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**The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the remote learning of
school-going children with hearing impairment disability in
South Africa**

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**This dissertation is submitted in pursuance of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Philosophy in Child Care and Protection**

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2025

DECLARATION

I, Sinesipho Nyalambisa declare that:

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Signed: 

Date: 12 March 2025

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to four people who meant the world to me and still do. Although they are no longer of this world, their memories still guide my life. To my late grandmother Mamthembu Sello, my late mother Moselantja Nyalambisa, my late brother Somzi Nyalambisa and my late partner Andile Hlongwa.

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I am deeply thankful to God for the strength and guidance that have empowered me to chase my dreams of a Master of Philosophy in Child Care and Protection and completing my dissertation despite the difficulties. Special thanks to my supervisor, Dr. A. Singh, for believing in me and giving me all the necessary support on this journey. To Afikile Nyalambisa, thank you so much for your encouragement and for being a great sister and support system for me.

ABSTRACT

Worldwide schooling systems have been fundamentally affected by COVID-19, requiring the variation of schools to remove learning methods. All school-going children confronted challenges in light of this shift, yet it's urgent to take a gander at what it meant for children attending school who have hearing impairment disabilities specifically. This study aimed to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairment disability in South Africa. The objectives were to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa, particularly examining how it influences their access to educational resources and levels of classroom engagement; to understand the challenges experienced by school-going children with hearing impairments in accessing remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic; to identify barriers faced by school-going children with hearing impairments in receiving adequate support from teachers and parents; and to provide recommendations for improving the remote learning experienced by school-going children with hearing impairments.

The study was a desktop study, and the results were based on the findings of several researchers on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on remote education for school-going children with hearing impairment disability in South Africa. The findings demonstrate how COVID-19 affects school-going children with hearing impairments access to online learning. The academic performance and engagement of school-going children with hearing impairments and disabilities were affected. The challenges facing school-going children with hearing impairments in online learning included communication barriers, limited availability of support services, limited sign language interpretation, difficult-to-read masks, limited availability of resources, and social isolation. Moreover, professionals have a duty and accountability to ensure that online education is accessible to school-going children with hearing impairments.

Collaborative efforts, the training of educators to deliver online learning for school-going children with hearing impairments, and structural interventions, alongside other strategies, can be utilized to enhance the participation of school-going children with hearing impairments in the South African educational framework. This research suggests employing a range of diverse interventions to tackle the issues encountered by children attending school with hearing disabilities in South Africa. Inform experts and the community about the rights of their children and their responsibility in obtaining education; offer additional resources to support teachers' development.

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ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19 – Coronavirus disease of 2019

UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

ACRWC - the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

CRPD – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

SASL - South African Sign Language

PEPUDA - The promotion of equality and prevention of unfair discrimination act

SASA - The South African Schools Act

SASL - The South African Sign Language

SIAS - The policy for screening, identification, assessment and support

ERIC - Education Resources Information Centre

CHAPTER ONE:

1.1 Introduction

Aljedaani *et al* (2022) argue that the COVID-19 epidemic greatly affected the education sector, especially the education of hearing-impaired school-going children. According to Krishnan *et al* (2020), educational institutions have experienced unprecedented transformations as a result of numerous actions aimed at preventing the transmission of the illness. For example, most schools switched to online learning to meet the social distancing requirements, but some had to close temporarily due to a lack of necessary technology. Although these actions had significantly slowed the virus's spread, they had also caused several difficulties that were detrimental to the educational system for school-going children with hearing disabilities worldwide. Online learning presented a particular set of challenges for school-going children with hearing impairments during COVID-19.

Based on literature, in South Africa there was limited information related to the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairments. The United States, the United Kingdom, and China were among the first nations to offer perspectives on how the COVID-19 crisis impacted remote education for school-going children with hearing disabilities (Aljedaani *et al*, 2022). The transition from conventional to online learning during the pandemic was expected to have the most significant impact on school-going children with hearing impairment. This research explored how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the remote education of school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa. The study includes a background overview of the study, a problem statement, a rationale of the study, research aims, research objectives, research questions, a research hypothesis, the significance of the study, keywords, a literature review, a theoretical framework, research methodology, and limitations of the research.

1.2 Background of the study

Access to online learning during the coronavirus school closure was highlighted by UNICEF data, which raised alarms about the difficulties encountered by school-going children in maintaining their education. Notably, 463 million children globally did not have access to distance learning, which begs the question of how well the education systems work to bridge the digital gap (UNICEF, 2020). One of the report's primary concerns was the availability of socioeconomic status-based disparities. 72% of school-going children from lower-income households lack access to online learning (UNICEF, 2020). It highlights the persisting educational disparities in which disadvantaged children have been further marginalized as a result of the crisis. The research also emphasizes the unique difficulties that

children in rural communities' encounter. Since distance learning was not available to 75% of children, it was evident that insufficient infrastructure significantly impeded educational prospects. This deepened the educational division and exacerbated inequality between urban and rural communities. Kamga (2020) argues that the pandemic of COVID-19 brought attention to the structural issues that children with hearing impairment disabilities face; over 600,000 of them have been turned away from school. The South African government is expected to play its role in providing educational settings, such as the implementation of universal sign languages (Department of Basic Education, 2020). This demonstrates that, not considering the essential needs and rights of those with hearing difficulties, the educational system was unable to offer inclusive and equitable opportunities for all school-going children with hearing impairments.

From a global perspective, the literature demonstrates that during COVID-19, education for school-going children with hearing impairments has been dealing with a special set of challenges. Since non-disabled school-going children were the majority, they quickly embraced distance learning platforms. Children attending school who have hearing impairment disabilities were initially left out of distance learning even though they have the undeniable right to receive education. A literature review was conducted by Aljedaani *et al* (2022) investigating difficulties faced by school-going children with disabilities during the coronavirus pandemic. This review highlighted significant barriers: 96.9% of children experienced issues with home network connections, while 72% reported that educational content was inaccessible to them. The synthesis of existing literature identified only two relevant studies from Africa, specifically South Africa and Ghana, out of a comprehensive review encompassing 35 studies. This lack of African research highlights a significant gap in understanding the distinct challenges faced by school-going children in these regions compared to those in more extensively studied areas like the USA. The findings are particularly relevant to South Africa, where technology availability and educational resources may be inconsistent. The high prevalence of children facing connectivity challenges underscores systemic issues that could exacerbate educational disparities for school-going children with hearing impairments. Furthermore, inadequate accessible content within South Africa indicates an urgent need for tailored educational strategies and resources accommodating diverse learning needs.

First, using suggested technology proved difficult for school-going children with hearing impairments. The primary reason was that the program and application interfaces were not designed to support school-going children with hearing disabilities (Aljedaani *et al*, 2022). Secondly, it challenged school-going children to adapt video conferencing to synchronous lectures. Thirdly, it was highly difficult for

school-going children with hearing impairments to follow conversations in which several signers were conversing at once. One of the most significant challenges to overcome was the lack of a sign language translator. According to Swift (2012), the sign language translator was used to ask questions, which the translator then translated for the teacher, delaying the setting up of mainstream and remote classrooms. Lastly, school-going children with hearing impairments found it difficult to wear masks because they had to read lips to understand what people said. Swanwick (2020) supported this in her study of how the pandemic affected individuals with hearing impairments in Ghana. In order for people to understand Ghanaian Signed Language, a language they must be able to read lip patterns, however, this was a problem during the pandemic because people were wearing masks.

Furthermore, in a study titled “School-going children with hearing impairment educational status during the suspension of schools,” Madhesh (2021) analyzed the effect of the coronavirus on the remote learning of hearing-impaired school-going children. According to Madhesh (2021), TV channels did not meet the needs of hearing-impaired school-going children. The three-week observation revealed that hearing-impaired, school-going children’s needs were not considered when designing the educational programs that were created for hearing school-going children. Secondly, as noted by Madhesh (2021), there were no alternative approaches specifically created to deliver educational services for children with hearing impairments attending school during the pandemic.

Additionally, it was discovered during the study's participant interviews that every participant agreed that the academic year ended for all school-going children with hearing impairments in Saudi Arabia when classes were cancelled. According to Madhesh (2021), all 18 participants concurred that there were no alternative teaching strategies for school-going children with hearing impairments during the crisis. Madhesh (2021) examined the teachers’ reactions to the complete exclusion of their hearing-impaired school-going children. The study revealed that only one teacher out of eighteen attempted to offer compensatory efforts, but he encountered some obstacles. He communicated with her school-going children through WhatsApp, but some did not have internet access. The teacher's experience above showed that some school-going children struggled to access internet services and could not afford to buy data. 17 out of the 18 respondents agreed that the crisis had forgotten about school-going children with hearing impairments, who were frequently treated like second-class citizens.

Furthermore, the research conducted by Aljedaani *et al* (2021) also lends credence to this; the study detailed the primary difficulties school-going children with hearing impairments faced when pursuing online education. According to the study, most of the school-going children (62 respondents; 96.9%)

reported network problems or unstable internet access at home. 42 school-going children (75.4%) admitted that they lack access to resources to help them use smartphones and televisions in their study rooms. Two school-going children (3.1%) were worried about working with their classmates. In comparison, an average of 34 school-going children (52.3%) expressed concerns regarding the challenge of communicating with the teachers. A total of 25 school-going children (38.5%) discovered the importance of having a fast internet connection during COVID-19. 20 school-going children (18.5%) mentioned that the COVID-19 emergence has caused drastic changes in Saudi Arabia's labour market. One student (1.5%) found that the issue was related to a shortage of interactions and sensations of loneliness. Contrast: 5 children attending school (7.7%) discovered that adapting to an unstructured work schedule might have been difficult to manage. They provided a more thorough analysis of these difficulties in the remaining sections of this subsection.

Lastly, according to Madhesh (2021), the studies conducted on Saudi Arabian school-going children have uncovered several noteworthy difficulties. Participants concurred that class cancellations marked the end of the academic year and that they were unable to access any other teaching tools during the crisis (Madhesh, 2021). The challenges some people encountered without access to the internet were brought to light by a teacher's attempt to make up for lost time by utilizing WhatsApp. The study also clarified how hearing-impaired, school-going children were treated as second-class citizens and excluded during the crisis. These findings were supported by Alkhalifah and Denden (2023) in their study titled "Investigating the Impact of COVID-19 on the Morale of Deaf and Hearing-Impaired Students in Saudi Arabia Technical Colleges: Lessons Learned and Future Implications." Research into distance education for school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities has revealed notable challenges, such as a shortage of essential technology and support systems, which supports the assertion that many school-going children faced difficulties. In response to these challenges, teachers resorted to using platforms such as WhatsApp to compensate for lost instructional time. Studies highlight the necessity for government-driven efforts to unify sign language interpretation and visual assistance in digital platforms (South African Disability Rights, 2007). Programs for training parents are likewise essential to close the gaps in support for learning at home (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

From a local perspective, Paediatrician Management Group (2020) argues that in South Africa only 20% of school-going children were required to obtain remote education, which disproportionately harmed vulnerable and underprivileged children. This was because while some schools could provide school-going children with online instruction and support, most school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities in South Africa did not have computers and laptops. Those school-going

children who had the resources faced the challenges of the high cost of data and Wi-Fi. However, "access" does not merely involve owning a device and having an internet connection; it also necessitates a specific degree of digital literacy to maneuver through online learning platforms, obtain educational resources, and engage effectively in virtual classrooms. In addition to having access to devices and data, the absence of digital literacy within families created considerable difficulties during the pandemic, especially in aiding children's online education, thereby increasing the difficulties. There has not been much research on how COVID-19 affects school-going children with hearing loss who are learning remotely.

Furthermore, Adigun (2022) conducted one study at four high schools in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. The study focused on South African science teachers' experiences of working with hearing-impaired school-going children through extraordinary distance learning using Zoom. Results showed that science teachers previously used hands-on teaching strategies where school-going children with hearing impairment actively participated in learning science concepts in schools before COVID-19 with the help of sign language interpreters. The participants thought that many teachers of natural sciences lacked the capacity and expertise to effectively deliver scientific instruction to school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities via Zoom (Adigun, 2022). Following the SASA of 1996, given the significance of parental involvement in education, schools ought to guarantee that parents actively make choices regarding their children's educational requirements and accommodations. This demonstrates that teachers require specialized knowledge and instruction to teach school-going children with disabilities. Mthethwa (2020) argues that the pandemic has made South African hearing-impaired school-going children's 'educational disparities worse. Children from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds have been disproportionately impacted by the scarcity of technical resources and restricted access to online education. According to a study by Adigun (2022), many teachers lacked the necessary skills to teach hearing-impaired school-going children via remote platforms. The school-going children with hearing impairment also lack skills to access online education. This emphasizes how crucial it is for educators to have specialized training and assistance to guarantee that hearing-impaired children receive an inclusive education during emergencies. In addition to teacher training, providing appropriate assistive technology, such as remote microphone systems, could greatly enhance the learning experience for school-going children. Relying solely on audio-speech communication also presented additional difficulties because some hearing-impaired individuals were unable to read and comprehend speech due to bad internet connections. Educational establishments and policymakers need to take immediate action to remove these barriers and guarantee that school-going children with hearing impairments are able to actively engage in online learning.

The Department of Basic Education (2001) argues that South Africa can strive to create a fairer and more attainable education system for everyone, regardless of their hearing ability, by emphasizing inclusive teaching methods and dedicating resources to assistive technologies such as hearing devices, cochlear implants, and remote microphone systems, which can assist in resolving problems of inadequate audio quality in remote learning settings, especially in areas with unstable internet connections. To tackle these challenges, the government and private organizations should form partnerships to manage the execution of these policies and collect input from impacted communities.

The outbreak of the pandemic caused by the coronavirus has profoundly impacted academic development, particularly affecting school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities. This crisis has highlighted a significant deficiency in research pertaining to this specific phenomenon. While extensive studies have been conducted in the USA and the UK, which emphasize technological access and pedagogical strategies (Gustafsson, 2022), South Africa's unique socio-economic context necessitates more localized research. Access to resources such as remote microphone systems will be important to address the technological challenges. For instance, a report published by Amnesty International indicates that only 10% of households had access to the internet during the pandemic, further exacerbating pre-existing disparities and leaving numerous school-going children from underprivileged communities without essential educational resources. Furthermore, Ardington *et al* (2021) claim that evidence suggests that significant learning losses occurred across various subjects due to prolonged school closures, with estimates indicating that school-going children suffered a loss of learning that exceeds 118% of one full academic year. Analyzing studies conducted in comparable contexts, such as Kenya, is vital because they offer important perspectives for South African policy reforms designed to tackle these imbalances and guarantee fair access to online learning for all school-going children, particularly those with disabilities (De Villiers and Villiers, 2023).

Even two years after the pandemic began, online learning and teaching issues still existed. One of the critical difficulties has been distinguished as extending the gap between school-going children with disabilities who approach innovation and hardware and the people who do not. Teachers' preparation for working with school-going children with disabilities and providing remote learning for school-going children with hearing impairments was insufficient (Mokala and Sefotho, 2022). As a result, during COVID-19, teachers lacked the resources necessary to transition school-going children from face-to-face to online learning. To address those challenges, policymakers need to prioritize school-going children with disabilities. This will be accomplished by offering teachers resources, training, and guidance they need to teach school-going children with disabilities, which includes listening to

the impaired. Furthermore, additional research and projects focusing on the effect caused by the coronavirus on improved education for school-going children with disabilities can assist in informing and shaping more inclusive and effective distance learning methods in South Africa.

1.3 Statement of the research problem

School-going children with hearing impairments encounter numerous challenges that greatly impact their educational experiences, even prior to the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. One significant challenge identified in educational settings is the limited availability of sign language (Ngobeni *et al*, 2020). Furthermore, a considerable number of educational materials lack adaptations for accessibility, posing challenges for school-going children with disabilities to effectively interact with the curriculum (Mapepa and Magano, 2018). The dependence on verbal instruction in classrooms exacerbates these issues. School-going children with hearing impairments often struggle to comprehend spoken language and frequently miss crucial information (Ngobeni *et al*, 2020). Additionally, insufficient support services, such as a lack of trained educators and interpreters, contribute to an environment in which these children experience feelings of isolation and lack of support (Casoojee *et al*, 2024). The presence of these barriers underscores the pressing necessity for systemic changes to cultivate an inclusive educational environment for school-going children with hearing impairments.

Furthermore, there was a problem with the impact of COVID-19 on the education of school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities in South Africa. In spite of the attempts of educational technology interventions for distance learning, in other words, online learning, the problem negatively impacted approximately 600,000 school-going children with hearing impairments who could not access remote learning during COVID-19 schools' closure in 2020. This was because, in the study that was done previously, it was discovered that issues existed in transforming and providing printed educational materials into accessible digital formats for school-going children with hearing impairments. It is because of rigid procurement procedures. The fact that the schools could not offer services like Braille conversion of the studied materials for remote delivery and online testing may have contributed to this issue. Furthermore, the lecturers and educators did not possess the required skills to support school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities who were already limited by the lockdown. There was a gap in the teachers' preparation for working with school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities. The other issue was that, because most school-going children with hearing impairments who came from underprivileged areas were already marginalized, some of them were unable to afford the supplies they needed for their studies. Research is therefore urgently needed to examine the effects of COVID-19 faced by the South African school-going children with

hearing impairment disabilities and to identify effective strategies to improve their access to quality education amid the ongoing disruptions caused by the pandemic.

1.4 Rationale of the study

From the literature, in South Africa it has been demonstrated that limited research has been conducted on the impact of coronavirus on the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairments. The focus is on this group of children with hearing disabilities, who rank among the most at-risk in educational environments, frequently encountering distinct obstacles that may impede their learning journeys. School-going children with hearing impairments may encounter difficulties in communication and comprehension, especially in remote learning settings that do not provide essential accommodations, such as sign language interpretation (Wickenden *et al*, 2023). It is important to conduct an investigation on how these school-going children adjusted to online education amidst the pandemic. The change to online education had a more significant impact on school-going children with hearing impairments. Many educational platforms did not provide adequate support, leading to significant barriers in accessing quality education (Aljedaani *et al*, 2022). Understanding these challenges is crucial for the development of inclusive educational practices going forward. Focusing on this group can inform policymakers and educators about the specific needs of school-going children with hearing impairments, advocating for better resources and inclusive practices to enhance their educational experiences (Casoojee *et al*, 2024). Research in this area aims to ensure that future educational frameworks are equipped to support all school-going children effectively. Steps are being taken to improve educational systems to address the varied needs of children attending school.

Furthermore, it is recommended to review previous research on the effects of distance learning during other crises, identify the unique challenges that school-going children with hearing impairments face, investigate distance learning strategies or interventions, and consider potential long-term school-going children. It is also important to identify long-term effects of the distance learning pandemic in their education and provide practical recommendations to policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to improve access and quality of distance learning for this specific group of school-going children.

1.5 The focus of the study

1.5.1 Research aim

The central aim of the study is to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the remote learning experiences of school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa, focusing on the challenges they

faced in accessing online education, the barriers to receiving adequate support from teachers and parents, and providing actionable recommendations for enhancing their remote learning experiences.

1.5.2 Research objectives

The specific objectives were:

- To explore the impact of COVID-19 on the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa, particularly examining how it influences their access to educational resources and levels of classroom engagement.
- To understand the challenges experienced by school-going children with hearing impairments in accessing remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To identify barriers faced by school-going children with hearing impairment in receiving adequate support from teachers and parents.
- To provide recommendations for improving remote learning experienced by school-going children with hearing impairments.

1.5.3. Research questions

The research questions are as follows:

- How has remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the academic performance and engagement of school-going children with hearing impairments?
- What challenges have school-going children with hearing impairments faced in accessing remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the fundamental and strategic support needs for school-going children with hearing impairments during the COVID-19 period?
- What are the recommendations for policymakers to support the education of school-going children with hearing impairments during COVID-19?

1.5.4. Research hypothesis

The research hypotheses were:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a long-term negative impact on the academic performance of hearing-impaired school-going children due to the lack of face-to-face communication.

- School-going children with hearing impairments during COVID-19 face unique challenges primarily due to technological barriers, communication issues, and isolation.

1.6 Theoretical framework

This section thoroughly examines the rights-based approach utilized in this study. The connection between the research objectives and the theoretical framework was investigated.

1.6.1 Right based approach

The basis of this research is founded on a rights-based strategy that highlights the inherent rights of each individual, particularly those with hearing impairments, to receive education and assistance. This framework corresponds with international human rights principles and legislation like fundamental law and the SASA No. 84 of 1996, which establish a strong basis to ensure educational access and necessary support for everyone, particularly individuals with disabilities. The document references the South African Constitution of 1996 and the UNCRPD. The legal framework establishes a strong basis for recognizing the importance of prioritizing the rights and needs of hearing-impaired school-going children in educational policy and practice, as emphasized by the Centre for Child Law. The rights-based strategy underscores that every individual, irrespective of ability, is entitled to equitable access to education. This perspective advocates for the pursuit of systemic transformation to guarantee that educational settings are inclusive and adaptable to varying needs. The Constitution of South Africa prohibits all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities and guarantees their access to vital services and support systems. This approach, which underscores the significance of social justice, seeks to eliminate barriers and challenges that hinder individuals with disabilities from obtaining education and to encourage their active involvement in the community. This framework empowers school-going children with hearing disabilities by acknowledging their rights and enabling them to champion their needs and fully engage in their education.

1.6.2 Social constructivism theory

Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism, proposed in 1968, emphasizes that individuals perceive, convey, and comprehend reality via the perspectives of language and culture (Akpan *et al*, 2020). The crucial role of language and culture in cognitive development suggests that knowledge is constructed socially through shared experiences and interactions within a community. Unlike traditional constructivism, which views knowledge as individually constructed through personal experiences, social

constructivism stresses collaboration among school-going children, teachers, and peers in the learning process. This approach recognizes that children's understanding is shaped not only by physical interactions with their environment but also by cultural and social interactions mediated by language. Thus, social constructivism underlines the importance of teamwork and social interaction in knowledge construction, making it a relevant framework for educational practices. Social constructivism might be applied in these ways:

1.6.2.1 Collaborative learning:

Collaborative learning, in which school-going children collaborate to construct knowledge, is emphasized by social constructivism. School-going children with hearing impairments could use technology to work together with their peers and teachers to build knowledge. However, throughout the coronavirus crisis, some of the children attending school could not have available technology to construct learning. Amidst the difficulties posed by the coronavirus pandemic, school-going children with hearing impairments had the opportunity to employ technology for collaborative learning, fostering knowledge acquisition and problem-solving alongside their classmates. Nevertheless, amid the COVID-19 situation, certain school-going children were unable to utilize technology for educational purposes.

1.6.2.2 Active learning:

Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of dynamic implementation where school-going children engage in participatory exercises to construct knowledge. However, during COVID-19, it was difficult for school-going children to participate in intuitive exercises that used innovative and knowledge-development aids. Active learning involves the dynamic implementation of social constructivism, where school-going children participate in exercises to construct knowledge. Amidst the difficulties posed by the coronavirus pandemic. It was difficult to engage in creative activities incorporating innovative and educational tools for hearing-impaired school-going children. According to social constructivism, people learn by interacting with their surroundings and through other people. School-going children are deprived of social interaction that the researcher believed was essential to constructivist learning in remote learning. This is made worse for people with hearing impairments by communication barriers that do not exist in face-to-face interactions. Generally, social constructivism can be a valuable learning hypothesis to direct the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairments during the coronavirus pandemic.

1.6.3 Ecosystems theory

The study also used the ecological theory. Recklein (2013) noted that the environmental theory examined a child's connection with their surrounding environment as the main factor in aiding the development of their language. Recklein (2013) cited Oswalt (2008); Bronfenbrenner created the ecological theory to clarify how a child's surroundings might affect that child's growth and development. The ecological theory had five environmental systems, but the researcher explained the environmental systems relevant to the study.

1.6.3.1 Mesosystem

Swanwick (2020) highlights that the mesosystem, essential for aiding school-going children with hearing difficulties and their relatives, experienced major disruptions throughout the coronavirus crisis, affecting movement and interaction between home, school, and community. In South Africa, where support was already lacking, especially in rural areas, these challenges intensified, mirroring issues in various global communities hindered by geopolitical factors. While adults found some connectivity through social media, children and families lacked access to essential support due to technological limitations, highlighting a gap in inclusive education resources.

1.6.3.2 Exosystem

The Constitution of South Africa expressly states that, with explicit reference to disability, no individual may unreasonably victimize any individual, including denying or enabling a facility from the disabled individual's possession. SASL has been officially recognized and designated as the twelfth official language of South Africa. This accomplishment has enhanced the availability of education and services for the hearing-impaired community. The provisions outlined in the PEPUDA No. 4 of 2000 guarantee equal protection rights for all citizens by prohibiting bias on the basis of disability. The Constitution of South Africa (1996) states that people with disabilities must have access to all public places and not be discriminated against in any way. Additionally, the Department of Social Development's Disability Policy stipulates those individuals with disabilities should have access to appropriate services. A person with a hearing impairment, for instance, needed sign language interpreters or hearing aids to hear and listen.

The legal framework in South Africa for protecting the rights of individuals with hearing impairments is established through various key documents and policies; for example, the Constitution of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996, acts as the legal basis for the Republic, outlining the rights and

responsibilities of its citizens. It is considered one of the most advanced constitutions globally, featuring robust safeguards for human rights and a dedication to social justice. A two-thirds majority of the National Assembly can only amend the Constitution, with certain provisions requiring a higher threshold for amendment. It is the responsibility of all branches of government, as well as all citizens, to uphold and protect the Constitution. The PEPUA No. 4 of 2000 protects against disability-based discrimination, ensuring equal protection and rights for all citizens. Complementing this is the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015); this framework promotes extensive reforms to guarantee the full integration of individuals with disabilities into society, embracing a social model that emphasizes societal obstacles instead of personal constraints. Additionally, the Integrated National Disability Strategy aims to create an inclusive society by focusing on equal opportunities across various sectors, including education. The Department of Basic Education has implemented programs aimed at integrating sign language into teaching methods. This initiative is designed to promote an inclusive educational environment for school-going children with hearing impairments.

Furthermore, the South African courts have played a crucial role in ensuring that children, including those with disabilities, can access education, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the matter of *Centre for Child Law v. Minister of Basic Education*, the court intervened following the issuance of a circular by the minister that prohibited children who could not provide birth certificates from enrolling in public schools (Kamga, 2021). This exclusion effectively deprived thousands of children of access to education. The court determined that the policy was unconstitutional, emphasizing that every child has the right to a fundamental education, irrespective of their documentation status (Centre for Child Law). This ruling has strengthened the constitutional rights to equality, dignity, and education by emphasizing that the best interests of children must be prioritized in all issues concerning them. Furthermore, literature draws attention to the persistent challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education for school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities. This issue has been extensively examined by Holness (2016) and Parkin (2010), revealing that despite the existence of legal frameworks, substantial practical barriers hinder the achievement of equitable access to education for all children in South Africa.

1.6.3.3 Macrosystem

Cultural and social elements significantly influence the learning opportunities of children with hearing difficulties who attend school in South Africa, especially amidst the difficulties posed by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Stigma surrounding disabilities frequently results in social exclusion, leading to discrimination against individuals with hearing impairments not only in educational environments

but also within their communities (Amnesty International, 2020). This stigma can lead to a deficiency in support from peers and even family members, thereby impeding the academic and emotional growth of these school-going children (Ochse and Lowton, 2023). Furthermore, cultural perceptions may prioritize traditional views over inclusive educational practices, limiting the opportunities for school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities to receive adequate support and resources (OECD, 2020). The focus on the collective reputation of the family can act as a deterrent for families in pursuing essential accommodations for their children. This may result in additional marginalization of these school-attending children and greatly impact their academic successes (Adigun, 2022). Tackling these cultural and social obstacles is crucial in establishing a more inclusive educational setting that adequately meets the requirements of all children attending school.

1.7 Research methodology

Daniel and Swas (2011) indicated that research methodology consists of the particular procedures employed to recognize, choose, process, and examine information regarding a subject. Daniel and Swas (2011) argued that researchers should not use this as a research model for a specific project but rather as a set of theoretical principles and frameworks that guide how to conduct research within a particular paradigm. They emphasize that it is a technique that encompasses both aspects. Abbott and McKinney (2013) argued that researchers refer to the plan of a research study as the research design. This design outlines the actions and methods that researchers will employ to address the research questions (Abbott and McKinney, 2013). The study used desktop methodology, systematically reviewing existing literature and documents to gather relevant data and insights. This involved an extensive literature review, including peer-reviewed journals, articles, research reports, case studies, and online sources.

Furthermore, the key databases consulted included Google Scholar and the Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC). These platforms widely recognize their role in providing access to educational research and literature. The literature review focused on studies published within the last five to ten years. This timeframe ensures that the findings are relevant to current educational challenges faced by hearing-impaired school-going children during the pandemic. The primary keywords utilized in the literature search included "hearing-impaired school-going children," "distance learning," "inclusive education," and "COVID-19." These keywords were essential for identifying relevant studies that address the specific context of the research. The study examined both domestic and international legal frameworks related to the rights of hearing-impaired school-going children. The analysis included South Africa's Constitution, which provides foundational rights related to education.

The research also took into account international agreements like the UNCRPD, which offers global standards for the safeguarding and advancement of disability rights. A comparison with foreign jurisdictions, specifically Kenya, was provided.

The relevance of this comparison lies in the similar socio-economic context of Kenya and the challenges they face in applying inclusive education policies for school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities. Studying Kenya offers valuable perspectives on different methods and potentially effective strategies that could guide South Africa's approaches. These sources offer valuable empirical evidence and insights to enhance understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on educational experiences in diverse contexts. Utilizing these studies enables a thorough examination that covers not only legal aspects but also encompasses the real-life experiences of school-going children, thus improving advice on how to support hearing-impaired school-going children in online learning settings. The study thoroughly examined a range of policies concerning special educational needs for children attending school with hearing impairments. The focus was on both local policies, such as those derived from South Africa's Constitution, and global frameworks, such as the UN Convention. The study involved a thorough examination of both the content of these policies and the effectiveness of their implementation. By maintaining a dual focus, researchers could evaluate whether legal structures effectively provide tangible aid for school-going children with hearing impairments in educational environments.

Lastly, using a human rights perspective, the research sought to empower school-going children with hearing impairments by improving their grasp of their rights in educational settings. The research examined the outcomes considering current studies and legal frameworks, conforming to human rights principles that encourage inclusive educational methods. After reviewing the research findings, they developed suggestions to improve the distance learning journey for school-going children with hearing challenges. The recommendations aim to help school-going children overcome challenges faced in remote learning during the pandemic and ensure that everyone has equal access to educational opportunities.

1.8 Significance of the study

The outcomes of this study will be utilized by researchers to learn more about how COVID-19 affects the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairments. This knowledge helped limit the factors contributing to school-going children's difficulties accessing online learning and informed

policymakers and law enforcement agencies about the obstacles they faced. Teachers would profit from comprehending the different encounters that school-going children with hearing disabilities had during a school year loaded with vulnerability. The field of education can learn how to train and prepare teachers for online learning, which helps address the high exclusion rate of school-going children with hearing impairments from education. As the experiences of children attending school with hearing incapacities suggest that the pandemic may necessitate additional support from these groups, this study could also offer recommendations to educators, administrators, and parents.

1.9 Limitations

An inherent limitation of desktop research is the absence of direct interaction between the researcher and the participants. Unlike personal interviews or observations, desktop research relies on existing data sources, such as documents and online resources. This limits the researcher's ability to follow up on the question. The availability of relevant data may limit desktop research. Another limitation of conducting desktop research is the potential for bias in the available data sources. The researcher's findings and conclusions heavily rely on the accuracy and reliability of the existing documents and online resources. If the data sources are outdated or incomplete, it may impact the validity and credibility of the research findings. Conducting qualitative research can constrain the researcher's capacity to get a richer body of relevant data. Without direct interaction with participants or the physical environment, the researcher missed important nonverbal cues and social dynamics that are critical to understanding the impact of coronavirus on distance learning for children attending school with hearing impairments.

1.10 Definition of keywords

1.10.1 Covid 19 pandemic

According to the World Health Organization (2021:01), "coronavirus disease is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus." These diseases affect millions of people around the world. Accessing education for school-going children with hearing impairments was also affected by this disease.

1.10.2 Education

Dictionary.com (n.d.) argues that education pertains to the methods of teaching and developing knowledge. It means more than the perusal of a particular course of study. The term education in the

study will refer to school-going children with hearing impairments receiving knowledge from their teachers.

1.10.3 Remote learning

According to Al-Arimi (2014: 83), “remote learning or distance education is a field that focuses on the pedagogy, technology, and instructional system design that are effectively integrated in delivering education to school-going children.” Teachers and school-going children may communicate asynchronously and synchronously, and in the study, school-going children with hearing impairments received learning online through Zoom meetings and WhatsApp. This means they could not meet in traditional classrooms due to COVID-19.

1.10.4 Hearing impairment

The World Health Organization (2020:01) defines “hearing impairment as a person who cannot hear as well as someone with normal hearing with hearing thresholds of 20 dB or better in both ears is said to have hearing loss.” The extent of hearing impairment can vary from mild to severe, affecting either a single ear or both ears, and encompasses moderate and moderately severe classifications. In other terms, hearing impairment can be described as a state that inhibits a person from hearing sounds in all or nearly all of its variations. Conversely, a child experiencing hearing loss can typically react to auditory stimuli, such as speech. The research focuses on school-going children who have hearing impairments.

1.11 Structure of the dissertation

The mini dissertation was made up of the subsequent chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter acted as an introduction to the research problem, outlining its background, aim, objectives, questions, and hypotheses. It also presented a theoretical framework, outlined the methodology, explained the significance of the research, and provided definitions for key concepts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The chapter examined the existing literature to create an academic basis for the study, highlighting research pertinent to the topic. It further pinpointed deficiencies in the current literature and tackled them to emphasize the importance of this study.

Chapter 3: Examination of International Legislation Relating to the Education of School-Going Children with Hearing Impairments

This chapter looked at the international legislation on the education of school-going children with hearing impairment and the legal framework that protects children from being denied access to education, including the ACRWC and CRC in other countries.

Chapter 4: South African legislation relating to the education of school-going children with hearing impairments and mandatory reporting

The chapter explored the legislative literature regarding children's educational rights in South Africa, concentrating on how existing laws facilitate mandatory reporting in the education of children experiencing disabilities. This legal structure directed the examination in Chapter 4, allowing the research to achieve its goals.

Chapter 5: Data Presented, Discussion, and Recommendations

The findings of the study were organized into themes and sub-themes, grounded in pertinent literature and aligned with the theoretical framework utilized in the research. The recommendations of the study were discussed based on these findings.

1.12 Conclusion

The chapter provided an introduction to the researched subject's information. It outlined the background of the study, the problem statement, the research aim, the objectives, the research question, the study's hypothesis, the study's significance, and the limitations, along with defining key terms. The research aimed to investigate the effects of COVID-19 on the remote learning experiences of school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa, concentrating on the difficulties they encountered in accessing online education, the obstacles to obtaining sufficient support from teachers and parents, and offering practical recommendations to improve their remote learning experiences. The study utilized desktop research methods. This chapter also included an overview of the methodologies and theoretical framework. It concludes with a brief description of the study's structure.

CHAPTER 2- LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

After COVID-19, the move from classroom-based learning to online has impacted the teaching standards for school-going children with hearing impairments. These children faced challenges as a result of the changes. The chapter examines the effect of coronavirus on the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairment in South Africa, focusing on the disruption of personal learning, increased reliance on online learning, social and emotional effects, and the loss of special education. Second, the challenges facing school-going children with hearing impairments during COVID-19 are explored, focusing on communication barriers, loss of specialized support, limited access to sign language interpreters, difficulty reading lips with masks, limited access to resources, and social isolation.

2.2 Effects of COVID-19 on the education of school-going children with hearing impairment disability in South Africa.

2.2.1 Introduction

Naylor, Burke, and Holman (2020) have argued that changes in the education sector and learning will undoubtedly have a significant impact on school-going children with hearing impairments. The primary means of communication for these models is visual, enhanced by appropriate audio features. Maintaining the language and academic development of these models is crucial. Unfortunately, the rapid move to online learning has not impressed people who rely on translation and interpreting professionals.

2.2.2 Disruption of In-Person Learning

Aljedaani *et al* (2023; 05) stated that “the sudden change from face-to-face to remote learning created challenges for school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities.” Ngubane and Zongozz (2021) argued that in South Africa, the pandemic-related shift to online teaching and assessment had a severe impact on hearing-impaired school-going children in remote learning and education programs. Higher educational institutions are looking to make a rapid transition to online teaching and assessment as the number of those who were excluded increases. The disruption of in-person learning for children experiencing hearing difficulties in South Africa has been critically examined in various studies, highlighting significant challenges faced by this demographic during the COVID-19 pandemic. One notable report by Deaf SA (2020) emphasizes that the educational system has historically failed to meet the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive needs of hearing-impaired school-going children, resulting in low literacy and numeracy rates. The research included participants from different educational

institutions for hearing-impaired school-going children across the country, comprising teachers, guardians, and hearing-impaired school-going children. The methodology involved qualitative interviews and focus group discussions to gather insights on the barriers faced during the transition to online learning. Findings revealed that many school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities struggled with inadequate access to qualified sign language interpreters and resources tailored to their needs, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration. The report emphasizes the urgent need for systemic change to create inclusive learning environments that support the unique needs of school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities (Deaf SA, 2020).

In addition, every child is entitled to receive an education that is tailored to their natural way of communicating and aims to develop their full potential. The significance of offering educational chances in sign language communication for school-going children with hearing impairments cannot be undervalued. These chances allow school-going children to engage with a peer community that employs comparable communication techniques, promoting social integration and improving their complete educational experience. In South Africa, a lack of adequate resources for school support for the hearing-impaired results in the regular placement of these school-going children with their hearing friends without sign language interpreters (Soudien *et al*, 2021). The pandemic can drive school-going children with hearing impairments further behind in standard schooling, broadening the gap between them and their hearing friends.

2.2.3 Increased Reliance on Online Learning

Soudien *et al* (2023:114) argued that “online learning has become the new normal and has disrupted traditional learning methods the most.” This is due to the enforcement of social distancing around the world. This is important as more school-going children have the option to stay in school. According to a study by Moustach and Makhoba in 2024, many school-going children experiencing hearing difficulties in South Africa were unable to continue their schooling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic because they did not have the means to access online education. For online learning, many school-going children with disabilities use assistive devices such as screen readers, braille readers, and hearing aids. According to Moustach and Makhoba (2024), less than 10% of school-going children with hearing disabilities were aware of the technology they were using.

Additionally, some parents mentioned that their children were unable to access the homework sent to their children. Admittance to remote learning was not accessible to all school-going children experiencing hearing difficulties. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, hearing-impaired school-going

children faced significant challenges in transitioning to distance education because only one organization reached out to the Ministry of Education to seek a solution. This lack of outreach resulted in difficulties for these school-going children in accessing learning resources compared to their peers in mainstream schools (Aljedaani *et al*, 2023). Additionally, the limited participation of hearing-impaired school-going children raises concerns about whether they received adequate support during this critical time. As we continue to integrate distance learning into the educational process, tackling these difficulties is essential to guarantee that hearing-impaired school-going children attain fair access and involvement in educational environments (Rehman *et al*, 2024).

2.2.4. Social and Emotional Effects

During the pandemic, school-going children with hearing impairments experienced tremendous social and emotional impacts (Krishnan *et al*, 2020). In school, the main language and communication environment for many school-going children with hearing impairments is facilitated. Hearing-impaired school-going children engage in social activities with their classmates, interact well with other children and teachers, join in classroom conversations, and foster a strong bond with the school setting. However, this was not the case in remote settings. Krishna *et al* (2020) found that most parents of hearing-impaired children attending school were more inclined to enrol their children in a public school rather than in a special school. As a result, school-going children with hearing impairments felt isolated from their peers. This finding was supported by Wickenden *et al* (2023), who looked at how disabled individuals in South Africa encountered the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey found a wide range of significant responses from respondents, including shock, disappointment, and hopelessness during the pandemic's underlying 17 months. Surprisingly, 60% of participants experienced social and emotional effects. The literature on hearing-impaired school-going children suggests that interpreters are often used in remote listening during virtual meetings to interpret content (Krishnan *et al*, 2020). Distance learning caused hearing-impaired, school-going children to feel disconnected from the class and the teacher.

2.2.5 Loss of Specialized Support

Special support is an important resource for many school-going children with hearing impairments. The social support from peers for school-going children experiencing hearing difficulties in South Africa has been significantly affected throughout the COVID-19 crisis, highlighting the critical part interpersonal relationships play in their educational experiences. Before the pandemic, peer interactions provided essential emotional and academic support, fostering a sense of belonging and

community among hearing-impaired, school-going children (Terlektsi *et al*, 2020). Furthermore, without the usual opportunities for group activities and collaborative learning, school-going children with hearing impairment faced additional barriers to forming friendships and receiving support from classmates (Terlektsi *et al*, 2020). This situation underscores the importance of fostering inclusive environments where all school-going children can engage meaningfully with one another, particularly through initiatives that promote South African Sign Language (SASL) education among hearing peers to bridge communication gaps (Boleu, 2024). According to the social constructivist theory, effective learning thrives in collaborative environments, where school-going children can engage with peers and educators alike who comprehend their individual needs. School-going children with hearing impairment disabilities encountered greater obstacles to achieving academic success as a result of inadequate specialized assistance. The lack of specialized support can be examined through the lens of ecosystem theory, contemplating the interactions among diverse systems. For instance, the scarcity of qualified sign language interpreters in educational institutions points to underlying issues within both the exosystem and macrosystem levels. When educational institutions overlook the importance of hiring qualified staff and offering essential resources, it can adversely affect the experiences of school-going children (Slome *et al*, 2024).

2.3 Challenges faced by school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities during COVID-19

2.3.1 Communication Barriers

Distance learning aims to mimic traditional schools and facilitate interaction between teachers and school-going children. This can be extremely difficult for school-going children with hearing impairments. School-going children with hearing impairments from previously marginalized backgrounds could have the same learning experience if the technology used is affordable and accessible (Aljedaani *et al*, 2023). Unfortunately, this is not true for everybody, particularly for children with hearing impairments. There are a few open innovations that individuals with hearing impairments can use in their day-to-day routines. However, for educational purposes, there are very few options. Most educational programs do not include subtitling and video streaming technology. In the case of COVID-19, school-going children encountered barriers to communicating via the internet because they did not have the appropriate software for communication. This is backed by research conducted by Aljedaani *et al* (2023) that examined the challenges encountered by school-going children with hearing impairment when engaging in online learning. 72% of responses indicated that the content was not accessible, and the survey found that 96.9% of 8 participants had difficulty

accessing the internet at home. They have to rely on email and chat to present their work and ask questions, and they usually use a free service. Email and chat are seen as slow processes. This type of technology only benefits the hearing impaired who use English as their primary language.

2.3.2 Lack of Accessible Technology

Limited technological resources hinder the transition to online education for school-going children with hearing disabilities. This problem is also considered comprehensive and multi-faceted. In mainstream and special schools, the transition from traditional to online learning is challenging. Moustach and Makhoba (2024) carried out a study that delved into the obstacles experienced by school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa amid the coronavirus crisis. The study involved school-going children with hearing impairments from different educational institutions throughout South Africa. It also encompassed parents and educators, offering a thorough understanding of the obstacles faced while adapting to online learning. Moustach and Makhoba used a qualitative research approach. They conducted interviews with school-going children, parents, and educators to collect personal experiences and insights. Focus group discussions engaged a variety of stakeholders to examine the obstacles hindering access to online education and technology. This method enabled a thorough investigation of participants' real-life experiences, shedding light on particular challenges associated with technology access. The study findings unveiled limited awareness of technology. Only a small fraction, less than 10%, of school-going children with hearing impairments are knowledgeable about the assistive technologies at their disposal. This highlights a notable disparity in accessibility and awareness.

Furthermore, Krishnan *et al* (2020) found that in mainstream schools, teachers rarely receive training to work with interpreters, leaving hearing-impaired or disabled school-going children as the only ones in the class using an interpreter. School-going children experiencing hearing difficulties in South Africa encounter technological barriers that hinder their educational experiences. Many schools lack essential assistive technologies, such as hearing aids and communication devices, which are crucial for facilitating participation in classroom discussions. Furthermore, educational materials are often not adapted for hearing-impaired school-going children, with e-learning platforms typically lacking visual elements, thereby creating accessibility gaps (Mohd and Tasir, 2020). Fitzpatrick and Neild, 2017 argue that the absence of training for teachers in effectively utilizing these technologies worsens the issue, causing educators to depend on conventional methods that do not address the unique requirements of hearing-impaired school-going children. Additionally, socio-economic factors further exacerbate these challenges, as marginalized school-going children experiencing hearing difficulties

may not have access to the necessary resources to benefit from available technologies. Addressing these barriers is essential for fostering an inclusive educational environment where all school-going children can thrive.

2.3.3 Limited availability of sign language interpreters

The lack of qualified sign language interpreters is a significant obstacle in South Africa, restricting the educational possibilities accessible to hearing-impaired school-going children. Although SASL has been integrated into the curriculum, numerous schools do not have enough qualified interpreters, which obstructs effective communication and learning for hearing-impaired school-going children (Slome *et al*, 2024). The deficiency of trained interpreters impacts academic success and restricts social integration prospects for these children. Furthermore, throughout the coronavirus pandemic, the shift to online learning exacerbated these challenges, as many school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities struggled with inadequate access to real-time interpretation and captioning services (Slome *et al*, 2024). Addressing these shortages is essential for ensuring equitable educational opportunities for school-going children experiencing hearing difficulties. Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, access to sign language interpreters was limited to those who explicitly requested and advocated for their presence through school disability departments. Krishnan *et al* (2020) highlight that sign language is the primary communication mode for many individuals with hearing impairment disabilities, emphasizing the importance of strong communication practices.

Furthermore, the identity of children with hearing impairment disabilities is deeply interwoven with their cultural context, especially their reliance on sign language as their primary mode of communication. The literature underscores that numerous school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities have expressed feeling unsupported as a result of insufficient access to sign language interpreters and resources catered to their specific requirements (Moustach and Makhoba, 2024). This lack of support impacts academic performance and also erodes their cultural identity and sense of belonging within the educational community. Social constructivism proposes that school-going children develop knowledge within the boundaries of their cultural perspectives. Consequently, any disturbance to these perspectives affects their capacity to learn efficiently. The challenges experienced by school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities in communication can be further grasped by examining Ecosystems Theory. At the microsystem level, the immediate environment, such as family support and school resources, plays an important part in influencing educational experiences. The absence of trained sign language interpreters highlights how systemic challenges at the exosystem level, such as insufficient funding and resources, can significantly affect

the effective communication and access to educational materials for these school-going children (Slome *et al*, 2024).

2.3.4. Difficulty reading lips with masks

Many hearing-impaired children struggle with communication, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they may not use sign language. In a new floating model, interpreters are expected to bridge communication between the children's homes and classrooms, yet challenges persist when translating through masks and screens. Some children have reported a lack of interpreters since the shift to online learning, which has altered how teaching occurs, as noted by Krishnan *et al* (2020). The online platform often lacks the interactive visual aids essential for effective learning, such as board writing that supplement oral communication. Consequently, these children may miss critical information because their questions go unanswered or they fail to grasp the changes in their learning environment. Lip reading, a key communication component for many, is hindered by the use of masks. Research by Garg *et al* (2021) confirmed that protective gear obscured facial cues and disrupted auditory signals, exacerbating communication difficulties and increasing anxiety among hearing-impaired school-going children with hearing impairments.

2.3.5 Limited access to resources

Limited resources for school-going children experiencing hearing difficulties in South Africa significantly impact their educational outcomes and career prospects, primarily due to linguistic barriers, inadequate teacher training, and insufficient educational infrastructure. A major issue is teachers' limited proficiency in South African Sign Language (SASL), with approximately 90% lacking adequate knowledge, which hinders effective communication and learning (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2023). Many school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities enter school without a solid foundation in language, leading to long-lasting challenges in literacy and comprehension. Furthermore, teachers often receive insufficient training in SASL and education of hearing impairment disability methodologies, contributing to high dropout rates as school-going children feel unsupported (Casoojee *et al*, 2024). The scarcity of specialized schools only 47 exist across the country further restricts access to quality education, particularly in rural areas (Department of Basic Education, 2021). Consequently, these systemic challenges limit the career opportunities for individuals with hearing impairment disabilities, as compromised literacy skills hinder their economic inclusion (Casoojee *et al*, 2024).

2.3.6 Social Isolation

All the hearing-impaired people reported a communication breakdown. They felt frustration while interacting with hearing people, which led to self-imposed isolation (Slome *et al*, 2024). They argue that communication problems create a barrier. They occur between the hearing-impaired and the hard of hearing. These problems restrict social interaction. They deeply affect personal development and self-esteem. This leads individuals to avoid unpleasant and repeated experiences with communication failure. "Academic Resilience Among Deaf School-Going Children During E-Learning in the COVID-19 Era," by Olufemi Timothy Adigun and Ntokozo Dennis Ndwandwe delves into the social isolation hurdles experienced by school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities amidst the coronavirus crisis. The study concentrated on hearing-impaired school-going children in South Africa, exploring their educational experiences and difficulties. The exact number of people who participated in the study was not specified in the search results. However, the objective was to reach a varied group of children attending school with hearing impairment disabilities to gain insights into their e-learning experiences. The study took place in multiple high schools throughout South Africa, focusing on the specific difficulties encountered by hearing-impaired school-going children in diverse educational settings amidst the pandemic. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data-gathering techniques to improve the credibility and richness of the results. Quantitative data were gathered via structured questionnaires evaluating academic resilience and experiences of social isolation among school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities throughout online learning. Qualitative insights were obtained by conducting semi-structured interviews with selected participants, aiming to delve deeper into their personal experiences, feelings of isolation, and coping strategies during the pandemic. The study revealed that school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities experienced notable emotions of social isolation as a consequence of the change to remote learning. The unavailability of in-person communication with peers and teachers played a role in their feelings of loneliness. The review revealed that 60% of the studies, 12 out of 20, discovered a correlation between hearing loss and loneliness. It was revealed that 64.7% of the studies, 11 out of 17, indicated that children with hearing impairments faced increased levels of social isolation. According to the social constructivist theory, knowledge is formed through social interactions. Therefore, the absence of peer engagement during online learning greatly impeded these school-going children's academic and social development.

3. Conclusion

The literature review chapter provides a thorough exploration of the complex challenges encountered by school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasizes the notable impact on traditional learning due to the shift to online education, causing challenges for school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities who did not have sufficient access to it. The findings emphasize that numerous hearing-impaired school-going children faced challenges with communication barriers, such as a shortage of qualified sign language interpreters and insufficient access to crucial assistive technologies. These challenges were further exacerbated by social isolation, impacting both their emotional well-being and academic performance. The review highlights the pressing necessity for systemic changes to establish inclusive educational environments that meet the specific requirements of school-going children with hearing impairment. It calls for enhanced resources, educator training, and increased technology accessibility. Overall, this chapter demonstrates how the pandemic has intensified pre-existing inequalities in the education of school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities, highlighting the urgency of taking collective action to tackle these disparities and guarantee that every school-going child with hearing impairment is provided with fair educational opportunities in the future.

CHAPTER THREE

EXAMINATION OF INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION ON EDUCATION OF SCHOOL-GOING CHILDREN WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT DISABILITY

3.1 Introduction

International collaboration has been promoted via the UNCRC and ACRWC to protect children's rights, requiring nations like South Africa to legally guarantee that children with hearing impairments do not face barriers to accessing education during the pandemic. This chapter examines international legislation on the education of school-going children with hearing disabilities, focusing on its implementation in South Africa throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve a wider perspective and highlight possible best practices, the chapter will contrast South Africa's initiatives with those of Kenya. Kenya was chosen for this comparative study due to its more decentralized educational system, which facilitated quicker adjustments to local requirements during the pandemic. This comparison will examine the advantages and disadvantages of both nations' reactions to the educational obstacles encountered by hearing-impaired school-going children during the pandemic, providing insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. This comparative analysis seeks to offer a more profound insight into the obstacles and possibilities in guaranteeing inclusive education for school-going children with hearing impairments. Through the comparison of these two distinct contexts, the

chapter aims to pinpoint possible lessons and strategies that could guide upcoming policy and practice in South Africa.

3.2 International legal frameworks protecting school-going children with hearing impairment from exclusion during COVID-19

3.2.1 The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD)

CRPD is a key global agreement on universal freedoms in the last two centuries, addressing a major gap in global regulations. Although disability issues have been discussed since the UN's beginning, there was no international system to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. They were largely overlooked in existing human rights agreements, with most not considering their needs and mentioning disabilities only minimally. This led to their invisibility in the framework of universal rights. The CRPD specifically details the essential rights of the education of persons with disabilities. The most relevant articles related to education in the CRPD are the following:

I. Article 24: Education

The article emphasizes the significance of inclusive education for individuals with disabilities. De Beco (2014) contends that it is the duty of authorities to ensure accessible, high-quality, and free primary and secondary education for children with disabilities within their communities. Education systems need to be established to assist the complete educational foundation and growth of school-going children with hearing impairments, foster their participation in society, and acknowledge human rights and diversity (Du Plessis, 2013). Nevertheless, the real-world execution of Article 24 in South Africa encounters major obstacles, as highlighted by the difficulties in delivering accessible online education for hearing-impaired school-going children during the coronavirus pandemic, such as restricted access to captioning and the worsening of inequalities due to the digital gap (Ntombela, 2020; Wang, 2021). Kenya's Ministry of Education collaborated with Safaricom to offer free data bundles for school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities, facilitating access to platforms (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development developed Kenyan Sign Language video lessons for television and YouTube, impacting 78% of school-going children with hearing impairment in urban regions (Institute of Curriculum Development, 2020). To tackle this digital gap, the South African Department of Basic Education ought to collaborate with telecommunications firms to offer subsidized data access to school-going children who have hearing impairments, alike to the Kenyan approach.

II. Article 5: Equality and Non-discrimination

“Article 5(1) and 5(2) require that all persons be recognized before the law and the effective provision of legal protection against discrimination.” (Weller, 2011:76). The COVID-19 pandemic revealed major shortcomings in maintaining this principle for hearing-impaired school-going children in South Africa. The unequal availability of technology for online learning, as noted by Wang (2021), resulted in many hearing-impaired school-going children being largely shut out of education during lockdown, infringing on their right to equal access and non-discrimination. This matter underscores the importance of the social model of disability, a viewpoint that Tobin (2019) has pointed out as essential for comprehending disability as a societal creation; discrimination frequently arises due to societal inequalities. Kenya’s Information Communication Technology Authority provided solar-powered tablets that came with offline Kenyan Sign Language lessons to school-going children with hearing impairments in rural areas (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). To advance equality and prevent discrimination, the South African government ought to allocate resources, especially in rural regions, toward supplying assistive technology gadgets, like tablets equipped with educational materials in sign language, to hearing-impaired school-going children.

3.2.2 General Comment No. 4 (2016)

The CRPD's Article 24 highlights that inclusive education represents a fundamental human right, which must be preserved even in times of crisis. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' General Comment No. 4 offers comprehensive guidance for guaranteeing that children with disabilities obtain quality education in inclusive environments (Hayes and Bulat, 2017). The following are the key points of General Comment No. 4:

I. Inclusive education as a right

General Comment No. 4 stated that inclusive education is a fundamental human right for all children, including children with disabilities. This required states to take positive steps to ensure that their education systems were inclusive and accessible (Tobin, 2019). However, the execution of these responsibilities by South Africa during COVID-19 exposed considerable deficiencies. The General Comment additionally requires states to assess and monitor measures for children with disabilities in times of crisis. Nevertheless, South Africa did not provide its COVID-19 educational strategies to the CRPD Committee (OHCHR, 2024), which undermined accountability and breached the monitoring responsibilities specified in the Comment. This gap underscores the difficulties in applying international recommendations in practice, especially when systemic problems such as the digital divide disproportionately marginalize specific groups. To adhere to General Comment No. 4, South

Africa must emphasize accessible technology, training for teachers in inclusive methods, and clear reporting structures to maintain accountability during future emergencies. To enhance transparency and accountability, South Africa ought to present its educational policies and information concerning school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities to the CRPD Committee.

II. Non-discrimination and accessibility

The commentary emphasized that children with disabilities should not be discriminated against when accessing education. To facilitate full participation in the education system, all obstacles need to be eliminated, comprising legal, physical, communication, social, financial, and behavioural obstacles (De Beco, 2014). However, in South Africa, obstacles to communication continue to pose a major challenge for school-going children with hearing impairments. The restricted number of trained sign language interpreters in educational institutions and the absence of accessible learning resources, like captioned videos, directly hinder their capacity to engage fully in the educational system (Ntombela, 2020). This illustrates a shortcoming in adequately tackling the communication barriers that General Comment No. 4 clearly advocates for removing. Kenya's Sign Language Interpreter Training Program in 2023 started with 12 interpreters, but now it has grown to 53 interpreters (The Kenya Sign Language Interpreters Association, 2023). The Kenya National Examinations Council required Kenyan Sign Language interpretation for every national exam, guaranteeing. Based on Kenya's example, South Africa ought to initiate a nationwide sign language interpreter training program to tackle the lack of skilled interpreters in educational institutions.

III. Supportive educational environment

The significance of creating extensive support systems in educational settings cannot be emphasized enough, as these structures are crucial for addressing the diverse needs of children with disabilities and fostering inclusive learning environments. This included giving necessary resources, such as specialized teaching methods and materials (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). However, in South Africa, the fact is that numerous schools are deficient in resources and trained staff to deliver sufficient support for school-going children with hearing impairments. This encompasses a scarcity of skilled sign language interpreters, a deficit of assistive technology, and inadequate training for educators on inclusive teaching strategies. Consequently, hearing-impaired school-going children with hearing impairment frequently find it challenging to engage with the curriculum and take part completely in classroom activities, which compromises the purpose of General Comment No. 4. To establish a more supportive educational setting, the South African Department of Basic Education ought to offer resources and training to educators on inclusive teaching methods for hearing-impaired school-going children.

IV. Guidance on Interpreting General Comments

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has published several general comments to elucidate the application of children's rights, including General Comment No. 9 (2006), which underscores the importance of creating inclusive education systems for children with disabilities. This includes adapting curricula, teaching methods, and assessment processes to meet diverse needs. General Comment No. 11 (2009) on indigenous children emphasizes the importance of respecting cultural identity in educational settings involving indigenous children with disabilities. General Comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of children to be heard highlights the importance of hearing children's views on matters affecting them, including educational decisions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the guidelines set forth in these General Comments encountered considerable difficulties in South Africa. Attempts to modify curricular and teaching strategies for online education frequently did not sufficiently meet the particular needs of hearing-impaired school-going children, and their perspectives were frequently overlooked in the development of remote learning options (Kamga, 2020). This emphasizes the necessity for a more proactive and inclusive strategy in applying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its General Comments, especially during times of crisis.

3.2.3 GUIDANCE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN STATES ON ENSURING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

Throughout the coronavirus crisis, South Africa had adopted several guidelines to ensure that the legal rights of minors, particularly those with hearing difficulties, were respected in the context of education. The key guidance includes the following:

I. Commitment to Inclusive Education

In reaction to the pandemic, the South African government reiterated its dedication to delivering inclusive education, emphasizing the educational requirements of children with hearing impairments to guarantee they obtain quality learning experiences. This is consistent with the principles set out in the CRPD and General Comment 4, which emphasize that inclusive education is a fundamental right (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). However, in spite of this dedication, the real experiences of hearing-impaired school-going children throughout the pandemic uncovered considerable shortcomings in execution. The restricted access to online educational resources and the absence of sufficient support services meant that numerous hearing-impaired school-going children could not completely engage in their learning, prompting inquiries about whether the government's pledge resulted in concrete advantages

for this at-risk group (Mohamed, 2021). To guarantee that government commitments result in concrete advantages, the Department of Basic Education must perform frequent audits of schools to evaluate the availability of resources and support services for school-going children who have hearing impairments.

II. Adoption for learning methods

Schools were requested to adjust their instructional practices to accommodate distance learning while ensuring that school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities receive the support they need. This included providing accessible materials and resources that meet the requirements of children attending school (U.S. Department of Justice, 2024). While schools were requested to modify their approaches, the effectiveness of these modifications relied significantly on the training and readiness of educators. Numerous educators did not possess the skills and understanding required to successfully instruct hearing-impaired school-going children in a virtual setting, emphasizing the necessity for focused professional development to assist inclusive remote learning strategies (Krishnan *et al*, 2020).

III. Provide Support Services

The guidance emphasized that sustaining support services, like specialized educational resources and assistive technologies, is crucial for guaranteeing that hearing-impaired school-going children obtain inclusive and effective educational assistance. Schools were tasked with ensuring that these services remain available during the distance learning period (Wang, 2021). However, the degree to which these support services were genuinely accessible throughout the distance learning phase is uncertain. Numerous hearing-impaired school-going children in South Africa encountered obstacles in accessing assistive technology because of expenses, connectivity problems, or insufficient technical assistance (Moustach and Makhoba, 2024). Additionally, special education resources were frequently not adequately modified for online delivery, resulting in many school-going children lacking the personalized support they required. Kenya's EduTech for All Initiative collaborated with UNICEF to provide hearing aids and captioning applications to school-going children with hearing impairment disability (Ministry of Education Kenya, 2021). Kenya Broadcasting Corporation transmitted KSL-interpreted lessons, impacting a high response rate in rural households (KNBS, 2022).

3.2.4 The findings from the review of international treaties on Disability rights

International agreements such as the CRC and CRPD offer vital direction on safeguarding the rights of children, including those with disabilities, within education during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The key findings from the review are the following:

I. Recognition of rights

The CRPD fills a major gap in international human rights instruments by addressing the rights of disabled people who were previously marginalized, disadvantaged, and neglected. In previous treaties, this recognition was essential to make certain that children with hearing difficulties were not marginalized in academic structure (UN General Assembly, 2007). However, this acknowledgment by itself is not enough to ensure equitable access to education. The success of these rights relies on their execution and enforcement, especially in difficult situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. South Africa's reaction to the pandemic revealed the disparity between the acknowledgment of rights in international agreements and the actual challenges encountered by hearing-impaired school-going children in obtaining online education (Chirowamhangu, 2024).

II. The Social Model of Disability

The review highlights the change in the perception of disability, shifting from viewing it as a personal misfortune to acknowledging it as a societal problem caused by inaccessible environments and attitudes. This viewpoint highlights that societal obstacle, rather than individual impairments, hinder complete engagement in education and society. The CRPD seeks to eliminate these obstacles to foster inclusion and equal opportunities (Tobin, 2019). The significance of this viewpoint is amplified when analysing the challenges faced by hearing-impaired children in South Africa throughout the pandemic, highlighting the necessity for customized educational and health services. According to the final research report on the impact of Covid-19 on persons with disabilities, 2022, the digital divide, lack of accessible educational materials, and inadequate support services created significant social hurdles that obstructed their ability to participate in and benefit from online learning, regardless of their personal abilities. The pandemic revealed entrenched inequalities and underscored the necessity for proactive actions to eliminate these obstacles and guarantee inclusive education for everyone.

III. Inclusive education as a fundamental right

According to De Beco (2014:274), "Article 24 (1) provided that inclusive education had to be guaranteed for all persons with disabilities." This document mandates that authorities should provide quality and access to education without discrimination and ensure that all children have access to educational environments (De Beco, 2014). However, South Africa faced difficulties in maintaining this right for school-going children with hearing impairments during the coronavirus pandemic. According to the final research report on the impact of Covid-19 on persons with disabilities (2022), the rapid transition to online education without sufficient preparation and resources caused many of

these children to be marginalized from learning due to the absence of accessible materials, sign language interpreters, and assistive technologies. This circumstance prompts inquiries regarding whether South Africa's response was genuinely inclusive and whether it sufficiently focused on the needs of hearing-impaired children in its educational policies.

IV. Non-discrimination and access

As stated by Du Plessis (2013), the CRC and CRPD together confirm that children with disabilities possess the right to education on an equal footing with others, free from discrimination, and this principle is essential to inclusive education. Authorities aim to remove all types of discrimination and obstacles legal, physical, social, and economic that hinder these children from engaging in educational opportunities. However, in South Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that substantial obstacles to equal educational access remain for hearing-impaired school-going children. Adigun and Ndwandwe (2022) emphasize that the lack of readily available digital learning resources, the limited number of trained sign language interpreters, and the high expenses associated with assistive technologies have led to significant disparities in education, which may violate the non-discrimination principles of the CRC and CRPD. Additional efforts are required to tackle these challenges and guarantee that hearing-impaired children have genuinely equal chances to obtain quality education.

V. Challenges in the Time of COVID-19

During the coronavirus pandemic, it has revealed difficulties in making sure that children with hearing impairment disabilities access online learning. Issues such as the digital divide have hindered proper access to online learning platforms, especially for families without adequate technology (Wang, 2021). This gap in digital access significantly impacted school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities from economically disadvantaged families, worsening pre-existing disparities in educational access. Lacking computers, internet access, and assistive technologies, these children could not engage in online learning activities, further isolating them and obstructing their academic advancement (Buthelezi *et al*, 2024). Tackling this digital divide is essential to guarantee that all hearing-impaired children possess equal chances to receive quality education, irrespective of their socioeconomic status.

3.2.5 The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)

Article 13 of the Charter stated that every child with a mental or physical disability has the right to special protective measures appropriate to their physical and moral needs and in conditions that ensure

their dignity, promote their independence, and encourage their active participation in the community (Lalli, 2018). State parties to this charter shall ensure, within the limits of available resources, that a child with a disability and those responsible for their care receive the assistance required and appropriate to the child's condition (Sloth-Nielsen, 2017). In particular, they shall ensure that the child with a disability has effective access to educational, vocational, and recreational opportunities in such a way as to help the child achieve the fullest possible social integration, individual fulfillment, and cultural and moral development (Lalli, 2018). The States Parties to this Charter shall use the means at their disposal to progressively achieve the full freedom of movement of persons with mental and physical disabilities and their access to public transportation and other places that they legitimately wish to access (Lalli, 2018).

3.2.5.1 The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Disability Rights

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an important instrument aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities throughout Africa. Here are the main features and implications of the protocol:

I. Overview of the Protocol:

Purpose and Scope indicate that the Protocol was adopted as an attachment to the African Charter on Human Rights and disability rights by concentrating on specific rights. The goal was to guarantee that individuals with disabilities possess the same rights and freedoms as other citizens and to foster their dignity, independence, and involvement in society (United Nations, 2006). Article 1 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines individuals with disabilities and acknowledges their particular rights (African Union, 2018). Article 2 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities advocates for the right to equality and non-discrimination and ensures that individuals with disabilities are not subjected to discrimination due to their disability (African Union, 2018). Article 4 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities supports the right to education and obliges states to create inclusive education systems that cater to the needs of school-going children with disabilities (Sloth-Nielsen, 2017).

II. Integration with other human rights instruments

Sloth-Nielsen (2017) argues that the protocol enhances and supports the commitments specified in the CRPD and CRC, guaranteeing that the rights of children with disabilities in Africa are protected and their educational requirements are fulfilled. This integration is crucial for establishing a thorough legal

framework aimed at safeguarding the rights of hearing-impaired school-going children in South Africa, guaranteeing that there are various pathways for seeking justice if their rights are infringed. Nevertheless, the success of this framework relies on the cooperation and synergy among various government departments and agencies, in addition to collaboration with civil society organizations (Khumalo and Hodgson, 2017).

III. Inclusive Education

The protocol requires states to provide inclusive education systems that enable school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities to learn alongside their peers in mainstream educational settings. Article 24 of the CRPD endorses this perspective by recognizing inclusive education as a basic right, mandating that states guarantee individuals with disabilities access to education in regular environments with suitable support (De Beco, 2014). However, the execution of inclusive education in South Africa encounters various obstacles, such as a deficiency of trained educators, an absence of accessible learning resources, and insufficient funding (Engelbrecht, 2020). To address these obstacles, the South African government must allocate additional resources toward inclusive education and foster a supportive environment for educators and school-going children with hearing impairment.

3.2.5.2 South Africa Implementation of ACRWC Article 13 During COVID-19

The ACRWC's Article 13 highlights the necessity for countries to establish specific protective measures for children with disabilities, enabling their access to educational opportunities that encourage personal growth and cultural advancement (Lalli, 2018). The South African approach to fulfilling these obligations for school-going children with hearing impairments showed both policy coherence and practical shortcomings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the government issued policy guidelines to promote equal access and provided funding for assistive technologies, systemic challenges hindered full compliance. Delays in the distribution of frequency modulated systems and subtitling resources, as well as the lack of SASL interpreters on virtual platforms, hindered effective access for many school-going children with hearing impairment. A 2021 study conducted by the South African Human Rights Commission in Gauteng Province found that the school's reliance on non-subtitled YouTube videos contravenes Article 13, as school-going children with hearing impairment who rely on visual cues are not catered for. While the Ministry of Education has pledged funding for subtitling, the implementation has remained unfinished. To fully comply with Article 13 of the ACRWC, South Africa must legislate for inclusive digital learning, improve technology access in rural areas, and strengthen accountability through reporting to the ACERWC.

3.2.6 Observation by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Rights of the Child on South Africa during COVID-19 pandemic

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2022) states that the insights from both committees illuminate South Africa's endeavours to fulfil its international obligations concerning the education of children with hearing impairments, highlighting both challenges and chances for enhancement. Both committees have expressed concern about the effectiveness of South Africa's inclusive schooling policy and highlighted the persistent barriers that prevent access to satisfactory schooling for hearing-impaired school-going children. The CRPD has pointed out that while South Africa is committed to inclusive education, major challenges remain when it comes to ensuring that all children have access to educational opportunities without discrimination (Mpu and Adu, 2021). This includes physical accessibility in schools, providing sufficient auxiliary services, and ensuring that teachers are properly trained to meet the diverse needs of school children with hearing disabilities (Engelbrecht, 2020). Similarly, the CRC has emphasized the importance of measures that promote the full improvement and participation of school-going children with hearing disabilities in the classroom. He calls on the authorities to remove the obstacles that prevent these school-going children from exercising their right to education. These include legal, social, and economic obstacles. Both committees call on South Africa to improve its monitoring mechanisms to control growth and ensure that it fulfils its responsibilities under global law. This underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to inclusive education that prioritizes the rights and needs of all school-going children.

1.3 An examination of the legislation in other countries

1.3.1 KENYA

Gathii (2013) states that the Kenyan Constitution confirms that all children have the right to fundamental education. It is expected that parents and caregivers must guarantee that all children receive their right to education. The Education for Persons with Special Needs Act guarantees the education of school-going children by specifying the various schools to be set up to cater to individuals with special needs, including school-going children with mild or severe intellectual disabilities, and equips them for integration into national development plans and budgets. Kenyan educational policy emphasizes the provision of top-quality education for all school-going children, ensuring they can achieve their full potential. During the pandemic, the government created guidelines to ensure

stakeholder support, guiding staff and stakeholders on the practices used by teachers and parents while prioritizing the safety of all school-going children, including children with hearing impairment disabilities.

The education system in Kenya comprises basic education, with a nationally set curriculum that emphasizes national values as the foundation of educational policy. The educational system in Kenya acknowledges various levels of learning. Such education provides the basis for social harmony, national identity, and the development of engaged and responsible citizenship. The Kenyan education system aims to preserve and enhance individuals' intellectual agility and knowledge, seamlessly integrating them into society. Despite the education policy, an emergency arose during the pandemic as face-to-face interactions were substituted with online learning.

3.3.2 Legislation and policies supporting the education of school-going children with hearing impairment in Kenya

I The Basic Education Act No. 14 of 2013

The law guarantees the entitlement to fundamental education for every Kenyan, outlining the structure of the educational system and the functions of key institutions within it. It addresses crucial aspects such as curriculum development, institutional management, and policies for human resources and finances. The Act emphasizes educational and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, as detailed in Part II. Part VI specifically mandates the integration of school-going children with hearing difficulties, including those with sensory impairments and special talents, into the general education system. The government is tasked with establishing minimum educational requirements and providing specialized services to ensure these children's inclusion in mainstream settings, covering aspects like physical facilities and educational support services.

II. The Constitution of Kenya (2010)

Implemented in 2010, the Constitution of Kenya serves as the highest legal document, structured into 18 chapters that cover different aspects of Kenyan society and governance. It supports inclusive education for people with hearing difficulties, promoting learning opportunities without discrimination. The state holds an obligation to guarantee that individuals with disabilities are provided with education and training designed to meet their unique requirements. The law also aims to improve

retention rates in special schools and offers affirmative action for disabled individuals. Both the state and society are tasked with enhancing political participation and ensuring access to essential services like healthcare and transportation for disabled persons, reflecting a commitment to the social model of disability.

III. The Special Needs Education Policy

This policy framework aims to enhance education for people with disabilities in Kenya, guaranteeing they have access to suitable educational resources and support, which is essential for their inclusion in society. The policy promotes inclusive education, particularly for children with hearing impairments (Kiru, 2019). It covers important topics like coordination, funding, program management, advocacy, and monitoring of educational programs for these children. The policy emphasizes the need for tailored educational methods, training for teachers, and adaptable resources to meet various learning needs. It seeks to provide hearing-impaired, school-going children a chance to learn and thrive in regular schools. Additionally, the policy connects education with curriculum guidelines and stresses the need for teamwork among different stakeholders for successful implementation. Overall, it aims to create learning opportunities that allow individuals with hearing difficulties to participate fully in society and contribute to social progress.

3.4 A comparative analysis of legislation and policies supporting the education of school-going children with hearing impairment in Kenya and South Africa

Utilizing Kenya as a point of comparison to South Africa provides significant insights, particularly regarding educational policies for children with hearing impairments during the coronavirus crisis. Similar to South Africa, Kenya has encountered historical obstacles concerning inequality and educational access, especially for marginalized groups, including those with disabilities (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The Kenyan government has made progress in advancing inclusive education through various initiatives, such as the launch of a mobile app aimed at assisting hearing-impaired, school-going children to learn online throughout COVID-19 (Ministry of Education, 2020). This initiative demonstrates a proactive strategy to harness technology to improve educational access, which is particularly pertinent given the digital divide that has affected many school-going children in both nations. Nevertheless, the long-term efficacy and accessibility of this app, especially for children in rural regions with limited internet connectivity, remain a critical concern for both Kenya and South Africa. Furthermore, Kenya's experiences during the pandemic reveal similar challenges encountered

by South Africa, including insufficient resources and inadequate training for educators to effectively support inclusive practices. Research indicates that although there are legal frameworks advocating for the rights of children with hearing impairments, implementation frequently falls short due to a deficiency in infrastructure and support systems (Kiru, 2019). The Kenyan scenario also emphasizes the significance of community engagement and collaboration among stakeholders to ensure that educational needs are adequately addressed, reflecting South Africa's focus on partnerships among schools, families, and organizations representing individuals with disabilities (Ressa, 2022). Additionally, studies have indicated that the impact of coronavirus on school-going children with hearing impairments in Kenya has been considerable, affecting their educational experiences and overall well-being (Ressa, 2022). This situation parallels the experiences in South Africa, where disruptions in education have similarly disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations. By exploring Kenya's initiatives and challenges in conjunction with those in South Africa, important lessons can be gleaned concerning effective strategies for fostering inclusive education and tackling systemic barriers that obstruct access for school-going children with hearing impairments. Specifically, a critical area for further research is to compare the particular support services and accommodations offered to hearing-impaired school-going children in mainstream schools in both countries and to evaluate the effect of these services on their academic performance and social inclusion.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the global legal frameworks aimed at safeguarding the educational rights of children with hearing impairments who are in school, concentrating on the application of these frameworks in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. By conducting a comparative analysis with Kenya, notable differences in the methods and results have been recognized. While South Africa encountered difficulties in properly executing inclusive education policies, especially regarding fair access to technology and support services, Kenya exhibited a more proactive and flexible response through strategies such as public-private partnerships and targeted initiatives.

This comparison emphasizes the significance of elements such as decentralized decision-making, cooperative partnerships, and evidence-based monitoring in meeting the educational requirements of children with hearing impairments during crises. The experiences of both South Africa and Kenya provide important understanding of the complexities involved in achieving inclusive education in varied settings and highlight the necessity for continuous efforts to enhance equity and accessibility

for all school-going children. Additional research is necessary to investigate the long-term effects of the pandemic on the educational achievements of children with hearing impairments in both nations and to determine sustainable methods for advancing inclusive education amid future challenges.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOUTH AFRICAN LEGISLATION SUPPORTING THE EDUCATION OF SCHOOL-GOING CHILDREN WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT DISABILITY

4.1 Introduction

South Africa already has policies and regulations that are aimed at protecting the rights of children with disabilities. The South African Constitution (1996) remains the overarching system for South Africa. Section 9 of the South African Bill of Rights states that 'everyone is equal under the watchful eye of the law and is privileged to be covered and to benefit from the law' (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996:06). The Constitution also states that no one, including the government and private companies, may unjustly discriminate against anyone based on one or more factors such as race, sex, color, age, or disability. The White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which contains the implementation of the framework, was delivered in 2015 as a means of adopting the UNCRPD. As indicated by the Ministry of Social Development (2015), this White Paper provides the public sector with clear policy instructions, techniques for execution, and rules for the implementation of projects and undertakings that promote and defend the privileges of persons with disabilities. Meanwhile, Education White Paper No. 6 aims to create an integrated learning environment that meets the diverse needs of school-going children, advocates for learning difficulties first, and develops the capacities of teachers. This chapter looks at the legal framework that promotes the education of school-going children with hearing disabilities in South Africa.

4.2 NATIONAL LEGISLATION ON ACCESSING TO EDUCATION FOR SCHOOL-GOING CHILDREN WITH HEARING DISABILITIES

4.2.1 The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (SASA)

According to Khumalo and Hodgson (2010), the Schools Act ensures that basic education is a right, mandating that children between the ages of 7 and 15 must attend school, usually from grade four to nine. They point out that a school-going child with hearing impairment can legally leave school upon turning 15, despite the SASA's emphasis on attending until grade 9. This responsibility to deliver education includes children with hearing disabilities. The authors argue that older children who have completed grade 9 or are above 15 should still have access to remedial education. Adolescents with

disabilities often fall behind academically but deserve the opportunity to remain in school, even if their age does not match their grade level. The SASA specifically accommodates the educational rights of these individuals, ensuring they can continue their education past the designated ages and grades, including graduating from high school. Importantly, Article 5 of the Act mandates public-funded schools to enrol children regardless of their disabilities, advocating for non-discriminatory practices in education.

Furthermore, during the coronavirus pandemic, the SASA of 1996 supported education in a significant way, despite some obstacles: SASA laid out school-overseeing bodies (SGBs) to entrust communities with enhanced responsibilities in supervising state-funded schools. The SGBs, made up of parents, educators, and community members, have been instrumental in overseeing school finances, enforcing health protocols, and upholding educational standards during the difficulties brought on by the pandemic. Nevertheless, they encountered significant difficulties, such as limited resources and obstacles in communication, emphasizing discrepancies in technology access. Nonetheless, SASA provided these governing bodies with the tools necessary to navigate the intricate landscape, encouraging community engagement and strengthening accountability within the education sector amidst a crucial period. This provided schools with the flexibility to address the needs of their school-going children throughout the COVID-19 closures. SASA strives to reduce disparities among schools by introducing fair state funding through a structured allocation framework that gives priority to schools that lack resources. This model uses a formula that takes into account school-going children's needs and socio-economic factors to distribute funds in a more equitable manner. Major challenges were brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for disadvantaged schools that are facing difficulties in collecting fees as a result of economic hardships. This probably affected admission to the school for the school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities (Bowen, 2023). While SASA advances comprehensive education, it does not have definite prerequisites for supporting school-going children with hearing impairments during COVID-19 (Schafer and Dunn, 2021). This might have made it challenging for school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities to get to remote learning during the COVID-19 school closure. In reaction to this, SASA is investigating different funding sources and building community partnerships to help sustain these schools throughout this challenging period.

Additionally, the Centre for Child Law case highlights the urgent need for inclusive insurance policies for school-going children with hearing impairments. It asserts that educational institutions must fulfil their constitutional duties by ensuring equal educational opportunities, particularly during the

coronavirus crisis (Kamga, 2020). Kamga (2020) argues that the case sets an important precedent supporting the rights of children to obtain the essential assistance and resources needed for their educational success. However, the South African Schools Act currently lacks specific provisions to assist hearing-impaired school-going children during emergencies, which has intensified educational inequalities as many struggled to access learning materials during school closures. To address these challenges, the case calls for several interventions, including improved access to technology, educator training, and development of inclusive learning materials. The necessity for inclusive training policies is emphasized to ensure that children with hearing impairments can enjoy equal opportunities for education and support (Kamga, 2020). Furthermore, when considering the SASA in conjunction with the Special Needs Education Act of 1996, it is crucial to adopt social constructivist approaches that foster an inclusive environment. Collaborative learning strategies can help bridge communication gaps and encourage a feeling of community among school-going children with hearing disabilities. Additionally, engaging local communities can provide essential resources tailored to the needs of these children.

4.2.2 The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000)

Pityana (2003) emphasizes that the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, passed in 2000, aims to enforce Section 9 of the Constitution, guaranteeing equality and averting unfair discrimination in South Africa. The Act assumes that it is crucial to review and redress past inequalities that are still deeply entrenched in public perception today. Pityana (2003) argued that, in line with Section 9(3) of the Constitution, the concept of limited grounds in the Act includes disability. Section 9 specifically deals with "not allowing unjustified segregation based on disability (PEPUDA, 2000:08). " Sections (a) and (c) are particularly important here. They declare that discrimination against a person based on disability is prohibited, subject to Section 6. In addition, this provision applies to both the state and any individual, as outlined in Section 6. This section requires the relevant parties to remove any barriers that may unfairly restrict the equal enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities. This can be interpreted to mean all barriers, whether physical, financial, social, or psychosocial. In terms of education, it can be seen as strengthening the government's obligation to provide an accessible learning environment for school-going children in schools (Pityana, 2003). Section 28 of the Act provides for "extraordinary measures to promote balance about race, orientation, and disability (PEPUDA, 2000:19). "The parties must prioritize "the "elimination of unfair discrimination and the promotion of equality about race, gender, and disability", " states 401 subsection 3(b). This is because, during apartheid, people were segregated not only by race but also by gender and disability. It is therefore commendable that the law recognizes the importance of redressing this

past inequality. During COVID-19, the PEPUDA 4 of 2000 was able to protect the rights of hearing-impaired school-going children in South Africa. The act stated that the state and other institutions must stop discrimination and promote equality.

Furthermore, the CRL Rights Commission is responsible for aiding in the implementation of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, concentrating on the rights of cultural, religious, and linguistic groups. The Commission is committed to monitoring complaints related to discrimination, particularly those faced by school-going children with hearing impairments during the COVID-19 pandemic (South Africa, 2021). PEPUDA ensures these children have equal educational opportunities alongside their hearing peers. Research shows that the pandemic has severely impacted the education of hearing-impaired school-going children, who faced challenges such as limited access to resources for remote learning (Dalton and Mitchell, 2022). Many online courses lacked the necessary accommodations for full engagement. Complaints highlight systemic issues, including insufficient family support and a lack of accessible materials. Cases like *Oortman v. The Minister of Basic Education* can set important precedents for addressing these complaints (Khumalo and Hodgson, 2017). The CRL Rights Commission and relevant stakeholders need to address these issues comprehensively to ensure that hearing-impaired children can fully engage in their education on par with their peers (South Africa, 2021).

4.3 NATIONAL POLICY ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR SCHOOL-GOING CHILDREN WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT DISABILITIES

4.3.1 National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996

The National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 creates a legal framework for the education of school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa, guaranteeing their entitlement to primary education without discrimination (National Education Policy Act, 1996). The Act forbids unfair treatment due to disability and encourages inclusive education, promoting the inclusion of these children in mainstream classes whenever feasible. The Department of Basic Education (2014) argues that it requires instructional support services to assist them in obtaining quality education and advocates for enhanced curricula that cater to varied learning requirements. In spite of these provisions, challenges such as a lack of resources and limited access to special schools remain, especially in rural regions, highlighting the necessity for ongoing efforts to effectively implement the act and realize its commitment to equitable education (Mudaly and Mudaly, 2021). The Act also highlights the significance of inclusive education through social constructivist principles, facilitating collaborative

learning opportunities that create a nurturing environment for all children. Moreover, the incorporation of ecosystem theory urges schools to engage families and communities, ensuring comprehensive support for school-going children with hearing impairments both inside and outside the educational setting.

4.3.2 Special Needs Education: Education White Paper 6 (wp6)

Murungi (2015:3168) argues that WP6 was presented as "a strategy to overcome politically sanctioned segregation, which was expected to be an extreme break with the past and a departure from the tradition of rejection that had described the design of schooling for school-going children with disabilities during the politically sanctioned years of segregation." The main policy document dealing with the right to education for hearing-impaired school-going children is Special Needs Education: Education White Paper 6, which is based on the findings of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) report. Murungi (2015) states that the main aim of White Paper 6 was to foster inclusive education, allowing all children to participate equally in learning activities and gain from educational opportunities. Inclusive education, in the sense of White Paper 6, means recognizing the barriers that all school-going children face and doing everything possible to remove these barriers.

Furthermore, children's developmental needs vary based on the obstacles they encounter, and public authorities should work to eliminate these obstacles, ensuring all children can access educational opportunities. WP6 highlights that hearing-impaired school-going children have faced exclusion from the education system due to barriers to learning. This document emphasizes the need for inclusion in mainstream education, while children needing more assistance are often placed in special schools. These exceptional schools cater to those requiring a high level of help and cannot fit into standard schools.

White Paper 6 presents six important strategies to tackle learning barriers and create an inclusive school system. The first strategy is to transform special schools into support centres that assist children with high needs and support nearby mainstream schools. The second strategy aims to enrol approximately 280,000 children with disabilities who were outside the education system from 2009 to 2021 into appropriate schools. The third strategy focuses on changing normal schools into fully managed schools, while the fourth involves training key partners on the reconsideration model. The White Paper on special needs education is criticized for inadequately addressing the online education access for hearing-impaired school-going children during the coronavirus pandemic in South Africa.

Many special schools' function more like day-care centres and fail to deliver effective public education. The education system for children with hearing impairments, which heavily relies on special schools, faced significant disruptions during the pandemic. Prior to COVID-19, the implementation of White Paper 6 was already inadequate, and the pandemic worsened the challenges for these children in the special education system.

4.3.3 A critique of the Education White Paper 6: implications for inclusive education

The following are the key critiques of WP6:

I. Implementation Challenges

According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), even with the focus on inclusive education, many hearing-impaired school-going children are still placed in separate institutions instead of being included in regular schools. They emphasize that the lack of readability in coverage and insufficient assets are predominant boundaries to high-quality implementation. It was discovered how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated present inequalities, revealing systemic fault strains in academic get-right access and quality, especially for marginalized groups.

II. Resource Limitations

A frequent theme throughout more than a few studies is the inadequate funding and sources allocated to schools, specifically those in deprived areas. This lack of guidance severely limits the potential to create inclusive environments (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). The desire for complete instructor education packages is highlighted as necessary for equipping educators with the integral capabilities to tackle various studying desires successfully.

III. Cultural and Attitudinal Barriers

Negative societal attitudes in the direction of disabilities persist, similarly complicating the integration of school-going children with hearing impairment disability desires into mainstream classrooms (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). This stigma frequently leads to a desire for segregated education alternatives amongst parents and educators alike. The historic context of apartheid continues to affect perceptions and practices surrounding disability and education, developing a complicated panorama for imposing inclusive policies.

Additionally, to advance inclusive education, educators can implement social constructivist principles by creating collaborative learning spaces where school-going children with hearing impairments participate in group projects using visual storytelling methods. This method not only encourages social

interaction but also enables school-going children with hearing difficulties to build knowledge together, in line with the objectives of Education White Paper 6. Moreover, integrating ecosystem theory into educational structures can offer comprehensive support systems for school-going children with hearing impairment disability challenges. For example, schools could form alliances with nearby health services to provide a wide range of resources that cater to educational requirements and promote family involvement.

4.3.4 The Policy for Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)

The aim of the SIAS processes is to help those school-going children who are most vulnerable and who are excluded due to a variety of barriers, including hearing-impaired disabled people (Department of Basic Education, 2014). Support educators, school support groups, and local support groups in their efforts to address the issues of all school-going children and provide quality teaching and learning opportunities (Human Rights Watch, 2015). According to Human Rights Watch (2015), the goal is to effectively support school-going children in gaining equitable access to education and closing learning gaps. The SIAS strategy is underpinned by the need for early intervention, competent handling, school leadership, and monitoring, including public investment (Ministry of Basic Education, 2014). This arrangement aims to provide appropriate help to school-going children with learning difficulties in grades R–12 to monitor and sustain learning (Ministry of Basic Education, 2014). Addressing learning difficulties requires a precise methodology that includes screening, progress monitoring, competent procedures, and countermeasures in the learning spaces, as well as mediation and learning support programs. The implementation of the SIAS strategy is a dynamic step within the education system in South Africa, as it aims to change the unequal character of schooling for vulnerable school-going children who have recently been excluded from full participation in the school system and to provide quality education for school-going children with learning difficulties.

Furthermore, the SIAS coverage in South Africa aims to foster an inclusive training system; however, its implementation displays considerable challenges. An integral examination highlights a disparity between the policy's theoretical framework and realistic application, with many educators focusing on the character of hearing-impaired school-going children instead of systemic obstacles to studying (Moustache and Makhoba, 2024). Additionally, insufficient education for instructors hampers their capability to efficiently conduct behaviour screenings and assessments, leading to inadequate guidance for school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities who require help (Moustache and Makhoba, 2024). Cultural and linguistic variations, in addition, complicate the implementation process, as many educators lack the equipment to navigate these complexities (Moustache and

Makhoba, 2024). Ultimately, while the SIAS coverage is a step toward inclusivity, addressing these gaps is critical for its success in helping susceptible school-going children.

4.4. Conclusion

In essence, South Africa has taken considerable steps forward in establishing a legal framework that aids in the education of school-going children with hearing impairments. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and various legislative acts, such as the South African Schools Act No. 1 of 1996 (SASA), along with the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA), lay the groundwork for inclusive education, banning discrimination due to disability and guaranteeing all school-going children receive quality education. Education White Paper No. 6 further underlines the significance of establishing an integrated learning environment catering to the diverse needs of all school-going children, endorsing the elimination of learning barriers, and fostering inclusivity within mainstream schools. Despite the robust policies in place, challenges persist, especially in ensuring fair access to resources and support for school-going children with hearing impairments, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter highlights the importance of continuous initiatives to tackle the existing gaps in educational services for school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities. This involves boosting teacher training, enhancing technology access, and promoting community engagement to establish nurturing learning environments. The focus on social constructivism and ecosystem theory highlights the importance of collaborative learning environments and holistic support systems in promoting inclusive educational practices. In South Africa's ongoing journey towards achieving educational equity, it is crucial for policymakers, educators, and communities to collaborate in advocating for the rights of school-going children with hearing impairments. They must ensure that these school-going children receive the essential support required for their academic success. The dedication to inclusive education should be seen not just in laws but also in the practical steps taken to tackle the specific difficulties experienced by these school-going children.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from a review of desktop research on the impact of COVID-19 on the remote learning experiences of school-going children with hearing impairments and disabilities in South Africa. The findings of the study addressed the research questions that were raised in chapter 1 and highlighted gaps and criticisms identified in existing literature. The research questions were as follows: What challenges have school-going children with hearing impairments faced in accessing

remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? What are the fundamental and strategic support needs for these school-going children during this period? What recommendations can be made for policymakers to support their education during COVID-19? A discussion of the findings is presented below in relation to these questions. These are the responses of the study:

5.2 Findings

5.2.1 The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on academic performance and engagement of school-going children with hearing impairments disability in South Africa

I Performance

The coronavirus has significantly influenced the educational achievements of school-going children with hearing disabilities, primarily due to challenges in language acquisition, which is crucial for their overall success. Many hearing-impaired children come from families where parents do not communicate using sign language, complicating their early language development (Salamah *et al*, 2022). The pandemic's restrictions have limited parental involvement in education, placing a heavier burden on parents to facilitate learning at home during distance education. Ecosystem theory suggests that family dynamics play an important part in the children's environment, influencing their performance in school (Bakker *et al*, 2022). Consequently, school-going children with hearing impairments may struggle to access necessary support and resources typically available in classroom settings. Participation in civil society is essential for these school-going children as it fosters their understanding of language and literature, including poetry and English comprehension. However, fewer school-going children with hearing impairments graduate prepared for higher education compared to their non-disabled peers (Mutanga, 2017). Disparities in educational outcomes are exacerbated by civil rights settlements that exclude middle and school-going children from certain protections, allowing them to file lawsuits for educational inequities. The research advises that guardians of children attending school with hearing impairment disabilities should learn sign language and communicate with their children to foster a sense of awareness and support.

II Engagement

The research conducted by Krishnan *et al* (2020) emphasized that academic results and the involvement of hearing-impaired school-going children during COVID-19 were influenced by both personal and contextual elements. These factors included gender, level of hearing loss, use of hearing aids, and preferences related to teaching styles. Gender differences affect how school-going children transition from traditional classrooms to distance learning; this is supported by findings from Salamah

et al (2022). For school-going children with hearing impairments, individual circumstances can have both positive and negative effects (Bakker *et al*, 2022). The mode and method of instruction used by family members significantly influence academic engagement (Adigun and Ndwandwe, 2022). School-going children participating in synchronous modes often receive more support from family members during online lessons. Furthermore, this situation can be analyzed from the perspective of social constructivism, which emphasizes that social interactions shape knowledge (Akpan *et al*, 2020). Schreiber & Valle (2013) argue that when caregivers do not communicate effectively using sign language, it can disturb the supportive atmosphere required for the best language acquisition, leading to challenges for children in developing their linguistic abilities. Moreover, ecosystem theory highlights how various support systems interconnect and impact these school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities (Recklein, 2013). Pandemic-related limitations restrict parental involvement and underscore the influence of family dynamics on educational outcomes (National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities, 2021). It is recommended by the study that the Minister of Education should provide adaptable learning alternatives to suit various learning preferences, including both synchronous and asynchronous modes. Offering a range of instructional formats can cater to the different requirements of school-going children (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

5.2.2 Challenges faced by school-going children with hearing impairment in accessing remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa

I. Accessibility Barriers in Remote Learning

School-going children with hearing impairments face significant communication challenges using electronic communication systems during remote learning (Adigun, 2022). Those who did not use technological aids in classrooms experienced difficulties online, indicating that video instruction was often unsuitable for hearing-impaired school-going children due to its reliance on auditory elements (Khlaifat, 2021). The quality of live translation services for distance learning was also inadequate due to issues such as camera placement and sound quality. School-going children with hearing impairments encountered significant problems using different learning platforms compared to traditional teaching methods (Khlaifat, 2021). Strategies used to support school-going children learning are often not clearly documented despite challenges being presented. The study recommends that schools are encouraged to involve parents in decision-making processes regarding their children's educational requirements, fostering their active participation. This can be done through consistent communication between teachers and parents discussing academic advancements and difficulties.

II. Technological Barriers

Many school-going children encountered technology barriers such as internet connectivity issues and limited access to devices (Aljedaani *et al*, 2023). The limited data supply further complicated online learning due to high expenses associated with internet usage. Financial constraints exacerbated these challenges as many families experienced decreased income and job losses during the pandemic, forcing some school-going children into part-time jobs (Adigun and Ndwandwe, 2022). To improve educational outcomes for school-going children with hearing impairments, educational institutions should enhance internet connectivity through infrastructural development partnerships involving local governments and internet service providers. Schools should also consider providing subsidized or loaned technology such as laptops or tablets for school-going children lacking sufficient resources at home (Masia, 2023). Furthermore, digital literacy training initiatives are essential for equipping school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities and educators with skills necessary for navigating online platforms effectively while accommodating varying levels of digital proficiency. Establishing robust technical support services will assist both school-going children and parents in overcoming technical challenges encountered during online classes.

III. Communication and Language Accessibility

The research conducted by Khoza-Shangase *et al* (2023) shows that sign language is the primary mode of communication on platforms used by school-going children with hearing impairments for teaching purposes. The Ministry of Basic Education's platforms utilized amid COVID-19 lockdowns are predominantly text-based, creating notable language barriers for these school-going children (Ngobeni *et al*, 2020). School-going children with hearing impairment disabilities needed electronic platforms for continued education; however, many faced various accessibility barriers (Matjila, 2023). Moreover, parents lacked training in using electronic devices, rendering them incapable of supporting their children effectively (Le Hanie, 2022). During lockdown periods, minimal support was provided, including little assistance from teachers and limited interpretation services at schools. During this period, reduced use of sign language negatively impacted functioning, limiting opportunities available to communicate (Adigun 2019). In developing countries like South Africa, the absence of literature on electronic support crises aiding school-going children's disabilities ensures adequate ministry assistance remains unaddressed. To assist school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa effectively during online learning, several recommendations should be prioritized: Firstly, in order to improve and enhance inclusive learning platforms, the Ministry of Basic Education should integrate various modes of communication (Peel, 2004). This includes sign language interpretation

and visual aids to address language barriers effectively. Secondly, parents of school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities should be provided with training programs focusing on using electronic devices and teaching strategies tailored for school-going children with hearing impairments. This training will empower them to support school-going children more effectively (Kelly, McKinney, and Swift, 2022). Lastly, the government should encourage the implementation of sign language across all educational environments to enhance communication opportunities for school-going children with hearing impairments (Peel, 2004). By addressing these areas comprehensively, educational institutions can more adequately support school-going children with hearing loss during challenging times.

5.2.3 Fundamental and strategic support needs for school-going children with hearing impairments during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa

I. Accessible Learning Material.

As reported by Aljedaani *et al* (2023), well-crafted learning materials that are accessible to school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities are crucial but unfortunately scarce in schools. Numerous schools are missing crucial assistive technologies, resulting in teachers being unsure of how to create learning materials that are accessible to hearing-impaired school-going children (Layton *et al*, 2021). DBE (2021) argues that the Department of Basic Education should incorporate real readiness assessments, such as the yearly evaluation of accessible learning materials. Recruiting experienced teachers of school-going children with hearing difficulties for the procurement and distribution of assistive devices and ensuring resources are accessible to all teachers and school-going children helps distribute the responsibility for scaling these resources in limited-income environments. Technological tools such as computers and Braille devices, along with software setup and implementation like video conferencing programs and social media platforms, should be made available with minimal training required (Ndlovu, 2021). The successful implementation of online teaching hinges not only on the active involvement of the country but also on the personal mindset of the teacher. Furthermore, the study recommends that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) focus on creating and executing a thorough strategy to enhance access to usable learning materials and assistive technology for school-going children with hearing impairments attending school in South Africa. The Department of Basic Education (2001) contends that South Africa has the potential to develop a more equitable and accessible education system for all individuals, irrespective of their hearing capabilities, by prioritizing inclusive teaching approaches and allocating resources for assistive technologies.

II. Teacher Training for Supporting School-Going Children with Hearing Impairment Disability

The research revealed that the change to remote learning because of the coronavirus crisis had a notable effect on the reading development of hearing-impaired, school-going children. Many faced challenges in advancing their literacy skills as they had limited communication assistance at home. This entails their participation in standard classes within the context of hearing education, placing demands not only on teachers but also on education and support workers in terms of teaching and support structures (Ismail, 2022). In South Africa, teacher training programs lack sufficient support for aspiring teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for educating school-going children with hearing impairments within mainstream educational settings (Tristani and Bassett-Gunter, 2020). Moreover, there seems to be a gap in adequately preparing preservice trainee teachers, as the training falls short of providing the essential education and skills necessary for effective work in mainstream school settings. The Minister of Basic Education in South Africa is promoting the inclusion of school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities into mainstream classrooms, with a dedicated teacher for each hearing-impaired school-going child. However, these educators have not received sufficient training or support to effectively assist the school-going children (Tristani and Bassett-Gunter, 2020). Due to this, there has been a heavy dependence on inexperienced interpreters who may not be consistently accessible or adequately trained to work in hearing impairment disability education. The study recommends training teachers to instruct school-going children with hearing impairments remotely.

5.2.4 Policy recommendations to support the education of school-going children with hearing impairments during COVID-19

I. Enhancing technological access:

To support school-going children with hearing impairments, it is essential to provide necessary equipment such as remote microphone systems and hearing assistive technology tailored to meet specific needs. Additionally, ensuring reliable internet connectivity is crucial, especially in rural areas where access may be limited (Ndlovu, 2021).

II. Training for educators:

Conducting professional development workshops focusing on inclusive teaching strategies is vital to meet the needs of hearing-impaired school-going children. Educators should be trained on effectively utilizing accessible online platforms that facilitate sign language and visual learning tools (Rensburg *et al*, 2024).

III. Policy Implementation:

Advocating for policies that prioritize inclusivity in education during emergencies is essential (Kamga, 2020). This will ensure that future responses to crises include provisions for school-going children with disabilities. Engaging with both public and private organizations will help oversee the implementation of these policies and gather feedback from affected communities.

IV. Training and support for educators and parents

For school-going children with hearing impairments to thrive during these challenging times, it is crucial that schools, teachers, parents or caregivers, and the hearing-impaired school-going children themselves receive necessary support (Rensburg *et al*, 2024). Ecosystem theory emphasizes the interconnection of different support systems, indicating that empowering parents and teachers is crucial for establishing a nurturing educational environment (Recklein, 2013). Many educators in special schools and inclusive settings may lack prior experience in teaching through virtual platforms and may feel uncertain about using technology effectively. Therefore, training should be provided for educators, parents or caregivers, and school-going children on the virtual platforms being utilized. This training will ensure effective use of technology while fostering a comprehensive understanding of all available functions of the online software. Developing a virtual platform accessibility tool for school staff and parents or caregivers can enhance this process.

2.5 A comparative analysis of the education of school-going children with Hearing Impairments in South Africa and Kenya

This comparative analysis investigates the impact of COVID-19 on the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairments during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa and Kenya, emphasizing both shared challenges and distinct contextual elements that shaped their educational experiences.

I. Communication Barriers

In both South Africa and Kenya, school-going children with hearing impairments encountered considerable communication barriers during online learning. In South Africa, the use of masks posed problems for children who depend on lip-reading and visual signals. Likewise, Kenyan school-going children reported difficulties in receiving clear communication through online channels due to insufficient support services, such as a lack of available sign language interpreters. This similarity highlights the essential need for effective communication strategies in remote learning settings.

II. Access to Technology

Access to technology surfaced as an important obstacle for school-going children with hearing impairments in both countries. In South Africa, numerous school-going children with hearing impairments did not have the important devices and dependable internet access to engage effectively in online classes. This concern was mirrored in Kenya, socio-economic inequalities restricted access to technology, especially for school-going children from low-income backgrounds. The scarcity of resources in both settings underscores the pressing need for governments and educational institutions to focus on equitable access to technology for every school-going child with hearing impairment (Coban, 2022).

III. Support Services

The presence of support services greatly affected the learning experiences of school-going children with hearing impairments in both nations. In South Africa, there was a recognized lack of specialized support services, including sign language interpretation and customized educational materials. Findings from Kenya similarly revealed that numerous school-going children did not receive sufficient support during remote education, which restricted their capacity to fully participate with the curriculum (Ngobeni *et al*, 2020). This deficiency in support highlights the necessity for improved training for educators and increased investment in resources to aid school-going children with hearing impairments with disabilities.

IV. Policy Implementation Gaps

A vital theme recognized in both contexts is the disparity between policy goals and their actual enforcement. In South Africa, despite existing policies designed to foster inclusive education for school-going children with hearing impairments and disabilities, there were substantial deficiencies in implementation and resource distribution. Similarly, Kenya's policies concerning inclusive education have frequently been poorly enforced, leading to ongoing barriers for school-going children with hearing impairments (DeafSA, 2021). This critique emphasizes the need for both nations to fortify their policy frameworks and ensure that they convert into real support for vulnerable school-going children with hearing impairments.

The comparative examination shows that although there are shared difficulties encountered by school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa and Kenya during the COVID-19 pandemic, each situation also offers distinctive elements that affect these experiences. Overcoming

communication obstacles, providing fair access to technology, bolstering support services, and enhancing policy execution are essential measures required to foster inclusive educational settings for all school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities. By gaining insights from one another's experiences, both nations can create more efficient strategies to assist school-going children with hearing impairments during upcoming emergencies and in the future.

5.3 Discussion

5.3.1 Discussion of findings in relation to the UNCRC and ACRW on school-going children with hearing impairment

The results of this study are closely connected to the principles set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Both of these global frameworks highlight the importance of children's rights to education, protection against discrimination, and involvement in decisions that impact their lives. This discussion will delve into how these findings correlate with these principles and underscore potential areas for enhancement.

I. The right to education:

UNCRC Article 28 and ACRWC Article 11 emphasize the right of all children to accessible and inclusive education (Pinheiro, 2006). As stated by Krishnan *et al* (2020), hearing-impaired school-going children encountered significant challenges in remote learning during the pandemic, arising from insufficient technology and a shortage of inclusive educational resources. These challenges contradict the rights outlined in these conventions, which aim to develop every child's ability. Kuhfeld *et al* (2020) pointed out substantial educational disparities, which are worsened by the lack of explicit protections in civil rights agreements, emphasizing the critical necessity for policies that foster equal education for every child.

II. Non-discrimination:

The UNCRC Article 2 and ACRWC Article 3 emphasize the importance of protecting all children from discrimination, regardless of their status, including disability. The research uncovers the systemic disparities encountered by school-going children with hearing impairments, including insufficient support mechanisms during remote education (Salamah *et al*, 2022). The principles of non-discrimination as outlined in both conventions are compromised by insufficient resources and accommodations. Educational institutions are required to actively promote inclusive practices that cater to school-going children with disabilities in order to align with these frameworks. This involves

improving learning platforms by incorporating different forms of communication, like sign language (Motimele, 2023). Policymakers can establish an inclusive environment and support all school-going children while preventing discrimination based on disability by making educational materials accessible to everyone.

III. Participation and voice:

Article 12 of the UNCRC and Article 4 of the ACRWC highlight the significance of involving children in decisions that impact them. The results indicate that there are limited channels for school-going children with hearing impairments to express their concerns about accessibility challenges in online educational settings. The results indicate that there are limited channels for school-going children with hearing impairments to express their concerns about accessibility challenges in online educational settings (Aljedaani *et al*, 2023). It is essential to create feedback mechanisms that enable these school-going children to share their insights and recommendations, as this is key to nurturing an inclusive educational setting. This resonates with the emphasis on listening to and valuing the perspectives of children in decisions that affect their education, as advocated by both conventions.

Additionally, the study uncovered notable disparities between the current educational approaches for school-going children with hearing impairments and the principles set forth in the UNCRC and ACRWC. In order to comply with these global standards, policymakers and educational institutions need to focus on overcoming these obstacles by improving inclusive learning settings, offering sufficient resources, promoting fair practices, encouraging engagement, and nurturing supportive home environments. Through this action, they can strive towards achieving the rights of every child, especially those with disabilities, guaranteeing them access to a high-quality education tailored to their individual requirements.

5.3.2 Discussion of findings in Relation to the Constitution of South Africa on school-going children with hearing impairment

The research draws attention to the considerable obstacles encountered by school-going children with hearing impairments amid the COVID-19 pandemic, especially concerning their educational entitlements protected by the Constitution of South Africa.

I. Right to Education

The Constitution guarantees that each individual is entitled to obtain a basic education (Government of South Africa, 1996). Nevertheless, school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities faced obstacles in remote learning, such as insufficient technological assistance and a lack of training for parents and teachers. The barriers go against the constitutional dedication to ensuring fair access to education (SAFLII, 2011).

II. Equality and Non-Discrimination

The Constitution highlights equality and non-discrimination, emphasizing the importance of equal treatment and prohibiting discrimination based on disability (Government of South Africa, 1996). The results indicate that school-going children with hearing impairments encounter systemic inequalities, such as insufficient support systems during remote learning. Educational institutions must proactively uphold inclusive practices to cater to school-going children with disabilities in accordance with constitutional requirements (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2015).

III. Supportive Environment

A supportive learning environment is emphasized in the Constitution for its significance (Government of South Africa, 1996). The Department of Basic Education (2014) argues that the results suggest that numerous hearing-impaired school-going children encountered difficulties as a result of insufficient support from parents and educators while engaging in remote learning.

5.3.2 Discussion of Findings in Relation to South African Educational Policies

The results of this study exploring the impact experienced by school-going children with hearing impairments amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa can be closely examined in connection with various essential South African educational policies. This conversation will delve into how these findings correspond with these policies and point out areas where enhancements can be made.

I. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA)

The SASA prioritizes education for all school-going children and requires schools to support school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities. The results suggest that school-going children with hearing impairments encountered notable challenges in accessing online learning, including limited technological assistance and a lack of training for both parents and teachers (Krishnan *et al*, 2020). The presence of these barriers goes against SASA's dedication to fostering inclusivity and ensuring fair access to education. In order to be in line with SASA, educational institutions should

improve their support systems and guarantee that every school-going child has access to high-quality educational materials.

II. Promoting Equality and Preventing Unjust Discrimination Act No. 4 of 2000

The goal of this Act is to eradicate unjust discrimination and advance equality across all aspects of life, particularly in the realm of education. The study exposes the systemic inequalities experienced by school-going children with hearing impairments, including differences in academic achievements in comparison to their classmates (Kuhfeld *et al*, 2020). The existing inequalities were further magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the crucial necessity for implementing policies that actively uphold equality. Educational institutions are required to put in place measures that guarantee all school-going children have fair access to educational opportunities, irrespective of their abilities or backgrounds, in accordance with this Act.

III. National Education Policy

The National Education Policy underlines the significance of promoting inclusive education and ensuring equitable access for every school-going child with a disability. The research suggests that numerous school-going children with hearing impairments faced difficulties concerning communication and language accessibility while participating in remote learning. The dependence on text-based platforms posed barriers that impeded the ability to engage meaningfully with educational material. In order to support the national education policy effectively, policymakers should focus on implementing inclusive practices that cater to school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities. This can be achieved by improving learning platforms to incorporate different communication methods seamlessly.

IV. White Paper 6 regarding Inclusive Education

White Paper 6 highlights South Africa's dedication to inclusive education, underscoring the importance of creating a nurturing setting for every school-going child with a disability. The results of this study emphasize notable deficiencies in the support available for hearing-impaired school-going children amid the pandemic (Salamah *et al*, 2022). The insufficiency of necessary resources, such as sign language interpretation and assistive technologies, highlights a shortcoming in fully applying the principles detailed in White Paper 6. In order to comply with this policy, educational institutions need

to create thorough strategies that guarantee inclusivity and provide support for all hearing-impaired school-going children.

V. Guidelines for the Screening, Identification, Evaluation, and Assistance (SIAS) Policy

The SIAS policy aims to provide a framework for supporting school-going children with learning obstacles. Findings indicate that many children with hearing impairments faced significant challenges due to inadequate evaluation and support during distance learning. This highlights discrepancies in SIAS implementation, necessitating improved screening and timely interventions. Additionally, the study identifies notable gaps between current educational practices for children with hearing impairments and South African policies promoting inclusivity and equality. To address these issues, policymakers and schools must enhance support systems, improve accessibility, foster parental involvement, and establish effective monitoring to ensure quality education for all, particularly for children with disabilities.

5.4 Conclusion

The study explored the impact of COVID-19 on the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities in South Africa. As mentioned previously, there is a significant gap in research focusing on the experiences of school-going children with hearing impairments in South Africa, particularly during the pandemic. Most studies have concentrated on developed countries, leaving a lack of understanding about the unique challenges faced by South African school-going children and other developing countries. This research is essential for addressing local needs and informing policy decisions. Therefore, studying the impact of COVID-19 on the remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities in South Africa is important. The shift to online learning unveiled notable technological obstacles. Numerous school-going children with hearing impairments experienced insufficient access to essential technology and unreliable internet connections. As indicated in the literature, 96.9% of school-going children reported challenges with home network connectivity, which severely obstructed their capability to engage with educational material (Aljedaani *et al*, 2022). Moreover, the absence of accessible educational resources tailored for school-going children with hearing impairments further intensified these difficulties. Many materials did not take into account their unique requirements, resulting in feelings of exclusion and frustration. Communication challenges arose as a major concern during remote learning. The lack of sign language interpreters and the dependence on audio-based communication methods created

significant barriers for school-going children who relied on visual signals for comprehension. This was especially apparent in video conferencing situations, where multiple speakers made it challenging for school-going children to keep track of conversations (Adigun, 2022). The challenge of school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities of not being able to read the lips of those wearing masks also presented a considerable obstacle, further distancing these school-going children from their peers and educators.

Additionally, the academic performance and mental health and well-being of school-going children with hearing impairments were negatively impacted during this time. The absence of social interactions and support systems contributed to heightened feelings of isolation and anxiety among these school-going children. The outcomes of this research emphasize the necessity of addressing not just academic requirements but also the emotional and psychological health of school-going children during crises. The findings of this research hold significant importance for policymakers and educational establishments. There is an urgent necessity to prioritize inclusive practices that guarantee equal access to education for all school-going children, particularly those with disabilities. This entails investing in assistive technologies, delivering specialized training for educators, and creating accessible educational content that accommodates the diverse needs of school-going children with hearing impairments.

While research conducted in other jurisdictions offers valuable perspectives, it may not fully reflect the distinctive challenges faced by South African school-going children due to socio-economic differences and infrastructural issues. Future studies should strive to investigate effective teaching strategies that can be implemented in varied contexts to better support these school-going children with hearing impairment disabilities. In conclusion, although the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unmatched difficulties for school-going children with hearing impairments, it simultaneously offers a chance for fundamental transformation within the educational field. By confronting these difficulties directly and promoting an inclusive educational framework, people can strive for a more just future for every school-going child, guaranteeing that no child is excluded irrespective of their disabilities. The results of this research undertaken urge prompt measures to remove obstacles and establish an educational system that is genuinely inclusive and attainable for all school-going children.

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Legislation

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa,1993 (Interim Constitution)

South African Constitution, 1996

Acts

The South African Schools Act No. 84 Of 1996 (SASA).

The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000)

Special Needs Education: Education White Paper 6 (WP6)

The Policy for Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)

National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996

The Special Needs Education Policy

International legislation

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC/CRC)

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)

1 The Basic Education Act no 14 of 2013

The Constitution of Kenya (2010)

Cases

Centre for Child Law v. Minister of Basic Education,

Oortman v. The Minister of Basic Education

Ethical clearance



Miss Sinesipho Nyalambisa (215010314)
School Of Law
Howard College

Dear Miss Sinesipho Nyalambisa,

Original application number: 00023252

Project title: The impact of Covid 19 pandemic on the remote learning of high school learners with hearing impairment disability in South Africa

Amended title: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on remote learning of school-going children with hearing impairment disability in South Africa

Exemption from Ethics Review

In response to your **amendment** application received on 30 Nov 2024, your school has indicated that the amendment has been granted **EXEMPTION FROM ETHICS REVIEW**.

Any alteration/s to the exempted research protocol, e.g., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its implementation. The original exemption number must be cited.

For any changes that could result in potential risk, an ethics application including the proposed amendments must be submitted to the relevant UKZN Research Ethics Committee. The original exemption number must be cited.

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.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Matthew Blain Kimble
Academic Leader Research
School Of Law

UKZN Research Ethics Office
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

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