and the effects on education; see for example: Mahaye (2020); Hoofman and Secord (2021); Ceesay (2021); Tarkar (2020) and Onyema et al. (2020). However, research that I had sourced tended to be concerned with higher education, remote learning and the effect of COVID-19 in general. Insufficient research has been conducted on the emotions of teachers, especially those that teach learners with disabilities (Aarnos, 2021; Barbour & Reeves, 2009). Hence, this gave me the motivation to conduct this study and focus on teacher emotions, especially those who teach learners with disabilities and how they navigated the negative emotions that they encountered. Thus, this study filled the gap that Aarnos (2021) argues is evident in research.

### **1.5 Key research questions and objectives of the study**

There are three main research questions that were employed in guiding the study:

1. What stories do teachers have to tell about their emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the factors that contribute to their emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How do teachers navigate their emotions?

The study aimed to accomplish the following objectives:

- To get in-depth understanding of the emotional experiences of teachers teaching learners with disabilities in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak, through the stories that they tell.
- To understand the factors that contribute to their emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic.
- To find out how teachers of learners with disabilities navigated their emotions.

### **1.6 Defining key concepts**

1.6.1 *Special school*: a school that accommodates learners with special needs and learning barriers which may be due to permanent or temporal abnormality in a learner (Maryanti et al., 2021; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit & van Deventer, 2016).

1.6.2 **Mainstream school:** a school that caters for both learners with special needs and for learners who do not require specialised support as they do not have disabilities (Shah, 2007; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit & van Deventer, 2016).

1.6.3 **Full-service school:** an ordinary school that is fully resourced materially as well as having qualified teachers to accommodate and address a wide range of barriers to learning (Makhubela, 2023). These schools, according to Deghaye and Hanass-Hancock (2023), are thought of as inclusive schools.

## **1.7 Theoretical framework**

In exploring and understanding teachers' experiences and emotions when teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic, I employed Hargreaves' theory of emotions and teaching and learning. Hargreaves (2000) mentions that teaching is not only about knowledge and intelligence but it is also an emotional practice. The experiences that teachers come across when they are in the classrooms bring about emotions as they interact with learners and their other colleagues. It is therefore important to understand that emotions occur in any relationship. Hargreaves (1998, p. 3) presents a view of a teacher as "emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy". However, many things occur that disrupt the positive emotions that teachers may encounter. Therefore, teaching involves both negative and positive emotions that a teacher encounters that influences and is influenced by the environment or atmosphere of the classroom (Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021). As previously indicated, the outbreak of COVID-19 brought a drastic change in the education system and changed the manner in which teachers interacted with their learners and colleagues and this greatly influenced their emotions (Hargreaves, 2021). Hargreaves (2021) further states that most of the emotions that teachers felt during COVID-19 were negative. Hargreaves (2001) asserts that teachers are also coerced into not exposing their negative emotions to learners, instead forcing them to mask negative emotions for a healthy classroom environment. This was especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic and to special schools as learners with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, causing teachers to feel more sympathetic (An, 2019). Teachers are also concerned about not worrying learners and so they are expected to control their moods, empathise with learners and motivate them (Greaves, 2019). Hargreaves (2000) forwards particular concepts that



frame his theory, that is, emotional understanding and emotional geographies and these are important to this study.

### ***1.7.1 Emotional understanding***

Hargreaves (2001, p. 1059) describes emotional understanding as “an intersubjective process requiring that one person enter into the field of experience of another and experience for herself the same or similar experiences experienced by another”. This calls for teachers, in this case, to empathise and understand the feelings and experiences of those they come in contact with. Hargreaves (2001) further indicates that emotional understanding requires emotional engagement where there are strong and continuous relationships between teachers and learners. As teachers spend more time with their learners and colleagues, they end up understanding each other emotionally. Hence, there must be close bonds between them. Fragmented relationships result in emotional misunderstanding. Emotional understanding and misunderstanding are therefore key concepts in Hargreaves’ (2001) emotional geographies. Fragmented relationships and misunderstandings were evident during COVID-19 because of the loss of traditional relationships.

### ***1.7.2 Emotional geographies***

Emotional geographies are determined by experiential patterns of closeness and/or distance in human interactions (Hargreaves, 2000). There are five key emotional geographies/distances of teaching, that is, sociocultural, moral, professional, political and physical distance. In this study, moral, professional, political and physical distance were used.

#### ***1.7.2.1 Moral distance***

This refers to teachers getting rewarded and appreciated when they do something good at work. This results in them having positive emotions. Also, they experience negative emotions when they feel like their purpose is being threatened or has been lost (Hargreaves, 2001). Negative emotions arising from moral distance can be damaging to teachers; they may even feel unenthusiastic towards their work. During the pandemic teachers could not teach learners effectively, and this was evident in achievement on tests which resulted in teachers feeling as though the moral rewards of teaching were not possible (Huber & Helm, 2020).

#### *1.7.2.2 Political distance*

This emotional geography concerns power relationships between, for example, teachers and members of management or parents and other colleagues. This greatly influences the kinds of emotions teachers experience, especially when feeling powerless (Hargreaves, 2000). Policy changes during the pandemic caused teachers to feel powerless as decisions affected their ways of working (Bartholo et al., 2021).

#### *1.7.2.3 Physical distance*

This results from fragmented, infrequent and episodic encounters between teachers and learners, resulting in disconnected interactions (Hargreaves, 2000). When individuals are far away and do not see each other, physical distances arise. Since some learners had to do homeschooling, this created huge physical distance between them and their teachers (Glessner & Johnson, 2020).

#### *1.7.2.4 Professional distance*

Professional distance is observed when a teacher becomes distant from the learners or parents for a certain reason (Hargreaves, 2001), which may not be a negative reason. Hargreaves (2001) further asserts that masking of emotions by teachers to learners and parents is a means of being professionally distant.

### **1.8 Methodological approach**

In this study, the critical paradigm was used. This paradigm allows the researcher to explore the multiple realities of participants' experiences with an understanding that their experiences are shaped by social, political, cultural, and disability considerations (Scotland, 2012). Teachers spoke about their lived experiences, explaining more about how disadvantaged they were during the pandemic. In getting to understand how the participants felt when teaching during the pandemic, I used a qualitative research style. According to Sutton and Austin (2015), qualitative studies are useful in accessing thoughts and feelings of teachers. I also used narrative enquiry and this allowed the participants to tell their experiences in the form of stories. Qualitative narrative research also enabled rich, in-depth data to be collected. Semi-structured interviews were employed in complementing the narrative research style. Semi-structured interviews allow the participant the freedom to explain perceptions, thoughts and emotions (Horton et al., 2004; Adeoye-Olatunde &

Olenik, 2021). Adding to the use of semi-structured interviews, collages were used so that the participants could portray their emotions through the creative process of pictures.

### **1.9 Introducing the participants**

In this section, I present seven teachers who willingly volunteered to participate in this study. The participants were purposively selected. The names of the participants used in this study do not reflect their real names, instead pseudonyms were used and they were chosen by themselves. They go by the names of Blessing, Nozipho, Zuki, Palesa, Sipho, Fikile and Nelisiwe.

**Blessing** is a 37-year-old male with four children. The subjects he is qualified to teach are Civil Technology, Bricklaying, Electricity and House Plan Designing. He currently teaches Woodwork skills and also assists in the Life Skills subject. He enjoys teaching learners with disabilities because of the experiences he has had in interacting with learners over the last 15 years.

**Nozipho** is a 40-year-old female with two children. The subjects she is qualified to teach are Business Studies and Economic Management Studies. She currently teaches isiZulu and Food Production. She enjoys teaching learners with disabilities and has 23 years of experience working with learners with disabilities.

**Zuki** is a 40-year-old female with two children. The subjects she is qualified to teach are English, isiZulu, Life Skills, Mathematics, Economic Management Sciences, Geography and History. She currently teaches Mathematics and Hairdressing. She enjoys teaching learners with disabilities and has approximately 18 years of teaching experience.

**Palesa** is a 45-year-old female; she does not have children of her own. The skills and subjects she is qualified to teach are Food Production, Sewing and Hairdressing. She currently teaches English, Food Production, Sewing and Hairdressing. She enjoys teaching learners with disabilities. She was inspired to teach learners with disabilities because of her own experience of living with her mother who had a stroke; hence she developed a love for people with disabilities. She has about 32 years of experience with learners with special needs.

**Sipho** is a 30-year-old male. He does not yet have children of his own. The skills/subjects he is qualified to teach are Agricultural Skills, English, IsiZulu and Life Skills. He currently teaches Agricultural Skills. He enjoys teaching learners with disabilities. He has 5 years' experience of teaching learners with special needs.

**Fikile** is a 50-year-old female, she has two children. She is qualified to teach Sewing and she currently teaches Clothing Skills and Life Skills. She enjoys teaching learners with disabilities, which she has done for about 28 years.

**Nelisiwe** is a 48-year-old female, she has four children. The skills/subjects she is qualified to teach are Mathematics, English, IsZulu and Natural Sciences. She currently teaches Life Skills and Hairdressing. She enjoys teaching learners with disabilities, having done so for about 26 years.

### **1.10 Structure of the dissertation**

This dissertation, which is about emotions of teachers who taught learners with disabilities during the pandemic, is divided into five chapters. These chapters are discussed as follows:

**Chapter One:** I presented the aim, rationale and background to the study. This was followed by the research questions that underpinned the study. I also provided a brief understanding of the theoretical framework and the methodological approach used. I then introduced the teachers that participated in this study and finally outlined the structure of the thesis.

**Chapter Two:** I present national and international literature on the emotional experiences of teachers teaching learners with disabilities during COVID-19. I also discuss the theoretical framework used. Hargreaves' Theory of emotions and teaching and learning is used in understanding the narratives of teachers' experiences.

**Chapter Three:** Here I present details on the research methodology and design that was employed in responding to the research questions of this study. Trustworthiness, limitations of the study and ethical considerations are also outlined in this chapter.

**Chapter Four:** I present and analyse data that were collected through semi-structured interviews and by the use of collages. Themes that became apparent from the data are discussed relative to the literature review and theoretical framework used.

**Chapter Five:** I present the summary of the findings discussed in Chapter Four. I also discuss limitations of the study and suggest recommendations for future studies on teachers' emotions.

## **1.11 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented an overview of the study. This was done through providing a general introduction to the study, aims and rationale, as well as the background to the study. I also gave a review of the methodology, literature and theoretical framework that was used in this study.

In the following chapter, I present a review of literature revolving around my topic of interest. Furthermore, I provide an insight into Hargreaves' Theory as a lens that was used in analysing and discussing the findings of this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I present national and international literature on the emotional experiences of teachers teaching learners with disabilities during COVID-19. To do this effectively, it is important to provide historical understanding of inclusive education and provide insight into teachers' experiences of teaching learners with disabilities prior to COVID-19. Thereafter, I review studies that focus on the impact that COVID-19 had on education, detailing the challenges that teachers faced at this time. I then address the impact this had on teachers teaching learners with disabilities. This is followed by an explanation of literature that looks at the emotional experiences of teaching during the pandemic and includes teachers who teach learners with disabilities. I firstly engage with the effect that COVID-19 had on the education system across the world. Thereafter, I focus specially on South Africa where the pandemic emphasised the inequality of the education system. Secondly, a historical understanding of inclusive education in South Africa is provided, detailing the challenges to implementation of inclusive education policy. Thirdly, I discuss the experiences of teachers teaching learners with disabilities, detailing their emotions whilst teaching during the pandemic and the manner in which they navigated the challenges that COVID-19 brought. Finally, I engage with the conceptual framework that underpinned the study, namely that of Hargreaves' theory of emotions and teaching and learning.

#### **2.2 A historical understanding of inclusive education before the pandemic**

This section explains the historical trajectory of inclusive education from its conception internationally through to implementation in South Africa.

##### ***2.2.1 The Salamanca statement and inclusive education policies***

In 1994, the Salamanca Conference was held in Spain and this had a great impact on the development of inclusive education policies across the world. Ainscow et al. (2019) state that the Salamanca Statement argued for an inclusive orientation that would challenge attitudes of discrimination, develop welcoming communities, build an inclusive society and accomplish education for all. This was particularly important for South Africa which had a history of apartheid that focused on exclusion of people based on race, in particular, but also for people with

disabilities. In addressing these inequalities and imbalances brought about by apartheid in the country, numerous measures were undertaken, and many policies were developed (Ntombela, 2011). These policies and legislation emanated from the Constitution of South Africa that ensured that the human rights of all are respected (Naicker, 2006). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act of 1996 which includes the Bill of Rights “entrenches the rights of all learners, regardless of race, gender, sex, colour, sexual orientation, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture or language to basic education and to access to educational institutions” (Engelbrecht et al. 2005, p. 460). Thus, all forms of discrimination and oppression are seen as equally important to challenge. This was especially important within education.

### ***2.2.2 Understanding the development of White Paper 6 for Education***

Amongst inclusive education policies that were developed, Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) is the most recognisable one (DoE, 2013). According to Nel et al. (2016), for inclusive education to be accomplished and practised, the policy of EWP6 on *Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system* was developed. This policy was developed with the aim of addressing the needs of learners with disabilities (McKenzie & Dalton, 2020). This is because during apartheid, schools were differentiated into special education and mainstream education (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). Donohue and Bornman (2014) indicate that the aim of EWP6 was to build an integrated system for all learners. These researchers posit that in building an integrated schooling system that focuses on the needs of all learners, there should not be a need for special schools and ordinary schools. Instead, schools across South Africa should provide for the needs of all learners. Thus, inclusive education is now regarded as the right of every child to have access to and participate in quality education (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). According to the Department of Education (DoE) (2001), there is a need to adopt inclusive education where learners could learn together with no special attention given to body disabilities as a barrier to learning but to focus on the systemic barriers that hinder learning including poverty, inequality and other social issues. Inclusive education was developed on the grounds that it would be able to change society’s attitudes and create a non-discriminatory society; it would also provide easy maintenance of schools for all children rather than specialising in a certain type of issue (Ainscow et al., 2019).

### ***2.2.3 Special education***

The school where the research took place is a special school and thus it becomes important to present an understanding of special schools and education. Special education targets learners that need extraordinary education that may be given to them continually and/or impermanently (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019); these are learners with disabilities or special needs. The function of a special school, according to Green and Engelbrecht (2006), is to give extensive professional countenance in curriculum, assessment and instruction, also to nurture the courage and capability of learners with disabilities. There has been a heightened need to provide special education as there are families and children that are challenged by disabilities. However, provision of special education in South Africa is still rudimentary due to challenges such as poverty, cultural influences, lack of resources and lack of government support (Chitiyo & Chitiyo, 2007). Chitiyo and Chitiyo (2007) further states that special education has not been the government's priority and that it has mostly relied on charity and humanitarian organisations. This means that most special schools in South Africa do not have enough of the required resources and facilities conducive to teaching and learning of learners with disabilities. Gwala-Ogisi et al. (1998) assert that the South African government pays little attention to the qualifications of African teachers who teach in special schools. This ultimately means that special schools do not necessarily have teachers that are qualified to teach learners with disabilities, impacting the purpose of special schools. According to the Department of Education (2001), special schools are one of the identified structures that can also implement inclusive education which is about providing equal education to all, regardless of learners' disability, language and/or learning difficulty (Engelbrecht et al., 2005).

#### ***2.2.4 The challenges to implementing inclusive education for all***

This section presents empirical understanding of the various factors that negatively influenced the implementation of inclusive education legislated in Education White Paper 6. These range from ambiguity in definition of inclusive education, a lack of professional training of teachers in inclusive education and various contextual factors that influence implementation.

##### ***2.2.4.1 Lack of clarity with regard to Education White Paper 6***

Research shows that there have been hinderances to the implementation of these developed inclusive education policies; see, for example, De Boer et al. (2012); Ntombela (2011) and Nel et al. (2011). Some of the reasons for the failure to implement inclusive education policies is their



lack of clarity, lack of training, and contextual conditions. Donohue and Bornman (2014) and Engelbrecht et al. (2016, as cited in Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018) outline that the EWP6 policy lacks clear implementation goals and clarity, leading to ambiguity. This leads to confusion in implementing inclusive education policy for teachers who are uncertain as to the intentions of the policy; they also do not know how to implement it effectively. Donohue and Bornman (2014) further state that the EWP6 policy only has broad strategies, however there is a lack of precision and detailing on how the policy can be effectively implemented on the ground. This is especially evident in research conducted by Ntombela (2011) and Nel et al. (2011) where teachers emphasise the challenge in implementing inclusive education. Teachers mention having no or limited training on inclusive education, making it difficult to implement. This leaves teachers unsure and puzzled about what to expect. The people most adversely affected are learners with disabilities and this leads to the exclusion of many learners (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Failure to implement inclusive education in schools also means inequity between learners with disabilities and those that have no disabilities (Ainscow et al., 2019) which is unfair to those learners with disabilities, as their particular educational needs are not met.

#### *2.2.4.2 Lack of training*

Other hinderances are the lack capacity and knowledge in teaching and developing a variety of learners in a single classroom (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Teachers are not well trained on how to deal with and teach learners with certain disabilities. This is because, according to Walton (2017), teachers are not provided with practical, feasible explanations of how to teach learners with disabilities. Instead, training that is offered is theoretical (Walton, 2017), leaving teachers unsure of how to apply what they have learnt. Comprehensive and frequent training programmes are required as teachers face different challenges from time to time. In the studies conducted by Nel et al. (2016); Prinsloo (2001); and Adewu and Mosito (2019), teachers complained about the lack of proper training. Adewa and Mosito (2019) conducted a study in Fort Beaufort District and their findings reveal that teachers believed that the lack of formal support structures, including teacher training, was one of the hinderances to implementing inclusive education. Teachers felt disempowered because so much was expected of them. However, in other countries, inclusive education has been implemented with not many hinderances (Nel et al., 2016). This also means that there is still inequality amongst the countries; South Africa being the least advantaged. This

lack of proper training in inclusive education strategies disadvantages teachers and learners in special schools as teachers are uncertain of what is really expected of them and learners end up not getting their well-deserved education.

#### *2.2.4.3 Contextual conditions*

South Africa is a developing country and there are a number of contextual factors that prevent the successful implementation of inclusive education. Policy objectives tend to favour the ‘ideal’ rather than reality (Doyle, 2020). This makes it difficult for teachers to successfully implement policies. According to Muthukrishna and Engelbrecht (2018), some of the contextual factors that unconsciously produce exclusion of some learners are inadequate material and human resources, financial resources and large/overcrowded classes. Walton and Engelbrecht (2022) state that classrooms are complex systems that evolve and transform from time to time.

#### *2.2.4.4 Financial constraints*

When there are sufficient financial resources, all activities are carried out perfectly (Ali et al., 2021), including conducive learning environments. This means that good financial provision is vital as it ensures that one does their job in a satisfactory way. Inclusive education has not been able to be implemented due to reduced finances in the schools. Since learners with disabilities require extensive time and support, Annie et al. (2021) assert that offering individual support to learners with disabilities requires more money that these schools do not have. Wan (2022) has the same view, and states that education funds are a direct factor that restricts quality of education. Annie et al. (2021) further state that learners with disabilities are disadvantaged academically as their schools do not have materials and resources that cater for their special needs. Hence, learner performance is poorly affected. This is mainly because the school then does not have a suitable infrastructure and has less teaching and learning resources. Finances are the economic foundation for the development of special schools and are important for the improvement of education quality (Wan, 2022).

#### *2.2.4.5 Overcrowding*

Most schools in South Africa suffer from overcrowding; the recommended learner-teacher ratio is 40:1 in primary schools and 35:1 in high schools (Motshekga, 2012). Schools are said to be overcrowded when the number of learners enrolled is higher than the number of facilities that are

designed for them (Lee et al., 2002). The less the facilities and infrastructure in the school, the less the school is conducive to learning. According to Marais (2016), teaching in overcrowded classrooms is very challenging since teachers cannot practise a variety of teaching methods and teachers cannot pay attention and give extra support to every learner in the classroom, which is especially needed for those learners with special needs. Marais (2016) further states that overcrowding affects learner concentration in class as some learners in the class may be noisy and restless. Overall, overcrowding affects learner performance in class (Lee et al., 2002) as teachers cannot even notice struggling learners who require extra assistance as teachers are busy managing other tasks (Botha, 2022). Botha (2022) further states that teachers find it difficult to recognise individual learners that require maximum support.

The Salamanca conference concluded with a view to building and implementing inclusive education through the White Paper 6 policy which aimed to address inequality issues in schools that were brought by the apartheid. However, there have been challenges that hinder the implementation of the White Paper 6. I will now look at how the outbreak of COVID-19 impacted the education system; also considering the existing challenges of special education.

### **2.3 The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the South African education system**

The outbreak of the pandemic COVID-19 had a huge impact on the South African education system. The section below provides an explanation of how this occurred.

#### ***2.3.1 The closing of schools***

COVID-19 is an infectious disease and the first case in South Africa was announced on 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 (Minister of Health, March 2020). As this disease is transmitted very easily, through contact in various ways, there was a sharp increase in people being infected by the virus (Starkman, 2022). Many countries were affected by the outbreak of this pandemic. In South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa proclaimed COVID-19 as a disaster that had affected the whole nation (Soudien et al., 2022). When the number of cases increased exponentially, a number of control measures were taken to prevent the spread of the virus and flatten the curve; these included the prohibition of gatherings and the closure of schools (Sekyere et al., 2020). It was believed that if schools were to close, there would be reduced incidences of person-to-person contact, thus positively preventing the transmission of the disease.

The decision to close schools was informed by the National Institute of Communicable Diseases and World Health Organization (Soudien et al., 2022). Mutch (2021, p. 245) explains the situation of staying indoors using this metaphor: “people were to seal themselves in their bubble, not to burst someone else’s bubble by mixing with people from a different bubble and not to allow others into their bubble”. Sealing oneself in a bubble meant that almost 80% of learners were affected by school closures as they did not have access to education for various reasons (which are explained below) (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). The outbreak of COVID-19 disturbed the South African education system, revealing its fragility. According to UNESCO (2020, as cited in Onyema et al., 2020, p. 111), “school closures carry high social, educational and economic costs, and the disruptions they cause touch people across communities, but their impact is particularly severe for disadvantaged persons and their families”. The educational opportunities for many students, especially those that are poor and students with disabilities, are still to be revealed (Reimers, 2022). According to UNESCO (2020, as cited in Tadesse & Muluye, 2020), over 80% of students were affected by COVID-19 school closures nationally.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, learners with disabilities were excluded from mainstream schools and also from special schools (Kamga, 2020). Learners with disabilities could not go to school during the pandemic as most of their schools’ resources could not accommodate the pandemic rules and regulations. Findings from Toquero’s (2020) study reveal similar ideas to that of Kamga (2020), in that the marginalisation towards learners with disabilities was exacerbated, since they had to stay at home because they were at a higher risk of being infected and also because face-to-face learning was prohibited. There was reduced education equity between learners with disabilities and learners with no disabilities.

### ***2.3.2 Changes in the education system***

#### ***2.3.2.1 Department of Education undertaking***

According to Ramrathan (2021) and Soudien et al. (2022), in order for teaching and learning to continue, in 2020 the Department of Basic Education developed a ‘recovery plan’, called the *School Recovery Plan in Response to COVID-19* [SRPRC] (Department of Basic Education, 2020), to ensure that the teaching and learning of all learners could continue. Teaching and learning were mostly to occur through the use of digital platforms, reorganising the school calendar and using radio and television to ensure that the curriculum continued. The SRPRC recovery plan

stipulated that only grade 12 learners were allowed to come to school every day and that the other grades would operate on a rotational basis, that is, bi-weekly, alternative day and the platoon model (National Department of Basic Education KZN circular no. 48) (DBE, 2020c). The reason for this rotational arrangement suggested by the Department of Education was to minimise person-to-person contact and the dangers of overcrowding in schools and hence to keep social distancing. Circular no. 48 (DBE, 2020c) did not make thorough information provision for teachers who teach in schools for the disabled and neither did they do this for learners with disabilities. If anything, teachers were expected to provide education in the same manner as mainstream schools. This shows the invisibility that surrounds disability and, according to Greaves (2019), this should be regarded as institutional oppression.

As schools closed from March 2020 and opened in September 2020, the Department of Education also made changes to assessment (DBE, 2020c). For example, departmental restructuring of requirements changed in the lower grades, promotion requirements were changed. The year mark of the learner prior to COVID-19 was made up of 25% of the continuous assessment (CASS) and 75% of the final examination. But with the outbreak of the pandemic, the weighting changed to 60% for CASS and 40% of the final examination (DBE, 2020d). This circular further elaborated on not administering common examinations and tests. Final examinations were replaced by controlled tests that were set in schools. The Department of Basic Education also came to a decision to revise and trim the curriculum; some topics for lower grades were omitted and some were reduced (DBE, 2020b). For the Department to make decisions on the curriculum, teachers felt powerless and power relations got exposed, where teachers were the ones disadvantaged (Bartholo et al., 2021). Teachers felt the injustice and unfairness which ultimately led to learners being marginalised. This is because teachers could not discuss their contextual realities which would have impacted the decisions about the curriculum by the Department of Education. This has led to some researchers questioning the quality of education (Daniel, 2020). Teachers teaching Grade 12 felt greater pressure of having to complete the syllabus that had not been trimmed down in a short space of time. Daniel (2020) adds that teachers in the other grades, however, did not have that immense pressure as the curriculum was trimmed, and some topics had to be omitted, according to the SRPRC developed.

#### *2.3.2.2 Implementation of online teaching and learning*

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the education system to shift from face-to-face teaching and learning to online teaching and learning in adopting distance or remote learning. Because of the lockdown regulations stipulated, including staying home, distance and online learning was seen to be the best solution in the education system (Guner et al., 2020). Many countries in the West continued teaching and learning using digital platforms and using media to ensure curriculum coverage. Zuhairi et al. (2019, as cited in Mukana & Aloka, 2020) outline that online learning is beneficial in evolving learners' capability of unconventional learning.

Sharifov and Mustafa (2020), however, maintain that schools in many developing countries that are poorer were not able to access digital platforms, mostly because of financial reasons and infrastructure. This had a negative impact on teaching and learning during the pandemic, highlighting socio-economic inequality between developed and less developed countries. Tadesse and Muluye (2020) further claim that online learning is a challenge in a developing country like South Africa, as most parents did not go to school (i.e. they are illiterate) and they lack vital skills on Information and Community Technology (ICT), infrastructure, computers, radio and television. Thus, even if South Africa had this available for learners, it is highly unlikely that parents would have been able to help their children with online learning.

However, inequality was observed in schools where learners did not have equal access to this new era of education (Yakut, 2021). While mainstream schools were able to continue with teaching and learning through online learning, special schools could not do that. Special education was greatly interrupted (Yesil et al., 2022) and special education was compromised since learners with disabilities, along with their parents and schools, did not have proper and relevant resources (Crane et al., 2021). Another factor that remained a challenge for continued and online learning for learners with disabilities is that they require special individual attention and teachers would not have been able to communicate with them individually according to their behavioural uniqueness and communication demands (Adigun et al., 2022).

Also, providing instruction and feedback in a virtual environment was a challenge for teachers (Adewoye, 2022). Adewoye (2022) further mentions that equipment (such as computers, tablets, TVs) used in online learning was not always accessible to all learners. Another challenge that contributed to no online learning in special schools was that teachers in special schools were not prepared and trained for the use of technological gadgets (Adewoye, 2022), which made it difficult

for them to engage in an online environment. Adigun et al. (2022) assert that it was difficult for teachers teaching learners with disabilities to shift from being the performers in the classrooms to being the guiders in a virtual setting.

This again points to systemic inequality evident in South Africa for the most vulnerable. The White Paper on E-Education was published by the Department of Education in 2004 as a means to roll out e-Learning in schools (Mukana & Aloka, 2020). The ideas behind the policy were for South Africa to meet the needs of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). However, one can see the failure of this initiative at a time most needed and this accounts for the continued inequality and disempowerment of learners in South Africa (Myran & Sutherland, 2018). Such an initiative would have ensured that the process of learning and teaching would have continued when COVID-19 hit.

### ***2.3.3 The influence of social factors on the education of learners during COVID-19***

Onyema et al. (2020) postulate that the pandemic generated severe disruptions in schooling. Some of these relate to the social impact of the pandemic on schooling that resulted in crime and dropping out of school. When schools closed, learners were left idle at home all day. In their study conducted across four countries, namely Nigeria, Bangladesh, India and Saudi Arabia, Onyema et al. (2020) found that being left alone had the effect of causing learners to become involved in various kinds of crime, losing interest in learning and studying and also resulted in poor academic performance.

Involvement in crime has greatly influenced the drop-out rate at schools and was closely linked to the pandemic. According to Mahaye (2020), increased drop-out rates were also attributed to schooling experiences of learners. Reimers (2022) outlines the following as reasons which may have added to the high rate of dropouts: reduction in the availability of education services, reduction in access to education services, the reduction in the utilisation of schools, and lack of quality education. Reimers (2022, p. 3) provides other factors that could have contributed to drop-out, namely that of “school closures and the inability of learners to access learning and teaching material; learners were also driven by a fear of contracting the virus”. Reimers (2022) also points to another interesting factor—a loss of income during COVID-19 that led to unemployment with the result that parents could no longer pay school fees. This led to learners dropping out of school to find work to supplement the family income. Institutional factors also influenced the drop-out rate, namely the lack of teacher preparedness and training at this time to ensure that learners had access to learning. Thus, one is able to see that there were few support structures to ensure that

learners were motivated and supported at this time. Hence, this made them see no need to go back to school (Reimers, 2022).

According to Mbazzi et al. (2022) and Houtrow et al. (2020), susceptible individuals such as those living with disabilities, they are predominantly demeaned and are less likely to be empowered economically. This population is unlikely to have satisfactory social conditions, unlikely to obtain better health care, education and social services. The outbreak of COVID-19 exacerbated social statuses of learners and families with disabilities, making them vulnerable to their family's employment status. Many parents lost their jobs at this time, adding to their deprived conditions (Mbazzi et al., 2022), and this influenced their access to food as parents' earnings were reduced. Mbazzi et al. (2022) further state that disability, malnutrition and poverty are closely related to each other.

In studies conducted by Yesil et al. (2022) and Masi et al. (2021) it was found that the routine for children with disability was greatly affected and impacted by COVID-19. Learners got to experience reduced quality of sleep, poorer diet, reduction in exercise and increased time spent on social media and TV (Masi et al., 2021). Learners with disabilities had nothing much to do in their homes and thus spent their time in these less stimulating ways.

One of the rules and regulations of COVID-19 that had to be followed was isolation and avoiding greater contact time with other people. This made children with disabilities feel lonely, excluded and have extreme cases of emotional upheaval, anxiety, mood swings, and aggression (Masi et al., 2021).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated inequalities in South African education. Spaul (2013, p. 2) states that "inequality touches every aspect of South Africa schooling and policy-making, from how the curriculum is conceptualized and implemented to where teachers are trained and employed". Spaul (2013) refers to this inequality within education as a bimodal system constituting 75% of learners not being exposed to quality education, that results in poor learning achievement. Schools falling under this 75% are mostly those in quintile 1-3. Learners, teachers and parents of these quintile schools encountered many challenges regarding teaching and learning during the time of COVID-19.



Contrastingly, the minority of learners making up the rest of 25% are in quintile 4 and 5 schools. Schools of these quintiles have successful backgrounds, and quality teachers that have excellent content knowledge. Ramathan (2021) indicates that schools falling under quantiles 4 and 5 have ample resources and are financially well off, which gives them advantage and privilege of experiencing an environment conducive to teaching and learning. It has been very easy for these schools to shift from traditional to digital learning. These schools commonly execute ZOOM, Microsoft Teams in classrooms. Ramrathanan (2021) argues that the new digital platforms entrench and reinforce inequality because the majority of learners in our schools did not have access to the internet, they stay in areas where internet connectivity is poor and do not have access to computers and other devices. The pandemic period was a difficult situation that actually demanded humanity and unity (Rieley, 2020, as cited in Dhawan, 2020) that was absent.

With the sudden change in the education system brought forward by the pandemic, I have outlined the various ways in which education and those who participate in education were influenced. In the section that follows I look at the experiences of teachers that teach learners with disabilities during the pandemic.

## **2.4 Teachers' experiences of teaching learners with disabilities in special schools during COVID-19**

If COVID-19 exposed inequality within mainstream schools, Flack et al. (2020) state that learners with disabilities were the worst affected. Smith (2020, p. 168) concurs by saying that, "The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed equity issues and challenges faced by all students, but especially for students with disabilities". Khumalo et al. (2020) have the same view. They state that learners with any kind of disability are more vulnerable than able-bodied learners since they need extra healthcare, safety and accessibility. Learners with disabilities also require special attention different to that of learners without disabilities, and that demands extended time for teachers teaching learners with disabilities.

### ***2.4.1 Teachers were not in charge of learning***

Since COVID-19 demanded countrywide lockdown, school closure and distance learning, there was then transition in teaching and learning from face-to-face learning to online or distance learning. This was something new to teachers and the use of new teaching methods eroded their

professional confidence (Selvik & Herrebroden, 2024). Teachers' sense of professionalism was compromised. According to Circular no. 48 (DBE, 2020c), the Department of Education mandated that South African schools follow the revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) and comply with the learner progression policy stipulated. Hence, teachers did not make any decisions, especially about what to teach their learners and what to leave out. In a study conducted by Yakut (2021) in Turkey, teachers felt a deep sense of loss of their professional identity. In Turkey, one of the government initiatives was to televise lessons that had already been prepared. Whilst this may have been a good initiative to ensure that learning happened, teachers, however, were adversely affected. This is because they felt that they no longer had control over their own sense of who they were as it was done by people they did not know. This was especially evident in the study by Sayman and Cornell (2021) where teachers teaching learners with disabilities found that homeschooling made them feel that they had lost their sense of identity. However, homeschooling meant that parents were taking on teachers' roles and teachers were concerned about learners' progress and understanding. They were not able to know if their learners had grasped content and knowledge. According to Selvik and Herrebroden (2024) and Glessner and Johnson (2020), teachers felt undervalued for inadequately supporting their learners and for the shifting of roles.

#### ***2.4.2 Distance learning***

Since teaching and learning had to be maintained, it was thought that distance learning was going to be a solution even though there were lockdown rules. However, teachers felt uncertain about how special education services would be provided to their learners (Glessner & Johnson, 2020). Since we live in a bimodal country (Spaull, 2013), not every special school was able to conduct online/remote learning, hence, teachers had to be innovative and develop at least study packs to provide for the continued learning of their special learners. In a study conducted by Glessner and Johnson (2020), teachers had to adapt to distance learning through preparation of worksheets and other materials that were sent to learners' homes. This called for teachers to make lots of packs for homeschooling. With the new teaching methods that had to be implemented, teachers felt confused about it, they were not sure if what they were doing was correct and what was expected; new expectations were frustrating teachers (Sayman & Cornell, 2021).

#### ***2.4.3 Compromised learning for learners with disabilities***

Learners with disabilities are used to having structured learning environments and interacting with their peers and teachers (Khumalo et al., 2020). Hence, learners faced increased isolation during this time of emergency remote learning as well as during the implementation of the rotational system as their accessibility to academic support and social life was limited (Khumalo et al., 2020). Some teachers and parents of learners with disabilities are technologically literate and some are not. Klapproth et al. (2020) state that people are more likely to feel stressed if they are required to use technology for which they are not competent enough. It is for this reason that Klapproth et al. (2020) and Aarnos (2021) indicate that teachers must be provided with the necessary training so that they feel competent in using these online platforms in ways that ensure learning. Further, teachers, especially in rural contexts as well as those teaching learners with disabilities, need to be provided with the correct equipment so that they can teach learners properly rather than reinforce the inequality that they currently are exposed to. In a study conducted by Kraft and Simon (2020) in the United States, it was found that in disadvantaged schools, including special schools, teachers found it more challenging to engage in distance learning due to the availability of resources. These include lack of adequate and stable internet access and lack of electronic gadgets (Permata et al., 2022). Yakut (2021) asserts that some schools that cater for learners with special needs did not have any plan regarding teaching during the pandemic, hence, some learners with disabilities did not continue with their education.

#### ***2.4.4 Loss of connections and relationships***

Teaching is people-centred and is all about connection: teachers connect with their learners, parents and colleagues (Glessner & Johnson, 2020). Connections may be academic, personal and emotional. The pandemic caused teachers and their learners with disabilities to have fragmented and sometimes non-existent social contact (Glessner & Johnson, 2020), especially since there was no learning for them during the pandemic. Hence, there were gaps in communication between teachers and their learners and also with the learners' parents. Personal contact is important for the development of the teacher-learner relationship and online learning cannot compensate for the personal contact that comes with face-to-face learning and teaching (Aarnos, 2021). Glessner and Johnson (2020) mention that special school teachers could also not collaborate with one another and could not support one another. Much time was then spent preparing for distance learning.

#### ***2.4.5 Extra work***

Teachers that teach learners with disabilities found it difficult to manage their time and intensity of working with their learners. Carrington et al. (2016) point to the time-intensive nature of teachers' work as one of the challenges that they faced. In the study conducted by Carrington (2016) in Australia, it was discovered that teachers found it difficult to manage their time. This is because they had to find ways to accommodate every learner in the classroom. Often this meant individualised attention and working at a slower pace. Aarnos (2021) also found that teachers had difficulty in managing their time teaching learners who required additional support even though it was via online platforms. This proved time consuming because they also had to manage learners who did not require as much attention. The result was that teachers felt that they were not doing justice to both kinds of learners—learners with disabilities and those without. Hence time was lost in the process and proved to be a source of distress for teachers. This is also because they were also held accountable for learners' results. This led to them working longer hours to try to find ways to meet the needs of learners.

It is evident that teachers teaching learners with disabilities have had major unfavourable experiences due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Teachers' emotions will be discussed below.

## **2.5 Understanding teaching and learning as an emotional practice**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and experiences of teachers teaching learners with disabilities caused them to experience different emotions. This, in turn, affected the teaching and learning process.

### ***2.5.1 Teaching as an emotional endeavour***

Emotions are at the heart of teaching (Hargreaves, 2000; Wilson, 2004). Teachers have different experiences in their classroom, with some being both positive and negative. All these experiences that they encounter make them feel different kinds of emotions. Emotions, according to Hargreaves (1998, p. 835), are “mental states accompanied by intense feeling and (which involve) bodily changes”. These emotions cause one to feel joy, despair, fear and so on and they are part of who we are (Cabanac, 2002; Hargreaves, 1998). Schools are filled with emotional encounters (Jones & Kessler, 2020).

Hargreaves (1998, p. 330) further indicates that “emotions are intricately linked to the purpose of teaching, the political dynamics of educational policy and school life, the relationships that make

up teaching, and the sense of self which teachers invest in their work”. This means that teaching on its own, having to engage with the school’s environment and context, having to engage with learners, teachers and parents bring about certain emotions. What occurs in the classroom and school deeply influences who teachers believe they are and can contribute to their emotional well-being (Bajinath, 2021). In a study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, Bajinath (2021) found that when teachers are inadequately trained, receive less support from senior managers and the department, are exposed to reduced resources and have financial constraints, they may feel anxious, frustrated, exhausted and burned out. Thus, emotions are linked to teachers’ lives and affect their effectiveness in the classroom.

#### *2.5.1.1 Emotions in the classroom*

Teaching is an emotional endeavour (Sutton et al., 2009); for whatever experiences teachers come across in the classrooms, they encounter emotions about them. Sutton et al. (2009) further state that teachers experience positive emotions, such as happiness, when their teaching objectives are accomplished and they also experience negative emotions, such as frustration and anxiety, when students cannot grasp a concept or when teachers’ competence is challenged through repeated failure of learners. Hence, it is vital that teachers and learners maintain good and healthy relationships in the classroom to create a positive classroom environment in supporting learner competence (Meyer & Tuner, 2007). Fried (2011) asserts that emotions in the classroom are powerful vehicles for enhancing or inhibiting learning. For healthy relationships in the classroom, it can be said that teachers are expected to only show and express good emotions to their learners. Brown (2011) describes masking of emotions for the benefit of others as emotional labour. Teachers in the classroom may sometimes encounter situations that make them feel angry, frustrated, disgusted and sad, yet they are expected to regulate and manage these emotions so that learners do not recognise them (Hargreaves, 2000). When teachers express positive emotions to learners in the classroom, learners also automatically feel good. With good and positive emotions in the classrooms, learners are motivated to perform well in their studies. In a study conducted by Harvey et al. (2012) in New Zealand, they found that a positive classroom climate actually contributes to improved academic outcomes, improved attendance, greater engagement and motivation to learn. When learners perform well, teachers feel good and positive. If a teacher portrays positive emotions, learners look forward to highly engaging and interesting lessons; whilst

when a teacher portrays negative emotions, learners loathe lessons, feel intimidated and dislike that subject (Frenzel et al., 2021). However, this should be reciprocal; when learners too give positive emotions to teachers, teachers also receive them positively. Meyer and Tuner (2007) mention that teachers may experience positive emotions towards students who are warm towards them. Furthermore, when learners are engaging and co-operating in the classroom, teachers get motivated to do better (Harvey et al., 2012). Thus, classrooms are emotion-filled spaces. According to Hargreaves (1998, p. 835), “Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy”. Harvey et al. (2012) further state that teachers are eager to improve their teaching practices and subject knowledge in order to maintain a positive environment in their classrooms and so that they bring the best out of their learners.

#### *2.5.1.2 Emotions on teacher relations with learners and colleagues*

Teachers, as part of their duties, interact with learners, colleagues, parents and the departmental officials (Olitsky, 2019). In all of these settings, teachers encounter challenges and pressures, leading to emotional changes. This may include engaging with different people with different personalities and demands and also the change of curriculum and policies from the department officials (Olitsky, 2019). Learners also come to school with their own experienced emotions and teachers have to legitimately understand and empathise with them (O'Connor, 2008). Thus, on a daily basis, teachers have to handle not only their emotions but also those of their learners. It is for that reason that Olitsky (2019) refers to this as emotional work. Hargreaves (2000, p. 815) contends that, “How people are emotionally is shaped by the emotional experiences they have developed within their culture, through their upbringing and in their relationships with those around them”. Having to engage with somebody, one will definitely encounter certain emotions about it. This brings up the Hargreaves’ concepts (2000) of emotional understanding and misunderstanding. Hargreaves (2000) describes emotional understanding as an instant reaction that happens when you reach down to your past in response to what happens to another person; whilst misunderstanding is a reaction that occurs when you have no experience of what the other person is going through. However, emotional understanding requires individuals to have spent a lot of time together so that they can ‘read’ each other. In fact, any activity that involves human interaction is an emotional practice.

### ***2.5.2 Teachers' emotions when change is introduced***

South African education has been subject to a great deal of *change* in preparation for future generations. Change enhances emotions as people in a work situation experience processes and outcomes of change (Smollan & Sayers, 2009). Change basically relates to feelings and emotions. Change introduced in a school may trigger negative or positive emotions, depending on certain factors. Smollan and Sayers (2009) and Klarner et al. (2011) state that when the institutional change does not align with the context, people will encounter negative emotions such as stress and insecurity, leading to mistrust. Alternatively, if the school context aligns with the change, then positive emotions such as confidence and trust will be enhanced. However, Klarner et al. (2011) assert that people have to adapt to organisational change and learn new strategies to obtain redefined goals while being resilient, regardless of the organisational context.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a significant change that brought about intense emotions on the part of teachers in trying to cope and adjust to the 'new normal'. Khumalo et al. (2020, p. 189) describe the new-normal as cohering to "social distancing, wearing of masks, sanitizing, working from home, home-schooling and online teaching and learning". It also included the alternating system of teaching and learning. Some of the feelings experienced may have included confusion, stress, concern, fear, despair, stress, worry and trauma. These emotions stemmed from the increasing infection rate, teachers' well-being and their emotional exhaustion (Klusmann et al., 2023).

According to the Education Labour Relations Council (2020), teachers most often expressed intense fear at the time of COVID-19. They were scared that they would get infected if they went to school, they feared being confronted with death all the time and they feared for the health and safety of their learners. Some teachers who were at a higher risk of being infected were even more overwhelmed because they had particular comorbidities and were asked to work from home (Education Labour Relations Council, 2020). However, upon their return to work they were highly insecure and uncertain because they worked with fear every day—fear they would get the virus and pass away from it (Klusmann et al., 2023). One can say that working with such extreme emotions cannot be good for the mental and emotional health of teachers and also for their ability to continue with the professional work in the manner that was expected.

Apart from concern and uncertainty about their personal health, Huber and Helm (2020) mention that teachers also feared and were worried about their learners with disabilities' academic achievement since they believed learning and teaching had been compromised. Their study conducted in Germany, Australia and Switzerland found that these teachers in the study were committed to their learners as they believed that it was their role to make sure that no learners were left behind during the process of learning. According to the Basic Education Circular no. s2 (DBE, 2020b), schools in South Africa were mandated to continue with teaching and learning with the aim of granting the right to education for all learners. In addition to that, the department even trimmed the curriculum just for the sake of continued learning. Teachers also had to be innovative and creative in coming up with various new teaching methods that were going to accommodate their learners, especially those with disabilities (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

These dark emotions of fear and worry (Hargreaves, 2000) may also be because according to Amin and Mahabeer (2021), quality teaching and learning, had been compromised in South Africa. These researchers point to the revised **SRPRC** with the trimmed curriculum that were developed to accommodate time lost during the closure of schools. They questioned, for example, the decision-making of which content to trim and how this fitted into the overall outcomes of the curriculum. For Jansen (2020), this provided schools and teachers the opportunity to remove some content and assessment. However, Ramrathan (2021), like Amin and Mahabeer (2021), argues that this was a mechanistic endeavour with no thought as to how this could be done without compromising quality teaching.

Further, Ramrathan (2021) has argued that the people (teachers) that should be involved were not consulted or trained on how to do this, adding to the disempowerment they already experienced. This impacted their sense of professionalism. One of the other suggestions by the Department of Education was to cancel examinations in all grades except for grade 12. However, there was not enough and consistent support from the department in terms of providing special education services, and this left teachers struggling and frustrated (Smith, 2020). This has added to the stress, frustration and worry that teachers have about the process of learning and teaching because they have felt a lack of professional control over their own work (Hargreaves, 2021).

### ***2.5.3 Teachers' emotions on teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic***



Teachers connect with their learners academically, personally and emotionally (Glessner & Johnson, 2020). Emotional turmoil arises when teachers have to embrace any change that occurs in the school (Smollan & Sayers, 2009). In Smollan and Sayers' (2009) study, conducted in New Zealand, teachers experienced emotional upheaval when they had to implement new teaching strategies for their learners with special needs. Hence, teachers encountered emotions of uncertainty and timidity as they were not sure how their learners were going to receive the new change and if they were going to adjust to it. These findings were similar to the study conducted by Easthope and Easthope (2000) where teachers complained about the intensification of their work. The fear of change and the intensification of teachers' work was also heightened during the pandemic.

One of the key changes was associated with online learning that teachers were not used to. Studies conducted by Supratiwi et al. (2021) and Pelleron (2021) show how the sudden change brought by the pandemic and the use of online teaching and learning influenced how teachers felt. In a study carried out by Supratiwi et al. (2021) in Indonesia it was found that the marked change in learning increased stress and anxiety for teachers. Teachers indicated that learners were not used to the new teaching methods implemented and soon became bored and less motivated. Further, parents were unprepared to help their children with online learning, leaving teachers feeling frustrated as they were confused as how to help their learners. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Pellerone (2021) in Italy, online learning was also not effective due to socio-economic factors in the society. Some learners did not have access to learning materials, some did not have electronic devices, there were connectivity problems and some learners experienced persistent fighting in the home. All this influenced how learners learned. Many of the teachers in the study felt that learners with special needs require the safety and accessibility of the classroom. This left teachers also feeling frustrated at online or remote learning and their overwhelming emotions caused them to experience burnout. It also appears from Schuck and Lambert's (2020) study that teachers felt emotions of uncertainty and confusion; they were not sure if the use of emergency remote learning was going to work with their learners with special needs.

It is understood that teaching alone is an emotional practice. Having to deal with the outbreak of COVID-19 and teaching learners with disabilities—which is hard work on its own—teachers then have to develop their own coping mechanisms and strategies.

## **2.6 Teachers' coping mechanisms**

With the negative experiences and emotions encountered when teaching learners with disabilities and teaching during the pandemic, teachers developed and practised ways of navigating them for conducive teaching and learning.

### ***2.6.1 Coping strategies to teaching during the pandemic***

Ntoaduro (2021) describes the term 'coping' as a cognitive and problem-solving behaviour that one uses to minimise or eliminate burnout. This means that one may decide to do something in reducing unfavourable consequences of that particular burnout. According to Palmer et al. (2021) and Soncini et al. (2021), during the pandemic many teachers experienced emotions of anxiety, depression, fear for self and others, inertia and stress which also led to emotional exhaustion and burnout. Palmer et al. (2021) further assert causes of these emotions as the application of new teaching methods, lack of digital devices, as well as a sense of loss of their and learners' cultural realities. With the difficulties, challenges and negative emotions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers had to develop strategies in dealing and coping with the new normal.

However, teachers diversely unfolded coping strategies, subjective to their psychological resources for instance, self-efficacy (Soncini et al., 2021). Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) describe self-efficacy as cognitive means that is advantageous when people navigate new and exhausting challenges. Mecham et al. (2021) also speaks of adaptability; having to understand that you cannot change the situation, then you need to adapt to the newly introduced change. According to Ackermann (2021), adapting is vital to avoid being stuck in transition. One of the adaptive mechanisms for teachers was to frequently communicate with parents and also letting parents take over their responsibilities and roles as teachers during the lockdown (Ackermann, 2021). Adding to that, teachers reduced emotional exhaustion and burnout by being able to plan, organise, adapt new teaching instructions, thus coping with changes and new educational challenges (Soncini et al., 2021). Soncini et al. (2021) further state that self-efficacy helped teachers to master challenging changes and prevented possible negative effects.

In a study conducted by Palmer et al. (2021) in the Northern Cape it was found that in ensuring that quality education was not jeopardised, teachers accepted the change of traditional teaching and learning to online/remote learning. This is also evident from Mecham et al.'s (2021) study conducted in America where they found that accepting and working with the new normal helped them to manage and develop new pedagogical skills. In South Korea, remote/online teaching and learning was executed in 2020 (Yi & Jang, 2020). Teachers in South Korea saw this as an opportunity for continued learning for their children. Teachers' input of being innovative, adapting and accepting what was happening also ensured that teachers were competent and efficient and maintained quality in teaching and learning (Palmer et al., 2021). This also helped them to manage their emotions.

Eisenberger (2013) states that having to talk to somebody you trust about your worries and stress actually reduces the chances of having a mental breakdown. Teachers made use of emotional upliftment from their loved ones, colleagues, district officials and mentors for psycho-social support (Mecham et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2021). Collie (2021), in her study conducted in Australia, states that some teachers allowed their senior colleagues to help them with any kind of support that they needed during this time. This meant that senior educators had to understand their junior teachers' needs. Palmer et al. (2021) have the same view, and they state that the School Management Team (SMT) in their study conducted in Northern Cape would provide support through listening to their teachers and addressing all the teachers' grievances. Teachers allowed their senior educators and the school management team to have input and opened space for guidance also in understanding the individual needs of everyone in the school environment. Senior educators helped junior educators in clearing the confusion they had in understanding the curriculum as well as guiding them through grief, making them feel better.

According to Issakah et al. (2021), it is vital for teachers to meet the behavioural and emotional needs of learners with special needs. This is crucial so that effective learning for learners will be maintained. Issakah et al. (2021) further assert that a special educator's job is usually more difficult, demanding and stressful compared to that of teachers teaching learners with no disabilities. With the above challenges that have been discussed, teachers develop their own coping mechanisms that help them cope with the challenges that they face.

Hence, it is crucial that teachers are exposed to coping resources and strategies in managing their stress and burnout. Coping mechanisms reduce any effect of stress by altering one's emotional state, reducing and/or completely eliminating the cause of stress (Issakah et al., 2021). When these resources and mechanisms are well utilised, teachers then maximise the effectiveness of their teaching.

*Physical strategies:* Issakah et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of regular exercise and meditation. Regular physical exercise improves one's brain health (Ruesegger & Booth, 2024). When teachers engage in regular body exercises, this may be useful to them as they would also be able to think about coping strategies and managing the stress brought by teaching and engaging with learners with disabilities.

*Institutional strategies:* Sharing useful experiences, teaching skills and behavioural management techniques with teachers that teach learners with disabilities also helps (Isaakah et al., 2021), especially in similar contexts. Support from experienced teachers and mentors (Brackenreed, 2010) also helps and increases commitment, especially to novice teachers. This alleviates stress. Jacobs (2010) has the same view; he states that talking to your colleagues regarding problems you are facing, as well as seeking help and resources from other teachers may be helpful in dealing with the challenges that you experience when teaching learners with disabilities.

*Professional strategies:* It is very important for teachers to attend workshops and webinars in order to network (Issakah et al., 2021) with teachers that also teach learners with disabilities in order to gain more professional information on how to deal with common challenges.

*Emotional strategies:* According to Jacobs (2010), seeking counselling services, mental imagery and separating yourself from stressful events is vital in coping with the stressful challenges of teaching learners with disabilities.

*Behavioural strategies:* Vuuren (2020) asserts that planning for lessons and classroom engagements, preparing yourself as a teacher, being flexible and acknowledging learner variety and adapting to the situation helps in overcoming the challenges encountered when a teacher engages with their learners with disabilities.

*Social strategies:* Jacobs (2010) states that getting support from partners/spouses and friends helps, especially if they are also in the teaching profession.

## 2.7 Conceptual framework

The theory that this study used was Hargreaves' Theory of teaching and learning and emotions. Education, being one of the rights for children, has been a priority for the South African government. Great efforts have been tried to improve the excellence of teaching and learning; this also includes implementation of different teaching methods and strategies. Constant change with regard to the curriculum, new roles and expectations from teachers (Martin & Amin, 2020) and now the phenomenon of COVID-19, causes teachers to experience a variety of emotions. Hargreaves (1998, as cited in Hargreaves, 2001, p. 3) argues that educational change "affect[s] teachers' relationships with their students, the parents of those students, and each other". Therefore, understanding that emotions occur in relationship was important in this study. Thus, understanding how the context of COVID-19 changed the professional work of teachers was important in the study and how it influenced their emotions. Hargreaves (2001) mentions that there is no understanding of how teachers' emotions are being shaped with varying conditions of their work. Hargreaves (2001) claims that teaching on its own is an emotional process; and that teaching is not only concerned with knowledge, skills and cognition. Emotional experiences that teachers go through actually affect their identities and how they relate to each other, learners and parents and, in turn, their ability to do their work. Hargreaves (1998, p. 3) describes good teachers as "emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy". Teachers' emotions have a significant influence on the classroom life and their emotions of joy, anger, and anxiety influence learners and their behaviour. It is understandable therefore that teachers had mixed negative emotions regarding teaching amid the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, considering that there was a drastic change in their teaching practices and strategies and relationships with learners. However, as Fataar (2020) has indicated, teachers have managed to perform despite this, which ultimately means that teachers have masked and controlled their emotions for the benefit of their learners. Teachers' emotions are influenced by and determined by sociological, political and institutional forces (Hargreaves, 1998). In relation to teaching learners with disabilities, in a study conducted by Greaves (2019) on teachers teaching learners with disabilities in KwaZulu-Natal, teachers had to control their moods, empathise with their learners, motivate them and just be there for them (and their parents). This was tough, at times they felt hopelessness, despair or worry, but they were expected not to show those negative feelings to learners and parents. This is what Hargreaves

(2001) refers to as emotional labour (Hargreaves, 2001). Hargreaves' theory of teaching was used in this study. He has particular concepts that have been used, namely that of emotional understanding and emotional geographies.

### ***2.7.1 Emotional understanding***

Denzin (1984, as cited in Hargreaves, 2001, p. 1059) outlines the definition of emotional understanding as a “process requiring that one person enter into the field of experience of another and experience for herself the same or similar experiences experienced by another”. This means that it is much easier to understand another person's situation if you have also experienced a similar situation. Hargreaves (2000) describes emotional understanding as how people are shaped by emotional experiences that they have gone through. Furthermore, Hargreaves (2000) thinks that emotional understanding occurs when people reflect on their experiences and bring emotions to the present situation. Denzin (1984, as cited in Hargreaves, 1998) further states that emotional understanding is vital in recognising the emotions in question and responding accordingly. For example, learners with disabilities may have felt hopeless, frustrated and stressed having to learn amid the COVID-19 outbreak (Supratiwi et al., 2021). However, their teachers knew how to console them as they felt the same with having to teach during this time (their feelings were shared). One can say that the pandemic required a strong bond and close association between teachers, learners and parents for successful teaching and learning. In this study the relationships between teachers and learners were important to understand given learners' socio-economic backgrounds and where a lack of resources and poor literacy levels of parents influenced the process of learning and teaching. Herein, teachers in the study believed it was their responsibility to ensure that learners had access to quality learning. Failing to respond to learners results in emotional misunderstanding and can result in the breaking down of bonds and relationships. Denzin (1984, as cited in Hargreaves, 2001, p. 1060) defines emotional misunderstanding as “a pervasive and chronic feature of everyday interactions where human engagements are not based on the kind of shared experience that fosters close and common understanding”. Learner-teacher misunderstanding results from teachers having no relationship with their learners, which could be conscious and/or unconscious, when a teacher does not have a love for children—if they do not have a sense of commitment to the learners (Hargreaves, 1998). In this study, the physical distances necessitated by COVID-19 regulations meant that teacher-learner relationships were often

misunderstood. Teachers were unable to be close to their learners and thus, physical distancing proved to be a factor that impacted relationships and teachers' experiences of teaching. Hargreaves (1998, 2000) recommends that teachers should make it their priority to understand their learners and have a strong continuous relationship for effective teaching and learning. This is especially true for learners who have target status like learners with disabilities and where teachers can be transformative change agents working towards ensuring that learners can access and participate in school during this time.

### ***2.7.2 Emotional geographies***

Hargreaves (2001, p. 1061) defines emotional geographies as the “nature of teachers’ recollections of emotionally laden interactions with those around them”. This means that as teachers interact with their learners, colleagues and also with parents, they encounter experiences that make them feel certain emotions. Emotional geographies result from emotional understanding and misunderstanding. Hargreaves (2001) has five categories of emotional geographies namely, socio-cultural, moral, professional, physical and political distancing. In this study the following geographies were used: moral geography, physical geography, professional geography and political geography.

#### ***2.7.2.1 Moral geography***

Hargreaves (2001) states that emotions are a moral occurrence. He further states that teachers experience positive and good emotions when they are shown gratitude and appreciation by their learners, parents and co-workers. When teachers have done well and they are being appreciated, that energises them and encourages them to continue doing well. This is what Lortie (1975, cited in Hargreaves, 2021) calls the psychic rewards of teaching. Hargreaves (2021) further indicates that teaching is not just about teaching and assessment, but teachers also care about their learners’ personal and social growth. Since the implementation of different teaching methods due to the outbreak of COVID-19 like online learning, or rotation or staggered school times (Department of Basic Education, 2020), teachers have had difficulties in maintaining emotional connections (Hargreaves, 2021) especially with learners with disabilities. This lack of emotional connection was evident in a study conducted by Glessner and Johnson (2020) which found that emotional connection was lost because there was also physical distance between teachers and learners due to homeschooling. Such working conditions have prevented teachers from gaining the emotional

rewards of teaching and this has had dire consequences for both teachers and learners. This was evident in the study. With this reduced moral engagement and rewards, closeness between teachers and learners and energising emotions are also unconsciously reduced as this is beyond their power. Teachers' well-being cannot be maintained, as seen in the literature review, and the well-being of learners academically and emotionally is also affected. The 'intensification' of emotions, workload and social issues experienced during COVID-19 has become a source of anxiety and depression amongst teachers (Hargreaves, 2021) and has caused teachers to want to leave teaching. This was evident in the study conducted by O'Brien (2020) who found that about 45% of teachers in Ireland want to leave teaching (O'Brien, 2020). Without the support from the institutions, teachers' ability to self-care has been lost.

#### *2.7.2.2 Physical geography*

When interaction between individuals is disjointed, limited and interrupted then there is a breakdown in understanding that can lead to a breakdown in relationships between the individuals (Hargreaves, 2000, 2001). With teaching and learning amid the outbreak of COVID-19, physical interactions and relationships between teachers, learners and parents were disrupted and transformed. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2020), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2020, as cited in Hargreaves, 2021, p. 139) "remote learning alternatives have often proved problematic with access to them being unequal, on-site learning with physical distancing has sometimes diminished or disrupted the regular learning experience". This physical distancing, evident not only in online learning but also in the rotational system of learning in South Africa, has led to teachers having negative emotions since there also had to be distancing amongst learners, to avoid the spread of the virus. Learners had to wear masks, and there could not be cooperative learning hence, the environment was not conducive for emotional support due to physical distancing and thus effective learning was limited and compromised (Hargreaves, 2021). This has also resulted in learners feeling marginalised as there were hindrances to physical interaction between them and the teachers. Teachers were unable to spend time with learners and the lack of physical contact was emotionally disturbing for them (Mahaye, 2020). Given that teaching is a collaborative profession, being unable to access colleagues for social and professional support also proved isolating (Glessner & Johnson, 2020). Teachers could not develop networks and this influenced



the emotional well-being of teachers who constantly felt uncertain and unstable (Hargreaves, 2021).

#### *2.7.2.3 Political geography*

This is mostly seen in experiences of power and powerlessness (Hargreaves, 2001). Hargreaves (2000) explains political geographies when hierarchical power relationships are exposed in an institution. This is mostly observed when senior teachers, especially principals, exert their power over junior teachers. For example, when principals do not socially interact with their junior colleagues, or if they take decisions for the school by themselves (DeMatthews et al., 2022). In this study, the principal according to the participants at the school used her positional power to force teachers to carry out work that was beyond their purview. This caused intense emotions of despair and disempowerment causing teachers to question their professional identity. Political geographies mostly give rise to emotions of anger, fear, depression, anxiety and dissatisfaction (Hargreaves, 2001). In the context of the pandemic, if, for example, principals force teachers to come to school even when they are sick, principals exercising their powers, making teachers feeling suppressed and inferior.

#### *2.7.2.4 Professional geography*

Teachers may sometimes choose to distance themselves from learners and parents with the aim of being professional. Hargreaves (2001) says to avoid emotional entanglement, professional distance has to be kept because learners and parents do not have to know about the teachers' negative emotions as this would exacerbate the situation. Hargreaves (2021) outlines that if teachers as the educational leaders fail to manage their emotions, and instead fall apart, it is very unlikely for learners not to be emotionally unstable too. Hargreaves (2021) has shown that remote learning brought about by the outbreak of COVID-19 has also resulted in the challenge of maintaining relationship and engagement between teachers and learners that are known to be vulnerable. Teachers are expected to always appear strong to learners and parents (Hargreaves, 2000), as learners and their parents put all their faith in teachers. This was difficult to do during COVID-19 as teachers experienced their own emotions, losses and grief.

Another aspect that influenced teachers' work is that of professional judgement. The decisions taken by the Department of Education and other educational stakeholders prevented teachers from

being able to exercise their professional judgement and this caused teachers to feel frustration and anger, especially for learners who are vulnerable, like learners with disabilities (Hargreaves, 2021). Having to work with a trimmed down curriculum or being left to make decisions about what assessments to leave out and how to integrate content was disruptive to teachers' professional work (Amin & Mahabeer, 2021; Ramrathan, 2021). Teachers felt isolated and alone and not in control of their professional work. Further, not having access to online resources or the proper resources for learners with disabilities further disempowered teachers who could not teach their learners properly. Their lack of professional capital (Hargreaves, 2021), seen in their inability to take control of their work and make decisions for the benefit of learners, led to disempowerment. This was also evident in the study however, what also emerged from the study was teachers' ability to negotiate various factors that prevented them from exercising their professional capital.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

In conclusion, educational policies, including Educational White Paper 6, have been developed in order to address the inequalities evident in apartheid. The review of literature indicated that there are still vast difficulties and challenges that teachers teaching learners with disabilities encounter that influence their ability to effectively carry out the imperatives of White Paper 6. These challenges were discussed. I then discussed the consequences of the pandemic on education in general and on the ability of teachers teaching learners with disabilities in particular. Despite attempts to negotiate the pandemic by the Department of Education, teachers continued to feel a sense of loss of their professional ability and capacities for various reasons explained above. Teachers' emotions were then discussed where I detailed how the pandemic influenced teachers' relationships with learners, colleagues and how the fear of the virus stifled relationships. The conceptual framework derived from Hargreaves' Theory of emotions and teaching and learning during COVID-19 was also discussed.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter details the research methodology and design that was used in this study. Firstly, I discuss the qualitative research style that was employed in gathering data from the participants. Secondly, the narrative inquiry approach will be discussed as a method that was used in obtaining in-depth experiences of teachers' emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this way I foreground the voices of the participants. This is in keeping with the tenets of the critical paradigm which also underpins this study. I also give an explanation of the methods of data production. This chapter ends by providing insight into the ethical issues that were followed and practised, limitations of the study, and how trustworthiness was achieved in the study.

#### **3.2 Research paradigm**

Taylor and Medina (2011) describe a paradigm as a belief system or a world view that guides the researcher during the study. The paradigm entails theoretical beliefs and propositions that shape the researcher's worldview and interpretations. Migiro and Magangi (2011, p. 4) outline the definition of paradigm as "a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research". It can then be said that a paradigm is a way in which we perceive, understand, and interpret things. In this study, the critical paradigm was employed as a lens and viewpoint to develop the research inquiry. According to Scotland (2012), the critical paradigm allows the researcher to explore the multiple realities of participants' lives with the understanding that their experiences are shaped by social, political, cultural, race, ethnic, economic and disability considerations. Throughout history the world has experienced crises and issues with COVID-19 being the most recent. The outbreak of this pandemic exposed inequalities in the country and, in this study, I show how the political considerations by the Department of Education influenced the experiences of teachers teaching learners with disabilities. Hence, the critical paradigm allowed me to understand the persistent inequalities that teachers and learners experienced and the difficulty of challenging the status quo. Teachers in this study provided insight into their emotional experiences of teaching and learning and the factors contributing to their emotions. Also, with the use of the critical paradigm, teachers were able to reflect on their emotions

and teaching during the pandemic and learn about their emotional triggers in order to manage these. This self-reflective process was also important for the critical paradigm and allowed personal change to occur for the participants. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), the critical paradigm also aims to bring about changes in the community. This was not possible in the study; however, what the study did was show the injustices as well as the realities of teachers who then negotiated the injustice as a way to ensure that learners with disabilities had access to education at the time of the pandemic. In the process of making change, participants showed their awareness of the contextual realities and the invisibility that surrounds the education of learners with disabilities (Scotland, 2012). This means that participants recognised that they encountered difficulties and also knew what influenced those difficulties. Scotland (2012) mentions that the researcher and the participants are both the subjects of the research, meaning they are both involved in the study and thus there is a dialectical relationship. In this study, teachers explained their efforts in navigating the negative emotions they encountered when trying to ensure a conducive teaching and learning environment. I accepted their ‘truth’ in an effort not to be judgmental. The relationship in this paradigm is complementary and reciprocal, no one is superior to the other. Freire (1978) states that the critical paradigm is used when the study is conducted *with* the participants and not *for* the researcher. This is achieved when teachers reflect on their own practices and emotions so that they can make decisions that will be in favour of them and their learners; and also, when the researcher gets the information they require. Moreover, a relationship of trust was built between the participants and myself where I sought only to accept their ideas in order to critically understand their experiences and how this affected their emotions at this time.

### **3.3 Research approach**

Mann (2005, p. 3) defines a research approach as “a particular perspective toward conducting educational research, determined by the psychological or sociological context (not by personal preference)”. The outbreak of the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 led to changes in the context of the society. Hence, in studying this ‘specific’ sociological context, a qualitative research approach was utilised. According to Magilvy and Thomas (2009) and Butina (2015) a qualitative research approach is one that is conducted in a natural setting in studying the everyday lived experiences of people. A qualitative approach therefore proved to be appropriate as I could understand the natural setting of the school in which participants taught. I could then understand

the contextual factors like parental illiteracy, for example, that proved to be influential in whether learners could access homeschooling and how teachers felt about this. Sutton and Austin (2015) outline the benefit of using a qualitative research approach, that is, it assists the researcher to understand the thoughts and feelings of those intended to be studied by enabling understanding of the meaning that the participants ascribe to their experiences. This approach was used as I, as the researcher, wanted to find out what teachers had been doing during the pandemic, what they thought and how they had been feeling through being in the field (Sandelowski, 2000; Grosseheime, 2014). Therefore, I was able to obtain, learn and understand in-depth stories about how teachers were affected by the outbreak of the pandemic. Sandelowski (2000) outlines that a qualitative approach of research enables the researcher to collect as much data as they can in capturing all elements of the event. Hence, textual data in the form of interviews and collages were collected from the participants. These methods are important in qualitative research, and they allowed me to collect rich, in-depth stories of participants' lived experiences (Butina, 2015; Magilvy & Thomas, 2009 and Pathak et al., 2013).

### **3.4 Narrative inquiry**

In the qualitative style of research, researchers may choose a variety of approaches when tackling the study, that is, “narrative research, case studies, grounded theory, phenomenology and participatory action research” (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 237). In this study, the narrative approach was implemented. Moen (2006) and Squire et al., (2014) indicate that narrative research is the study of how human beings experience the world, and is told in a story form. Kim (2015) shows the link between telling a story and getting to know the story as part of the research. This means that in the narrative approach, the researcher obtains data from people who are in the position of knowing their subjective truth and they have the capacity to give rich data and information to the researcher. In this study, stories of how teachers had been feeling regarding teaching learners with disabilities at the unusual time of COVID-19 were told. These stories were the raw data and information that were gathered in developing themes and coming to conclusions.

Narrative research is also marked by its emphasis on the interaction between the researcher and the participants (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Carless & Douglas, 2017). There is engagement between the researcher and the participants during data collection. I met with participants to discuss the study and to establish a relationship. The time spent at the school when I went in to

collect data from interviews allowed trust to be built where participants felt free to discuss their innermost feelings. Clandinin and Caine (2008) further stipulate that the aim of narrative research is to understand and make meaning of experience through conversations, dialogue and through participating in the participants' lives. This means that there should be some understanding between the researcher and the research participants. Butina (2015, p. 191) outlines the following as the usefulness of using narrative enquiry as a research approach:

“First, humans are natural storytellers and as such it is easy to elicit stories. Second, gathering in-depth data is easily accomplished as narratives usually provide thick descriptions. Last, it is possible to gather in-depth meaning as participants usually reveal themselves in their stories”

Narrative enquiry was seen to be the best approach and allowed teachers to tell me their stories of teaching learners with disabilities at such a complex time and where I could understand how this influenced their emotions. The use of interviews and collages also allowed rich in-depth descriptions. The collages were in picture form but participants were given the opportunity to indicate what their pictures revealed and how they felt about them. The interviews and collages then provided me with a window to understand their stories of teaching at this time. Thus, Butina's (2015) ideas of narrative inquiry were fulfilled.

### **3.5 Research context**

This study was conducted in a special school in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. This school is situated in a rural area of King Cetshwayo District, in the Nkandla circuit. The rural setting of the school was used with the purpose of studying emotions of teachers that teach learners with disabilities in the rural areas where there are no or limited resources. Nel et al. (2014) indicate that rural areas have been deprived for quite a long time because of the shortage of resources. As these schools are located within poor contexts, this sometimes affects the favourable functioning of the schools. These researchers also maintain that there is basic structural inequality evident in the lack of sanitation, electricity and most of the houses are made out of mud. There is a great deal of unemployment and high levels of crime. Many of the children attending these schools have parents who are either unemployed or underemployed, often receiving wages that do not meet the high cost of living. Some parents of learners in this school are also disabled and disadvantaged like their children. Learners enrolling in this school are from different areas, not only from Nkandla. The school is a government no fee-paying school, according to the Department of Education (2013).

For anonymity, I have named this school Thembalihle School and it accommodates learners with various disabilities ranging from learning disabilities, through to physical disabilities. There are 280 learners (boys and girls) and 23 teachers in the school. Only about 10% of the teachers are professionally trained to teach in a special school; most of teachers are trained to teach in mainstream schools. Many of the teachers were placed by the department, whilst others were transferred to the school through the Post-Provisioning Norm (PPN) process. This means that many of the teachers had little choice in where they were placed. In discussions with them they often spoke about how they felt disadvantaged and unprepared to teach at a special school. Many of the teachers teaching at this school live in the area during the week and travel to their homes which are located elsewhere in the province over the weekends.

### **3.6 Selection of participants**

According to Bhardwaj (2019) and Gentles et al. (2015), sampling is a process or technique of selecting a group or an individual that may best represent a wide population as they are able to provide data to answer the research objectives or questions. This then calls for the researcher to make decisions about who to involve in the research, and to take cognisance of the settings, events or behaviours that influence the participants (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). In acquiring responses or data from the stipulated research questions, it is vital to determine people that will be part of responding to those questions. In this study, probability sampling was utilised. Acharya et al. (2013) and Bertram and Christiansen (2014) further state that probability sampling is when every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected in the research study. One of the advantages of using probability sampling and randomly selecting the participants is that the study will not be biased in any way (Taherdoost, 2016). Since this study utilised the critical paradigm, the concern was not on the transferability and representation of the findings, rather the concern was to get rich, detailed and in-depth qualitative data on the emotions of teachers within that school. Eight teachers agreed to participate in the study.

I intended to use the eight participants that agreed to be part of the study. However, one participant withdrew from the study because she felt that her tight schedule would not allow her to be part of the study. I accepted her reasons for withdrawing. I then ended up having seven teachers that participated in my study. Robinson (2014) argues that a small number of participants enables the researcher to get in-depth data as more time is spent with them. Teachers that participated were

male and female. They also taught across the different phases and were of various age groups. Their teaching experience ranged from five years to 32 years.

### **3.7 Methods of data collection**

Willson and Miller (2014) indicate that data collection methods are techniques used with the aim of generating information from the participants. According to Jackson et al. (2007) and Hameed (2020) in a qualitative study, data are mostly collected verbally and then later transcribed by the researcher to textual data. The aim of this narrative study was to explore the emotional experiences of teachers who were teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and further investigate factors that contributed to the emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as how teachers navigated their emotions. Hence, I decided to engage with two data collection methods that I knew would give me in-depth data from the participants, that is the use of collages and semi-structured interviews. By using these two data collection methods collectively, I believe that the aim of this study was accomplished.

#### ***3.7.1 The use of collages***

The first stage of data collection was the use of collages. Bianco and Gianluigi (2015, as cited in Rachmawati, 2019) describe collages as a collection of photos or pictures placed on a piece of paper of a limited size. Mackworth-Young et al. (2021) define a collage as artwork that could include drawings and words to represent one's thoughts. The use of collages is an interesting way of writing and expressing what is on a person's mind without having to write it in words. According to Biffi and Zuccoli (2015), during collage production, images and pictures pasted become part of the narrative process. Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) have the same view; they indicate that collages are useful in allowing inner and unconscious thoughts to bubble to the surface. In this study, collages (see Appendix VI) were used to help teachers express the emotions they had when teaching learners with disabilities and the factors that actually influenced that. Adding to that, collages were seen as the best tool, as one could use them to access the right word indirectly (Biffi & Zuccoli, 2015). Teachers had different emotions that provided insight into them on a personal individual level, hence it was intriguing to see different collages expressing different stories of the teachers. The participants used collages to portray the experiences and emotions that they encountered during the pandemic. Mathison (2009, as cited in Krafft & Donovan, 2020) outlines that visual abstracts are enthralling when they are used coherently, legitimately and



relevantly. Collages have three attributes: they are used in the reflective process, as a form of elicitation, and as a way of conceptualising ideas (Gerstenblatt, 2013).

Strack et al. (2004) describe the use of photographs as photovoice. In this study, teachers were using images from magazines to express their emotions on teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic and showing what contributed to those emotions. The prompt used to guide teachers was: find pictures that describe how you felt teaching your learners during the time of COVID-19. Further, find pictures that show what influenced your feelings and emotions. When making the collages, I provided the participants with some of the resources I thought they were going to need like coloured pens, magazines, newspapers, glue, scissors and a big chart on which to paste photos. Teachers were also asked to bring photos that they thought would be relevant to the study. They were asked to relax when doing the collages and not worry about them being perfectly made, as long as they portrayed their narratives. Designing a collage is not daunting as anyone can make one, whether a novice or expert, they can cut and paste and ultimately get a sense of satisfaction with the finished product (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). One does not have to be artistic when making collages, their primary aim is to allow detailed expression and narration of the stories (Culshaw, 2018). Participants were also informed that they were allowed to add descriptions beneath photos and pictures, explaining the meanings behind them. Through the use of collages, teachers were able to express their emotions, some of which may have been unexpressed for a long time. And this actually helped them in accepting and later navigating the emotions they had.

### ***3.7.2 Semi-structured interviews***

The second stage of data collection was the use of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used to respond to the research questions. According to Harrell and Bradley (2009), interviews are a conversation or a dialogue that is conducted with the aim of acquiring information on a topic under investigation. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) describe semi-structured interviews as those that have both open- and closed-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method as I engaged deeply and richly with the participants in trying to understand the emotions that were brought by the pandemic and how they navigated the emotions that they encountered. Horton et al. (2004) outline that semi-structured interviews grant the participant notable freedom to explain their perceptions, thoughts and

emotions. Our informal conversation was guided by the set of questions outlined in the interview schedule (see Appendix V), as suggested by Cohen and Crabtree (2008) and Dakwa (2016). The use of semi-structured interviews allows a mutual and reciprocated communication between the researcher and the participant (Maree, 2007; Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). As semi-structured interviews have open-ended questions, this allowed the participants to respond to the questions in a way that they felt like expressing themselves; and also allowed me as the researcher to be flexible and probe the given information when that was needed. I was also able to guide and govern the participants' responses through probing in order for me to get rich data. The aim of conducting interviews was to get narratives from different teachers on the emotions they encountered when teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they overcame those negative emotions. One of the known advantages of using semi-structured interviews is that it enables the researcher to get independent perceptions from each individual (Adams, 2015). It therefore is noted that each participant had a different story to tell about the experiences they encountered and their emotional reactions to these.

When conducting these interviews, a safe quiet and comfortable space chosen by the participants was used. According to Wahyuni (2012), it is vital for the researcher to respect the participants' choices on where interviews can be conducted. I began with asking general questions like giving brief details about their backgrounds and that made them get used to the setting and calmed their nerves (Wahyuni, 2012). Teachers were allowed the freedom to respond to the questions using their preferred language in participating in the dialogue, and they all opted for isiZulu. This freedom to speak in their own mother tongue then allowed them to provide as rich a story as possible without fear of not knowing words to properly express what they wanted to say. The interview schedule accommodated isiZulu dialogue as it was written in both English and isiZulu. An advantage of conducting the semi-structured interviews second, was that clarification of the collages could be asked. There were no major interruptions during the interview sessions, as this was done after school hours (with the aim of also not interrupting the functioning of the school). Interview sessions were audio recorded from the beginning to the end. This helped me to remember every detail that was given by the participants when writing up the report. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

The qualitative (including both textual and visual) data that had been collected had to be analysed and sense made out of it. The process of data analysis involves the reduction of data, data display, conclusion and verification (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). According to Hammersley (2016), data reduction entails selecting raw data collected from the participants, making it easier to understand and arranging it into codes and themes. This involves transcription of data from the audio- and video-taped data. Hence, the raw audio data was sifted, sorted and organised into categories with the aim of looking for the patterns that may make up themes from the acquired data. From the participants' responses, more accurate and rich data were extracted and coded into themes for better understanding. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 400), thematic data analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data". I also used both inductive and deductive analysis when coding, categorising and coming up with themes. Thomas (2003) describes inductive analysis as when the frequent, dominant and/or significant themes are developed from raw research findings. Inductive analysis allows the data to speak for itself. I also used deductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning analysis is known as a method of identifying, analysing and reporting on the themes developed from the data (Oun & Bach, 2014; Pearse, 2019) using specific theoretical or conceptual concepts. Thus, Hargreaves' theory and concepts of emotional geographies and teaching and learning became important. From the themes that emerged, conclusions were made about teachers' emotions, factors that contributed to them and how teachers navigated the negative emotions or factors that affected them. The participants' responses were used in the emerging themes of the study. Thematic analysis goes hand in hand with narrative analysis where various incidents are told in developing a common story (Kohler, 2005).

### **3.9 Trustworthiness of the study**

Trustworthiness is all about giving assurance that the study is authentic and has rigour (Pilot & Beck, 2012). This involves the methodology employed when conducting the study, data generation methods and data analysis. If all these protocols are followed correctly, then the study is considered worthy to be unveiled to the readers. Lub (2015) argues that trustworthiness refers to the authentic reflection of personal and/or lived experiences of the participants in the findings. I understood that my study would only be trustworthy if it reflected what was told by the participants and that the

readers believed it to be so. Hence, I employed the criteria of credibility, dependability and confirmability that Lincoln and Guba (1985) affirm need to be used in a qualitative study.

### ***3.9.1 Credibility***

According to Holloway and Wheeler (2002) and Macnee and McCabe (2008, as cited in Anney, 2014), credibility refers to the certainty and trust that the research findings are truthful. Connelly (2016) has the same view; he states that credibility is all about having confidence in the veracity and authenticity of the study. This is achieved when the participants' viewpoints or responses are correctly inscribed in the research report. Shenton (2004) maintains that to achieve credibility, peer-debriefing and member-checking should be applied. These were used in this study. Frequent debriefing sessions were maintained between my supervisor and I to make sure that the study was conducted in an acceptable way. When I finished the interview transcriptions, I took the interview schedule and their transcripts to the participants so they could check if what was written was a true reflection of what they said, as there could be some mistakes when interpreting data. They were told not to hesitate to reject incorrect interpretations. Member checking occurs when "data and interpretations are continuously tested as they are derived with members of the various audiences and groups from which data are solicited" (Guba, 1981, as cited in Anney, 2014, p. 10). Teachers were also allowed to be part of the study as they were given an opportunity to read the transcripts, comment and contribute to the final thesis. Shenton (2004) states that member checking also includes the verification of the themes that emerged from the raw data. This is what I hoped to achieve by the manner in which I described how I arrived at the themes in Chapter Four.

### ***3.9.2 Dependability***

Shenton (2004) argues that dependability refers to when one gets the same results if they conduct a study under the same context with the same methodology used. Since this was a qualitative study, it was conducted in a way that rich data were collected from the participants. Hence, greater details were explained and were also clear to the readers. This rich description of how the study was conducted also allows any reader to confirm and affirm that proper research methodology was followed (Shenton, 2004). Hence, in my description I included the research design that was implemented and data generation methods. When all of this is achieved, then it can be said that the study is reliable as dependability relates more to reliability (Gunawan, 2015).

### ***3.9.3 Confirmability***

According to Korsetjens and Moser (2018), confirmability of the study focuses on the results being authorised and approved by other researchers. Confirmability is exercised when corroborating that the researcher's findings result from the participants' raw data. I kept all documents reflecting on the raw data provided by the participants. These documents of raw data were read and reviewed by my peers and my supervisor, in order to confirm that what is in the final report reflects what was said by the participants. This also helps in preventing bias of the researcher in selecting data that suits them (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability also denotes that the results can be corroborated and supported by people other than the researcher (Zondi, 2017). Hence, confirmability may also be established through member checking.

### ***3.9.4 Transferability***

Transferability refers to the results of the study being used and fitting into other contexts (Anney, 2014). In order for a study to be transferable, a thick and in-depth description of the context of the study and its methodology is provided. Thick and rich description of the study assists other researchers who may have an interest in the study to know which contexts and conditions to apply to their studies (Gunawan, 2015). It is hoped that the rich and in-depth descriptions that I have provided prove to be trustworthy in this study.

## **3.10 Limitations of the study**

When this study was conducted, vast challenges and limitations were encountered. Time was one of the limitations, as the study was not supposed to interrupt the functioning of the institution. Hence, interviews could only be conducted after school hours. At this time, participants were tired and hungry. However, I ensured that interviews did not go over time and did not exacerbate their feelings of being tired. It was also sometimes difficult to find a time to interview participants when issues arose that forced them to cancel appointments to conduct the interviews. It meant that I had to visit the school more times than I had anticipated.

The two data collection methods utilised were a one-time event, which required no observation in the field. Hence, information obtained may not have been a true reflection of what participants really experienced. In navigating this, I had to give them the assurance that it was perfectly acceptable to speak what was in their hearts and not mask it with what they thought I wanted to

hear. Since this was a narrative study, and within the qualitative paradigm, I did not search for the truth but rather multiple truths as revealed by the participants in telling me about their lived experiences.

### **3.11 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are about ensuring that no harm comes to anyone participating in the research. Ethics are the blueprint of how to conduct research. The basic research ethics were given attention all the way through until the study was finished. Three major concepts were observed in dealing with the ethics of this study, that is, autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence.

**Autonomy** refers to obtaining consent to conduct the study from the participants and the gatekeepers (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). I first obtained permission to conduct this study from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Ethics Committee (See Appendix VII). I also applied for permission to carry out research in the school from the Department of Education (see Appendix I). Furthermore, I obtained permission from the school principal (see Appendix II). According to Ketefian (2015), autonomy also refers to allowing the participants to make decisions on whether or not to participate in the study with no explicit or implicit pressure. Autonomy was therefore respected with participants where I obtained their permission to conduct the study with them (see Appendix III). Before commencing the research, teachers who were going to participate in this study were given an information sheet explaining the whole procedure and aims of the study. This time allowed them to decide whether they wanted to participate in the study or not. The information sheet provided participants with information about what was expected of them. After they had read the information sheet, they were required to bring back a signed consent form. Signatures indicated their willingness to participate in the study (Arifin, 2018). The information sheet and informed consent form were written in English and isiZulu; this gave the participants a better understanding as they were Zulu speaking. Participants were also informed that they were allowed to withdraw from the study any time they felt any discomfort with being part of this study; participation was completely voluntary. They were assured they were not going to be penalised or face any consequences if they withdrew from the study. The participants' identities were kept confidential and anonymous. The participants were assured that their identities were not going to be revealed in the study report and pseudonyms would be used. They were invited to choose a pseudonym for themselves. They were also assured of confidentiality and privacy.

**Non-maleficence** means to do no harm (Summers, 2020; Yip et al., 2016). No harm would be done to the participants, learners and school as a whole. In this study, it was understood that the questions asked could trigger negative emotions in the participants; hence, I had arranged social workers that would intervene in giving professional help if it was needed (See Appendix IV). The participants were told that if they did not feel comfortable responding to some questions as they may bring negative emotions, they were allowed not to answer them. They were also assured that if they required professional intervention from the counsellors during, and/or after participating in the study, they would get it. It was very important that justice was applied, teachers' emotions were regarded, considered and respected regardless of the interviewer being desperate to acquire data. During data collection, COVID-19 protocols were observed. I had to make sure that the participants did not get scared and worried about being in the same space with other colleagues. We sat 2 metres apart when conducting the interviews. Hand sanitising and sanitising of the office space was conducted after every interview. Masks were also worn at all times. I also made sure that the process of teaching and learning was not interrupted so as not to disadvantage learners, as well as the school in general.

**Beneficence** refers to the researcher being very diligent in doing good to benefit the participants (Barrow et al., 2021) and also to the researcher (Yip et al., 2016). I, as the researcher, benefitted by getting all the information I had wanted to get from the participants of this study. The participants benefitted during the research process when they were reflecting on what triggered the mixed negative emotions that they were experiencing so that they could learn to manage these negative emotions.

With all the above-mentioned considerations that were taken, respect and justice were also maintained throughout the study.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

In this chapter I discussed the methodology and research design that was used when this study was conducted. The critical paradigm was used with the aim of allowing teachers to reflect on their emotions brought about by teaching learners with disabilities, especially during the pandemic. During qualitative data collection, teachers were encouraged to tell stories on the experiences they had encountered. They were able to give in-depth and rich data when explaining the emotions they were experiencing when teaching during COVID-19. Two data collection methods were used in

obtaining the data, viz., semi-structured interviews and collages. These two data collection methods were suitable as they allow the participant to provide rich information and also allow the researcher to probe and guide participants in responding to the two research questions. Data were analysed using both inductive and deductive reasoning, and also using thematic data analysis. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations were observed throughout the study.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter detailed the methodology chosen for the study. In this chapter I focus on presenting and analysing participants' narratives that explored teachers' emotions when teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic. The narrative excerpts were taken from the semi-structured interviews and the collages that the participants designed. The analysis and discussions in this chapter respond to the research questions stipulated as follows:

1. What stories do teachers have to tell about their emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the factors that contribute to their emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How do teachers navigate their emotions?

This chapter is divided into three sections, with each section responding to a research question.

The first section, section 4.2, responds to the first question: I focus on teachers' narratives about the experiences they encountered when teaching during the pandemic. From the narratives, the main theme 'mixed emotions on teachers' experiences' emerged which is further subdivided into three sub-themes: emotional upheaval caused by COVID-19, operational rules and regulations demonstrating new ways of functioning, and the departmental intervention.

The second section, section 4.3, responds to the second research question. Here I analyse the contributing factors that influenced the emotions that teachers encountered. From the data, the main theme 'factors contributing to teachers' emotions' emerged. This theme is further divided into sub-themes, that is, teacher-learner relationship, teacher-principal relationship and the school context.

The third section, section 4.4, responds to the third question. The main theme is 'navigating emotions'. The participants showed that they embraced the pandemic and became proactive, they

adapted the curriculum and developed new teaching strategies and had supportive families and colleagues.

Hargreaves' theory underpins the study and was used to analyse the themes that emerged from the data. This theory is used in understanding the concepts of emotions and teaching and learning (as discussed in Chapter Two). The analysis that follows reveals the names of the participants in the study: Blessing, Fikile, Nelisiwe, Nozipho, Palesa, Zuki and Sipho. These names were pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves.

## **4.2 Mixed emotions on teachers' experiences**

This section focuses on the emotions that teachers experienced during the pandemic when teaching learners with disabilities. It addresses the first research question. This theme analyses the uncertainty that teachers felt when confronted with the changes that the pandemic brought. Hargreaves (2001) asserts that teaching is not only about knowledge, cognition and skill; it is also an emotional practice. Thus, he concludes that emotions are at the heart of teaching. Lee et al. (2016) provide further understanding of why teaching is an emotion-filled endeavour and indicate that it is because classrooms are always changing, and these new experiences cause various emotions. Teaching during the outbreak of COVID-19 expanded the emotional lives of teachers. The outbreak of the pandemic also brought about many changes in the education system, which caused teachers to feel great uncertainty about their teaching. Most of the emotions that teachers felt can be described as negative and is reflective of emotional fragility that the change or upheaval associated with the pandemic caused.

### ***4.2.1 Emotional upheaval caused by COVID-19***

Eriksson (2004) and Smollen and Sayers (2009) claim that people who are exposed to rapid change are bound to experience some emotional turmoil and that fundamental change usually brings about intense emotions. With the outbreak of COVID-19, teachers were forced to still maintain teaching and learning in schools regardless of the challenges and difficulties they faced. The data below show the manner in which this affected the emotions of teachers that I describe as mixed emotions, for example, guilt, uncertainty, timidity and fear. The analysis shows how the decisions by the Department of Education to implement homeschooling and thereafter the use of the rotational system of education to ensure the continuation of learning, caused teachers to experience mixed

emotions. All the participants thought that homeschooling and the rotational system was different to what they had normally experienced. Blessing and Sipho reflected this idea:

*Blessing: When learners had to come back from lockdown, we decided that we do not have to bring them all back. Some had to do homeschooling, which was something new to us. We kind of lacked self-confidence with homeschooling as we had not done it before, we felt timid.*

*Sipho: I was embraced with fear, concerned and worried, everything happened so fast and everything that happened was not expected at all; we were just not ready for COVID-19. We had to let other learners do home schooling and others had to remain at school.*

The narratives above show that the outbreak of the pandemic brought about significant changes to teachers which also influenced how they felt about teaching, their learners and parents. In particular, one notices that their emotions revolve around their feelings of being exposed to *something new*. The pandemic called for change in the *normal* way of doing things, resulting in them suddenly lacking *self-confidence*. Blessing felt out of his depth as home schooling was something he had not encountered before and this caused him to rethink his professional sense of self, resulting in him feeling *timid*. Hargreaves' (2021) concept of decision-making capital is important here. For Hargreaves (2021), decision-making capital is a store of reserves that is accumulated through experience and learning about the teaching profession. Here, Blessing and Sipho found that the rapid change associated with the pandemic made them question their professional ability and where their professional judgments could no longer be trusted (Hargreaves, 2021). In this they experienced a loss of professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). Blessing was no longer the confident teacher he was before COVID-19.

Furthermore, homeschooling and the pandemic brought about persistent fear, concern and worry for Sipho. One is able to see that the political directives forced by the pandemic caused a distancing of teachers not only from their work but also from their learners (Hargreaves, 2000). This resulted in a feeling of being not in control of their work—a sense of powerlessness over work that they thought signified their moral purpose (Hargreaves, 2000). This sense of powerlessness was further heightened because Blessing questioned the decision to do homeschooling as it was something *new*. Homeschooling caused Sipho to experience dark emotions of *fear, concern* and *worry*. These darker emotions (Hargreaves, 2000) emerged because of the rapid change that came with COVID-

19 and the even quicker response that was expected from teachers and caused Sipho to conclude, “we were just not ready for COVID-19”.

Teachers responded to the decision by the Department of Education to develop study packs for learners who were being homeschooled to ensure that learning continued, but they had concerns.

Nelisiwe: *We developed study packs for learners that had to leave for homeschooling; that was added work for us, we suffered pressure. The workload increased for us. Something new was done, which is compiling study packs which we also had to make copies of them for every learner and it was very straining. I felt so much pressure of which it was the only way in continuing with teaching and learning regardless of the situation. There was no any other way.*

Fikile: [with the compiling of study packs] *I felt like the work was doubled, it was straining. There was just too much in our plates. I had to make sure that I include work for the whole term in the packs... It felt tiring too...*

Sipho: *So, we made study packs for those that were in their homes. It was difficult for our learners to do this. For the study packs we would include materials for them to study and assessment sheets too. Even though we could not stand in front of them, we had to assess them. We would rely on parents and their relatives to help them. However, deep down we knew we were not doing justice to them. I would feel guilty assessing regardless of their obvious challenges. Some would submit packs that were just untouched.*

Nozipho: *It took me a while to get used to it, it put more pressure to us as teachers. Considering that before the outbreak of the pandemic there was no study packs compiling, no too much photocopying and nothing was being sent to the parents at home.*

Palesa: *We also had to be more creative, compose study packs for learners. Also, we had to differentiate the curriculum in accommodating illiterate parents so that they could help their children at home. However, this was a very stressful activity to do, it was something new to us. We were also not sure if what we were doing was correct.*

According to Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021), the pandemic forced teachers to be innovative and implement alternative educational and assessment strategies. The participants above mention that

in maintaining continued teaching and learning, they came up with the idea of developing study packs to accommodate homeschooling. In developing these study packs, teachers encountered exceptional emotions showing their passion and intense love for their learners and teaching and as Nelisiwe said, it was the “*only way in continuing with teaching and learning*”. However, it is evident that the newly implemented teaching method introduced excessive workloads for them, where their work was doubled. Hargreaves (1994, as cited in Easthope & Easthope, 2000) refers to this as the intensification of teachers’ work, where teachers are expected to do much more than they had to do in a day. The narratives above however also show the consequences of this intensification of their work as they indicate the *pressure, strain, stress* and *difficulty* that came with developing study packs to cater not only for learners but parents too as parents were *illiterate*. The consequences of all these demands caused Fikile to think “*there was just too much in our plates*”. In as much as they had expertise within the classroom, homeschooling caused them to feel as if they did not have control and authority over learning. Instead, learning was left to parents and this reliance on parents and relatives to help learners caused undue stress. This was compounded by the idea that sometimes the packs were “*just untouched*”. For Sipho, his concern and worry led him to believe that even this creative solution by them was a form of *injustice* as learning for learners with disabilities did not happen. Hargreaves (2021) states that teachers’ well-being can be threatened by being required to behave and teach in ways they do not like or believe in, hence, they may feel that their professional judgement and discretion is being undermined. He further states that teachers’ effectiveness in teaching can be reduced if alien ways of teaching like the development of study packs or leaving ‘teaching’ to parents and relatives are introduced.

The rotational system of schooling also influenced how teachers felt about the state of learning and teaching for learners. Participants indicated this:

Nelisiwe: *Our learners rely more on demonstration in class, that was not done much because one would get scared that learners would also ask to touch the ‘items’ and we did not like that, so we basically avoided it. Learners could not share textbooks as this would easily spread the virus. That in turn affected teaching and learning because learners could not even visit the libraries and they couldn’t be in groups and share information. We were all bitter about that, honestly.*

Sipho: *During the pandemic, there was just no effective and fair teaching and learning. It was difficult for us because we knew those that did homeschooling could not understand work well. With the ones that were at school, we couldn't do much activities, like group work since we had to follow all COVID-19 regulations such as social distancing. We couldn't do demonstrations because they would want to touch, which was prohibited at that time. I was concerned, I was concerned with how they were going to pass and get good marks with this change that had taken place drastically. Also, the periods were shortened but the knock off time remained the same. So, contact time with learners was reduced. That means less time spent with learners in class. We could not complete syllabus in time. Things were just not balancing.*

Palesa: *During the pandemic we completely stopped with all the physical skills and activities that require learners to be in groups. Our learners are not from well off backgrounds so we could not even do music demos due to not having access to equipment. There are just a few learners from affording families. This got me very concerned, I felt like learners' learning was being compromised. [Teaching and learning were affected] negatively because our children were even afraid of talking. Their participation in class dropped since they also had their own fears. Adding to that I would say the pass rate dropped during the pandemic. I was worried because some of them also felt discouraged with the results they were getting.*

With the new methods of teaching and learning implemented, teachers felt like teaching and learning was *compromised*. The knock-on effect of homeschooling was also a cause for concern for teachers. Hargreaves (2001) states that teachers experience positive emotions when they feel a sense of accomplishment. Considering that most of the learners were in their homes, there was reduced moral engagement with their learners (Hargreaves, 2001) and for Sipho this reduced engagement associated with homeschooling meant that learners “*could not understand work well*”. Student engagement during the pandemic had dropped (Hargreaves, 2021), even when they were within the confines of the classroom. Nelisiwe noted that “*We could not keep track of their understanding... we could not monitor their learning... and I'm guilty of that*”. Sipho also mentioned feeling guilty with what was being offered at school. He mentioned earlier that “*we were not doing justice... I would feel guilty for assessing learners regardless of their obvious*

*challenges*”. Here Sipho’s sense of injustice was related to the assessment policy that still required that assessment took place even though learners were being taught by parents who were illiterate or who did not help their children. The consequences however were most acutely felt by learners who were most marginalised in the schooling system. The emotional geography of political distance (Hargreaves, 2001) caused this unfairness. For these teachers, the circular by the Department of Education (KZN Circular No. 48) (DBE, 2020c) paid little attention to the needs of learners with disabilities and made no amendment or adaptation for teachers teaching learners with disabilities. This can be seen as disempowerment for both teachers and learners.

Teachers also pointed out that the pandemic forced them to make changes to pedagogical practices which in turn affected effective teaching and learning. Guner et al. (2020) state that to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, people were advised to avoid crowds and close contact with other individuals, that is, social distancing had to be practised. Hence, Sipho stated that “*We couldn’t do much activities, like group work since we had to follow all COVID-19 regulations.... We couldn’t do demonstrations.*” For Palesa, critical physical skills, group work, music demos had an unfair consequence for learners who were not only disabled but the only space where they could engage in or have access to equipment like music demos was at school, but this was no longer available. This was because of their socio-economic backgrounds. Hardiman and Jackson (1997) indicate that people can express double oppression based on their identities. Here the learners experienced this double oppression based on the class status as well as their ability status. Teachers’ sense of professionalism was challenged (Hargreaves, 2000) because demonstrations, group work, touching, sharing of textbooks, and physical activities could not take place in order to avoid transmission of the virus. This impacted the quality of teaching and learning. Adding to factors that compromised teaching and learning, the contact time/lesson periods were also reduced. Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) state that teaching during the pandemic introduced a paradigm shift in the way teachers delivered quality education. Inasmuch as it was then not quality education, this was done with the aim of accommodating COVID-19 regulations such as sanitising and screening. The rotational system of learning also did not help with learning because “*periods were shortened*”. For Sipho, this meant that learners *were not going to pass* because there was less time spent with learners and because shortened time frames meant that there was a great deal of the syllabus that could not be completed. Being unable to complete the syllabus caused Nozipho to feel *worried* and *concern*. It should however be noted that the Basic Education circular no. s2

(DBE, 2020b) mandated a trimmed curriculum stipulated by the Department of Education. This meant that some topics were totally omitted and some were reduced; this was done with an aim of accommodating curriculum coverage (DBE, 2020b). However, for these teachers, learning was compromised, causing a drop in the pass rate and where Palesa, for example, felt discouraged at the poor results. As indicated by Hargreaves (2001), classrooms are places of intense emotions and for these teachers, their emotions were because they believed that what was happening in their schools was inequality and marginalisation of already vulnerable groups of learners and this was not social justice. Moreover, learners' fear were also evident as this prevented dialogue between teacher and learners as "*children were even afraid of talking*". Palesa highlighted that this resulted in less participation which is key for ensuring access to learning for learners with disabilities. This finding is in keeping with the findings from An (2019) who also discusses the decreased participation on the part of learners.

#### ***4.2.2 Operational rules and regulations demonstrating new ways of functioning***

As the Department of Basic Education released a mandate of continued teaching and learning, teachers had to ensure the safety and security of learners whilst in the school. There were rules and regulations that had to be followed in reducing the transmission of the virus in schools:

*Blessing: We could not be together and we had to socially distance ourselves in following COVID-19 regulations. We put signs that showed them where to sit and where not to sit.*

*Nozipho: Learners had to wear masks and sometimes face shields. So as for us that teach in special schools it was very challenging for our learners to wear protective gears, they just could not and that was stressful. We would sometimes let them not wear them and we as teachers would be the only ones wearing them. They just couldn't cope. In the midst of sharing, they had to sanitise before using these items, that also was a challenge because we had to remind them each and every time.*

*Sipho: At first it was difficult to get used to sanitising every now and again. But then since it was something that had to be done, we also had to do it regardless of how we felt about it.*

It is evident from the data above that the school adhered to COVID-19 rules and regulations as a way to ensure the safety of teachers and learners. Kelchtermans' (2005) understanding of



vulnerability is useful here. Kelchtermans (2005) explains that when teachers do not feel as though they are in full control of what is happening around them, coupled with uncondusive working conditions, they begin to feel a sense of vulnerability. Complying with the COVID-19 regulations, especially ‘social distancing’, resulted in what Hargreaves (2000) describes as an emotional geography of social distancing or physical geographies. Masks, physical distancing and sanitising became the weapons that distanced them from their learners and learning and depicted conditions uncondusive to working that made them feel vulnerable. Siphso, for example, like the teachers in the Guner et al. (2020) study, understood all these were preventative measures to limit the spread of the virus. They however did not have any choice but to adjust to these instructional changes in controlling the spread of the virus. Nozipho’s narrative is interesting because for her, the ‘protective gear’ was stressful for both learners and herself. Her actions can be seen in two ways. Firstly, it shows her protective nature and awareness of the needs of the learners in special schools. Secondly, decisions to allow learners not to wear the masks, with teachers only using them actually means that learners’ safety was compromised whilst teachers were protected. One wonders if the safety and security of teachers was more important than that of the learners. What this does is show the uncertainty and fragility of decision making that occurred with teachers at this time (Hargreaves, 2021), with teachers not knowing which decisions were correct or not.

Complying with all the rules stipulated in controlling the spread of the virus also affected the instructional pedagogy of teachers. Lesson periods were reduced as they had to accommodate screening and that in turn had an impact, resulted in ineffective teaching and learning.

*Siphso: Learning timetable even changed, in accommodating our daily routine”*

*Nozipho: I was worried with how lesson periods were reduced since we had to accommodate sanitising and cleaning surfaces in between the lessons, there was reduced contact time with learners. Before we would start off a day, they would line up for screening.*

*Zuki: I was worried about the reduced time for teaching and learning.*

It is evident that a new daily routine was introduced. The members of this institution had to do COVID-19 screening every day. Siphso stated that, “*Learning timetable even changed, in accommodating our daily routine*”. This change in the learning timetable caused worry and

concern for the teachers above because of the reduced time spent on learning as “lesson periods were reduced” and contact time was lost. Hargreaves (2000) asserts that successful teaching and learning depends on maintaining close bonds between teachers and learners and also creating conditions of teaching that make emotional stability possible. Here, however, teachers experienced emotional instability because of a lost sense of their professional work.

#### ***4.2.3 Departmental intervention***

The Department of Basic Education has the objective of advancing, conserving and supporting the education system of the country (DBE, 2023). Vast challenges are encountered in schools and the department has to make sure that they intervene in making sure there is an environment conducive to teaching and learning. When there was an outbreak of COVID-19, school teachers were not ready and did not know how to react to it. Hence, they expected more support and intervention from the department. In the narratives below, teachers provided their understanding of the support given by the Department of Education.

*Blessing: They did help us in providing us with informative documents. Oh, and also, documents of how we should adjust to the COVID-19 pandemic. The departmental support was not enough. We have insufficient space in our school. I wish they could have provided us with park homes, the containers so that we could divide and separate learners; Also, I think they should have provided us with more personal protective equipment (PPEs), including protective overalls. I felt like the department was neglecting us.*

*Nozipho: Well, they tried. I'm saying they tried because they provided us with the PPEs even though they were not enough. I mean, sometimes when they bring the PPEs, they would bring small masks which could not fit to our learners. I was disappointed with their intervention; it is like they were providing for the sake of just doing it, I know they could have done more. That gave us stress because we had to compromise, give our own masks to the learners and that costed us to buy more.*

*Sipho: They tried bringing safety posters and signs, the one-metre apart signs. They also brought tanks so we could wash our hands regularly as it was stipulated. However, I don't think this was enough. In my own opinion, I think they should have also provided protective suits like overalls for learners for an increased protection. I think it would have been better*

*that way. We were happy for the little that they did, but angry at the same time because a lot of money was wasted during the pandemic. A lot should have been done. This made us think they didn't care about us and about our protection.*

*Zuki: Yes, they did something. They trimmed the curriculum for us. It wasn't the same as before the outbreak of the pandemic. Things were much easier with the trimmed curriculum. Their decisions on what was to be eliminated was good because there was no pressure. What they did was enough. They did everything that was in their power. And honestly, that spoiled us because it was then difficult to go back and adjust to the untrimmed curriculum after the pandemic.*

*Nelisiwe: They did extend some help. They gave us some documents in helping us adjust to the pandemic. Those documents included the trimmed curriculum, information about the virus nokuthi how we should behave ourselves and how to treat our learners. They also conducted workshops in teaching us more about the virus. I think what they did was enough because nobody knew and expected the outbreak of this pandemic. So, what they did was in their powers. There was no miracle that they were going to do, and I would say I was happy with it; they did their best and they were sympathising with us.*

From the narratives one is able to see the subjective truth for participants who sometimes indicated that the support from the department was sufficient to saying, even in the same breath, that it was not enough. This was directly related to their contextual needs. For them, the department provided the school with informative documents, some COVID-19 necessities, like PPEs, and the department conducted workshops. According to DBE (2020c), all COVID-19 essentials, namely, sanitisers, masks, water tankers, sanitation, safety posts and signs and measures of cleaning the schools were delivered with the aim of saving people's lives. However, some teachers thought that what the department did was not enough. Nozipho noted that, *"I was disappointed with their intervention, it is like they were providing for the sake of just doing it, I know they could have done more"*, signaling that for her the provisions were a tick box activity that did not require thought. This was because they did not bring masks that were the correct size. For her, this was very disappointing because their lack of planning meant that learners' and teachers' health and needs were compromised. Others mentioned feeling *disappointed, angry, neglected* and *stressed* as the Department of Education showed little care and concern about their protection. In a study

conducted by Allison and Levac (2021) it was found that during the pandemic there were disruptions and lack of service provisions in special schools. Thus, the findings from my study are similar to Allison and Levac (2021) and relate to findings from previous studies about the lack of support for schools that service learners with disabilities. Greaves (2019) also found similar ideas in her study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal. Ramrathan (2021), in the same vein, highlights that the poorer schools were forgotten. Ultimately, the findings show the systemic inequality evident in schools for learners with disabilities.

Sipho spoke of the corruption because money was wasted. The idea is in keeping with Hargreaves' (2001) understanding of political geographies where hierarchical power relationships exist. The Department of Education was able to use their power to disempower those most in need who needed additional help in the form of protective suits because of their compromised health. The unequal relationship is evident in the lack of support even to the teachers who were teaching in schools where little attention was paid to their specific needs. Reich et al. (2020) also indicate the importance of creating equity in schools most in need as the work of government. Despite these forms of discrimination, teachers showed their care and commitment to their learners by "*give[ing] our own masks*" to learners at the personal expense of the teachers, demonstrating their humanity. This is in keeping with research conducted by Martin and Amin (2020) who found that caring for learners in deprived contexts is an important source that becomes a necessity but also provides teachers with a sense of emotional well-being.

However, Zuki and Nelisiwe acknowledged the support provided by the department and believed it was sufficient and that they could only do what was in their power. Zuki provided a possible reason as to why the response should be seen as sufficient because of the newness of such a change: "*Nobody knew and expected the outbreak of this pandemic. So, what they did was in their powers*". The DBE (2020) noted that the COVID-19 outbreak came as a shock to everyone, nobody was prepared for it and hence there would be challenges and hinderances in service delivery. The (BDE, 2020c). These teachers understood that with a sudden outbreak of this pandemic, we should not expect everything to be perfect or that miracles were going to be performed. It could also be seen as teachers colluding with oppression (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997) by accepting this as *expected* and thus the responsibility of the Department of Education was excused because of the newness of a pandemic.

### 4.3 Factors contributing to teachers' emotions

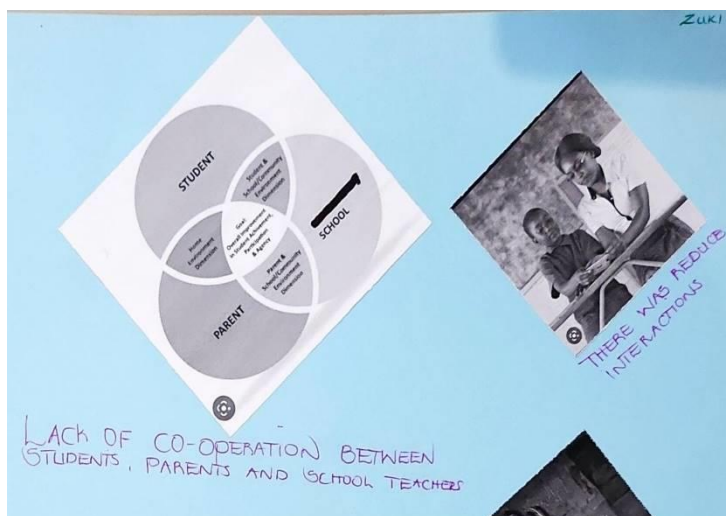
This section provides understanding on the various factors that contributed to teachers' emotions, with teachers experiencing negative and positive emotions because of this. The complexity of emotions experienced by teachers teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic was driven by certain factors and determined relationships between the teachers, learners, principal and the school context.

#### 4.3.1 Teacher-learner relationship

Pianta et al. (2012) posit that classrooms are social places, where teachers and learners laugh and play together, and where they work together in creating an environment conducive to learning. The outbreak of COVID-19 made a huge impact on how teachers interacted with learners in the classrooms. Their relationship was enormously affected.

**Figure 1**

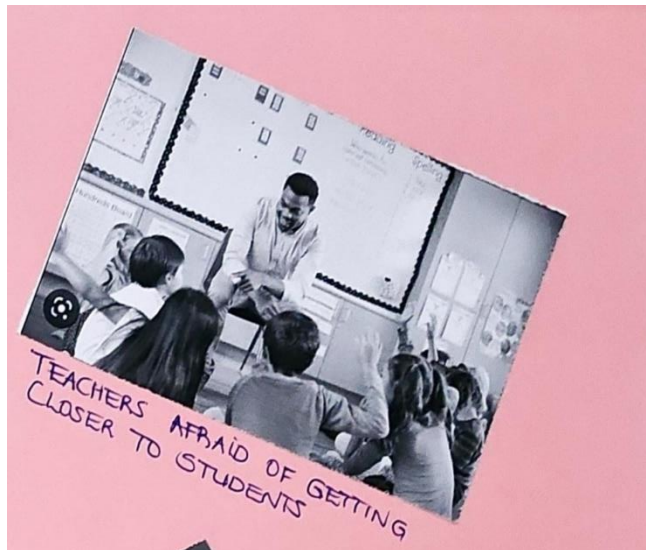
*Image extracted from Zuki's collage*



*“There was reduced interaction as we could not be close to each other. They also feared we would infect them. They could not and did not come near us as often as they used to. We couldn't spend much time together. I would feel uncomfortable, concerned and kind of embarrassed when they didn't want to come close to me. It was difficult for us to communicate with learners that engaged on homeschooling. We could not communicate with them whenever we needed to. That impacted on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. I was very concerned about learners' progress.”*

**Figure 2**

*Image extracted from Nelisiwe's collage*



*“The kind of learners that we have in our school are slow in making sense of what you say, that requires a teacher to be close to them for monitoring. We could not do that because we were scared to get infected and also feared that we would infect them. We would prefer to just stand in the front and not move around. And inasmuch as one had to protect themselves, I was very concerned about my learners. This whole drastic change wasn't making any justice to them, teaching and learning could not be done in an expected way and efficiently.”*

It is evident that the teacher-learner relationship was affected negatively. UNESCO (2020) stated that in controlling the spread of the virus, people have to comply to the stipulated rules and regulations of COVID-19, including wearing of masks and social distancing. The emotional geography of physical distance brought by complying to the regulations had a huge impact on teachers' emotional lives. Teachers and learners could not be close to each other as they all feared infection. This kind of action and emotion of being in a state of constant fear was mutual to both of them. Zuki felt “*uncomfortable*”, “*concerned*” and “*embarrassed*” when learners did not want to come close to them. This was unexpected and unnatural for teachers as well as for learners who were used to being near teachers. This changed the personal relationship between the teacher and the learners.

This in turn affected effective teaching and learning. According to Flack et al. (2020), learners with disabilities and special needs require more and special attention. The physical distance now expected by regulations of physical distancing meant that teachers could not attend to learners' individual academic needs in the classroom, instead teachers like Nelisiwe would “*just stand in the front and not move around*”. Nelisiwe and Zuki felt professional guilt (Morrow, 2001) as they knew that they could not provide sustained engagement with learning, especially for learners with

disabilities. The psychic rewards of teaching (Hargreaves, 2021) were not there as teachers could not fulfill their true responsibility of ensuring learning for the most vulnerable in their care. It is for this reason that Nelisiwe believes that this was not “*justice*” for the learners.

With the learners that opted for homeschooling, there was also definitely reduced social and educational interaction as they could not communicate well. Zuki said that “*It was difficult for us to communicate with learners that engaged on homeschooling. We could not communicate with them whenever we needed to*”. Apart from being emotionally distant, these learners were physically distant from their teachers (Hargreaves, 2000). This is similar to what Kelsey and D’souza (2004) indicate that relationship building is difficult when there is distance. This remote kind of teaching associated with homeschooling caused these teachers to feel a sense of loss because they were unable to connect with learners on an emotional and personal level. Their concern about their learners made them feel like they could not conduct their personal and moral duties (Hargreaves, 2021). Teachers being *concerned* stem from the love they have for their learners, their sense of responsibility and from the extended moral commitment they feel for their learners. Negative emotions that the teachers experience emanate from the moral investment they make in the lives of learners (Yeo et al., 2014) but are unable to access. This is in keeping with the findings from Fataar’s (2020) study that showed that during COVID-19 teachers showed greater care and concern for their learners.

#### ***4.3.2 Teacher-principal relationship***

Wahlstrom and Louis (2008, p. 460) state that “one of the most frequently explored ways in which leaders can influence an organization’s effectiveness is through creating a positive organizational environment”. Principals are thought to be the ones that determine how effectively the school is going to operate and function. They also have an impact on how their teachers feel about being in their schools. Different principals have had different ways of embracing and ensuring continued functionality of the school during the pandemic. However, their actions have caused teachers to encounter certain emotions.

**Figure 3**

*Image extracted from Blessing's collage*



*“I expected an extended support from the principal. I got infected and had to leave for two weeks of quarantine, but she instructed me to still come to school to continue with teaching and learning, as sick as I was. I was disappointed with her doings. Her insensitivity was just disgusting, she just did not show any support and sympathy to my situation. I could not get any of emotional support, help, guidance and advice from her.”*

**Figure 4**

*Image extracted from Fikile's collage*

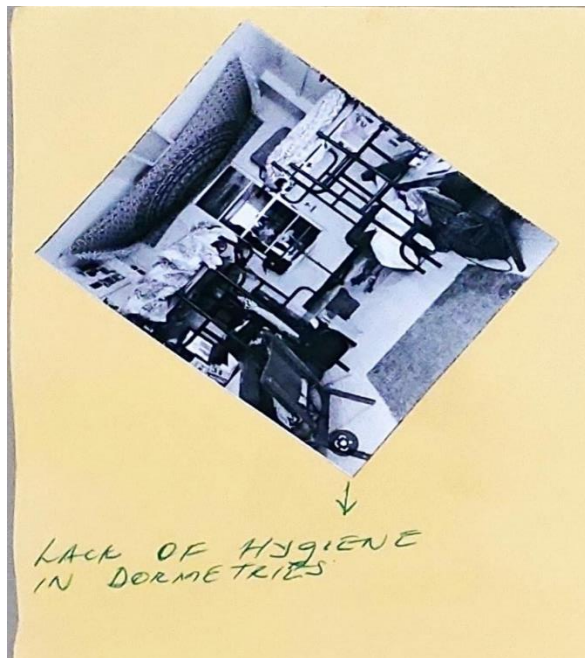


*“The principal did not even make phone calls in checking how we were holding up during that difficult time. She never. That made me think and feel that she doesn't care about us and all that she cares about is work if she only communicates with us only about work. We expected at least a bit of love and caring from her. More than being neglected, her lack of sympathy was disgusting. So that just made me feel neglected and angry.”*



**Figure 5**

*Image extracted from Palesa's collage*



*"The principal instructed us to clean learners' hostels. We had to take off our clothes and wear pinafores. I felt undermined because my role is to teach these learners, not to clean their hostels. We felt like she did not care about us, we felt some resentment, we were in danger of getting sick and die, especially because we had to clean learners' dirtiness."*

From the teachers' data one can conclude that the relationship between the teachers and the principal is one that is negative and causes dark emotions to arise. Hargreaves (2021) indicates that teaching is a social profession where the expectation is that colleagues and members of management support and help one another through a system of shared commitment and professional learning. However, COVID-19 brought about a changed relationship between the principal and the teachers. From the data one can firstly see that the principal did not show any *sensitivity, love, sympathy and care* to her junior teachers. Blessing mentioned that he got infected by COVID-19 and got sick. However, the principal turned a blind eye to that and expected him to still come to school.

Fikile's belief that in such an unprecedented *difficult time*, the support from the principal was expected even with a simple phone call to check "*how we were holding up during that difficult time. She never*". This brought a loss of connection and changed emotional dynamics where they expected care, love and sympathy, but it was absent. There were no rewards in the form of sympathy and care, concern and love from the principals. This affected them negatively where

they felt dark emotions of *disgust*, *anger* and *neglect* (Hargreaves, 2000). This is contrary to the findings of the study conducted by Collie (2021) where teachers and principals developed a reciprocal caring relationship in order to be supportive. Hargreaves (2021) also indicates that teacher well-being is connected to how teachers perform their work. Here the failure by the principal to be sympathetic and caring affects their well-being. The principal's main concern was to ensure that teachers were physically present at the school, even if, as in Blessing's case, he was sick.

Palesa also revealed the expectations of the principal were not in line with her professional role as a teacher. For her, the principal's instructions to *clean* the hostels, wear clothes that made her feel insignificant and not in keeping with her professional skills were unfair and made her feel undermined. Palesa's complaint is significant because there are no policy prescriptions that force a teacher to do this work. The Norms and Standards for Educators (Republic of South Africa, 2000) do not include cleaning the hostel and getting sick when surrounded by "*learners' dirtiness*". Here the principal used her positional power as principal to disempower the teachers (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Palesa instead felt *resentful*, because of her lack of power and where her capacity as a professional was reduced. The complexity of the relationship between teachers and the principal indeed involved negative emotions (Hargreaves, 1998 and Sutton et al., 2009). One may look at the principal's deeds differently. She may have felt overwhelmed by the expectations required of her and to avoid emotional entanglements with the teachers' problems, she resorted to professional distancing (Hargreaves, 2001) but ultimately this caused teachers to feel unsupported and their emotional health suffered.

#### **4.3.3 School context**

Dey (2001) defines context as an environment or situation. However, contexts do not exist in isolation and are influenced by, for example, facilities, resources and where the context is located. The school context in which this study was located is a semi-rural area in KwaZulu-Natal. The school is surrounded by a community that is poor, there is a high rate of unemployment or underemployment and has limited resources and poor infrastructure. All of these factors have an impact on the functioning of the school. The lack of resources and its ability to influence teaching and learning was over-emphasised during COVID-19. Participants indicated:

*Zuki: Our school is built in a semi-urban area, we have a few resources. We are in short of infrastructure and buildings. We do not have things like projectors, charts etc. Also, when we teach, we mostly theorise than being practical. I think officials just do not think that this much shortage of resources and infrastructure leaves us as teachers demoralised.*

*Nozipho: We do not have sufficient resources, more especially since we are a special school, we do not have needs and resources that cater and accommodate our kind of learners. We end up using our own money as teachers. We compromise. As I have mentioned earlier that I teach food production, learners have to know fruits' colours. And we do not have a photocopying machine that shows colours, ours has black and white colour and I am dismayed by that, really it concerns me that our learners do not get education that suits them.*

The participants' responses above depict the dire state of schools in semi-rural and rural areas. Surchev (2010) described rural areas as those that are poorly developed and at the time of data collection, very little had changed. According to Johnson and Strange (2007, as cited in Hannum et al., 2009, p. 1) "rural schools face unique challenges associated with geographic isolation, racial segregation, and limited school and community resources." The resources they lack relate to systemic factors like infrastructure and buildings, whilst institutional level resources relate to projectors and charts. The resources that they need are different to schools in urban areas or public schools—here resources must cater for and accommodate the needs of learners in a special school. Haung et al. (2020) have also found that little effort and limited work have been done in providing sufficient resources to schools in catering to the needs of learners with disabilities. This sentiment is evident in the data where participants speak of a lack of resources like photocopying machines, essential for teaching learners with disabilities for example *fruit colours*. The school context where a lack of resources is evident has a huge impact on the effectiveness of teaching and learning and this in turn causes teachers to experience mixed emotions. In order for a school to provide quality education and be productive, there must be learning materials, physical facilities and human resources (Okongo et al. 2015). The failure to provide these resources leaves teachers like Zuki and Nozipho *demoralised*.

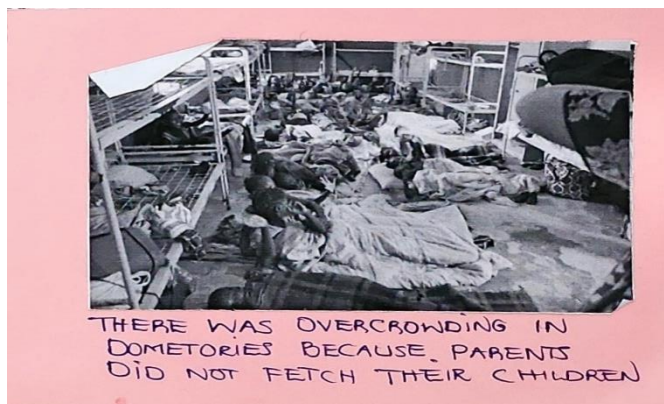
However, despite the shortage of resources, teachers from this school love their learners so much that they improvised for effective teaching and learning. From the interviews conducted, Fikile

and Nozipho mentioned that because the school did not have sufficient resources, and because they cared about their learners and their professional sense of self, they ended up *improvising* and *compromising*. Improvising and compromising means using “*our own money as teachers*” to help learners who need to have access to cognitive development. According to Wang (2013), public schools are often perceived to correct social inequality, however, these schools do not possess the facilities and resources required to address this social inequality issue. Whilst teachers are not able to provide all that the learners need to challenge the inequality and symbolic violence that learners face, they do it in small but valuable ways. These findings concur with that of Martin and Amin (2020) where teachers also used their own money to take care of the needs of learners who live and learn in deprivation.

Adding to the above teachers’ concerns, they also mentioned the school experiencing overcrowding of learners. The school has too few classrooms and could not adequately cater for the number of learners, and in the hostels many learners do not have enough rooms to sleep and play in.

### Figure 6

*Image extracted from Sipho’s collage*



*“We don’t have sufficient space in the hostels. We had to make sure that hostels are clean. To think we (teachers) were cleaning them, we had to, for an improved hygiene. We would even wash curtains for them. Honestly, I felt undermined by that, I felt suppressed. The school was supposed to hire more cleaners.”*

**Figure 7**

*Image extracted from Zuki's collage*



*"Our school is a boarding school, we have learners staying within school premises, in the hostels. Learners were too overcrowded in the hostels considering that we had to follow COVID-19 protocols such as social distancing. With this overcrowding, it was easy for them to infect one another. They would even infect those that travel every day to their homes. Our classrooms are also small, there was just not enough space for social distancing. We could not even walk around the rows because of overcrowding, because we were scared we were going to catch the virus since COVID-19 is a respiratory disease. That made me not comfortable, and timid about teaching."*

**Figure 8**

*Image extracted from Nozipho's collage*



*"Learners were too many that we could not practise social distancing. Before we sent some learners home, this made me feel fearful because if one was to be infected in that situation, we would all be infected and get sick since there was no way we were going to be 1.5m in our classes."*

*"In our school we do have flushing toilets, yes, but we did not have enough cleaners for these toilets for better hygiene, I would feel anxious about this and fearful. And since we were in a rural area, it happens sometimes that we do not have access to water for days, whereas the pandemic required and demanded cleanliness and we wash our hands more frequently. This brought me fear; I was scared that I was going to get infected. So not having water in the school was very disturbing. I think I also have to mention that our school is located close to our small town and close to the circuit so the department officials would hold meetings in our school and workshops for different schools and subjects. So now the thought of using the same toilets as these people from different areas just gave me fear of even using the toilet. I just stopped using it completely because I was scared that I would get infected through the use of these toilets."*

It is also evident that there was overcrowding in this school (both in classrooms and in hostels). Overcrowding added to the dirtiness of hostels and this situation had forced teachers to clean for learners, leaving them feeling undermined and oppressed. Sipho remarked that, *“To think we (teachers) were cleaning them, we had to, for an improved hygiene. We would even wash curtains for them. Honestly, I felt undermined by that, I felt suppressed”*. This left teachers with negative emotions because of the extensification of their work. According to Pratt and Jarvis (2006), extensification of work occurs when tasks are shifted to others that is beyond what they normally do. Lau et al. (2022) describes extensification of work as an increased workload.

Ready et al. (2004) mention that overcrowding is determined by the number of learners enrolled compared to the number of learners the facilities were designed to serve and Butera and Dunn (2005) extend this to include the reason for overcrowding. Butera and Dunn (2005) attribute it to a shortage of resources and infrastructure. From the above data one recognises that there was a shortage of classroom space; thus, social distancing during COVID-19 could not be practised. Guner et al. (2020) state that some of the precautional measures that should be taken to avoid the transmission of COVID-19 is to avoid overcrowding, and practise good hygiene and social distancing. However, the data suggest this was impossible and *“we could not practise social distancing”*. The lack of human resources like cleaners and additional assistants to help care for learners led to a compromise of care for both teachers and learners. However, one is also able to see the care and concern that teachers have for learners; teachers would go beyond what was reasonable to help their learners despite being *fearful*.

Not only were there limited resources in the school, classrooms were also overcrowded. Zuki mentioned that, *“We could not even walk around the rows because of overcrowding, because we were scared that we were going to catch the virus, since COVID-19 is a respiratory disease”*. The context of the school was not conducive at all for teaching and learning during the pandemic. Nozipho commented that, *“There was no way we were going to be 1.5m in our classes”*. It also reflects that when there is a shortage of resources and improper infrastructure, effective teaching and learning is not accomplished. Teachers were unable to do practical learning, only theory learning. In the interviews Zuki stated that, *“Also, when we teach, we mostly theorise than being practical”*. Zambo (2006) outlines that the use of models and pictures enhances learner thinking

skills and makes them engage well in the classroom, but the lack of resources prevented this from happening.

In Nozipho's collage, it is shown that the school has a poor sanitation system. She explained that *"In our school we do have flushing toilets, yes, but we did not have enough cleaners for these toilets for better hygiene, I would feel anxious about this and fearful"*. Nozipho feared she was going to get infected and get sick by using toilets that lacked hygiene. The COVID-19 virus is mostly transmitted when one does not frequently wash their hands with soap and water or alcoholic sanitiser, especially after touching common surfaces and using the bathroom (Lotfi et al., 2020). Water becomes a scarce commodity and that engenders fear and anxiety in participants. The fact that the schools, learners and teachers did not have access to running water for days during the pandemic is a form of systemic oppression (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997).

#### **4.4 Navigating emotions**

From the previous themes, one is able to see that the outbreak of the pandemic elicited complex and varied emotions from teachers. Ackermann (2021) outlines that every individual encountered change that was brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, however, teachers also had to adapt to that change. This section responds to the final research question which seeks to explore how teachers navigated their emotions when they encountered challenges associated with COVID-19 that were discussed above. The sub-themes that follow provide insight into the various strategies that teachers used to overcome obstacles, ranging from colleagues and family which were also features that helped them navigate their emotions.

##### ***4.4.1 Embracing the pandemic and being proactive***

One of the coping mechanisms that was best used was to embrace the drastic change that was brought forward by the pandemic and come up with coping strategies and mechanisms to continue with life. According to Ackermann (2021), understanding any situation is vital to circumvent being stuck in transition. Below are participants' responses when they were asked how they navigated the emotions and challenges that they encountered when teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic.



Blessing: *Since I was already taught about the pandemic, and also since I am a Life Skills teacher which we had received documents about the virus, I knew about the virus. Hence, I felt buoyed and confident because I knew I was going to be fine. When testing for COVID-19 I knew I was going to tolerate whichever results I was going to get. We had to make sure that we followed all COVID-19 protocols, wash hands, sanitise, social distance. One thing that made me cope during the pandemic was knowing and realising that COVID-19 can be treated and being infected by it is not a dead-end.*

Fikile: *What made me feel better was following all regulations that were put that made me cope during that time. I would always have medication and home remedies for prevention and treatment of COVID-19 since we now know what helps. I would follow all COVID-19 protocols that would be stipulated. Practise more social distancing, promote and practice individual activities in class and avoid group activities. I had to ignore the negativity, focus on myself and my business. I had to accept the situation as it was.*

Nelisiwe: *One had to accept the situation as it was, giving in and bring the best we could. I think getting vaccination helped us reduce the worries we had about the virus, even though there was a lot of things said about the vaccines we received.*

Nozipho: *We had to follow all COVID-19 protocols, including social distancing. So we had to take out some beds in the hostel. We all had to do screening in the morning, we all had to socially distance ourselves, we also had to vaccinate learners if their parents agreed, this was just too much to take. We ended up asking parents that they buy masks for their children, knowing very well that most of them cannot afford buying these items. But to those who truly could not buy for their children, we as teachers could extend our arms and buy for those learners with our own money. It was just acceptance. I had to accept that the situation was there and I had no control over it.*

Sipho: *I would make sure that they follow all COVID-19 protocols and regulations; frequent wash of hands, social distancing, sanitise surfaces and their workbooks. We got vaccinated and encouraged one another to get vaccinated. I vaccinated three times; first one was Johnson & Johnson. We did that with an aim of boosting our immune system.*



*Zuki: I vaccinated and I felt hopeful that my immune system will be boosted. I told myself that I had to ignore all these updates about it. I would instantly ignore every update or message that would pop up in my phone because people were even lying about the facts of the virus.*

From the above data, one can see that the participants did have *fears, anxiety* and *concerns* about the pandemic. Teachers feared they were going to get infected and die from the virus. However, their resilient spirit and acceptance that the pandemic would not last long helped them to feel a sense of relief. Nozipho said, *“I had to accept that the situation was there and I had no control over it”*. Ackermann (2021) indicates that one of the key ways in which to navigate emotional turmoil is to accept and move on from things that are outside of our control. This is evident in the teachers’ narratives. Also, it appears for all of them that the main thing that they did was to follow all COVID-19 protocols and regulations as they were mostly engulfed with a fear of infection and death. Hence, to avoid those negative emotions, they used their knowledge of protective factors and complied with the stipulated rules and regulations of COVID-19: *“we followed all COVID-19 protocols, wash hands, sanitise, social distance”*.

Some even took *home remedies* and ensured that they had a ready supply of *medication* to treat COVID-19. Choudhary (2020) stipulates that complying with COVID-19-set regulations may also help in reducing chronic psychological manifestations like depression and anxiety that are known to be a threat posed by the virus. It appears that embracing and accepting the situation really helped them in navigating these negative emotions and so some even felt confident and buoyed because they understood that if they were proactive and followed the rules *“I was going to be fine”*. This self-soothing and acknowledgement of fears and understanding them is similar to research conducted by Eva et al. (2020). Some teachers stated that being vaccinated helped reduce fear of infection. Zuki and Sipho stated that they got *“vaccinated”*. This is in keeping with findings from Mutch (2021) who established that the provision of vaccines for teachers and some learners alleviated some of the fear that engulfed education. Thus, teachers capitalised on their knowledge about the virus, taking the required precautions to show self-care and being ready gave teachers the strength to continue despite the difficult circumstances.

#### ***4.4.2 Adapting the curriculum and developing new teaching strategies***

The outbreak of COVID-19 also posed a threat to the education system; teaching and learning were affected. Hence, in navigating that, teachers had to be strategic in making sure that learners did learn during this critical time. Thembalihle school educators came up with some strategies in making sure that there was continued teaching and learning and also in trying to do justice to their learners regardless of an uncondusive environment. All indicated that one of the key strategies that they used was study packs to ensure teaching and learning, but that study packs were not fail proof.

*Fikile: We did study packs for learners that could not come to school due to their chronic illnesses, they did homeschooling. With the ones that were at school we encouraged individual games so that they do not touch each other.*

*Nelisiwe: So, these study packs also included assessment sheets and activities. However, since they were not that effective, when it was time for our learners to come back full time, we had to re-do what they did at home since they can be too forgetting.*

*Zuki: In terms of teaching and learning, since the lesson periods were reduced, I used to have extra classes to make up for the time that was lost during the practice of COVID-19 protocols. I figured learners needed an extended time for them to understand what I had to teach. Besides, I thought they deserved justice. Even when those that did homeschooling returned, I had to do extra classes because honestly, there was no learning for them whilst they were away from school—that gave me peace and satisfaction.*

The teachers' decision to use study packs proved helpful, especially for "*learners that could not come to school due to their chronic illness, they did homeschooling*". The study packs also included "*assessment sheets and activities*". Here what is critical to teachers (who can be seen as agents of change) (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997) is the awareness and understanding of their learners' needs. Teachers did this with the aim of responding to and accommodating learners that had comorbidities (The South African Human Rights Commission, 2013). This ensured that in some way, the right to learning was assured for those most in need. Teachers are so aware of their learners' needs that when they realised that the study packs and assessment sheets were not effective, they resorted to having to "*re-do what they did at home since they can be too forgetting*". Thus, reteaching concepts and knowledge was one of the key ways in which to respond to learners'

needs. Zuki extended this to include having extra classes to make up for the lost time. The extra lessons were the only way to not feel negative about learners with disabilities' experiences during COVID-19 as *"there was no learning for them"*. This increased her sense of responsibility and accountability to learners who she believed *"deserved justice"* and this actually made her feel *"relieved and certain that they did learn"*. Teachers did this in keeping with Hargreaves' (2002) idea of emotional geographies which allow for personal and self-fulfillment where learners' learning and well-being are connected to how they feel as teachers. Here they could receive the psychic rewards of teaching (Hargreaves, 2021) by being responsible for ensuring that learners had access to learning. Soldaat (2019) also indicates that the reason why teachers go the extra mile for their learners is because of the beliefs that teachers have about their responsibility towards the well-being of learners. It is for this reason that teachers took the extra time to teach after school.

#### ***4.4.3 Supportive families and colleagues***

When teachers received support from important people in their lives, teachers experienced reduced distress which led to better outcomes (Gleason et al., 2008). In this study, participants indicated that having people who they could talk to and confide in helped them to navigate their negative emotions.

*Blessing: It was one of my female colleagues. I was pleased with her readily availability and with any support I would need. If I needed an ear, an advice she would be there very willingly. She was always there for me. She would frequently check up on me, that actually made me feel blessed. I probably would have died if she wasn't there for me even during my sickness.*

*Fikile: It was my life partner. When I was feeling sick, he would always take me to the doctors. He was taking care of me, making sure that I eat and take the medication. He would check up on me regularly. He also was taking care of himself so that the kids and I would not get infected. I would feel loved, special and see how much he cares for his family.*

*Nelisiwe: It was my brother. He used to check up on me a lot and constantly. He used to give me information about the virus, giving information about home remedies for prevention of the disease. And that gave me hope about life, that I was not alone, there are people that care about me.*

Nozipho: *It was my sister. She used to check up on me more frequently. Checking if everything was well and if I was okay. I would talk with her about all my COVID-19 worries and fears. She would tell me that the pandemic was going to pass and there is really nothing we can do, it is something that we have to adjust to it, we cannot change anything about it but must just adapt.*

Palesa: *It was my sister who works at Social Development Department. She was giving me counselling services most of the time. Telling me that this is not the end of the world, I am not going to die. Her support would make me feel at ease, she also used to call and check up on me every now and again.*

Sipho: *It was my brother. We would always remind each other about all COVID-19 protocols, the wearing of masks. We would frequently check up on each other. And ke talking with him on daily basis which made me feel better. I would feel that I am loved and have an assurance that I am not on my own with this whole situation.*

Zuki: *It was my whole family. I for one, got infected by the COVID. They took care of me; they showed great care. They would check up on me regularly and with their check-ups and them being there, I would feel comfortable, eased and gain hope about life.*

Almost all the participants found that their families were their support structure, be it a brother, sister or the whole family. Allen and Wiles (2013) state that having the required available support has numerous advantageous outcomes. Their supportive units helped them negotiate their emotions associated with the fear of COVID-19. Often this was in the form of ‘*frequently checking up on them*’ or ‘*taking them to the doctor*’ or ‘*providing information about COVID-19*’. These frequent interactions had the positive effect of helping participants feel at *ease* and *comforted* during these times. There seemed to be emotional engagement (Hargreaves, 2000) between teachers and their loved ones. Gleason et al. (2008) outline that people feel satisfied when the support they need from other people meets their wished expectations. For Blessing, this “*actually made me feel blessed*”, with Fikile feeling “*I would feel loved, special and see how much he cares for his family*”. Nelisiwe, Nozipho and Zuki mentioned that the support and intervention gave them a sense of well-being and they felt *hopeful* about life and *eased* from all the negative emotions they had. Having a confidant like a colleague to ask for advice and who is there significantly reduces chances of encountering negative mental health outcomes (Eisenberger, 2013). At the time of

COVID-19 and the isolation that it brought, having a support system caused many of the participants to not feel so alone or that the end of the world was far away. The importance of collegial support was also evident in the study conducted by Aarnos (2021). One would say that inasmuch as there was physical distance (Hargreaves, 2001) as the participants had to quarantine, but there was increased moral and emotional proximity, albeit from a distance (Hargreaves, 2021) which made them able to cope. Significant others were able to provide the emotional support needed to manage the pandemic.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter attempted to analyse the data to respond to the research questions that underpinned this study. I used the participants' narratives to obtain an understanding of teachers' emotions when teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic. Their experiences were mostly influenced by the drastic change that was brought by the pandemic and that caused a change to how schools function and the different expectations for teachers. Inevitably this resulted in a variety of emotions that show the struggles teachers experienced at this time. The data also reveal that relationships, important in a classroom and schooling context, were impacted in many ways, causing a change in relationships. This caused intense emotions for teachers, reiterating Hargreaves' (2001) ideas of emotions being at the heart of teaching. Teachers are also seen as agents of change, responding in ways that ensured that the learners who they cared about the most were not completely disempowered by the events of the pandemic. In the following chapter, I present reflections that emerged from this study, the study's implications and I provide concluding thoughts.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **REFLECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented, discussed and analysed data and findings of the study relative to the emotions teachers encountered when teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed that teachers experienced emotional turmoil. In this chapter, I reflect on the relevance and appropriateness of methodology, theory and data collection methods that were used in this study. I also discuss key findings in relation to the key research questions that guided the study. I then discuss limitations that I encountered when conducting this study and future research recommendations. Lastly, I conclude with my thoughts and reflections.

#### **5.2 Purpose and significance of the study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the emotional experiences of teachers who taught learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings of this study contribute to the scholarly knowledge about the emotions that teachers encountered when teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic. Findings also reveal the many challenges that teachers faced. Despite the challenges COVID-19 brought, teachers also showed their sense of agency as they navigated the challenges that they came across in order to maintain the right to education for their learners who had disabilities. The study used narrative inquiry and thus the stories and voices of the teachers created awareness of their everyday lived experiences during this unsettling period.

The following questions guided the study:

1. What stories do teachers have to tell about their emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the factors that contribute to their emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How do teachers navigate their emotions?

The study also aimed that the participants to self-respect. Through teachers' engagement in making collages and interviews, they were able to provide relations between the principal and the

Department of Education. The department could not help them enough, which was unfair to the teachers.

### **5.3 Reflections on theoretical framework and methodological issues**

In this section, I review the theoretical framework and methodology that was used in this research study.

Hargreaves' Theory of emotions and teaching and learning was employed as a theoretical framework for this study. This theory was used in analysing teachers' emotions, especially when teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic. Teachers encountered emotional turmoil brought about by the pandemic, also considering that it introduced a drastic change in the education system. Hargreaves (2001) and Wilson (2004) indicate that teaching is an emotional experience, with Wilson (2004) arguing that it must be understood that emotions are the heart of teaching. Teaching alone does trigger certain emotions in teachers, however, teaching in a drastically changed environment effects more intense emotions in teachers. Emotions are described by Jones and Kessler (2020) as mental states that are intertwined with intense feelings and can sometimes even trigger bodily reactions to any experience. On a daily basis in acting out their daily duties, teachers engage with learners, other colleagues, parents and the Department of Education officials and various external factors that cause them to experience their emotions in a variety of ways. Using Hargreaves' theory made me understand the emotions that teachers encountered when teaching during the pandemic. This also made me understand the relationship they have with their learners when they describe feeling worried when being away from them.

This study was located within the critical paradigm. This paradigm allows one to understand power dynamics in the society (Asghar, 2013) and was especially helpful to me when trying to understand the power dynamics that occurred when teaching during the pandemic. For example, teachers in this study saw the trimmed and revised curriculum from the Department of Education as one that lacked consultation with them. Thus, the decisions to include or exclude content made them feel powerless and timid. Teachers were left disempowered but their emotions showed the deep despair that they felt, especially when it came to their learners with disabilities' learning. Teachers in this study teaching learners with disabilities felt disadvantaged since their learners require special, intensive care and attention as compared to learners with no disabilities. Teachers felt this change did not do justice to their learners. One of the ways in which this affected the most vulnerable was

the lack of support and lack of knowledge about what was going on when it came to the workbooks that were sent home. The critical paradigm allowed for another key characteristic to unfold, namely, that of self-reflection.

The research style that was employed in this study was a qualitative one. This style was useful in accessing thoughts and feelings teachers (Sutton & Austin, 2015) experienced when teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since I aimed to get in-depth textual data from the participants and also to work closely with the participants in order to build trust, the qualitative style was the most fruitful in this regard. In the beginning of the study, I explained to the teachers that their real names were not going to be revealed. The participants were able to engage in the interviews willingly, giving as much information as they could. In the qualitative style, participants are studied in their natural context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). To ensure authentic understanding, I visited and interviewed them in spaces that they felt most comfortable within the school. I often interviewed them in the classrooms and in learners' hostels. For that reason, I had to visit them and interview them in their preferred place around their school. This helped in enhancing their memories of working in contexts steeped in poverty and where learners with disabilities were made visible. The failure by the Department of Education to provide the required resources for learners with disabilities during the pandemic became even more stark. The result was that teachers could tell stories of marginalisation of those most vulnerable in society—learners with disabilities.

Narrative inquiry was used to understand teachers' experiences when teaching during the pandemic. Squire et al. (2014) and Moen (2006) describe narrative inquiry as a study of how human beings experience the world, which may be converted and interpreted in a story form. I obtained rich and in-depth data from teachers which I understood and accepted as authentically told based on their realities or subjective truth. Narrative inquiry was thus an appropriate approach to understand the stories teachers told about how they experienced the various challenges that COVID-19 brought, how they believed it affected their learners with disabilities and their understanding of whether these experiences were just or unjust. Narratives are convenient when the researcher wishes to study teachers' emotions in teaching (Naidoo, 2018). I engaged with them as we conducted interviews. The second method of data collection that was used was collages. Collages are described as a piece of paper made up of images, drawings and words and are used



to express a person's thoughts (Mackworth-Young et al., 2021). These were very useful when teachers wanted to express their emotions and the factors that contributed to the emotions that they encountered.

#### **5.4 Summary of key findings of the study**

This section provides a summary of the key findings, as they are summarised as themes that emanated in this study. There are three main themes that emerged.

##### ***5.4.1 What stories do teachers have to tell about their emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?***

Findings in the first theme revealed that teachers encountered a multitude of intense emotions brought about by the outbreak of the pandemic. The pandemic came unexpectedly; hence it introduced drastic change in the education system. Teachers were just not ready and not equipped for COVID-19 and its expectations. Teachers experienced both negative and positive emotions. However, it must be stated that, for the most part, teachers encountered mostly negative dark emotions (Hargreaves, 2000) such as guilt, uncertainty, timidity and fear. These emotions arose from what the department introduced as a rotational system of learning with the aim of ensuring that teaching and learning continued in schools. The findings show that it was a pressure-filled time with teachers developing study packs for learners who were doing homeschooling. However, working in contexts of intense pressure and lack of knowledge caused them to feel uncertain and lacking in 'self-confidence'. This had implications for their professional judgement and professional capacity and ability causing them to question the decisions they made. Hence, they experienced loss of professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). The introduction of this new pedagogy of homeschooling resulted in teachers being distant, not only in relation to their work but also to their learners (Hargreaves, 2000). They felt powerless over both the loss of control of their work as well as their inability to be supportive of the learning of their learners who they believed were most vulnerable. Furthermore, homeschooling and the implementation of study packs caused the intensification of teachers' work (Easthope & Easthope, 2000). This is because their workload was intensified having to develop study packs that catered for learners and parents. Developing the study packs took time that teachers felt they did not have. Thus, the intensification was because of having to firstly develop the study packs but also to develop them in such a way that illiterate parents could help their children without the support of the teachers. Secondly, their

work intensified because the study packs required administrative work that took up time they did not have. Teachers thus felt pressure, strain, stress and difficulty. However, it should be noted that teachers questioned the effectiveness of the implementation of homeschooling; they felt study packs were ineffective and believed that teaching and learning were compromised. This is because some learners would bring the study packs back to school untouched. Teachers did not have control of how learners at home were learning, and they also could not monitor learners' learning. The intense emotions of guilt riddled the data as they worried that there was no effective learning for their learners. For them it was a matter of justice which they believed was not done to their learners, especially those who had to be homeschooled.

Teaching and learning were also compromised for those learners that were at school. COVID-19 rules and regulations had to be followed. Hence, teachers' teaching strategies also had to change. Social distancing regulations meant that teaching practices important for learners with disabilities could not occur. Teachers could not be physically close to learners; physically touching and guiding them could not happen. Demonstrations and the sharing of textbooks and doing physical activities that were all traditional practices that they used to show their commitment to learning and learners could not be practised. Hargreaves (2001) indicates that the concepts of distance and closeness influences relationships and the manner in which interactions can occur, which in turn influence emotions. Teachers' sense of professionalism here was challenged (Hargreaves, 2000) and they experienced a loss of accomplishment and engagement (Hargreaves, 2021). Teachers' sense of professionalism was also challenged by the Department of Education when they made the decision about curriculum trimming. In trying to control the spread of the virus by adhering to COVID-19 rules (Guner et al., 2020), learners and teachers were socially and physically distanced from each other (Hargreaves, 2000). This led to extreme emotions for teachers caused by emotional geography of political distance (Hargreaves, 2001). Whilst the Department of Education extended some support to the schools in navigating challenges and drastic change brought by COVID-19, most teachers voiced that the department's intervention was not enough for their contextual needs. Important measures like face masks did not fit their learners, thus compromising their already compromised immune system. For the teachers, this lack of thought shows the abuse of power associated with political geographies of the Department of Education. Teachers showed their care and concern for learners where often teachers used their own money to navigate the challenge of proper masks. Their sense of commitment and concern to learners brought about positive feelings

where using their own money did not matter. Their data suggest that teachers believed that the department had the capability of doing more, but lack of thought prevented them from responding correctly. Hence, they encountered emotions of disappointment, anger, neglect and stress. However, it should be noted that some teachers were satisfied with the departmental intervention. They argued that nobody was ready for COVID-19 and so they thought that the department did everything in their power to support educators in schools.

#### ***5.4.2 What are the factors that contribute to their emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities during the COVID 19 pandemic?***

Findings in the second theme revealed that factors that contributed the most were the teacher-learner relationship, the teacher-principal relationship and the school context. The relationship and interaction between teachers and learners were greatly affected. This was mainly because of complying with COVID-19 rules and regulations. Hence, they could not be close to each other as they were physically distant (Hargreaves, 2000). This was a mutual feeling for both teachers and learners. Teachers outline that this in turn affected effective teaching and learning. Teachers, because of the physical distance, could not engage well with their learners; and thus, they also could not give intensive attention to learners. There was then less and/or reduced psychic rewards (Hargreaves, 2021). The relationship between teachers and the principal gave rise to dark emotions in teachers (Hargreaves, 2000). Data reveal that the principal showed less or no sensitivity, love, sympathy and care to her junior staff. Teachers mentioned that the principal did not care about their wellbeing and was more concerned with work requirements, often at the expense of teachers' health. This made teachers encounter emotions of disgust, anger and negligence. Teachers also believed that the principal exercised her positional power to disempower teachers (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997) when she ordered them to clean learners' hostels, which was beyond their professional roles and responsibilities (Republic of South Africa, 2000). This made teachers feel resentful and powerless.

Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) reveal that schools that are located in rural areas have reduced resources and infrastructure. This finding is similar as resources were problematic for teachers in this study. For them, the resources available in this school did not match with the needs of special learners. This also affected effective teaching and learning. This left teachers feeling demoralised about teaching. However, it should also be noted that these teachers love their learners so much

that they went the extra mile in trying to provide cognitive development to their learners. They mentioned that they sometimes used their own money to provide necessary resources; they *improvised* and *compromised*. Teachers using their own money to help their students to learn seems to be common in deprived schools (Martin & Amin, 2020). It is also evident that overcrowding in the classrooms and hostel gave rise to negative emotions in the teachers. Overcrowding in hostels led to more dirt which forced teachers to intervene and clean so that there would be better hygiene for the learners that was necessary due to COVID-19. Thus, teachers experienced hostile emotions because of the extra work that was introduced (Lau et al., 2022). The extensification of work, according to Lau et al. (2022), leads to an increased workload. Adding to the above, the school has a poor sanitation system, whereas COVID-19 demanded maximised hygiene. This left teachers feeling anxious and fearful.

#### ***5.4.3 How do teachers navigate their emotions?***

The final theme responded to the final research question the study asked and provided details on how teachers went about navigating the dark emotions that they experienced. The first navigating technique was to embrace the pandemic and be proactive. Inasmuch as the pandemic brought forward dark emotions such as fear, anxiety and concern; teachers became resilient and embraced the pandemic as they did not have any power to change the situation (Ackermann, 2021). They mentioned that they also had to follow COVID-19 protocols such as washing of hands, sanitising and socially distancing themselves. This helped in reducing the chronic psychological manifestations (Choudhari, 2020) of fear, worry and uncertainty that surrounded them. By embracing the consequences of the pandemic, teachers were able to be resilient because they knew that they had no control over it.

They also vaccinated themselves against the virus with the hope of reducing the fear that they had about COVID-19. The feeling of fear mostly stemmed from the thought of being infected and dying. This was the reason they decided to get vaccinated—to reduce fear. This finding is similar to that of Mutch (2021) who found that teachers felt less apprehensive about COVID-19 after they had been vaccinated. Teachers in this study also used home remedies as a further layer of protection against the virus. Sanitising and handwashing protocols were strictly adhered to, and all these became protective features that allowed them to feel less concerned, anxious and depressed

about the virus. This allowed them to feel a sense of confidence—positive emotions that if they did all of these then they would be fine.

Teachers showed themselves to be proactive and teachers working towards change when they developed the study packs for learners that did homeschooling. This was actually done with the aim of accomplishing the right to education to all. However, the intentions behind the study packs were not fully realised and teachers had to think of alternative ways to ensure the continued learning of learners with disabilities. It was the only way in which to ensure justice for their learners. Thus, they re-taught the work as a key way to ensure that learners got the benefit of schooling. Doing this gave teachers a sense of achievement and fulfilment knowing that on a personal level they could contribute to learning (Hargreaves, 2002; Soldaat, 2019). Thus, when this moral purpose of teaching was achieved, then teachers were able to access the psychic rewards of teaching (Hargreaves, 2021).

Another navigating strategy that emerged was having supportive colleagues and families. It appears that there was great emotional caring (Hargreaves, 2000) from the participants' loved ones. Getting support from important people reduced their stress (Gleason et al., 2008) and helped them navigate negative emotions. Almost all the participants had families as their support structure. Family members would take care of them, they would frequently check up on them and share useful COVID-19 information. This kind of support allowed the participants to have emotional control at a time when they felt alienated because of the strangeness that COVID-19 brought. One participant mentioned that he received the most support from his colleague that was always there for him, even in his sickness. This made teachers feel hopeful, more at ease and blessed to have these people as their support structures. These supportive networks allowed them to share experiences and develop some sort of normality to manage the time of COVID-19.

## **5.5 Implications of the study**

This study has implications for education and teachers working in disadvantaged contexts. This study revealed that teachers encountered emotional turmoil due to the drastic change introduced by the pandemic. The issue of inequality and injustice towards learners with disabilities also surfaced which affected effective teaching and learning in the school. The pandemic forced teachers to opt for homeschooling, which means they spent less time with their learners and they could not give them special attention and extra care whilst they were home. Hence, teachers

experienced dark emotions, especially feelings of intense worry and guilt because they could not live up to their professional roles and their beliefs about their responsibilities towards learners with disabilities. It is suggested that teachers should be provided with professional psychological service whenever they need it. This would help them reduce their negative emotions whilst in the classrooms. With unexpected changes in the education system, teachers teaching in special schools should be trained for unforeseen challenges as is done in mainstream schools. Special school teachers should also be trained for distance learning that would accommodate and suit their learners. Research shows that teachers need to feel supported or there is a risk that they will feel alienated and disempowered (Greaves, 2019; Hargreaves, 1998). The consequences could also be that apathy sets in and that would have dire consequences for learners who need support the most.

Furthermore, the changes brought forward by the department did not suit the school context. This therefore has implications for the Department of Education as introducing policy change requires more careful planning for learners with disabilities and for rural contexts. To this end, the department officials should visit the schools, get to know the school contexts that they serve and what the school needs and then discuss changes to be implemented collectively with the teachers. Findings reveal that a lack of resources significantly impacted teachers' work, learners' learning and thus emotions. This implies that schools in disadvantaged backgrounds and contexts should also be the department's priority. Special schools should be provided with proper resources and infrastructure since learners with disabilities have the same right to education in the same manner as learners from mainstream schools and urban schools.

There were also power relations observed in the study. Findings here reveal the unequal power relations where power is used in ways that prevent positive emotions. Hence, principals should be workshopped on how to treat their junior teachers and be frequently reminded of their roles in the institutions. Not having a good relationship with your manager/senior makes it difficult to operate in an institution. So, for better functioning of teachers in the school, professionalism should be clearly explained and mentored.

## **5.6 Limitations of the study**

While conducting the study, some challenges and limitations were encountered. My study was conducted in one special school and in one district of King Cetshwayo; thus, it was a small-scale study. Seven teachers participated in the study. Hence my findings cannot be generalised to a larger

scale unless the contexts are similar in various ways and studies use the same methods of data collection. It should also be noted that the aim of this study was to get a situated context-specific in-depth and rich data on the emotions of teachers who were teaching in a rural special school and who taught learners with disabilities during the pandemic and not to generalise the findings to other contexts. It is further hoped that my study stands up to scrutiny in the manner in which I provided detailed description of the school's context, data collection methods and how I analysed the data. Thus, it is hoped that this study has met the requirements of trustworthiness. Another limitation was that the focus of the study was only on teachers and not on learners with disabilities and their parents. Thus, the findings can only be used to explain the emotions of teachers.

This study took a long time to complete compared to the initial timeframes. One of the reasons for the delay was because I lived up to the ethical considerations of not disturbing the functioning of the school. Hence, I had to wait for teachers to indicate when they would like me to interview them. It took a long time to be able to find time, given the requirements of the Department of Education to ensure the completion of the curriculum. The school was a busy one where lots of expectations were required of the teachers. The collection of data was conducted mostly after school hours and teachers would complain about being tired and hungry. To manage this, I provided them with refreshments to re-energise them, given that I was taking time away from families.

## **5.7 Recommendations for future research**

The findings that emerged from this research show that there are some aspects that need scholarly attention. The following are recommendations for future research:

- This research focused on teachers' emotions during the pandemic. It revealed that at times of intense change and disruption teachers find it difficult to manage the teaching and learning process, especially for learners with disabilities who require more extensive support. Thus, an area that needs more concerted research is that future research also hears the voices of learners with disabilities and their emotions. My study shows that learners with disabilities are consistently alienated and made invisible and thus their stories cannot be under-privileged any longer.
- Findings from this study also show the school context that could not align with COVID-19 regulations. It shows the persistent inequality, that schools that teach learners with

disabilities are under-resourced and lack support. I recommend research that focuses on the department's senior officials responsible for service delivery to rural schools that service learners with disabilities.

## **5.8 Concluding thoughts**

This study focused on teachers and the emotions they encountered when teaching learners with disabilities during the pandemic. This study also outlined the variety of emotions that the teachers encountered. From the findings, three main themes have emerged, that is, mixed emotions on teachers' experiences, factors contributing to teachers' emotions and navigating emotions. It became evident that teachers did not receive the change brought by the pandemic well. This drastic change brought dark emotions such as uncertainty, fear, worry and stress. However, it also appears that they managed to make it through those dark emotions that they encountered. These teachers love and care for their learners so much that they maintained continued teaching and learning even though the circumstances were very difficult. The Department of Education should pay more attention to the emotional states of teachers and learners. My study highlighted and concurs with studies by Hargreaves (2022) that schools are places infused with emotions—both positive and negative—and that it is critical to learn and understand more about teachers' emotions, particularly those who teach learners with disabilities since they are known to be disadvantaged comparative to teachers that teach learners with no disabilities as they encounter added work.



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## APPENDIX I



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**

**EDUCATION**  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

**Enquiries:** Phindile Duma

**Ref.:**2/4/8/4040

Miss SG Ntshangase  
23 Pineview Mews  
Signal Hill  
**PIETERMARITZBURG**  
3201

Dear Miss Ntshangase

### **PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS**

Your application to conduct research entitled: **“THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC”**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 04 April 2022 to 02 April 2025.

7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

**KING CETSHWAYO DISTRICT**



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**Mr GN Ngcobo**  
**Head of Department: Education**  
**Date: 05 April 2022**

**GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER**

## APPENDIX II

### DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I ..... (Full names of Principal), of the school hereby confirm that I have been informed about the study entitled: The emotional experiences of teaching learners with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic by Sinethemba Ntshangase. I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to allowing participants to participate in the research project.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that participants may withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Participants involved in the study must indicate on their own if they are willing to have data to be collected in the following ways:

	Willing	Not willing
Use of collages		
Digital audio recording of interviews		

.....

**Name of Principal**

.....

**Signature of Principal**

### APPENDIX III

#### CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed about the study entitled:  
**The emotional experiences of teaching learners with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic** by Sinethemba Ntshangase

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher, the supervisor or the research office.

I hereby provide consent to: (Please circle response)

Audio-record my semi structured interview YES/NO

Use the collage that I have designed YES/NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Witness**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Appendix IV



**LifeLine Zululand**  
P O Box 905, Richards Bay, 3900  
Tel: (035) 789 2472  
Fax: (035) 789 0157  
Office Crisis Line: (035) 789 7788  
National Counselling Line: 0861 322 322  
[llzul@telkomsa.net](mailto:llzul@telkomsa.net)



11/02/2022

REF: LLZUL(OUT)2020/11/

### **CONFIRMATION LETTER FOR COUNSELLING**

Lifeline Zululand is a non-profit organisation, affiliated to Lifeline South Africa. Our focus is on the emotional health of individuals and communities. We offer a 24-hours reactive crisis intervention (counselling and trauma debriefing) service together with a variety of both reactive and proactive programmes in communities and schools. Information is disseminated on a variety of social issues relating to gender-based violence, rape and sexual abuse, suicide, sexual reproductive health (teenage pregnant), HIV&AIDS, TB, Relationships, substance abuse, depression, etc., in an effort to encourage positive behaviour change through awareness campaigns.

### **VISION**

Improved emotional wellness in individuals and communities throughout South Africa

### **MISSION**

Lifeline aims to cultivate and grow emotional wellness in individuals and communities by **healing** emotional trauma and crisis through training and capacity building, and mobilizing communities.

**As I was approached by Ntshangase Sinethemba(211503100) requesting counselling services to her participants of the study titled: The emotional experiences of teachers teaching learners with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic; her request is warmly accepted. I am agreeing to give professional support of counselling to teachers that will be used in the study. This, of course will happen if the participants feel and think they require emotional support.**

Should you require further information, please contact Dolly Xaba 0762290273 and Nondumiso Mayise on 035 789 2472.

Kind Regards



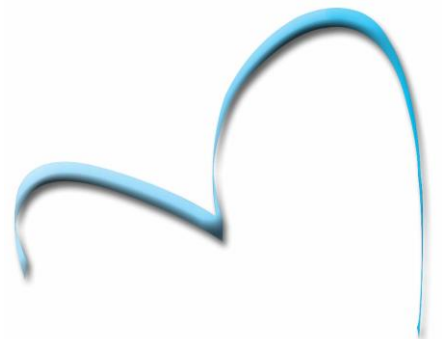
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Dolly Xaba  
Social Worker

---

Nondumiso Mayise  
Project Coordinator

Chairperson: Andrew David ('Dave') Savides  
Director: Bethel ('Michelle') Jewlal  
NPO No: 002-544



## APPENDIX V

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### English version

##### Section A: Biographical Information

1. Kindly tell me about yourself, briefly (personality, age, kids, home etc.)
2. What are major subjects/skills you qualified to teach?
3. What are subjects/skills you are currently teaching at school?

##### Section B:

*What stories do teachers have to tell about their emotional experiences of teaching learners with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

- a. Can you tell me about your school context?
- b. What was it like teaching learners with disabilities before the outbreak of COVID-19?
- c. What were some of your experiences that you had of teaching during this time of COVID 19? Tell me about this?
- d. What changes would you say have been brought about the outbreak of COVID-19, in terms of how you had to teach? How do you feel about this? (Teaching methods, teaching strategies, assessment practices)
- e. Is there anything that has been done by the Department of Education in helping you adapt to this 'new-normal'? Do you think they have done enough? How do you feel about what has been done and/or has not been done by the Department?
- f. What emotions does teaching during the outbreak of COVID-19 bring to you? Tell me about this and what made you feel this way?
- g. How do you think teaching learners with disabilities amid COVID-19 is different from teaching learners who are able-bodied? Why do you think this is?
- h. What challenges are you facing with the subject/skill that you are teaching?
- i. How has covid 19 affected your relationship with learners? Tell me about this? How does it make you feel?
- j. How has COVID 19 affected your relationship with colleagues? Tell me about this? How does it make you feel? Why



- k. How has COVID 19 affected your relationship with parents? Tell me about this and why?  
What have been your main concerns at this time? Tell me about this?
- l. Who have you received support from? Tell me more about this? How does it make you feel?
- m. Who would you have liked to receive support from and you did not get? Tell me more.

### **IsiZulu version**

#### Isiqephu sokuqala: imininingwane yathisha

- 1. Ngisacela ungitshele ngawe kafushane nje. (ungakhuluma ngokuzivhaza ukuthi ungumuntu onjani, iminyaka yakho, unazo izingane, ikhaya lakho nokunye)
- 2. Yiziphi izifundo owaqeqeshelwa ukuzifundisa usasenyuvesi?
- 3. Yiziphi izifundo ozifunisayo esikoleni?

#### Isiqephu sesibili:

*Othisha abafundisa izingane ezinokukhubazeka banaziphi izindaba abangazixoxa ngendlela ababazizwa ngayo befundisa ngesikhathi sesifo I COVID-19?*

- i. Ngisacela ungazise ngosikole sakho. Ungakhuluma ngokuthi sakheke endaweni enjani, sinayo yini ingqalasizinda, nokunye.
- ii. Ungathi kwakunjani ukufundisa izingane ezinokukhubazeka ngesikhathi sesifo i COVID-19?
- iii. Imaphi amava noma izinto osubhekane nazo ngalesisikhathi se COVID-19? Naba kancane
- iv. Ungathi ukufika kwesifo se COVID-19 kwafika naluphi ushintsho noma izingqinamba kwizindlela ezahlukene zokufundisa?

- v. Zikhona izinhlelo esenziwe umnyango wezeMfundo ukuhlengisa othisha kwisimo esikhona se COVID-19? Ucabanga ukuth ngakube umnyango usuwenze okwanele? Uzizwa unjani ngosekwenziwe noma ngokungenziwangwa umnyango wezeMfundo?
- vi. Ngabe ukufundisa ngalesisikhathi se COVID-19 kukulethela miphi imizwa? Awuxoxe ngalemizwa nokuthi yini eyenza ukuthi uzizwe ngalendlela
- vii. Ucabanga ukuthi ukufundisa izingane ezinokukhubazeka kuhluke kephi ukunokufundisa izingane ezingenakho ukukhubazeka? Yini eyenza ucabange kanjalo?
- viii. Iziphi izingqinamba owawuhlangabezana nazo ngesikhathi se COVID-19 kwisifundo osifundisayo ezihlukile kwezazikhona ngaphambi kokuba kufike lesisifo?
- ix. Ngakube isifo se COVID-19 sibuthinte kanjani ubudlelwano onabo nezingane ozifundisayo? Xoxa kabanzi? Uzizwa kanjani ngalobubudlelwano obusha?
- x. Ngakube isifo se COVID-19 sibuthinte kanjani ubudlelwano onabo nazokwenu? Xoxa kabanzi? Uzizwa kanjani ngalobubudlelwano obusha?
- xi. Ngakube isifo se COVID-19 sibutheinte kanjani ubudlelwano onabo nabzali bakho? Xoxa kabanzi? Uzizwa kanjani ngalobubudlelwano obusha?
- xii. Ikuphi ukukhathazeka onakho ngelesisikhathi? Xoxa kabanzi?
- xiii. Ngakube kukhona lapho osuke wathola khona usizo noma ukwesekeka? Xoxa kabanzi? Uzizwa kanjani ngalokhu?
- xiv. Ngakube kukhona lapjo ofisa ngabe uthole ukwesekeka khona owangathola? Xoxa kabanzi?

## APPENDIX VI

### GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING YOUR COLLAGES (English version)

McKay, Cunningham and Thomson (2012) have indicated that collages are a visual representation often in the form of pieces of information, photographs and other material that one can easily stick to provide insight into experiences and emotions. An additional value is that it allows one to be creative through the process of self-reflection of one's life.

This collage will allow you to express yourself as freely without having to write too much of information. The purpose of this collage is for you as the participant to describe the factors that have contributed to your emotions whilst teaching at this time of the pandemic. You are reminded that all the information that you put on this is for research purposes only and will be treated with confidentiality and respect. I thank you also for taking the time to be part of the study. The guidelines for this are provided below:

Design a collage that reflects who you are as a teacher and your emotions that you experience teaching learners with disability during COVID 19.

What are some of the barriers and opportunities that you have encountered during this time that have influenced your ability to teach your learners and how it makes you feel.

Method:

1. Select suitable pictures, words or quotations that you have found in magazines, newspapers, social media memes, photographs and other media forms that express your emotions and feelings of teaching learners with disability during COVID 19.
2. Stick these on the piece of paper that has been provided to you and write a short description below each to explain the picture
3. Your collage will allow your story to be told.
4. Further questions around your collage will be picked up in the interview

Once again thank you for your time. It is appreciated.

Here are some of the barriers and opportunities that you **could** think of:

- Infrastructure
- Professional development during COVID-19
- Curriculum, lesson planning, assessment and teaching
- Support from the management
- Resources
- Learners, Parents, Colleagues
- And anything at all that may have contributed to the emotions you encountered during the pandemic.

## IsiZulu – version

Ngokubhala kuka McKay, Cunningham no Thomson (2012) ama collages yinto eyenziwe ngemibhalo emining emincane, izithombe kanye nanoma ngabe yini ongayinamathisela ukuchaza izigameko esenzeke kuwena noma ukuchaza imizwa onayo ngento thizeni. Kanti futhi okunye ngama collages ukuthi aveza ubukhono ngesikhathi umuntu ebukeza impilo yakhe.

Le collage izokwenza ukuthi uveze imizwa yakho ngaphandle kokuthi ubhale imininingwane eminingi. Inhloso yale collage eyokuthi wena njengomuntu oyinxenye yalolucwaningo ukwazi ukuchaza izinto ezibe yimbangela ekubeni nalelizwa onayo ngokufundisa ngalesisikhathi sobhubhane. Khumbula ukuthi imininingwane oyifaka lapha izosebenzisela lolucwaningo kuphela, okubhaloyo ngeke kuzovikeleka emphakathini futhi kuzohlinishwa. Ngisacela ukubonga ngesikhathi sakho sokuthi ube yinxenye yayolucwaningo. Ngisacela ulandele lemiqathango uma usuwenza I collage yakho:

Yenza I collage engachaza wena njengothisha nemizwa oke ube nayo njengoba ufundisa izingane ezinokukhubazeka ngesikhathi se COVID-19.

Veza izingqinamba namathuba osube nawo ngalesisikhathi okube nomthelela ekufundiseni kwakho nakwindlela ozizwa ngayo.

Indlela yokwenza:

1. Khetha izithombe, amagama, amazwi aseshiwo abantu ngaphambilini angaveza imizwa onsube nayo ekufundiseni izingane ezinokukhubazeka ngalesisikhathi sobhubhane; ongakuthola emabhukwini, kumaphephandaba, kwizinkundla zokuxhumana, ezithombeni nanoma ngabe nakuziphi izinkundla.
2. Namathisela lokhu okutholayo kwiphepha olinikeziwe mese ubhala incazelo encane ngezansi kwesithombe.
3. I collage yakho iyona ezoxoxa indaba yakho ngezithombe ozisebenzisile.
4. Imibuzo engavela kwi collage yakho isingabuzwa kwi-nhlolokhono  
Ngiyabonga ngesikhathi sakho.

Nakhu okunye okungaba izingqinamba namathuba ongacabanga ngakho

- Inggqalasizinda
- Ukuqeqeshelwa ukufundisa ngesikhathi sokhuvethe
- Izifundo ezikhona esikoleni, ukuhlelwa kokufundisa, ukuhlolwa kwabafundi nokufundisa
- Ukusekelwa ngabaphathi
- Izinsizakufunda
- Abazali
- Abafundi

## APPENDIX VII

### UKZN ETHICAL CLEARANCE



20 May 2022

Sinethemba Gugu Ntshangase (211503100)  
School Of Education  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear SG Ntshangase,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004124/2022

Project title: The emotional experiences of teaching learners with disability during the coronavirus pandemic

Degree: Masters

#### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 25 April 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

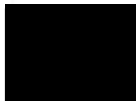
This approval is valid until 20 May 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

#### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## **APPENDIX VIII**

### **LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR**

Cell: 076 389 3246  
gill.hannant@outlook.com

Mrs G C Hannant  
28 Hillcrest Avenue  
CRAIGHALL PARK  
2196

2 February 2024

#### **TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

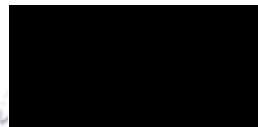
I certify that I have edited the Master's dissertation

**The emotional experiences of teaching learners with disability during the  
COVID 19 pandemic**

by

**Sinethemba Gugu Ntshangase**

However, the correction of all errors/missing information remains the responsibility of  
the author.



**G.C. HANNANT (BA HED)**

## APPENDIX IX

### TURNITIN REPORT

The emotional experiences of teaching learners with disabilities

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ORIGINALITY REPORT

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6%

SIMILARITY INDEX

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INTERNET SOURCES

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PRIMARY SOURCES

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1

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Internet Source

3%

2

"Primary and Secondary Education During Covid-19", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2022

Publication

<1%

3

[etd.uwc.ac.za](https://etd.uwc.ac.za)

Internet Source

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4

Ramashego Shila Mphahlele, Mncedisi Christian Maphalala. "Contextualising Rural Education in South African Schools", Brill, 2023

Publication

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5

[hdl.handle.net](https://hdl.handle.net)

Internet Source

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6

Serges Djoyou Kamga. "COVID-19 and the inclusion of learners with disabilities in basic education in South Africa: A critical analysis", African Human Rights Law Journal, 2020

Publication

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