

**A Qualitative Exploration of Lecturers' Experiences in Teaching and Assessment of
Students with Disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal**

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Declaration

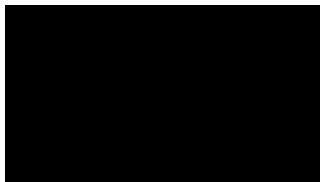
I, Kelly Leahy (Student number: 219044004), declare that the following dissertation titled:

‘A qualitative exploration of lecturers’ experiences in teaching and assessment of students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal’ is composed of my original work. In the exception that other sources of information contained within this dissertation have been used, then they have been specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers in the text and detailed in the references section. Where other written sources have been utilised then their words have been re-written, though the general information attributed to them has been referenced. In instances where exact words have been used, then quotation marks and references have been allocated in the text. This dissertation has not been submitted for the requirements of any other degree or assessment at any other university.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-------------|---|
| CRPD | Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| DSU | Disability Support Unit |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| ICF | International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health |
| UKZN | University of KwaZulu-Natal |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |

Abstract

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, an inclusive education policy was implemented in the education system to address barriers to learning. Although this has increased the enrolment percentage of students with disabilities in higher education institutions (HEIs), a disjunction between policy and practice remains in HEIs in South Africa. Challenges in implementing inclusive education may stem from teaching practices and assessment methods which have not been adjusted appropriately in response to the inclusion of a diverse student body. While the experiences of students with disabilities in HEIs have received considerable research interest, the experiences of lecturers appear to be an understudied research area, particularly within the South African context. This research study drew on the theoretical framework of Differentiated Instruction and qualitatively explored the lived experiences of lecturers in teaching and assessing students with physical disabilities within a South African HEI. Data for the study was collected through individual semi-structured interviews with eight lecturers within the College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Howard College campus, and analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The findings suggested an emphasis on deficit thinking among lecturers in higher education. In addition, the study revealed that both challenging and positive experiences with these students emerged during teaching and assessment which may hinder or promote the inclusion of students with physical disabilities, respectively. Conclusively, the findings suggested that further progress is required in the institution to support lecturers and their students. Recommendations to enhance inclusivity in the institution may include the incorporation of, and access to inclusive pedagogy, greater awareness and sensitisation, a reduction in attitudinal and physical accessibility barriers, and the promotion of shared responsibility and collaborative effort among relevant stakeholders.

Keywords: higher education; lecturer experiences; students with disabilities; physical disability; teaching and assessment; inclusive education

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Statement of the Problem

Since the emergence of democracy, inclusive education became an important aspect of the education and training system in South Africa to promote the inclusion of previously marginalised members of society, including people with disabilities (Department of Education, 2001). In turn, the implementation of various disability laws and educational policies has increased the enrolment percentage of students with disabilities in educational institutions (McKinney & Swartz, 2016). While policy implementation has occurred, the progress that is evident on paper has not translated into equal opportunities and inclusive practices for all students with disabilities enrolled in HEIs in South Africa (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). Consequently, students living with a disability continually experience many challenges to receiving inclusive education after they are enrolled in these institutions (Ntombela, 2013; Zongozzi, 2020).

More specifically, students with disabilities who are enrolled in HEIs globally have indicated that lecturers are one of the predominant barriers to receiving and accessing inclusive education (Majoko, 2018; Molina et al., 2016; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Moriña & Perera, 2020; Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Barriers to an inclusive learning environment may be a result of curriculum and teaching methods that have not been adjusted appropriately in response to the inclusion of a diverse student population to meet their individual academic needs (Dosch & Zidon, 2014). This may point to the responsibility of lecturers as key stakeholders in the collaborative effort to ensure that inclusive practices are promoted and carried out within the lecture room. The use of inclusive pedagogy by academic staff is necessary to promote equal access, full participation, and effective integration of students with disabilities into the academic programme.

Previous research studies have tended to focus on students with disabilities and their experiences in accessing higher education (Fuller et al., 2004; Moola, 2015; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Mutanga, 2018; Ntombela, 2013; Tugli et al., 2013). However, the experiences of lecturers in providing inclusive education to students with disabilities in HEIs appear to be understudied, especially in South Africa. A small but expanding body of research in South Africa has explored lecturers' perceptions of, and experiences with students with disabilities (Mayat & Amosun, 2011; Mutanga & Walker, 2017; Zongozzi, 2020). Therefore, this study may contribute to the body of knowledge in this area. This study focuses on a sample of lecturers within a South African HEI and analyses their lived experiences to explore the challenges and opportunities that lecturers may face when providing inclusive practices through their teaching and assessment methods for students with physical disabilities. This study further explores some recommendations to address challenges in teaching and assessment to promote inclusive education for students with physical disabilities.

1.2 Aim and Rationale

This research study aims to identify and understand lecturers' conceptualisations of disability. This study also aims to identify and understand lecturers' experiences of teaching and assessment for students with physical disabilities in the context of South African higher education, particularly at the UKZN, Howard College campus. Understanding lecturers' experiences is important as the instructional approaches of academic staff and student-lecturer interactions are likely to have an immediate influence on the process of student learning. An exploration of lecturers' experiences is further justified as educators can be regarded as agents of influential change in the transformation of inclusive learning environments, especially when they are encouraged to reconsider their current pedagogical practices and seek ways to assist students in reaching their full potential (Juma et al., 2017).

Insights gained from lecturers' experiences seek to provide helpful data to further understand the experiences of students with disabilities who are enrolled in a South African HEI. This knowledge may contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of lecturers in the lives of students with disabilities and the challenges and opportunities that these stakeholders may face in providing inclusive education. This knowledge may also facilitate an understanding of the support that lecturers may require to effectively address the diversity of student needs within the lecture room and plan appropriate academic accommodations to enhance inclusivity for students with physical disabilities in HEIs.

More specifically, the aims and objectives of this study are:

- To identify lecturers' understandings of the term 'disability'.
- To identify and understand lecturers' experiences of teaching and assessment of students with physical disabilities at this university.
- To identify ways in which lecturers' teaching methods and assessment procedures at this university consider the needs of students with physical disabilities.
- To make possible recommendations to address any challenges in teaching and assessment to improve the quality of the learning experience for students with physical disabilities.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the lecturers' understandings of the term 'disability'?
2. What are the lecturers' experiences of teaching and assessment of students with physical disabilities?
3. What measures are utilised by lecturers to accommodate and assist students with physical disabilities in teaching and assessment?
4. What recommendations in teaching and assessment can be made to improve the quality of learning for students with physical disabilities?

1.4 Definition of Key Terms

Academic accommodations – Academic accommodations refer to modifications or adjustments to methods of instruction, assessment procedures, learning materials, and/or academic environment to ensure equal access and full participation in the academic curriculum (Hatcher & Waguespack, 2004). Academic accommodations reduce or eliminate barriers to participation that may occur when students with disabilities interact with the educational environment (Hatcher & Waguespack, 2004).

Inclusive education – Inclusive education can be defined as an education system in which every student is “accepted and fully included, educationally and socially” (Mpu & Adu, 2021, p. 225). In inclusive education, the learning environment fosters the full academic and personal development of all students, regardless of their disability, race, gender, culture, religion, language, and learning styles (du Plessis, 2013, as cited in Mpu & Adu, 2021).

Students with disabilities – The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) conceptualises and defines disability as an individual impairment, activity limitation, and/or restriction in participation as a result of the interaction between physiological conditions and contextual factors, including personal and environmental factors (WHO, 2011). People with disabilities are often impacted by the negative consequences of the interaction between their health condition and contextual factors (WHO, 2011). In the higher education context, persons with disabilities who are enrolled in HEIs are referred to as *students with disabilities*. It should be noted that the term ‘disabled students’ was used interchangeably in the initial conception of the research study. However, the politically correct terminology ‘students with disabilities’ will be used going forward in this study.

Pedagogy – In the modern context, pedagogy refers to the study of imparting knowledge and skills through teaching and learning techniques in an educational context, and the interactions that occur during learning are considered (Shah & Campus, 2021).

1.5 Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation provides a comprehensive write-up based on a qualitative exploration of lecturers' experiences in teaching and the assessment of students with disabilities at the UKZN. This chapter provided a brief background of inclusive higher education in the South African context. An argument was made for a relative lack of research on lecturers' experiences in teaching and assessing students with physical disabilities, particularly in South Africa.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed review of the relevant literature. In this chapter, the term disability is discussed alongside policy-related issues in higher education, curriculum access, and assessment challenges. This chapter also discusses lecturers' experiences of providing inclusive pedagogy and the role of lecturers in providing inclusive education. An argument for a gap in South African research is also made in this chapter. In addition, Differentiated Instruction is presented as the theoretical framework that underpins and informs this study.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study. This chapter discusses the research design, research setting, sampling approach, data collection method, data analysis, ethical considerations, the validity of the study, and the researchers' reflexivity.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings of the study. The findings showed that there was an emphasis on deficit thinking among participants. In addition, both challenging and positive experiences that participants encountered with these students emerged during teaching and assessment. The findings also indicated that the participants used inclusive pedagogy to accommodate and assist the students with physical disabilities in teaching and assessment. Moreover, inclusion strategies and collaboration among stakeholders emerged as

the main recommendations to enhance inclusivity and improve the quality of the learning experiences of students with physical disabilities in this HEI.

Chapter 5 provides a critical discussion by presenting the research findings against the theoretical framework and relevant local and international literature. Lastly, limitations, strengths, and recommendations made by this study are discussed and a conclusion is provided.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this review of the relevant literature is to gain an understanding of the existing research that explores the experiences and perceptions of lecturers in teaching and assessing students with disabilities. Simultaneously, this review raises some of the challenges that students with disabilities have experienced during their interactions with lecturers to highlight the effects of student-lecturer interactions. This literature review further focuses on the lecturer-student interaction in delivering inclusive pedagogical practices that are implemented in HEIs for students with a disability both globally and within a South African context. A review of extant literature seeks to ensure that a relevant body of knowledge supports this research study. The key concept of disability is defined and some key issues concerning the challenges that lecturers experience in providing inclusive education to students with disabilities are highlighted.

The theoretical framework that underpins and informs this research study, Differentiated Instruction, is also discussed to further understand lecturers' experiences in providing inclusive education and identify how their current pedagogical practices consider the needs of students in heterogenous lecture rooms. In line with the findings in the relevant literature, this theoretical framework is utilised to emphasise the imperative for lecturers to accommodate diversity by providing appropriate instructional techniques to meet the needs and learning styles of every student, including students with disabilities.

2.1 Understanding Disability

Disability can be regarded as an inevitable and complex human phenomenon (Tugli et al., 2013). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2011), people with disabilities are considered diverse and heterogenous individuals. The term 'disability' encompasses different phenomena and may pose an individual at risk of experiencing various types of challenges that exist in society (Hedlund, 2009). More importantly, disability is a

human rights issue as people living with a disability experience inequality, a violation of their dignity, and are denied autonomy (WHO, 2011).

2.1.1 Defining Disability

It has been more than a decade since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 2006 was signed and ratified in 2007 by South Africa. The CRPD is an international legislation document that incorporates the human rights of people who live with a disability (WHO, 2011). According to the definition provided by the CRPD (2006), disability can be defined as inclusive of individuals who have physical, sensory, mental, or intellectual impairments which are long-term. Furthermore, these impairments may interact with various barriers which subsequently hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (CRPD, 2006). However, this definition has been contested to adopt a medical approach to viewing disability and may be considered restrictive to long-term impairments, therefore, failing to recognise a variety of short-term or episodic impairments that can occur (Leonardi et al., 2006).

The WHO (2011) broadly defines disability as an individual impairment, activity limitation, and/or restricted participation in society. Specifically, the WHO's (2001) ICF conceptualises human functioning and disability according to the interaction between physiological conditions and contextual factors such as personal and environmental factors. Their definition acknowledges the impact of the negative interaction that often occurs between the individual's health condition and their contextual factors. However, the consideration of both health conditions and contextual factors in this definition is important as it allows for appropriate interventions to be designed to improve a person's health functioning and address the environmental factors to improve their access and participation in society (Leonardi et al., 2006).

Hedlund (2009) explains that definitions of disability may refer to conditions that occur naturally and various phenomena that society understands as disabling. These conditions may be congenital, acquired through an accident, or due to an illness, and can occur at any stage in a person's life. Disability also has various dimensions. According to the WHO (2011), "Health conditions can be visible or invisible; temporary or long term; static, episodic, or degenerating; painful or inconsequential" (p. 8). Based on this conceptualisation, disability is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon.

2.1.2 Models of Disability

The term 'disability' has been conceptualised and understood from various perspectives and theoretical frameworks. Two predominant and contrasting views of disability have been established according to the medical model and the social model of disability. These two models have been contested in literature. The medical model pathologizes disability and maintains the notion that a disability is an inherent deficit or limitation in the human body (Hedlund, 2009; Mole, 2013). Limitations are believed to be the direct result of an illness, injury, or other health complications which can be alleviated through medical intervention, including medicine or rehabilitation (Hedlund, 2009). Based on this view, disability stems from the individual who is viewed as the root of the problem, requiring interventions that focus on curing or treating pathology (Mole, 2013).

Within the context of education, interventions typically require these individuals to be educated separately with remedial support (McKinney & Swartz, 2015). This model has been criticised for emphasising the individual as the problem as opposed to focusing on the individual's possibilities, strengths, and other capabilities (Hedlund, 2009). As a result, this model arguably maintains discriminatory perceptions towards individuals with disabilities, failing to acknowledge the vulnerability and marginalisation of these individuals.

Consequently, the social model of disability emerged from these criticisms that were predominantly asserted by an organisation known as the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (Shakespeare, 2013). According to Shakespeare, this organisation was committed to the removal of segregation and emancipating people with impairments by allowing them the opportunity to fully participate in all aspects of society, to live independently, and to assume productive work. More specifically, the social model of disability considers disability as a social construct and views the experience of disability as a product of social, environmental, and attitudinal barriers, as opposed to individual deficits or limitations (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013; Hedlund, 2009). According to this model, individuals experience a disability due to barriers in their daily living which can be attributed to society's response toward diversity (Mole, 2013). These barriers arise due to an inadequate response to the need to make adaptations or adjustments to the social and physical environment. As a result, individuals who live with a disability are unsuccessfully integrated into society (Hedlund, 2009; Shakespeare, 2013).

2.1.3 Conceptualising Disability in Education

Both models of disability are maintained in the context of education and underpin how society approaches the education of students with disabilities (Cartagena & Pike, 2022). For example, application and enrolment forms that require students to state their particular impairment arguably subscribe to the medical model of disability (Matthews, 2009). In contrast to the views of the social model, diagnostic labels have been viewed as helpful for both the affected individual and the educational institution as it allows educators to assist students by providing the appropriate pedagogical techniques and resources (Powell, 2003). However, Matthews (2009) states that those who view disability based on the social model would seek to reduce the focus on the use of diagnostic labels in institutional forms and processes. Instead, Matthews explains that followers of the social model seek to emphasise an

institutional environment that promotes accessibility and learning. The social model of disability which promotes human rights has assisted institutions in demanding that students with disabilities receive support services (Matshedisho, 2007). Matshedisho further asserts that despite the South African education system becoming increasingly inclusive of students living with a disability, these rights have not fully translated into a reality due to insufficient resources and assistive devices, a lack of staff development, and curriculum inflexibility.

In the context of South African higher education, no single definition of disability exists as institutions appear to classify disability and students living with a disability differently (Bell, 2011). Although a move towards the implementation of the social model has been acknowledged in South African HEIs, they tend to define disability using the medical model (Ndlovu & Walton, 2016). In turn, Mutanga (2017) argues for a common definition of disability in South African HEIs which reflects the fluidity of conceptualising disability. According to Mutanga, this definition should recognise the various aspects in which students with disabilities can be assessed according to function, impairment, limitations, or barriers. The definition provided by the ICF, which follows a biopsychosocial framework in terms of conceptualising disability by integrating views from the social model and medical model of disability, is arguably the most consistent and comprehensive conceptualisation of disability (Leonardi et al., 2006; WHO, 2001, 2011).

Based on the varying conceptualisations of disability, it is evident that disability is understood in various ways. In turn, this affects how other individuals, institutions, and policies accommodate and support individuals living with a disability (Kaplan, 2000, as cited in Devar et al., 2020). In the context of the current study, various understandings of the term 'disability' among lecturers may have implications in their teaching methods and assessment practices when seeking to provide support and academic accommodations for students with physical disabilities.

2.2 Barriers to Inclusive Higher Education

2.2.1 Policy-related Issues in Higher Education

The context of higher education in South Africa is necessary for understanding current equity and inclusion urgencies. In the traditional context of higher education, individuals living with a disability have been marginalised and systematically denied their constitutional right to access education (Liasidou, 2014). However, since the emergence of democracy, various disability laws and educational policies have been implemented in the South African education system to promote the inclusion of previously marginalised members of society (McKinney & Swartz, 2016). In particular, the development of Education White Paper 3 (1997) provided a policy statement concerning the transformation of the existing higher education system to address various areas of disadvantage that continued to prevent many students from full access and participation (Ntombela, 2013).

Subsequently, a South African inclusion policy known as Education White Paper 6 was released in 2001 as a complimentary document due to the growing demand for education reform and the need to continually revise and align support systems (Department of Education, 2001). This document provides educational institutions such as HEIs with guidelines to remove barriers and challenges and improve the access and participation of marginalised groups (Department of Education, 2001; Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Inequalities of the past are also acknowledged, and inclusive education is defined as an education system that ensures academic and social acceptance and inclusion of previously marginalised members of society (Department of Education, 2001). Furthermore, this document also aims to undermine staff attitudes, teaching methods, learning environments, and curricula to address and meet the needs of all students (McKinney & Swartz, 2016; Ntombela, 2013).

However, this policy guideline proved to be problematic as it failed to acknowledge the extent of diversity among students with disabilities and tends to cluster students with disabilities into one group, resulting in a one-size-fits-all approach that is not tailored to support the unique needs of a diverse student population (Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Despite evidence for policy implementation, the progress that is evident on paper has not translated into equal opportunities and inclusive practices for all students with a disability in educational institutions (McKinney & Swartz, 2016). In agreement, Mosia & Phasha (2017) indicate that a disjunction between policy and implementation remains in South African HEIs. They further add that these policies seek to serve institutional ends in terms of achieving equity goals on paper, as opposed to the reality of meeting the needs of students with disabilities and identifying the barriers they continue to face within their educational environment.

2.2.2 Curriculum Access Challenges for Students with Disabilities

Studies that have focused on the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education have indicated that many barriers to curriculum access still exist for these students following their acceptance into these institutions (Fuller et al., 2004; Ntombela, 2013; Liasidou, 2014). More specifically, Dosch and Zidon (2014) argue that a predominant curriculum access challenge for these students stems from curricula and teaching methods which have not been adjusted appropriately in response to the inclusion of a diverse and growing student body.

A failure to appropriately adjust curricula and teaching methods for students with disabilities may create barriers to learning and participation. For instance, the challenge of accessing learning material such as lecture notes in the appropriate format from lecturers has been highlighted in the learning experiences of students with disabilities (Hewett et al., 2017; Hopkins, 2011; Madriaga et al., 2010). Students often require access to lecture notes in an

electronic format before the presentation of lectures to ensure that learning material can be adapted to the students' format of choice to ensure preparedness before class (Hopkins, 2011; Riddell et al., 2005). However, some lecturers reportedly refused to upload notes before a lecture as they believed that it would reduce attendance (Riddell et al., 2005) or demotivate students and interfere with their commitment to participate in class (Majoko, 2018).

Inaccessible lecture notes before the lecture have been found to augment learning difficulties for students with disabilities (Majoko, 2018).

However, there appears to be a juxtaposition in the existing literature on lecturers' perspectives and experiences in inclusive education. Despite instances where lecturers strive for inclusive education, they have reported consistent difficulties in employing inclusive practices and ensuring access to curriculum due to insufficient training, information, and awareness of disability and diversity in higher education (Cotán et al., 2021) or feeling overwhelmed, pressurised, and uncertain in terms of achieving a balance between upholding academic standards and providing appropriate academic accommodations (Kendall 2018). In turn, Cotán et al. (2021) further explain that this may result in lecturers experiencing insecurity in their teaching practices and in the development of designing appropriate methods of instruction for students with disabilities.

2.2.3 Lecturer Attitudes towards Students with Disabilities

Negative or indifferent attitudes of lecturers without disabilities towards disability and implementing inclusive education have been cited by students with disabilities as one of the most prevalent challenges to inclusion for these students in higher education (Kermit & Holiman, 2018; Moriña, 2017; Rao, 2004). Institutional culture and practice are continuously affected by negative attitudes toward diversity, and this appears to discourage these students who long for change (Ntombela, 2013). Attitudinal barriers are often due to a lack of information, knowledge, and understanding among lecturers regarding disability issues and

the appropriate support needed for these students (Aguirre et al., 2021; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015). Similarly, Mutanga and Walker (2017) found that in instances where lecturers were perceived by students as unhelpful, students attributed their lecturers' actions to insufficient awareness regarding disabilities as opposed to their unwillingness to help them. Fuller et al. (2004) concur with this finding to an extent, however, there was also evidence for unhelpful attitudes among lecturers, despite being aware of their students' disabilities and their academic needs.

It is important to also acknowledge that not all lecturers display negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. Recent studies have identified generally positive attitudes among academic staff (Elbeheri et al., 2020; Freer & Kaefer, 2021), demonstrating a shift in attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. In addition, Matshedisho (2010) found that students reported some lecturers as being relatively responsive to curriculum flexibility. Their article found that when lecturers were asked by students or the disability services office to make the appropriate accommodations, they were able to provide the student with differentiated teaching methods and assessment formats which were supportive and sensitive to the students' needs. Similarly, Cotán et al. (2021) discovered that lecturers who were characterised as being flexible, respectful, empathetic, accessible, and sensitive towards students with disabilities were able to develop and maintain inclusive practices in the learning environment.

It is evident that lecturers' attitudes, whether positive or negative, translate into consequential actions and influence educational practices. While negative attitudes regarding diversity can become a barrier for both students and lecturers, positive attitudes may enable the lecturer to foster an inclusive environment (Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Consequently, the attitudes of academic staff and their willingness to accommodate students with disabilities

impact the success of these students (Edna, 2016; Rao, 2004). The attitude of lecturers is a core component of employing inclusive pedagogical practices to achieve inclusive education (Cotán et al., 2021). Ntombela (2013) argues that although an inclusive environment emphasises the removal of attitudinal barriers, the challenge arises in determining ways to change these deep-rooted attitudes of people without disabilities who are indifferent to the barriers that do not affect them. Therefore, Ntombela maintains that emphasis should be placed on transforming these attitudes and prejudices that make lecturers without disabilities unaware of these social injustices.

Collaboration is subsequently required within institutions to improve lecturers' attitudes toward students with disabilities (Edna, 2016). It is equally important for discussions and collaboration to occur among staff at department and faculty levels to move beyond discussing disability issues in educational policies (Fuller et al., 2004). Despite the necessity of these policies, personal responsibility from staff members is also crucial to creating inclusive learning environments (van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015). Consequently, there becomes a demand to understand an extensive variety of different abilities and provide appropriate academic accommodations to eradicate attitudinal barriers among all staff. Some studies conclude that this may be achieved through institutional training and access to information on disability awareness, institutional policies and the relevant legislature, and pedagogical support which should be provided by HEIs to their staff (Edna, 2016; Lipka et al., 2020; Papadakaki et al., 2022, Shaw, 2021).

2.2.4 Assessment Challenges

Assessment methods that have not been adjusted appropriately to accommodate the diverse needs of students with disabilities have also been cited as a barrier to inclusion in HEIs. For instance, studies have cited challenges to participation in learning arising from restrictive assessment methods (Fuller et al., 2004), inequitable assessment processes

(Mutanga, 2018) and unfair time concessions (Mosia & Phasha, 2017), and inflexibility in terms of the administration of assessments (Majoko, 2018). In addition, writing challenges in examinations and assignments may arise as a result of the mode of assessment used by HEIs (Mutasa et al., 2013). Furthermore, engaging with digitalised content and submitting assessments through online platforms can become a time-consuming process for students with disabilities as it can take more time to navigate different online platforms and databases, in addition to using assistive technology (Cain & Fanshawe, 2021).

In response to these challenges, assessments such as tests and examinations may require adaptations to accommodate the individual learning needs of students with disabilities. This can include the allocation of time concessions, individual invigilation, the use of sign language interpreters, and adaptations to the formats of test and examination papers (Matshedisho, 2010). Matshedisho argues that the content included in assessments for all students should not differ, regardless of their abilities. However, the difference should lie in the way in which the assessment is presented to ensure fairness in assessment for all types of students. In contrast, a study conducted by Mosia and Phasha (2017) found that supportive accommodations and concessions in tests and examinations were seen to potentially promote inequity among students as opposed to promoting access. More specifically, this issue was revealed in a study conducted by Fuller et al. (2004) in which experiences of inequity and stigmatization among participants during assessments were a direct result of the physical separation of students with disabilities who received time concessions during tests and examinations. Therefore, adjustments to assessment methods may not always result in equitable academic outcomes for these students (Kilpatrick et al., 2017).

Madriaga et al. (2010) highlighted the importance of understanding that both students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities will benefit from a system that is supportive and promotes inclusive practices that do not require discrimination between these

two groups. Since different impairments require different concessions, it remains uncertain as to how higher education staff decide on these concessions due to differing views and opinions about this distinction, particularly regarding additional writing time (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). The Disability Compliance for Higher Education (2017) argue that to ensure equitable and fair practice, students with disabilities should be provided with the opportunity to state what would work best to accommodate their disability.

2.2.5 Accessibility to Online Learning for Students with Disabilities

Online or distance learning refers to the transformation of traditional face-to-face teaching and learning in educational institutions to an online or virtual environment, increasing the flexibility of time, place, and content for both educators and students (Rasheed & Wahid, 2018). Education provided online through distance learning courses was initially designed to provide educational opportunities to students who were restricted or unable to access traditional methods of attending a face-to-face educational setting due to their geographic location or lifestyle (Erickson & Larwin, 2016).

However, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has further driven the advancement of online learning. Educational institutions were required to adhere to COVID-19 social distancing and health protocols, therefore, necessitating the transition from traditional face-to-face instructional methods to an online instructional environment within a limited timeframe (Gin et al., 2021; Smith, 2020). Smith (2020) further explains that this transition was a difficult and stressful task for both educators and students, forcing educators to learn new skills and technologies and exposing issues of inequity for students with disabilities, especially in low-income communities. In the context of South African higher education, students with disabilities were further impacted by a lack of resources such as insufficient data, stable connectivity, and assistive devices (Khumalo et al., 2021).

Assistive technology can enable virtually all students with a variety of disabilities to access and operate digital devices. Despite this, many students globally do not have access to the technologies that are required to participate in online learning such as screen readers, braille devices, voice recognition systems, alternative keyboards, and assistive software (Burgstahler, 2015; Cooper, 2006). Research conducted on the impact of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that the limitation of assistive technologies posed a challenge to many students with disabilities (Dianito et al., 2021; Khumalo et al., 2021). Consequently, it has been argued that inaccessible technologies are as problematic and frustrating as inaccessible buildings and infrastructure (Shaheen & Watulak, 2019).

Moreover, research suggests that online learning can provide specially designed instruction, bridging the gap for students with disabilities to access graduate degrees in higher education (Erickson & Larwin, 2016). However, Burgstahler (2015) states that some online learning practices provided by educators have created a barrier to inclusion for students with disabilities. In particular, these practices have included inaccessible components of online courses, such as videos without captions or subtitles for students who have hearing impairments, files that are unreadable by screen readers for students who have visual impairments, and disorganised content and presentations for students with learning disabilities and attention deficits (Gladhart, 2010). Additionally, students with disabilities also reported challenges with time concessions for assessments that were not appropriately administered by educators, inaccessible delivery of information in video format, and educators making assumptions about what academic accommodations were appropriate (Gin et al., 2021). Inaccessible online learning practices also appeared to have been a challenge that students with disabilities continued to experience in HEIs during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa (Khumalo et al., 2021).

There is still much for academic staff to learn regarding the provision of online instruction in education and adapting face-to-face courses to online environments to meet the needs of all students. It has undoubtedly been a challenging task for educators since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, research indicates that a possible starting point for educators is that they do not necessarily need to require expert knowledge on accessibility issues (Cooper, 2006). Instead, educators are encouraged to have a general awareness and appreciation of disability and diversity issues as well as an understanding of how students with disabilities may choose to effectively utilise a computer. Cooper further states that awareness of accessibility is significant as it will ensure that accessibility issues are addressed before they arise. In addition, research also argues that training in providing instruction in an online environment should be provided to educators to ensure inclusive practice and that all students regardless of their ability are meeting the expected course objectives and outcomes (Smith, 2020). Based on these findings, it appears that there are both challenges and opportunities to accessing online learning in HEIs.

2.3 The Implementation of Inclusive Education

2.3.1 Lecturers' Experiences in Providing Inclusive Pedagogy

Contrasting experiences among lecturers have emerged in the literature concerning the provision of inclusive education. Positive experiences may increase the willingness of staff to include students with disabilities, subsequently improving their attitudes toward addressing diversity issues and their commitment to inclusive practices (Boitumelo et al., 2020). Boitumelo et al. further highlight that professional growth and personal satisfaction develop from positive experiences. Other positive experiences have included the development of connectedness and sensitivity towards students with disabilities through supportive lecturer-student interactions (Svendby, 2020). Svendby explains that when lecturers connect with students, they can critically reflect on their current pedagogical

practices, develop innovative and inclusive techniques that are tailored to their students' academic needs, and subsequently increase maturity in their role as lecturers. However, the ability to connect with students is not always a possibility in HEIs that are characterised by a large student population.

In contrast, research also indicates that despite the positive attitudes of lecturers and their commitment to providing inclusive education, lecturers continue to experience various challenges when employing these practices in their lecture rooms (Cotán et al., 2021; Boitumelo et al., 2020). There appears to be a consensus among researchers that these challenges relate to various factors such as the lack of staff knowledge and training on disability, inadequate university policies, and insufficient time, resources, and support provided to lecturers within these institutions (Boitumelo et al., 2020; Cain & Fanshawe, 2021; Cotán et al., 2021; Kendall, 2018; Langørge et al., 2020; Svendby, 2020).

Barriers to inclusive practice due to insufficient knowledge and training on inclusive education have been echoed by many lecturers in local and international literature. For instance, challenges to inclusive practices have stemmed from lecturers' lack of knowledge, responsibility, and understanding of inclusive practices (Boitumelo et al., 2020; Mutanga & Walker, 2017), a lack of training on inclusive education (Kendall, 2018) or on the tools to create inclusive and equitable opportunities (Cain & Fanshawe, 2021), uncertainty, confusion, and a lack of resources (Svendby, 2020), as well as a lack of information and awareness on issues that pertain to disability and diversity in higher education (Cotán et al., 2021; Mayat & Amosun 2011). In addition, a lack of understanding of the concept of inclusive education for some educators may make it difficult to transform disability-related policies into practice in higher education (Boitumelo et al., 2020).

Further, lecturers may also be faced with the challenge of students not disclosing their disability to the institution and staff for various reasons, including stigmatisation, receiving

equal treatment to their peers, and not identifying as an individual with a disability (Kendall, 2018). Disclosure of a disability is a personal decision, and students are not obligated to disclose this information to the institution (Carey, 2012; Couzens et al., 2015). Consequently, this creates further difficulties for lecturers and the respective institution to appropriately support and accommodate students with disabilities on campus (Kendall, 2016; Svendby, 2020).

2.3.2 The Role of Lecturers in Inclusive Education

As diversity increases in the student population, it becomes imperative for these institutions to understand the learning needs of students and ensure their academic experience is supported through appropriate accommodations in teaching, learning, and assessment (Kendall, 2018). Svendby (2020) states that HEIs place the responsibility on academic staff to ensure a commitment to inclusive practice. In agreement, van Jaarsveldt and Ndeya-Ndereya (2015) maintain that personal responsibility from staff is crucial to creating inclusive learning environments. More specifically, Singh (2017) suggests that academic staff attitudes and understanding are important to improve the experience of students with disabilities, as opposed to simply implementing university policies.

Lecturers play a significant role in the inclusive practice as they are often considered the initial point of contact for many students (Mutanga & Walker, 2017), especially when academic support is required (Khairuddin et al., 2020). Without assistance from the disability services office, academic accommodations for students with disabilities may be left to the lecturers' agency and judgement. However, studies conducted on lecturers' perspectives in South African universities identified insufficient lecturer knowledge and awareness, responsibility, and skills that appropriately address the needs of students with disabilities as prominent barriers to inclusion (Mayat & Amosun, 2011; Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Furthermore, lecturers that participated in a Norwegian study identified a lack of formal

training in inclusive practice and a lack of access to pedagogical resources for lecturers (Svendby, 2020). The attitude of lecturers toward providing inclusive pedagogical approaches can also influence the progress of students with disabilities (Fuller et al., 2004).

Mutanga and Walker (2017) highlight the importance of understanding the perceptions and experiences of lecturers to improve existing disability-related policies and their commitment to inclusive practice. While the experiences of students with disabilities in HEIs have received extensive research interest (Fuller et al., 2004; Moola, 2015; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Mutanga, 2018; Ntombela, 2013; Tugli et al., 2013), what has not attracted considerable research interest is the experiences of lecturers with regards to the implementation of inclusive education. In particular, there appears to be a gap in the literature that focuses on the experiences of lecturers in teaching and assessment of students with disabilities enrolled in HEIs, and ultimately their role in creating inclusive learning environments. Additionally, this appears to be an understudied area of research in the context of South African higher education. Therefore, this study sought to identify and understand lecturers' experiences of interacting with students with physical disabilities in a South African HEI, namely the UKZN, Howard College campus.

Lecturers alone may not be able to bring about a positive change in how students with disabilities are impacted by inaccessible inclusive education. However, the role of lecturers is crucial in the collaborative effort of various stakeholders in assisting students with disabilities to achieve equal and inclusive opportunities and practices in their educational environment as they engage with students daily (Devar et al., 2020). Lecturers are the focus of this research study. However, it should be highlighted that in addition to lecturers, the involvement of other key stakeholders such as students with disabilities, disability support staff, and university management, in addition to the successful implementation of internal and external

policies and legislation will collectively allow for appropriate accommodations and solutions to be found (Mutanga & Walker, 2017).

In agreement with the above argument, Mosia and Phasha (2017) highlight the need for HEIs to articulate a clear policy on support and the practical implementation of guidelines concerning students with disabilities, with the input of staff, students, and other relevant stakeholders. Fuller et al. (2004) explain that it is only through collaboration that the quality of the learning experience and curriculum access will improve for students with disabilities. For the purpose of this study, insights gained from the findings may assist lecturers in promoting inclusive education and providing appropriate accommodations in teaching and assessment to support the academic needs of students with disabilities in higher education.

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Theory of Differentiated Instruction

The context of contemporary education is characterised by heterogeneity as increasing student populations become more academically diverse (Fry et al., 2008; Subban, 2006; Tomlinson et al., 2003). Academic diversity among students can include factors such as age, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, language, physiological abilities, and socioeconomic status (Ginja & Chen, 2020). While there has been an increase in diverse student populations in the context of higher education, the diverse range of student needs is often not accommodated by educational institutions and their academic staff (Tomlinson et al., 2003). In response to this issue, academic staff in higher education have voiced their concerns regarding the challenges that they continue to experience when teaching a diverse student body (Evans-Hellman & Haney, 2017; Kendall, 2018; Mutanga & Walker, 2017).

Meeting the needs of diverse students, including students with disabilities, within a lecture room setting has been effectively achieved through the process of differentiating instructional methods (Dosch & Zidon, 2014; Evans-Hellman & Haney, 2017; Johnsen, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999). According to Merrill (2013), instruction in the educational context can be

defined as an intentional attempt to promote learning by structuring a learning environment in a particular way for a student to develop and gain specified knowledge or skills. It is against this background that the theory of Differentiated Instruction has been selected to inform and develop a greater understanding of lecturers' experiences in providing inclusive education for students who are living with a physical disability.

Originated by Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999), a leading expert in this field, Differentiated Instruction is a student-centred theoretical framework that acknowledges the increase in heterogeneous classrooms due to the inclusion of a diverse student population. This framework emphasises the imperative for educators to accommodate diversity in the classroom by modifying teaching and learning and providing appropriate instructional techniques to meet the academic needs and learning styles of every student (Tomlinson 1999; Tomlinson et al., 2003). This theory further maintains that all students, regardless of their diverse academic skills and abilities, have the potential to learn and succeed.

According to Tomlinson (1999), educators who employ this framework are required to accept and effectively prepare for the fact that students bring both commonalities and differences to the learning environment. Based on the extent of differences among students, it is argued that educators should then provide tailored instruction, in their teaching and assessment methods, so that the learning opportunity of each student is maximised within their respective learning environment (Rasheed & Wahid, 2018; Tomlinson, 1999). In practice, the educator should assume responsibility for modifying the curriculum, employing differentiated teaching and assessment methods, making physical adaptations to the classroom, and creating a supportive learning environment (Tomlinson, 2005, as cited in de Jager, 2019).

Two types of differentiation can occur in educational institutions. Rasheed and Wahid (2018) distinguish between internal and external differentiation. According to their article,

external differentiation refers to the separation and grouping of different students based on their physical and educational needs and abilities. This includes special educational schools. However, this practice may exclude students from the opportunity to learn in heterogeneous classrooms. Conversely, they also identify internal differentiation which occurs within the learning environment in which the educator modifies methods of instruction and assessment. Internal differentiation implies the possibility of all students being able to learn and succeed in heterogeneous classrooms, further encouraging the inclusion and participation of students with different needs and abilities within all educational institutions (Rasheed & Wahid, 2018).

2.4.1 Sociocultural Learning Theory and Differentiated Instruction

There are various elements of differentiation. According to Tomlinson (1999), educators can differentiate content, process, or product according to the student's readiness, interests, and learning profile. Differences in the readiness, interest and learning profile of students can be further understood and informed by learning theories. A key theory of learning that supports the differentiated instruction model is embodied in Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning. The Russian psychologist theorised that social interaction is crucial in the development of human cognition as children attain knowledge through social interactions and dialogues with more knowledgeable adults or capable others (Vygotskij, 1986, as cited in Ginja & Chen, 2020). With the aid of interacting with a more knowledgeable or capable other, such as an educator who guides appropriate instruction, a student should concurrently be encouraged to engage in tasks independently. Vygotsky (1978) referred to the difference between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can achieve with the appropriate instructions from a knowledgeable or capable other as the Zone of Proximal Development. Subsequently, educator guidance and support in the form

of purposeful instruction is crucial for student development and independent learning (Subban, 2006).

Sociocultural Learning Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development provide a theoretical basis for understanding the importance of differentiating instruction according to student readiness (Lawson et al., 2017). According to Rasheed and Wahid (2018), Vygotsky highlighted the importance for educators to assess students' cognitive readiness to determine their exact level of capabilities to provide instructions and tasks that are slightly in advance of their level of development. In essence, successful learning occurs when a student is cognitively ready to complete a moderately challenging task while being provided with the appropriate support from an educator (Lawson et al., 2017). Taking academically diverse classrooms into consideration, Lawson et al. further explain that educators should be cognisant of students who may not be cognitively ready and subsequently encouraged to make the appropriate instructional changes or curriculum modifications based on the students' capabilities.

Educators can engage student interest through the provision of lesson content or curricula and the delivery of instruction and assessment methods according to student interest (Subban, 2006). Student interest may be influenced by personal experiences, cultural background, and individual strengths (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). To engage student interest, educators should seek to connect these aspects of pedagogy to the lives of students in a meaningful way. This may be achieved through discussions and tasks which connect to student areas of need, strengths, and experiences (Subban, 2006). Similarly, educators should accommodate individual strengths by identifying individual learning styles or profiles. Culture is also an essential component that influences both student interest and learning profiles as students may place varying emphasis on the value of content or information based on their cultural upbringing (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Dosch & Zidon, 2014).

2.4.2 Differentiated Instruction and Online Learning

The advancement of online learning within educational institutions, which has been further propelled by the global COVID-19 pandemic, has ultimately led to the development of various instructional designs and pedagogies incorporated within online learning environments. One of the many advantages of online learning is that it allows educators to personalise teaching and assessment to provide individualized attention and support to accommodate students who require it the most (Watson, 2008).

Few studies exist regarding the implementation of differentiated instruction in online learning. Among the available research, one study describes various approaches to differentiation and how they can be incorporated by educators within an online or blended learning environment (Rasheed & Wahid, 2018). In terms of assessments, research has acknowledged that the provision of various assessment methods can be limited in the online environment (Williams et al., 2012). However, this has been contested by other studies which have argued that the flexibility of the online environment promotes opportunities for providing students with varying online assessment methods (Broadbent & Poon, 2015; Crawford-Ferre & Weist, 2012). These methods can include various technologies that would not be available in face-to-face assessment settings.

Moreover, other studies have highlighted the benefits of institutions and educators in providing differentiated instruction through online or blended learning for students. Differentiated instruction may be easier, more efficient, and more manageable for educators who teach larger student populations in online or blended learning environments (McKenzie et al., 2013; Rasheed & Wahid, 2018). Other researchers have reported on the advantages of online media in supporting the learning experiences of students who feel particularly isolated (Gillett-Swan, 2017). In addition, the use of assistive technologies in conjunction with online learning to provide differentiated instruction has indicated increased student engagement and

retention, especially among deaf students (Shepherd & Alpert, 2015). Boelens et al. (2018) argue for the adoption of blended learning approaches as it can increase the possibility of implementing differentiated instruction in HEIs. Conclusively, the limited body of existing literature identifies promising results for students who struggle to access the curriculum through traditional face-to-face methods of teaching and assessment.

2.4.3 Differentiated Instruction in the Context of the Current Study

The South African inclusion policy, Education White Paper 6, promotes the use of differentiated instruction in terms of differentiated teaching and assessment methods to accommodate a diverse student population (Department of Education, 2001; de Jager, 2019). However, de Jager (2019) argues that little transformation has occurred in teaching practice. This is highlighted by the limited research on the application of Differentiated Instruction in the context of higher education (Bimantoro et al., 2021; Dosch & Zidon, 2014; Evans-Hellman & Haney, 2017; Johnsen, 2003; Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009), with less information available regarding the use of this pedagogical framework and approach in South African HEIs (de Jager, 2019; Jeannin & Ojo, 2021; Kirstein et al., 2018; Shay, 2013). Thus, the disjunction between policy and practice in higher education is further emphasised, justifying this theoretical framework within the context of the current study.

This theoretical framework is important as the present study seeks to understand lecturers' experiences of teaching and assessing students with disabilities and to identify how their current pedagogical practice considers the needs of students with disabilities in the lecture room. According to Rasheed and Wahid (2018), Differentiated Instruction provides a framework for educators to evaluate their current pedagogy in a heterogenous classroom and transition from standardised instruction to personalised instruction that is tailored to the requirements of each student. In agreement, Broderick et al. (2005) employ this theoretical framework to encourage every educator to consider how aspects of their pedagogy, including

methods of instruction and assessment, may be disabling or restrictive when educating students with disabilities.

Differentiation subsequently promotes staff development by encouraging lecturers to identify and understand the array of differences that exist among students in their class and to use this information to plan appropriate instructions. Additionally, the process of differentiation in learning environments requires continuous and committed personal and professional reflection, discussion, and action to be undertaken by staff in all educational institutions (Tomlinson et al., 2003).

This approach further emphasises how disability should not be viewed as a problem inherent in the student. Instead, Broderick et al. (2005) state that differences in students' abilities can arise from pedagogical practices and the interactional relationship between the educator and student. Moreover, a predominant barrier to meeting the academic needs of students with different abilities is rooted in systemic issues such as educator beliefs about diversity and traditional teaching practices which tend to utilise a one-size-fits-all approach (Tomlinson et al., 2003). This is further problematic as traditional teaching practices tend to expose and remediate individual deficits (Levine, 2003). Consequently, this may put some students at risk of repeated academic failure.

Therefore, the student-teacher relationship forms an important component of this theoretical framework. It may assist in understanding lecturers' experiences of their interactions with students with disabilities in a university setting, and their role in cultivating inclusive learning in the lecture room. While the student-lecturer relationship is deemed reciprocal and collaborative, it can be argued that within this relationship, the responsibility of enabling inclusion is assigned first to the educator, then to the student (Tomlinson, 2004). Therefore, in the context of this study, the application of this theory may also encourage lecturers to take responsibility in adjusting their current teaching methods and assessment

practices and ensuring the successful inclusion of students with disabilities, and potentially other students in HEIs. Moreover, by using this theory to evaluate lecturers' experiences, it may provide an effective and inclusive teaching approach that informs possible recommendations that lecturers may implement to enhance the quality of teaching and learning for students with disabilities.

2.5 Summary

This chapter provided an argument for the current study based on existing theory and relevant literature. The key concept of disability was defined and discussed concerning various perspectives and theories of disability. In turn, this chapter highlighted that different conceptualisations and perspectives of the term 'disability' can influence how individuals, institutions, and policies accommodate and support individuals living with a disability. Some of the key challenges to inclusive education that have been cited by lecturers in international and South African HEIs were discussed. The review of literature simultaneously acknowledged the challenges voiced by students with disabilities during their interactions with lecturers to highlight the effects of student-lecturer interactions. Subsequently, the role of lecturers in providing inclusive education was discussed. Lastly, Differentiated Instruction was presented as the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study in detail.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents a detailed description of the methodology that was used in this research study. More specifically, this section provides a discussion of the rationale for the research design and a description of the setting and sampling methods. This chapter also describes semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. The justification and step-by-step description of thematic analysis as the selected method of data analysis are presented. Ethical considerations, the validity of this research study, and the researchers' reflexivity are also discussed and provided at the end of this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

The study aimed to explore lecturers' experiences of teaching and assessing students with physical disabilities at a South African HEI. Following the nature of the study, a qualitative research design and interpretivist paradigm were deemed suitable. A qualitative research design involves gathering non-numerical or textual data to understand experiences and gain in-depth insights into a research problem (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Moreover, du Plooy-Cilliers et al. state that a qualitative research design aims to identify, explore, and understand an individual's lived experiences concerning a certain phenomenon and the meaning that these individuals attach to that phenomenon. A qualitative research design is also appropriate in this study as a qualitative data collection method was employed, such as an in-depth semi-structured interview, to generate data through active engagement and the creation of meaning with participants. This type of research design contrasts quantitative research as the researcher does not seek to predict, quantify, or generalise the research findings (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

From a social sciences perspective, du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) state that research paradigms are often referred to as research traditions or worldviews which encompass the views, methods, and beliefs that are embodied by the researcher when studying a

phenomenon that is relevant to their field. They further add that this worldview ultimately influences the researchers' approach toward the research process, such as their research topic, the manner of conducting research, and the interpretation of the research results. The research paradigm is also dependent on the nature of the research study (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

It is for this reason that the study adopts an interpretivist paradigm which maintains that humans and their experiences are continuously evolving and influenced by their surrounding environments (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). In addition, a qualitative research design often conforms to interpretivism, and this is applicable as this research study is concerned with the quality of lecturers' experiences and gaining an in-depth understanding of their interaction with students with physical disabilities through their teaching methods and assessment procedures at the UKZN, Howard College campus.

Interpretivism also allows for an appreciation and understanding of the unique differences between individuals and their lived experiences (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This is compatible with the aims of the research study, namely, to identify lecturers' *understanding* of the term 'disability' and their unique *experiences* of teaching and assessing students with disabilities in a South African HEI. In conjunction, a qualitative research design and interpretivist paradigm allow the researcher to further understand how the issue of inclusive pedagogical practices that are utilised by lecturers, or the lack thereof, can impact the quality of the learning experience for students with disabilities in a university setting. Furthermore, an interpretivist paradigm assists in providing possible recommendations or solutions from a South African perspective to support lecturers in improving the quality of the learning experience for students with disabilities.

3.2 Setting

The geographic site of the research study took place at UKZN, Howard College campus, which is situated in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa. This university includes five campuses within the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and offers higher education student's various choices of study programmes through four colleges, namely, the College of Humanities, College of Agriculture, Engineering & Science, College of Health Science, and the College of Law and Management Studies. The most recent and accessible UKZN statistical data published online indicated that a total of 44 068 students were enrolled at UKZN in 2021 (UKZN, 2021).

3.3 Sampling Approach

3.3.1 Sampling Strategies

Non-probability sampling was used as participants within the research study did not have an equal chance of being selected since only those who met the criteria were selected (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). More specifically, purposive sampling was used as the researcher relied on predetermined characteristics or criteria as well as their judgement to purposely select the participants to be included in the research sample to ensure that each participant in the sample was beneficial to the research (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

To adhere to COVID-19 protocols, lecturers were approached directly by email to inform them of this research study and what it entailed. This email specifically requested the participation of lecturers who had taught and assessed students with physical disabilities at UKZN's Howard College campus. Physical disabilities in this study included a range of mobility impairments such as partial or total paralysis, amputation, cerebral palsy, and epilepsy, as well as sensory impairments such as vision and hearing impairments. More specifically, this sample was limited to lecturers within the College of Humanities as it was determined that a large proportion of students with disabilities tend to enrol for qualifications

within the College of Humanities. In addition, this ensured that data collection was feasible, while still providing the researcher with the opportunity to obtain various perspectives from lecturers across different schools and disciplines within this college. The researcher in this study, therefore, used their judgement to purposely select participants according to the following inclusion criteria:

- (a) Participants must be a lecturer within the College of Humanities at UKZN.
- (b) Participants must have taught and assessed students living with a physical disability at UKZN, Howard College campus.

Due to the limitation of being unable to approach lecturers face-to-face on campus to request their participation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic continuing into the 2022 academic year, snowball sampling was later deemed appropriate as an additional sampling strategy to recruit participants. This sampling strategy assisted the researcher in identifying other potential academic staff members to participate in the research study (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). In effect, participants were asked to refer or identify their colleagues within the College of Humanities who may have previously taught students with a physical disability at UKZN, Howard College campus. This sampling method proved beneficial as it improved the researchers' access to finding suitable participants who met the criteria for the research study.

3.3.2 Sample

The sample in this study consisted of eight participants, five of whom were females and three males. This sample size was feasible for qualitative research, and it allowed the researcher to gain an improved understanding of lecturers' experiences of teaching and the assessment of students with disabilities. It also generated sufficient data to promote an understanding of lecturers' realities when engaging with students with physical disabilities in their teaching and assessment practices.

The sample consisted of participants across various schools and disciplines within the College of Humanities at UKZN. Two participants were lecturers within the discipline of sociology and the school of social sciences, and one participant was a lecturer within the discipline of religion and the school of religion, philosophy, and classics. One participant was a lecturer within the discipline of social work and three participants were lecturers within the discipline of psychology and the school of applied human sciences. While one participant was a lecturer within the discipline of educational psychology and the school of education, which is based at the Edgewood campus, they were previously a lecturer within the school of applied human sciences and transitioned to the school of education during the period in which the study was conducted. However, they met the inclusion criteria and, therefore, spoke exclusively to their experience of teaching and the assessment of students with physical disabilities during their years in practice at the Howard College campus. Refer to Table 1 below for a summary of a description of the sample.

Table 1

Summary of Sample Description

| | N | % |
|-------------------------------------|---|-------|
| Sex | | |
| Male | 3 | 37.5% |
| Female | 5 | 62.5% |
| Position held within the university | | |
| Lecturer | 8 | 100% |
| Number of years in practice at UKZN | | |
| 0-5 years | 1 | 12.5% |
| 10-15 years | 2 | 25% |
| 15-20 years | 2 | 25% |
| 20-25 years | 2 | 25% |
| 25+ years | 1 | 12.5% |
| College | | |
| College of Humanities | 8 | 100% |

| | | |
|--|---|-------|
| Discipline | | |
| Sociology | 2 | 25% |
| Religion | 1 | 12.5% |
| Social work | 1 | 12.5% |
| Psychology | 3 | 37.5% |
| Educational psychology | 1 | 12.5% |
| School | | |
| School of Social Sciences | 2 | 25% |
| School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics | 1 | 12.5% |
| School of Applied Human Sciences | 4 | 50% |
| School of Education | 1 | 12.5% |

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Data Collection Instrument: *Semi-structured Interviews*

A semi-structured interview which lasted for approximately thirty minutes to one-hour was used as the primary means of collecting qualitative data from the selected participants. All eight interviews were conducted in English. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to develop interview questions based on the research objectives in advance (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This provided the researcher with a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix D) to ensure the researcher remains on track during the interview. However, this method of data collection was also flexible as it provided the researcher with the opportunity to ask participants to elaborate on questions where appropriate to gain further in-depth information and meaning from the participant (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

Each participant was individually interviewed with various questions focused on exploring each lecturer's experience of teaching and assessing students with disabilities at UKZN's Howard College campus. This enabled the researcher to determine the extent to which their teaching methods and assessment practices considered the individual needs of students with disabilities. In addition, participants were able to provide recommendations to

address previous challenges and promote inclusive practices to improve the learning experience for students with disabilities.

3.4.2 Data Collection Process

The initial phase of data collection involved several points of contact. The Registrar of UKZN was contacted to request gatekeepers' permission to conduct this research study with staff members at UKZN, Howard College campus. Gatekeeper's permission was subsequently obtained (Appendix A). Approval from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) to obtain ethical clearance was then granted (Appendix B). Once these documents were obtained, the contact information of lecturers in the College of Humanities at Howard College campus was sourced through the UKZN website.

Once selected, the participants were provided with an information sheet and an informed consent form, with the consent to audio record (Appendix C), to be completed and returned to the researcher before the scheduling of the interview. Once received, the researcher arranged a date and time with the participants by email to conduct the semi-structured interview.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the relevant health and safety protocols, the data collection method of a semi-structured interview was adapted for an online video-conferencing platform such as Zoom. This adaptation to the method of data collection required participants to have access to video-conferencing technologies and devices. The Zoom platform was deemed the most suitable platform for conducting the interviews among research participants as this was the main online platform in use by lecturers at UKZN at the time of data collection. The researcher used the audio recording function available on Zoom, as well as another audio recording device as a backup to record the interview. This ensured that the researcher was able to fully transcribe the data after the interview had been

conducted. Additionally, a note pad was used for the researcher to write down additional qualitative information or early impressions obtained before, during, and after the interview. Throughout the process of data collection, the researcher ensured that the identities and any information obtained from the research participants remained confidential.

3.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative data that emerged from this research study was analysed using a more flexible qualitative method of data analysis known as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically, this research study employed Braun and Clarke's framework to conduct a thematic analysis that followed six phases.

The first phase involved a process in which the researcher familiarises themselves with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). During this phase, the researcher immersed themselves in the data by initially transcribing the audio recordings verbatim in written format to ensure that the data set retained the information that was required for the process of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In conjunction, the researcher ensured that the data was transcribed in a way that was accurate to its original nature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each transcript was then checked against the original audio recording to ensure accuracy. Once all eight audio recordings had been transcribed verbatim, the researcher then engaged in a systematic process of reading the data multiple times. Notes on important points or impressions that emerged during the interviews were collated and inserted on one margin of the relevant transcription. This assisted in the process of informing the development of codes and themes during the subsequent phases of data analysis.

Once the researcher had become familiar with the data, the second phase required the researcher to generate codes by breaking up the data, organising it in a systematic and meaningful manner, and assigning labels (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was done manually and was facilitated by writing comments on the transcribed documents and using highlighters

to note potential patterns across the data. The purpose of this phase was to reduce the large quantity of data obtained in the transcripts to a smaller data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This phase allowed the researcher to code the data and then compare and modify the codes appropriately. Inductive or open coding was used for this research topic as it allowed for the development of initial codes based on the meaning that emerged from the qualitative data set (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Therefore, coding was data-driven, allowing for codes, and later themes, to emerge from the data. Open coding was further chosen to reduce potential researcher bias that may have arisen if pre-set codes had been utilised.

Once coding was completed, the researcher transitioned to the third phase of analysis which involved searching for any significant ideas or potential broader themes that emerged from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The appropriate and relevant codes from phase two were collated within these identified themes. The use of a table assisted in the assembling of coded extracts into broader themes and determining if any sub-themes were present to provide more detail on the main themes.

The fourth phase required the researcher to initially review the identified themes by exploring whether the coded extracts supported the themes that emerged by ensuring that a coherent pattern was formed in each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Once coherent patterns were identified, the second part of this phase required the researcher to refine the themes until a thematic map was produced to accurately reflect the entire data set.

The fifth phase of data analysis involved the process of defining and naming the themes by pinpointing the essence of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). These themes were further refined by considering the meaning of each theme and its relevant sub-themes. In addition, each theme was placed in the broader overall

context of the research study, relating it to the research questions and theoretical framework, and ensuring that each theme was identifiable and distinguishable from the other.

Lastly, the sixth phase of analysis is presented as an analytic narrative of the identified themes and potential sub-themes which are supported through data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). These extracts are embedded within a narrative that describes and argues the relevant themes in relation to the research questions. The theoretical framework, Differentiated Instruction, further informs the discussion of identified themes that were analysed, and the findings are presented in a narrative format in Chapter 4.

Overall, the use of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis in this research study allowed the researcher to identify and understand the various experiences of each participant. It simultaneously highlighted both the similarities and differences between each lecturer's experience at one campus within this particular South African HEI. The thematic analysis further allowed the researcher to identify the emerging themes within the data that was collected. It enabled the researcher to describe these themes in rich detail to reflect the reality of lecturers in their interactions and pedagogical practices during both online and face-to-face lectures and assessment procedures. Moreover, thematic analysis enabled the researcher to interpret the data, explain different aspects of the research topic, and address the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, this data analysis method was useful in analysing and interpreting large data sets that emerged from the data collection method of in-depth one-on-one interviews by sorting the data and structuring it into manageable and broader themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

A research proposal was submitted to the Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) for review. Approval was granted by the HSSREC in September 2021

(reference number: HSSREC/00003115/2021) (Appendix B). Gatekeeper permission to conduct interviews among the staff was received from the university Registrar (Appendix A).

This study was of minimal risk to participants. While human subjects were involved in this research study, namely lecturers, they were not considered vulnerable groups. The content of this research was also not of a sensitive nature. COVID-19 protocols according to the national and UKZN guidelines were adhered to by obtaining data through online interactions and conducting interviews on Zoom.

The autonomy of participants was fully protected through the use of an informed consent form which was completed and signed before the interviews were conducted. Within the information sheet and informed consent form (Appendix C), the participants were informed that there were no risks involved in the participation in this study, that all responses and participant information would be treated confidentially, and anonymity would be ensured through the use of codes and general descriptions. The participants were also required to consent to an electronic audio recording of their interviews.

The participants were fully informed of the nature of the study, that their participation and responses were voluntary, and that they were allowed to refrain from answering questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequence. Only the researcher and research supervisor have access to the data through a secured shared folder. All files are password protected and saved for a period of five years within the discipline of applied human sciences.

3.7 Validity and Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Research Study

This research study followed an interpretivist paradigm that acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge and the influence of one's subjective reality on knowledge and experience (Yardley, 2000). In qualitative research, the researcher and the participants are interdependent or influence one another (Anney, 2014). According to Anney, this contrasts

with quantitative research which believes in one reality and objective truth. Although it may be more difficult to prove the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research in comparison to quantitative research, there are four key criteria to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research, namely credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Schwandt et al., 2007).

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the believability of the findings derived from the participants' original data (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Credibility ensures that the participants' experiences are accurately interpreted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Anney, 2014). The use of one-on-one semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to obtain an in-depth account of the phenomenon in inquiry. The participants in the current study were allowed to identify and discuss their experiences which were facilitated by open-ended questions during the semi-structured interview. The researcher also employed an empathic and non-judgemental approach to facilitate honest responses from participants. As a result, thick descriptions, and an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences in a South African higher education context added to the credibility of the study. Credibility was further established during the interview phase. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to seek clarity from participants in their responses by summarising and paraphrasing participant responses, as well as clarifying their responses with the participant to determine accurate understandings and interpretation by the researcher.

3.7.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of the research findings over time (Bitsch, 2005, as cited in Anney, 2014). One of the ways that the researcher ensured dependability was by initially ensuring the credibility of the study. In addition, Anney states that dependability can be established through an audit trail of the research process. In the current

study, the researcher provided a detailed and traceable record of all research processes to demonstrate how the data was collected, recorded, analysed, and the final findings were reported. These are reported in Chapter 3 of the current study.

3.7.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of this research study can be applied to a similar situation to yield the same results (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Due to the limited nature of qualitative studies which tend to include small sample sizes, the researcher acknowledges that the experiences of participants may not be representative of all lecturers in South African HEIs. However, generalisability is not the aim of qualitative research. In qualitative research, transferability can be facilitated through various transferability strategies such as providing thick descriptions and utilising purposive sampling (Anney, 2014). In the current study, the researcher provided thick descriptions through a detailed description of the research processes including the context of the study, data collection and analysis, and the production of the final report in the format of a research dissertation (Anney, 2014). Furthermore, the findings are presented in a way that lecturers at other South African HEIs who read this research may be able to relate the findings with their own experiences, leading them to reflect on their pedagogical practices for transformation purposes. In addition, the researcher employed purposive sampling to intentionally select lecturers who met the inclusion criteria to answer the research questions in this study. This sampling method elicited in-depth findings in terms of lecturers' experiences.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is enhanced by ensuring that other researchers confirm the results or arrive at similar conclusions to reduce bias in the researchers' interpretation of the research findings (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Confirmability was increased through the process of supervision. In addition, potential researcher bias was reduced during the process of data

analysis by using open coding which allowed for codes and subsequent themes to emerge, as opposed to having preconceived themes or ideas. This ensured that the findings reflected the participants' descriptions and were not significantly influenced by any preconceptions that the researcher may have had about the topic and findings. However, researcher subjectivity cannot be separated from qualitative research. Thus, confirmability can also be achieved using a reflexive journal or practice in which events and the researchers' reflections are documented during the research investigation (Anney, 2014). As a result, confirmability was established through the process of the researcher engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process. The researchers' reflection on their subjective position in the study is described in the reflexivity section below.

3.8 Researcher reflexivity

The subjective nature of qualitative research depends on nuanced decisions and judgements that require researcher reflexivity throughout the research investigation (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). According to Olmos-Vega et al., reflexivity can be defined as a process of ongoing, collaborative, and multidimensional practices in which researchers critically reflect, critique, and evaluate the direct and indirect influence of their subjective positionality on the research process. Due to the interpretivist nature of this study, reflexivity was deemed important to acknowledge and understand the impact of the researchers' subjectivity throughout the research process.

Personal reflexivity required the researcher to explore the influence of their prior experiences and motivations on decisions throughout the study (Finaly, 2002, as cited in Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). The researcher acknowledged that limited exposure to, and engagement with, students with disabilities influenced their understanding of what it means to live with a disability and the importance of using politically correct terminology. In addition, the term 'students with disabilities' appeared to be used interchangeably with the

term ‘disabled students’ in the existing literature. As a result, the researcher initially adopted the term ‘disabled students’ during the conception phase of the research study and this term was used interchangeably with ‘students with disabilities’ in the research study. Sarasati (2020) acknowledges that information and discourses can be communicated by anyone, however, the intention of the discourse behind the existing text may not always be realised by the reader. This may have been further influenced by the researchers’ privileged position as a person living without a disability. Therefore, it became important for the researcher to engage in critical language awareness during the study. According to Sarasati (2020), critical language awareness refers to a personal awareness that requires ongoing effort and critical engagement so that the “language user is aware of the language function being conveyed” (p. 20). This effort allowed the researcher to understand the subjective use of their language and their positionality as a person without a disability. Sarasati adds that it can also enable the researcher to demonstrate a sensitivity towards the use of language in different contexts.

In addition, the researcher engaged in interpersonal reflexivity, which examines the relationship between researchers and participants, and identifies the impact of this relationship on the research and parties involved in the research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). The researcher was an insider in the institution, specifically within the College of Humanities. Thus, they shared a student-lecturer relationship with some of the participants. Consequently, the researchers’ interaction with these participants during the research investigation was influenced by their experience as a previous student, which may have impacted the data and context. For instance, the researcher was known in the context of teaching and learning which allowed the researcher to access some participants. While putting one’s preconceptions aside is impossible in qualitative research, the researcher sought to manage any assumptions and feelings about the lecturers to explore their experiences in teaching and learning.

Moreover, researchers tend to assume positions of power in contrast to participants due to their ability to interpret the data and determine which information is valid (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). The researcher in the current study experienced conflicting feelings regarding these dynamics as the researcher viewed themselves and the participants as both in a position of power during different phases of the research. Due to the student-lecturer dynamic, the researcher, who is also a student, had preconceptions about lecturers in advance of the interviews as being knowledgeable and experts in their teaching experiences. However, the researcher also demonstrated the power of interpreting the data and deciding on the validity of the data during data analysis. In response to this conflicting experience, the researcher acknowledged the shifting power dynamic by appreciating the unique knowledge and experiences shared by participants during the interviews, while recognising the researchers' position in the process of interpretation. Thus, an appreciation for the co-construction of the data and findings emerged during this qualitative study.

3.9 Summary

This chapter addressed the methodological aspects of this research study, namely the research design, setting, sampling approach, data collection, and data analysis. In addition, this chapter addressed the ethical considerations, the validity of the study, and the researchers' reflexivity. The fourth chapter presents a discussion of the research findings and themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with the research participants.

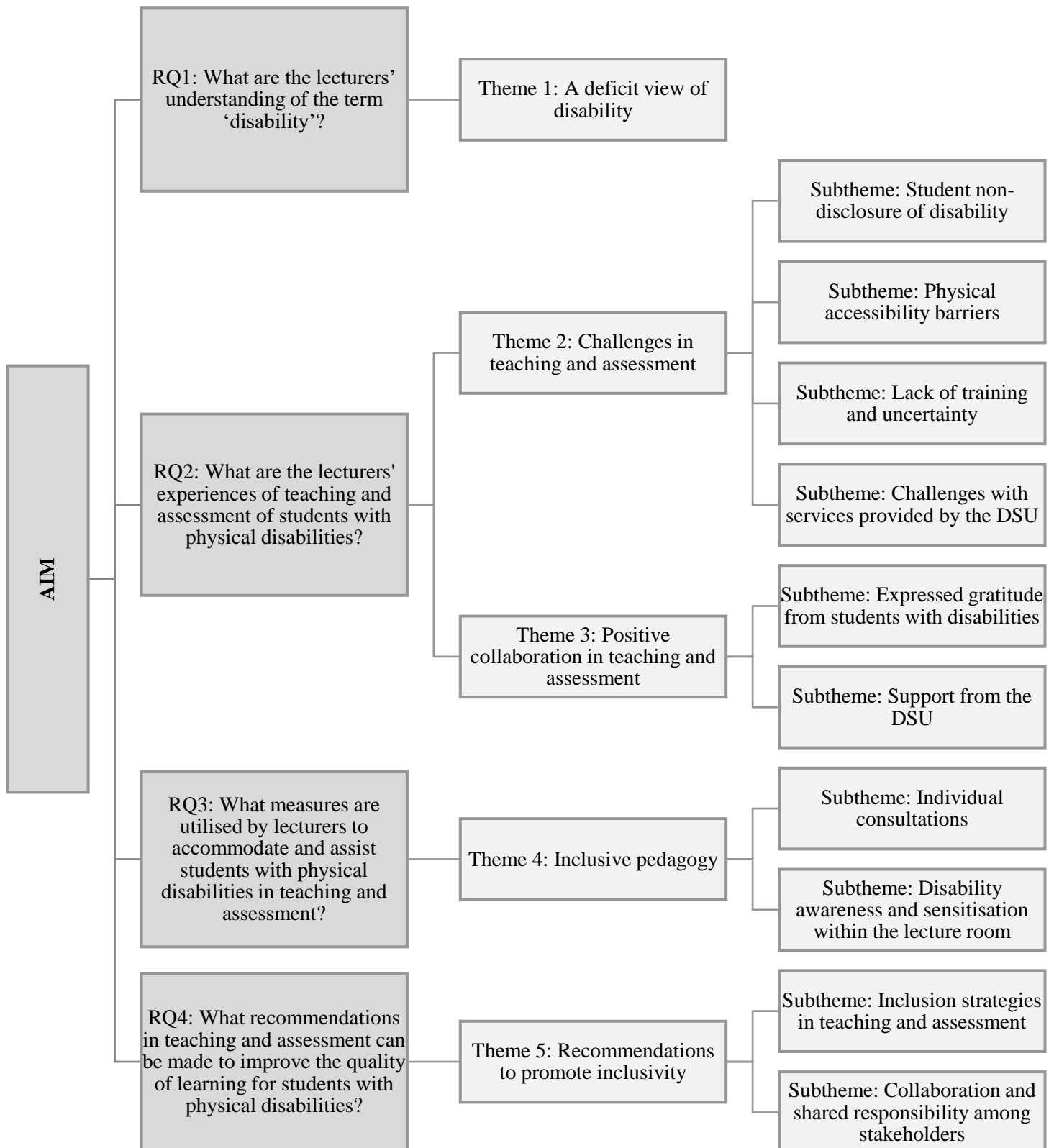
Chapter 4: Findings

This study aimed to explore lecturers' experiences of teaching and assessment of students with disabilities within a South African HEI. This chapter outlines and presents the findings of the study in relation to the following research questions:

1. What are the lecturers' understandings of the term 'disability'?
2. What are the lecturers' experiences of teaching and assessment of students with physical disabilities?
3. What measures are utilised by lecturers to accommodate and assist students with physical disabilities in teaching and assessment?
4. What recommendations in teaching and assessment can be made to improve the quality of learning for students with physical disabilities?

The primary data was obtained from the personal experiences and reflections provided by eight lecturers during in-depth semi-structured interviews. This data was then analysed to explore the constructs and questions of the research study. The analysis of each interview produced interesting and valuable findings, which appear to enhance the body of knowledge on this topic. Each lecturer shared different content in terms of their unique experiences as a lecturer working with students with disabilities within their specific discipline and school. The accounts shared by lecturers were also reflective of their experiences through traditional contact learning and online learning provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the main themes underlying their experiences in terms of teaching and assessing students with disabilities were mostly similar.

The findings which inform the study were organised into five themes with associated subthemes. A summary of the theme groupings is presented in Diagram 1. The five themes and subthemes will be discussed in relation to their relevance to the research questions and supported by evidence from the participants' lived experiences in the following sections.

Diagram 1*Summary of Themes and Subthemes*

4.1 Theme 1: A Deficit View of Disability

A deficit view or model of disability appeared to underpin the understanding of disability provided by almost all of the participants (n=7). Disability was described by these participants as an incapacity, impairment, or deficiency that arises due to a physiological condition. One participant understood disability as “certain deficiencies or limitations, or deficits that students experience because of their physical impairments” (Participant 5). Similarly, another participant summarised their understanding of disability in the following extract:

Disability refers to a physiological condition, where a person is not able to do every other thing that a person– that other so-called able-bodied people can do. And this comes as a result either of a congenital condition that they were born with, or as a result of an accident that they were involved in. Or, alternatively, as a result of an illness they may have acquired along the way. The issue is that the person is unable to carry out the duties, the activity, or the actions that an able-bodied person can actually do (Participant 1).

The physiological conditions described by some of the participants included physical, sensory, intellectual, and psychological conditions. One participant stated, “It's a term that means people who are not capable of doing things, whether it's physical, sometimes they have a mental disability with various types of mental disabilities...” (Participant 3). Similarly, Participant 8 responded, “Where functionality is impaired for differing reasons, whether it be physical, emotional, or psychological, those would be to me, that's what disability would refer to.”

While participants understood disability as a form of deficit or impairment due to a physiological condition, their understanding highlighted that a disability can impact an

individual's ability to demonstrate and achieve their full potential. This is indicated in the response from one participant who described a physical disability as, "Physical complaints, deficits, challenges... that in any way impacts on the individual's ability to optimally benefit from teaching and learning and optimally be able to express themselves adequately in assessments" (Participant 6). Similarly, Participant 4 regarded disability as "any physical or mental impairment that an individual encounters in society, this can be an impairment in relation to hearing, sight, so your perceptual abilities, mental in terms of you suffering from any condition that adjusts your ability to adapt and demonstrate your true potential."

Although one participant did not view disability as a deficit, they stated that as a result of the ideology of ableism, "When I think of disability, I think of, you know, there's a deficit model that comes up— comes up in my head" (Participant 2). Consequently, this participant explained that a binary understanding of ability and disability is typically embedded in society's conceptualisation of disability. In contrast, this participant argued for an inclusive understanding of disability in which individuals are acknowledged as differently abled:

It becomes important to acknowledge that people are differently abled, rather actually see it from that perspective, you know, rather than disability, I think it's a very loaded term... I would prefer *differently abled*, I think that bodies come in variations... that it shouldn't be regarded as a binary that you either have a working body or non-working body or an able body or disabled body, that we have a *variety of bodies* with a *variety of needs* (Participant 2).

The understanding provided by Participant 2 further highlights the power of language which should be used to promote inclusivity and not further marginalise individuals who are living with a disability. Furthermore, a deficit view of disability that emerged from the data indicated that most participants conceptualised disability in terms of an individuals'

perceived deficiency, impairment, or limitation which was attributed to a physiological condition. Subsequently, it appeared that these participants did not include the impact of the interaction between physiological conditions and contextual or environmental factors when understanding the term ‘disability’.

4.2 Theme 2: Challenges in Teaching and Assessment

The participants shared various challenges that they encountered when interacting with students with disabilities including student non-disclosure of disability, physical access barriers, a lack of training and uncertainty among lecturers, and challenges with services provided by the Disability Support Unit (DSU). Some experiences were unique to lecturers who had taught and assessed students with certain physical disabilities in a specific discipline. More significantly, many of the challenges that emerged from the data were experienced across the board.

4.2.1 Student Non-disclosure of Disability

Non-disclosure of disability among some students emerged in the data as one of the challenges faced by half of the participants (n=4) during teaching and assessment. More notably, this is a challenge that had been experienced by participants who have provided teaching and assessment through both traditional face-to-face and online learning settings. One participant who reflected on their experience of teaching and assessing students with disabilities in a traditional lecture room setting shared that, “Some of them tend not to indicate in their application forms that they have a disability” (Participant 1). Similarly, a participant who had only taught and assessed students in an online setting stated:

There's a challenge with just encouraging students to come forward and register themselves with the Disability Support Unit so that we, as the department or as the program, are aware of their disability and the reasonable accommodations that we

need to employ, not only for assessments but for teaching purposes as well (Participant 7).

Based on some of the participants' experiences, students tended to disclose their disabilities in certain situations. Disclosure of a disability during teaching appeared to be less frequent in comparison to the frequency of students who would disclose their disability for assessment purposes when an academic accommodation during the assessment was required by the student with a disability, as reported by some of the participants (n=3). This is exemplified in the following extract from one of the participants:

I find that a lot of students only come forward before assessments. And they only come forward when we need to allocate extra time to them. But for teaching purposes, it will only be one or two students who do come forward, and in the extreme cases that they have to come forward because, for example, the student who's completely blind, I had to register her scribe on to the module page so that they can be working together throughout the duration of the module (Participant 7).

The reasons for non-disclosure from the lecturers' perspectives appeared to be varied. One participant commented that students do not disclose their disability to the institution as "they so wish to be considered as able-bodied people and identify with able-bodied students, but at the same time, they want to be acknowledged that they have a disability" (Participant 1). This appeared to create a complicated and conflicting dynamic for this lecturer in terms of teaching and assessing students who do not disclose their disability to the institution.

Additionally, a reason for non-disclosure during teaching appeared to be attributed to issues of safety and discomfort in disclosing their disability. One participant reflected:

I think the challenge has been to, I don't know, maybe to be a safe space for them to come up to lecturers and for them to come up to us and demand whatever support they need to get in order to participate equitably in teaching, and not just in assessments (Participant 7).

Furthermore, these difficulties may be attributed to the environment that has been created by the institution, as evident in the following excerpt:

Even though I'm saying the challenge has been that they don't come forward, that—that's not necessarily a challenge that's brought on by the students, but more so by the environment, the fact that they don't feel, or I assume they don't feel that the environment is safe for them to openly comment or disclose that they are living with a disability (Participant 7).

While the challenge of non-disclosure appeared evident across the different disciplines in the College of Humanities, one participant discussed an experience that appeared unique to students with disabilities who are enrolled in the discipline of psychology. In particular, the participant described an experience with a student who had not disclosed their debilitating type of anxiety, which caused them to become physically impaired during an assessment. The reasons for concealment appeared to be attributed to the stigma and stereotypes that society attaches to people with disabilities studying a particular profession such as psychology, as evident in the following extract:

This need to conceal is based on sort of how society values one's identity in relation to a person suffering with any condition. It starts from a visual place, what you see, and then the judgment then starts, and then that starts disentangling the person's ability to empower themselves to—because it takes a certain amount of courage to come up to your lecturer and, or the department and say, you know, “This is something that's real

for me, and this has been evaluated and assessed, and I'm on medication for it.” And then they kind of protected themselves on thinking, okay, I'm working, and I'm studying in psychology and psychology is a profession where, if you're treating people who have problems, you can't also have problems. And then they sort of shy away from the disclosure (Participant 4).

Moreover, the issue of non-disclosure among students with disabilities raised reflective questions for one participant regarding the appropriate stakeholder that is responsible for ensuring inclusive spaces:

In those situations, it's interesting to ask who's responsible for that? Is it the responsibility of the student to speak up and say, “Hey, I'm here?” Well, is it the responsibility of the university to create a system that works with students who are different with different abilities? Is it the students' responsibility to have to ask in a sense, you know, is that an inclusive space? Whose responsibility is it to create an inclusive space? (Participant 2).

Another participant stated, “I think awareness and disclosure of disability might still carry that stigma—stereotype that has some sense of awkwardness around it, which I think that the university has a mandate to help distinguish and neutralise as best as they can” (Participant 4). The reflections from these two participants suggest that it should be imperative for the university to ensure inclusive and safe spaces for students to disclose their disability.

4.2.2 Physical Accessibility Barriers

Challenges with students with disabilities accessing the physical infrastructure at the UKZN's Howard College campus were experienced by most of the participants (n=6). In particular, participants explained that some of their students with physical disabilities

encountered difficulties when accessing the lecture venues. Subsequently, this impacted the allocation of lecture venues as not every lecture venue on Howard College campus had been designed to accommodate students with physical disabilities. One participant stated, “Lecture halls are allocated in terms of class sizes, so you find that, we must now move a bigger class into a smaller venue, because there's a person with a wheelchair who needs to access it, and then it becomes a nightmare for timetables” (Participant 1). Similarly, another participant explained, “If you're having a student who is having a wheelchair then you have to rearrange the venues that have been allocated to you. So, you'll find that sometimes you find it very difficult to get venues that will fit the whole class” (Participant 3).

Consequently, a student with a disability may be accommodated in a smaller lecture venue that is accessible. However, this may sometimes disadvantage other students as one participant found that the “venue is not accommodating all of them, some of them will have to sit on the stairs” (Participant 3). These experiences reflect the challenges that lecturers have experienced when accommodating each student in teaching and learning spaces that are assumed to be inclusive of all students.

The design of the lecture room seemed to produce further implications for lecturer engagement with students with disabilities, as evident in the following participants' experience:

I found that in terms of interacting with students, I would hardly ever, ever, if I asked a question, point at that student, or even notice that they put their hands raised. I have never, in my experience, had an interaction in class with these students precisely because it's either they are right at the back, or as in L6 [lecture venue], they are right next to me. You know, they just were right next to the podium where the lecturer stands, that it's a bit awkward, you know, because you hardly ever can engage them (Participant 1).

Another participant stated that students who were positioned next to the lecturer sometimes failed to capture the attention of the lecturer: “When you are looking up in the venue and you have the students sitting right next to you, your kind of peripheral vision potentially cuts them out, which is so not right” (Participant 4).

Subsequently, this impacted their attendance of lectures: “You will be teaching, and then suddenly, two weeks into lectures, you either get an email, or the student presents in my office, to say, “I haven't been attending, because the lecture venue does not allow me”, you know, it's not suited for maybe [their] wheelchair” (Participant 1). Another participant indicated a similar experience with a student in a wheelchair: “I only became aware of her need when she came and let me know that she was constrained from coming in and hearing the lectures adequately” (Participant 2).

Inaccessible lecture venues appeared to further marginalise this group of students as one participant stated that it essentially “reinforces this notion of difference, of othering” (Participant 2), while another stated that inaccessible lecture venues “makes them feel that they are not welcomed” (Participant 3).

Concerns regarding the safety of students with physical disabilities accessing lecture venues also emerged among some of the participants' experiences (n=4). One participant explained that certain staircases on campus may pose a danger to all students:

You'd find the student trying to walk up George Campbell stairs which are frightening, even for an able-bodied person. And on the odd occasion, I kind of held a hand—took them up myself, because I was too afraid that if they fall, and I'm standing there and watching that happen, I wouldn't be able to live with myself (Participant 4).

Another participant expressed similar sentiments regarding the height of staircases on campus and the danger they may pose for people without disabilities and students with disabilities. However, their particular experience was described as “traumatising” for both students and the lecturer:

Students have to really a—the battle to get in that lecture and to find that in the structure of the lecture hall is too steep, and I am actually not disabled, but you know, the height, and I don't know what it's for, or what, yeah, it's just not conducive, but the student fell. And it was quite traumatic for me as well, as a lecturer (Participant 3).

Despite there being progress in terms of the implementation of more inclusive infrastructure within the university, some of these physical accommodations may not always be appropriate or accessible for students, posing further safety risks. One participant provided an example of a ramp that had been built for students using a wheelchair which was described as unsafe: “A person would have killed themselves going down” (Participant 2). Another participant explained the danger that can occur for both students using a wheelchair and students without disabilities when infrastructure such as elevators are not working:

The elevators were not working for a very long time. And then students had to carry this particular student to class, up the stairs or down the staircase, so that he is able to reach the classroom. And it was taking time for the university to fix the lift. As a result, the student felt it was quite dangerous for him to be carried on the staircases by other students. It was dangerous for him. It was also dangerous for other students who were carrying him because they might actually fall because it was not just a, you know, it's like two levels up (Participant 3).

In addition to the issue of inaccessible lecture rooms, one participant explained the challenge of students not being able to access their offices:

A big problem for me is I'm very passionate about my teaching, my students, and being accessible to students. They were not able, up until today in sociology, they cannot—students in wheelchairs cannot come in to consult with us in our offices (Participant 5).

As a result, Participant 5 emphasised that “students with a wheelchair cannot do the one-on-one consultations”, forcing the lecturer to utilise another space such as a lecture venue to accommodate the student during an individual consultation.

Based on these experiences, it is apparent that more progress in terms of providing appropriate accommodations and adjustments to university infrastructure needs to be prioritised. This is necessary to ensure that students with disabilities can access lecture rooms and other infrastructure to prevent marginalisation or exclusion from a space that claims to be inclusive of students with disabilities.

4.2.3 Lack of Training and Uncertainty

Another subtheme that emerged from the experiences of the participants was a lack of training on inclusive education and a subsequent experience of uncertainty in providing inclusive education for students with disabilities. Most of the participants shared that they had not received any formal training on inclusive education prior to becoming a lecturer (n=6). The participants had either relied on their teaching qualifications (n=4) or on other qualifications and personal experience of teaching students with disabilities to inform their teaching methods and assessment practices (n=2).

In instances where participants received training in the form of a qualification to become an educator, they asserted that it prepared them to teach students but not students who are differently abled, as evident in the following statement from Participant 1: “My training was not for students’ abilities, it was just on how to teach.” Similarly, another participant expressed:

My training did not include how to teach students who are different or who are differently abled, or who are disabled. You know, when you're teaching, you'll say, "As you can see..." but not all of them can see right? So now the language that you use, you have to be careful of the language that you use, because we have to accommodate that there's students or there are students in class, who are, who are actually blind and who cannot see. And also, it means that for me, especially I had to take my own initiative to sit down with a student and find out how I can help them because I'm not trained on how to teach students who are blind. I'm not trained in terms of the language that I have to use. So, I become careless, or I just use the normal language I use, like, "As you can see in the slide" —you know, things that then it's not visible for them (Participant 3).

Based on the experiences of some of the participants, it appeared that there was also a lack of training on inclusive education provided by the UKZN. One participant expressed, "The university just recruits students and expect lecturers to do some magic to somehow accommodate them without any preparation whatsoever" (Participant 1). This participant further reflected on their experience as a lecturer at the UKZN and highlighted the lack of training provided by this institution in the following extract:

There was no particular training, preparation, umm, any tuition of—I don't know what to call it, workshops on anything that is helping the people teaching, to be able to work with students with disabilities and accommodate the various kinds of disabilities that they might present with, and how to then maybe some kind of training or workshopping to help people structure their lectures in order to suit different types of disabilities. We've never had that (Participant 1).

In addition, there also appeared to be a lack of training provided to lecturers on the functions and services provided by the DSU. One participant added that there was a “lack of training, in that there's no formal process of us sitting with the disability unit and understanding how they work” (Participant 4).

Among the participants who were interviewed, very few had received training from UKZN that assisted them in working with students with disabilities (n=2). More specifically, the training they received was provided by the DSU. One participant acknowledged that “the training is there, it's often, you know, we are reminded all the time, but unfortunately not everybody attends these things” (Participant 5). Poor attendance at institutional training by lecturers may be attributed to various reasons. In particular, resistance towards attending training appeared to be a common underlying insinuation that was elicited from some of the participants and was attributed to time constraints posed by the burden of completing other administrative functions within the institution. One participant proposed that workshops and training “will be met with a lot of resistance from staff because already, you expect people to do so much in terms of preparing lectures” (Participant 1). Similarly, another participant stated, “A lot of academics just don't want to dabble with that. They feel they already have too much to deal with” (Participant 5).

Overall, a lack of training on inclusive education appeared to produce implications for participants as it caused confusion and uncertainty regarding the provision of support for diverse student populations. One participant stated, “I'm a little bit unclear around what support I can offer beyond just a disability” (Participant 4). A similar experience of uncertainty concerning teaching students with disabilities was shared by another participant who maintained, “You don't know whether what you're doing is correct” (Participant 1). Moreover, this participant also experienced uncertainty in their interaction with students with disabilities in the lecture room: “It's as if I'm always juggling between not wanting them to

feel like they're getting picked on because of their disability, but at the same time, I want to engage with them, but I can't engage, because I don't know” (Participant 1). Subsequently, a lack of training on inclusive education was a challenge as it produced feelings of uncertainty among participants.

4.2.4 Challenges with Services Provided by the DSU

Some lecturers (n=3) also shared similar sentiments regarding challenging experiences with services provided by the DSU during their course of teaching and assessing students with disabilities. In particular, two of these participants reported on the challenge of losing control of assessments during the process of administering assessments by the DSU. One participant raised their concern regarding this challenge when collaborating with the DSU:

We're very much expected to just hand over the structure or the processes around assessment to this [disability support] unit that manages the process. You know, I think there have been some concerns around that. Like, how do the transcripts—are they safe when they move from this to this discipline to this central unit? How are they handled there? I know a few of us have had some concerns about that (Participant 2).

In agreement, another participant described their concern and subsequent frustration with the process of releasing the assessment paper beforehand to the DSU, with a particular focus on the process of converting assessment papers to Braille. This participant described their views as follows:

It becomes a nightmare of a thing to control. Because we don't know who's doing this Braille thing. So, there's always this thing of not knowing who exactly is responsible

for taking exam material or, or test material to be Brailled or converted to Braille (Participant 1).

Moreover, another difficulty faced by participants was a lack of communication and engagement from DSU regarding teaching and assessment-related matters: “I do find that the disability unit is a bit slow in their responses to, for example if I needed to ask a question, if I needed to find information, you don't—unless you can get a hold of them on the phone, the response via email is not all that great” (Participant 8). Another participant experienced a lack of communication from the DSU regarding the assessment processes:

You then say if there's somebody who's writing in the Disability Unit, please can they inform me as the lecturer way ahead of time so that I can make preparations for the papers to be sent there at the time of the assessment. And nobody would come through, nobody would say that. The minute the test has been written at the SU or OMSH [assessment venues], then you suddenly get a strange person coming to say that “I'm from disability unit, I've come to take papers for the students with a disability” (Participant 1).

The experiences of these participants, therefore, reflect various challenges with services provided by the DSU, including a loss of control of assessments and a lack of communication from DSU staff.

4.3 Theme 3: Positive Collaboration in Teaching and Assessment

Positive collaboration between lecturers and students with disabilities and the DSU emerged as another core theme from the experiences of participants. More specifically, the subtheme of expressed gratitude emerged from the experiences of participants who collaborated with students with disabilities during teaching and learning. In addition, the

subtheme of lecturers being supported by the DSU emerged from the experiences of participants that collaborated with the DSU during teaching and assessment.

4.3.1 Expressed Gratitude from Students with Disabilities

The subtheme of gratitude which was expressed by students with disabilities towards some participants (n=3) during teaching and learning underpinned their experiences of positively collaborating and engaging with this group of students. This finding indicated that some students with disabilities expressed gratitude and appreciation towards lecturers when they were acknowledged and supported in the lecture room. This is evident in the following experience of one participant: “My experience has been that students who feel included or who feel that their needs are prioritized, they are grateful” (Participant 7). This participant further explained that these experiences of gratitude may emanate from previous experiences of intolerance from lecturers towards students with disabilities:

They are also quite appreciative of the offering of support and attention that they get, which I, as I've learned over the years, is also as a result of maybe feeling like other lecturers or other departments are intolerant or impatient with them. So, when they just get the very basic services and support that they are entitled to, it almost seems as if they have quite a bit of gratitude (Participant 7).

Moreover, some students with a disability may feel forgotten and disregarded when lecturers fail to acknowledge and engage with them during their teaching practices. One participant discussed their experience in which they verbally acknowledged, welcomed, and engaged a deaf student and their sign language interpreter during a lecture to sensitise the other students to variation within the lecture room. The following extract illustrates the impact of this interaction on that particular student:

What was really moving was after the lecture when she came to me and she said via the translator, “You are the first lecturer to have actually named it—like acknowledged me”, she said, all the other lecturers just pretended she wasn't even there. Like wasn't happening. And she's like, “You made—you made it reality, you like named it and you—you engaged with me and I'm extremely grateful for that” (Participant 2).

Another experience of gratitude emerged when one participant prioritised individual consultations and developed personal relationships with each of the students who had a disability in their class. In turn, this participant further stated, “The academic relationship, I think was sound, because I saw it as a challenge. And I believe I accommodated that challenge. And I know they appreciate it because I got letters from all of them saying so” (Participant 6).

Overall, these findings suggest that students with disabilities were appreciative when they received acknowledgement and support from lecturers. The gratitude that was expressed by students with disabilities toward these participants appeared to be a motivating factor for participants during teaching and learning.

4.3.2 Support from the DSU

The findings also highlighted the positive encounters that several of the participants had experienced when collaborating with the DSU. In particular, these participants (n=4) felt supported in their teaching and assessment practices when guided and informed by the DSU. Based on their experiences, there appeared to be considerable progress in terms of the support services and information offered to lecturers from the DSU since its implementation at the Howard College campus. More specifically, the support services offered by the DSU to academic staff and students with disabilities appeared to be more progressive in recent years.

The following participant who had taught at this institution for 22 years reflected on this advancement in the following account:

When I first started at the university there was no support and individual lecturers would, for example, be responsible for examining a student who, for example, might be blind or differently sighted. In the more recent past, the Disability Unit on campus has really stepped in to assist and provide the kinds of resources needed. For example, turning a paper into brail, or super sizing a paper or even transcribing an answer. This is really important as the unit also offers a place of comfort and safety for the students (Participant 2).

Another participant who had been at the institution for 19 years shared similar sentiments:

In the last few years, there's been a very strong move... I would say in the last five years, I've become more in tune with what are the needs. There was very little, there was no training actually, like I said, in the beginning, you didn't even know who was disabled in your class, if you couldn't see the physical disability, you didn't know (Participant 5).

Moreover, a participant who started working at the institution shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in 2020 stated, "I've been interacting with students and the Disability Support Unit virtually since then. So, my experience with working with students who have different disabilities has been significantly supported by the Disability Support Unit" (Participant 7). This reflection further emphasises the progress of the DSU in providing support to academic staff through online teaching and learning. Participant 7 specified the type of support they had received from the DSU throughout their duration of online teaching and learning:

My experience with working with students who have disabilities has been good because also of the support that I've been given by the Disability Support Unit, the information that they gave us at the beginning of the year is quite empowering. They give us ideas on how we can be more inclusive with delivering content, what services they have, translation services into Braille, what interpreters we have, sign language interpreters that we can access, etc. So, they've made my experiences of working with students with disabilities quite seamless because they've been so generous with information and yeah, with just enlightening me as an able-bodied person.

In addition to teaching and learning, the DSU also reportedly provided support to lecturers for assessments by informing lecturers of the type of assessment concessions required by a student with a disability. One participant stated, “When it comes to the actual test, we are very guided by the Disability Unit in terms of what extra provisions are given” (Participant 5).

Upon further discussion on the extent of the participants' engagement with the DSU, it appeared that positive experiences emerged when the participants took initiative to collaborate with the DSU. One participant stated, “It's Disability Unit for me that I've worked closely with and tried to be involved in many other things that they do so that I get to understand better the struggles of disabled students and also how I can improve my own teaching as a lecturer” (Participant 3). Similarly, another participant added, “We've made ourselves very much part of the Disability Unit... And if I may say so, quite a few of us in our program enjoy a good relationship with the unit” (Participant 5).

The various experiences provided by these participants reflect the benefits that may emerge when lecturers collaborate with the DSU. More significantly, the benefits of collaboration extend beyond the lecture room. Lecturers may not only feel supported in their experiences of interacting with students with disabilities, but a commitment to collaboration

may also promote harmonious interpersonal relationships between academic staff and the DSU staff.

4.4 Theme 4: Inclusive Pedagogy

The use of inclusive pedagogy to accommodate and assist students with disabilities during teaching and assessment practices emerged as another core theme. More specifically, the subthemes of individual consultations and disability awareness and sensitisation within the lecture room emerged from the findings as measures that were utilised by the participants to accommodate and assist students with disabilities in the teaching and learning environment.

4.4.1 Individual Consultations

Individual or one-on-one consultations between lecturers and students with disabilities were an inclusive measure utilised by all participants (n=8). This measure was used to identify reasonable academic accommodations and provide support for students with disabilities during teaching and assessment. Some participants prioritised these consultations with students from the onset of the academic year. This assisted in the identification of their students with a disability, and to understand the nature of their disability and the associated challenges they presented with during teaching and assessment. Prioritising individual consultations and initiating contact with students with disabilities was important as one participant stated, “I realize you have to reach out, they won't reach out to you otherwise” further asserting, “I make it my duty now as a responsibility to reach out to the students once I have their information. And I try to engage with them” (Participant 5).

One-on-one interactions with students with disabilities proved beneficial in instances where a student experienced difficulty in understanding the content of a lecture. Upon inquiry into whether the participants used differentiated methods of instruction in a lecture, one

participant responded, “Not different techniques, more like sitting with him in my office and explaining and discussing and sort of teaching more on a one-to-one basis” (Participant 8).

Moreover, individual consultations assisted some participants in establishing a student-lecturer relationship. For one participant, this proved to be the most useful measure to accommodate students: “The thing that worked the best for me was like establishing a relationship with the students” (Participant 2). Additionally, engaging with students during individual consultations assisted some participants to establish rapport with their students as one participant stated, “I get to know the students personally. And you know, and in doing so we establish rapport almost, you know, a teacher-student relationship” (Participant 5). Another participant found that once they had established and built rapport with the student, it resulted in increased confidence for both the participant and the student with a disability:

It actually builds confidence. That's the impact I found, that once you build that rapport with them, you have that one-on-one, you show that you care, you understand their struggle, you try and figure out what are their needs, and see how you can actually cater for their needs. And it gets easier for them as well to come to you (Participant 3).

Individual consultations between the participants and the students with disabilities who were enrolled in their classes appeared to have been an effective and mutually beneficial measure to promote inclusivity during teaching and assessment.

4.4.2 Disability Awareness and Sensitization within the Lecture Room

The promotion of disability awareness and the sensitisation of both lecturers and students towards disability emerged as another component of inclusive pedagogy in the lecture room. At the individual level, sensitization and awareness appeared important among lecturers. Based on their experiences, it appeared that a useful starting point may be for

lecturers to become aware of the heterogenous student population during the preparation phase of teaching. When preparing for lectures and providing academic accommodations, one participant stated, “I just become sensitive or conscious to the variety of people that are in my, in my classroom” (Participant 2). Similarly, another participant added, “The starting point is, which a lot of lecturers do not do, is to first get to know the student body, you know, the composition of the student body, particularly to the students with disabilities, because you cannot use an umbrella term and say, “I've got disabled students in my classroom.” They all have their own individual disabilities, diverse disabilities that require special accommodation” (Participant 5).

The data also indicated that sensitisation and awareness of disability may benefit both lecturers and students with disabilities. This is reflected in the following extract provided by one participant:

For me having that awareness as a lecturer, that there's someone in class who needs special attention does bring about positive impact on a student and it also gives you confidence as a lecturer that you are actually catering for their needs. So, keep on checking if things are still fine, if whatever you're doing is okay, and so forth. So, it becomes a mutual benefit. And it's a mutual impact because you'll also learn, okay, oh, this is what has happened... okay, this is how now I need to change... So, it becomes a learning curve for you as well. But for you to be able to— to learn, you also have to open up yourself to be sensitized about disability and be having that awareness (Participant 3).

Moreover, sensitisation towards diversity and disability awareness was also important among the student body. This was illustrated in the experiences of several participants (n=3) who sought to sensitise all students within the lecture room towards the needs and

accommodations of students with disabilities. Participant 2 shared their experience of their initial encounter with the first deaf student to have graduated from the UKZN. In this encounter, other students in the lecture room were “absolutely enthralled by what they [were] seeing, which was such evidence of how absolutely incredibly foreign this was.” This encounter further encouraged this participant to use that opportunity to educate the class on diversity and inclusivity. This is maintained in the following extract:

I stopped the class, and I took a risk and I just said, “Okay everyone, I just want to pause...” and I turned to the student, and I said, “Welcome to this course. I'm now aware that you are a deaf student, and this is your sign language interpreter. I just want to welcome you. And I'd like to just explain to the class that this is what's happening here, this is sign language. It feels a bit foreign and unusual for you guys. But this is a good example of variation. And—and the need for inclusive spaces” (Participant 2).

In addition to educating the class on inclusion, other participants also focused on educating the class on the various types of disabilities and the needs of each student with a disability. One participant stated, “I encouraged the class to be more inclusive of our students. So, I'd say you know, “Please allow student X to sit in the front because he has a problem seeing the board from the back”. So also, part of an education for our students as well, because they don't know what the impairments are, for example, of a student who has albinism” (Participant 5). Furthermore, educating students on issues that pertained to blindness was also necessitated by this participant as they stated, “Otherwise, the students just barge out. They don't care that there's a completely blind student next to them, they don't care, they'll walk over them, and they'll go out. So, we've also had to make them aware of

these things, because they don't know there's a blind student sitting next to them, for example” (Participant 5).

During teaching and learning, another participant emphasised the importance of sensitising students to their peers with disabilities and how best they can accommodate them during group activities. This is illustrated in the following account:

You also need to sensitize the class to what is happening, so that students can also have an understanding of the person that they are with in class. So that when you are doing group discussions, maybe you separate students into a group and then the group that is going to have that person who is blind, then the student also who are in that particular group will have to have an understanding as to how to have the group discussion (Participant 3).

It was further important for students to be educated on the appropriate and politically correct language to employ when engaging in matters of diversity and disability. One participant explained:

We've also had to use the sort of politically correct terminology with the students. Because I had someone saying to me, I remember, oh gosh in 2018, “We got a deaf and dumb student in our class” because they were so taken aback that there was a sign language interpreter (Participant 5).

The experiences elicited by these participants indicate the ongoing need for lecturers to educate their students on various types of disabilities and the issues that pertain to each disability. While it should be noted that the UKZN has made considerable progress in terms of inclusion and promoting diversity, ongoing progress to achieve an inclusive institution is required. This is reflected in the following statement from Participant 3: “There's a lot of

sensitization and awareness that needs to be done. So that we can realize the inclusivity and also not to treat them as other, but to treat them the same as us.”

4.5 Theme 5: Recommendations to Promote Inclusivity

Some recommendations to promote inclusivity during teaching and assessment emerged from the participants’ reflections on their experiences. More specifically, the subthemes of inclusion strategies in teaching and assessment in addition to collaboration and shared responsibility among stakeholders were recommended to promote inclusion during teaching and assessment. In turn, these recommendations may improve the quality of the learning experiences of students with physical disabilities.

4.5.1 Inclusion Strategies in Teaching and Assessment

Various inclusion strategies were recommended by the participants based on their experiences in teaching and assessing students with physical disabilities. In particular, an inclusive measure utilised by all participants (n=8) that proved to be the most beneficial and successful for both stakeholders was individual consultations between lecturers and students with disabilities. From the outset, it appeared that individual consultations allowed the participants to establish a relationship with the students, identify reasonable academic accommodations, and provide support during teaching and assessment. One participant stated, “I think one of the ways in mitigating the challenges is to first know, who the students are, what their disabilities are, or what their challenges are. And then I try as far as possible to get them to consult on one-on-one basis as well” (Participant 5).

Moreover, it appeared useful to establish a relationship with the students outside of the lecture room and engage with them through a communication platform. This is voiced in the following account provided by one participant:

I'll have them on a WhatsApp group. And I'll say, “Look student, this test is coming up, please let me know, what are your challenges?” So, yeah, so those kinds of

provisions we put in place, and I find it works well, because then within that group, they're comfortable to speak to me about the challenges (Participant 5).

Similarly, another participant reflected on the usefulness of having a communication platform for students to voice their challenges during teaching and learning: "When it came to issues of requiring additional feedback, or dealing with conceptual issues that were problematic, I had hotlines to all of these students so that they could contact me whenever they wanted" (Participant 6). Subsequently, establishing a relationship and promoting contact between a student with a disability and a lecturer through a communication platform was recommended.

In addition, the use of assistive devices and technology was also recommended by some participants as an inclusion strategy in teaching and assessment. Based on the experiences of these participants, it appeared that the university had insufficient assistive devices and technology. One participant stated, "I really do feel that UKZN needs to, to invest in, in the proper equipment in terms of facilitating the students" (Participant 8). Similarly, another participant argued, "We need the university to take that [Disability Unit] seriously. And, and stop, stop giving the false impression that it's actually accommodated for. I mean, there's hardly any software" (Participant 6). In addition, Participant 5 stated, "My suggestion would be that we need to explore more of these devices that will, I think, will make the teaching and learning process far easier for these students."

In terms of teaching practices, other recommendations that were identified in which technology may assist students with disabilities during lectures included "the technology to change lectures and audios into transcripts, because they are very useful for students" (Participant 2). In addition, another participant added, "What we've also done is that for every lecture that we have, we have both a zoom recording that we upload, and an audio that students listen to" (Participant 7). Audio and video recordings as well as the conversion of

these recordings into transcripts, therefore, appeared to be a useful strategy during teaching to accommodate students with disabilities.

In terms of assessment practices, participants reflected on their experience of students with disabilities being disadvantaged due to writing in a separate venue, such as the DSU. As a result, one participant explained that they ensure their availability during the assessment for students with disabilities to be supported and have an opportunity to raise questions:

I make myself available even during the exam... once I leave the main venue, I'll drive down to the Disability Unit and I can unpack it with the student. So, I'm very cognizant about you know, the disadvantages that come when they write outside of the main venue (Participant 5).

In terms of teaching and assessment practices as a whole, one participant critically reflected on the current practices at the university by asking, "What do the students want? How much of it is based on the—and the practices at our university are based on what students who experience differences want? Or would prefer?" (Participant 2). Similarly, another participant suggested that lecturers should consult with students with disabilities in their class to identify the relevant and appropriate academic accommodations for each student and their different needs: "A possible solution would also be to ask the students themselves, what would work best for them?" (Participant 8).

While various strategies were recommended to promote inclusivity during teaching and assessment, progress in terms of developing and implementing inclusive pedagogy is required to ensure that the university does not further marginalise its students with disabilities. This is expressed in the following reflection from one participant: "We need to develop various ways of assessment or teaching tools that could actually equip lecturers in

delivering their content or their module in a way that does not exclude disabled students who already feel excluded in the society” (Participant 3).

4.5.2 Collaboration and Shared Responsibility among Stakeholders

Collaboration and shared responsibility among stakeholders in the university was also a common subtheme that emerged from the recommendations of some participants (n=5) to promote inclusivity. One participant responded by explaining that academic accommodations for students with disabilities can occur across various levels: “One is, what can I do? The other is what can the disability office do? And the third is what can the university do?” (Participant 6). Participant 6 further explained the need to address inclusion among various stakeholders as “lecturers can't do everything. They've got lots of responsibility and no authority.”

Many of the participants recommended that collaboration occurs between lecturers and students with disabilities. One participant recommended having an “opportunity to meet and greet our students in advance of the academic program”, suggesting that collaboration between lecturers and students with disabilities occurs from the onset of the academic year (Participant 2). Participant 2 further emphasised the need to “bring the lecturers and the students together to hear their voices.” Moreover, another participant explained that the DSU may facilitate this process by providing a platform for students with disabilities and lecturers to engage in a dialogue and share their experiences, as evident in the following extract:

I feel that disability unit falls directly under the teaching and learning committee of all schools, in colleges. And that's the platform where experiences of students can be shared, the difficulties and challenges that students are facing can be shared and also the difficulties that the lecturers are facing in dealing with the challenges that they face in teaching students who are disabled can actually be shared so that we can have policies that are practical, that really deal with real life as situations of disabled

students and real life challenges of lecturers that are coming across at hand, that can be integrated in all the schools (Participant 3).

In addition, some participants recommended that the university prioritise the provision of workshops and training on disability and inclusive education for all staff members. One participant asserted, “The university needs to, to put disability training as a core requirement for all staff” (Participant 6). Similarly, another participant explained:

I really do think training should be given to, to staff at UKZN simply because UKZN markets itself as a university of excellence and a university also of transformation. They don't just mean transformation in terms of decoloniality or of transformative—transforming in terms of racial equity, but they also mean in terms of inclusivity. And if they're going to bring students in and accept students into the university who do have all of these disabilities, I think they also do need to provide workshops and training. I think that's really important (Participant 8).

In response to this issue, one participant suggested that the DSU collaborate with staff to facilitate staff training:

It should be mandatory that academic staff have training in accommodating or managing students with disability. This can be enacted by the Disability Unit, per se. Also, in terms of getting some idea as to what shifts, or changes can be implemented in relation to how the course is disseminated and assessed (Participant 4).

However, a contrasting view was presented by one participant who reflected on their experience of collaborating with the DSU. Based on their experience, this participant argued that “working closely with the Disability Unit is a must. And that has been something that comes across very strongly when the Disability Unit has its meetings and its training, that

lecturers do not reach out and do not get to know what the needs of the students are”

(Participant 5). This participant further argued that collaboration with the DSU is important for lecturers, especially lecturers within the College of Humanities:

In the humanities, we house the highest population of students with disabilities. And so, I think it's absolutely crucial that you get onto the database, find out who's in your class, what the disability is, and then also skill or reskill yourself on how best to accommodate these students and their needs (Participant 5).

In addition, some lecturers recommended that more important topics be addressed during the training provided by the DSU. This is voiced by one of the participants:

I would welcome genuine, helpful, useful workshops and training, that that doesn't just tell you superficially things you know, but actually interrogate what you're doing, what you could be doing, what you might be missing, you know what I mean? I think there's, there should be a responsibility that goes more than just what one lecturer decides or not decides to do” (Participant 6).

More specifically, another participant recommended that the training focus on topics such as “social justice approaches to education” and “critical pedagogy” (Participant 2). Participant 2 further highlighted that social justice training is essential for all stakeholders to address within the university, including academic staff and students: “I think we need to be quite careful of assuming just because a person's a lecturer or an academic—they need social justice training as much as the students do, you know, this should be something we all have to address.” Similarly, another participant emphasised that “lecturers have responsibilities. It is not totally the responsibility of the disability office” (Participant 6).

Moreover, collaboration and shared responsibility among all stakeholders are arguably crucial to ensure that the university is inherently inclusive. One participant felt that

the university was not inclusive in terms of addressing disability, but it was rather viewed as an additional component: “I think the way it's handled at university often, I don't know, it's, I don't feel like it's become a very inclusive system. It feels like an add on” (Participant 2). This participant further explained that this can also be frustrating for lecturers and a difficult experience for students with disabilities:

In a system where lecturers are feeling so overwhelmed already that when it's just thrown at you last minute, it is frustrating. You know, but like if it was integrated, and the policy was made clear, and everything was put in place, this would just run so much more smoothly and become like an accepted part of our job and our responsibility. Not just crisis management. You know how hard it is for the student to be thrust into that kind of position? (Participant 2)

In response to this issue, one participant asserted that the university should be “structured in a way that is inherently inclusive without having inclusivity be an add-on or an afterthought” (Participant 7). Similarly, another participant emphasised that the “Disability Unit should not be seen as a stand-alone unit” (Participant 3). Instead, it was argued that university staff should work collaboratively to ensure that the university is “holistically inclusive without having a disability unit that is run as an ancillary or an addition” (Participant 7). Moreover, inclusive practices should be normalised instead of being “something that we have to tag on” and inclusive education should be “considered as normal as needing fresh air in a room, a door to exit from, or an emergency exit in case there's a fire” (Participant 2).

Conclusively, collaboration and shared responsibility among all stakeholders are recommended and arguably crucial for the institution to be deemed inherently inclusive of all students with diverse needs.

4.6 Summary

Five themes and subsequent subthemes that emerged during the data analysis stage were identified and discussed in this chapter. The first theme identified in this chapter was a deficit view which prevailed as the predominant understanding of disability among participants. The second theme was centred on the challenges experienced by participants in teaching and assessment practices, while the third theme focused on the impact of positive collaboration between the participants and students with disabilities and the DSU during teaching and learning. The fourth theme that was identified explored the participants' use of inclusive pedagogy. Lastly, the fifth theme emerged from the participants' recommendations to improve the quality of the learning experience of students with disabilities and promote inclusive practices in the institution. The findings from the data that emerged during data analysis therefore appeared to answer the research questions. A discussion of these findings in relation to the relevant and existing literature is provided in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The experiences of lecturers in teaching and assessing students with physical disabilities in HEIs appeared to be understudied in South Africa. This study focused on a sample of lecturers at one campus within a South African HEI and explored their experiences of teaching and assessing students with physical disabilities. The analysis of each interview produced interesting findings which appeared to answer the relevant research questions. The findings suggested that the participants understood disability according to a deficit view of disability (RQ1) and that both positive and challenging experiences emerged across the board when teaching and assessing students with physical disabilities at the UKZN (RQ2). The findings also indicated that the participants utilised inclusive pedagogy to accommodate and assist students with disabilities in teaching and assessment (RQ3). Inclusion strategies and collaboration and shared responsibility among stakeholders emerged as the main recommendations based on the experiences of the participants (RQ4).

5.1 A Deficit View of Disability

Concerning the first research question, the findings revealed that almost all of the participants understood the term ‘disability’ as an individual deficit, limitation, or impairment in the human body. A core theme that subsequently emerged from their understanding was a deficit view of disability. This finding is congruent with existing literature which maintains that a deficit view is a dominant way of thinking in higher education when understanding student difficulties (Smit, 2012).

In existing research studies, a deficit view, which may also be referred to in the literature as *deficit thinking*, has been conceptualised and defined in various ways. However, the most common conceptualisation and definition of deficit thinking engaged in educational literature adopts a perspective of victim blaming in which students’ educational failures, challenges, or inadequacies are primarily attributed to individual, family, or community traits

which can be fixed or remediated (Ford, 2014; McKay & Devlin, 2016; Reed, 2020; Smit, 2012). Moreover, a deficit view maintains that the student is required to adjust to “the dominant norms, values, and conventions”, states Mampaey and Huisman (2022, p.1234). Accordingly, this perspective follows the medical model of disability which views disability as an individual deficit or limitation that can be cured, remediated, or accommodated (Baglieri et al., 2011; Hedlund, 2009; Mole, 2013).

Moreover, the findings revealed that the participants’ understanding of disability did not include the interaction between health conditions and contextual factors such as personal and environmental factors that may collectively produce challenges and negative consequences for students with disabilities. In the educational context and aligned with the theory of Differentiated Instruction, disability ought not to be viewed as a problem inherent in the student. It is important to acknowledge that differences in students’ abilities can arise from pedagogical practices and the interactional relationship between the educator and student (Broderick et al., 2005). From a deficit perspective, educators tend to apply traditional teaching practices which typically utilise a universal approach (Tomlinson et al., 2003). In turn, these practices may expose and remediate deficits, putting students at risk of continuous academic failure (Levine, 2003).

Consequently, a deficit mindset may also result in educators avoiding any responsibility for providing sufficient support and academic accommodations to students with disabilities (Reed, 2020). Similarly, other studies have demonstrated a connection between deficit thinking and minority groups being held responsible for their unequal position and challenges (McKay & Devlin, 2016). As a result, some scholars have argued that deficit thinking disregards the existence of systemic or structural factors including policies and practices within educational contexts that may cause and perpetuate inequalities (Davis & Museus, 2019; Smit, 2012).

Furthermore, this approach has been critiqued in literature for defining an individual or group primarily in terms of their perceived deficiencies, limitations, and impairments (Dinishak, 2016). In the context of higher education, this approach is arguably problematic as it alienates students from higher education and perpetuates stereotypes in the minds of educators, policymakers, as well as students (Smit, 2012). In addition, Davis and Museums (2019) argue that a deficit view prevents educators and policymakers from addressing the root causes of the challenges that marginalised groups may experience. Therefore, a deficit view is regarded as a predominant challenge to diminish ongoing disparities in Western education (Mampaey & Huisman, 2022).

Despite ongoing critiques, research indicates that the power and influence of deficit thinking in teaching and learning has not decreased, suggesting the resilience of deficit views in educational settings (Dudley-Marling, 2015). While there has been a shift in understanding disability according to the medical model to understanding it within the social model in South African higher education, Ndlovu and Walton (2016) highlight that an individual and deficit understanding in South African HEIs predominates. The resilience of a deficit view in higher education may explain the prevalence of this perspective and understanding of disability among lecturers as reflected in the findings.

Therefore, a change in thinking in higher education is required to suitably respond to a diverse student body (Smit, 2012). In agreement, Dinishak (2016) argues for the contestation of deficit thinking and an ongoing reflection on the deficit view to address problematic deficit thinking in educational contexts. Although Dudley-Marling (2015) asserts that confronting the deficit-based narrative in education is challenging, Ndlovu and Walton (2016) argue that deconstructing the deficit view of understanding disability is crucial. HEIs are urged to continuously engage with discriminatory and exclusionary narratives and practices that are pervasive in these institutions (Ndlovu & Walton, 2016).

5.2 Challenges in Teaching and Assessment

One of the core findings of this study suggests that the participants at this HEI were somehow restricted in adequately supporting students with physical disabilities due to various challenges. These challenges related mainly to student non-disclosure of disabilities, physical access barriers, insufficient training and uncertainty among lecturers, and challenges with services provided by the DSU. Some participants reported difficulties with overcoming the challenges they faced when teaching and assessing students with disabilities. However, other participants indicated the ability to overcome similar challenges. An unexpected finding was that many of these challenges were experienced by participants regardless of teaching in a face-to-face or online learning setting and their number of years in practice at this institution. These challenges appeared to stem from the shortcomings of various stakeholders involved within the institution.

5.2.1 *Student Non-disclosure of Disability*

The issue of non-disclosure became a problematic and frustrating feature of supporting students with disabilities, particularly during teaching (Ashcroft & Lutfiyya, 2013; Kendall, 2018). Interestingly, the experiences of lecturers revealed that students tended to predominantly disclose their disability for assessment purposes when academic accommodations and concessions were required. Similarly, Barnard-Brak et al. (2010) found that some students minimised their disability status in engagements with lecturers and only disclosed their disability to receive academic accommodations in the lecture room.

In HEIs around the world, students are generally expected to disclose their disability to the institution before the academic year commences so that academic staff and the relevant disability service offices can make reasonable academic accommodations and support them (Grimes et al., 2019; Jacklin, 2011). In agreement, Majoko (2018) found that initial disclosure from the onset of the academic year enabled lecturers to support the individual

learning needs of their students through the adaptation of the academic environment, teaching and assessment methods, and curriculum. Conversely, a reluctance to disclose can create difficulties for lecturers to provide individualised support (Kendall, 2016), as demonstrated in the findings of this study. Therefore, Jacklin (2011) maintains that initial disclosure should be encouraged by HEIs.

Despite the advantages of the disclosure, students are not obligated to disclose this information as it is an individual decision (Carey, 2012), and some students choose not to disclose it for various reasons. In relation to the findings of this study, reasons for non-disclosure included a desire by students with disabilities to be accepted as students without disabilities, as well as concerns about being treated differently from their peers without disabilities, a view which is supported by Hargreaves et al. (2014).

Another possible reason for non-disclosure was attributed to concerns about safety and discomfort in the learning environment. Smith et al. (2021) identified a correlation between a lack of opportunities to privately disclose to staff and increased discomfort, as well as a link between negative peer interactions following disclosure and increased discomfort. Rankin et al. (2010) maintain that an environment characterised by trust, honesty, and openness is required to facilitate disclosure and reduce harm to students with disabilities. Similar features were evident in other areas of disability studies. For example, a study that focused on facilitating disability disclosure among employees in the workplace found that building trust, eliminating stigma and prejudices, and having effective communication skills created a comfortable and safe space for employees to disclose their disabilities (Lindsay et al., 2020).

Moreover, stigmatisation and stereotypes were also suggested by participants as a reason for non-disclosure. Previous studies revealed that students do not disclose their disability before admission to avoid stigmatization and discrimination associated with

disabilities, and the perceived impact of negative attitudes on their acceptance into the institution (Grimes et al., 2020; Majoko, 2018; Redpath et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that the issue of non-disclosure was not necessarily a shortcoming on behalf of the students. Instead, it could be viewed as a shortcoming of the institution and its key stakeholders who are responsible for creating a safe and supportive space for these students to come forward and disclose. Therefore, the findings suggest that it should be imperative for the university to create an inclusive and safe space for students to disclose their disabilities. However, it is also important to note that irrespective of the concerns raised by lecturers regarding student non-disclosure, Couzens et al. (2015) maintain that the disclosure of any disability is an individual decision.

5.2.2 Physical Accessibility Barriers

The inaccessible infrastructure at the institution was identified in the findings as another challenging experience for most of the participants. In particular, the participants in this study explained that not all lecture venues had been designed or adapted to accommodate students with physical disabilities, particularly students using wheelchairs. This finding was not surprising as a recent systematic review of the relevant literature confirmed that infrastructural barriers are a predominant type of access barriers for students with disabilities (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). Fernández-Batanero et al. acknowledge that this may be due to most university spaces consisting of old infrastructure and buildings which have not been designed or adapted to meet the needs of students with disabilities, resulting in mobility challenges when navigating university spaces. The participants in the present study further explained that the issue of inaccessible venues and large class sizes impacted the allocation of lecture venues which became a frustrating experience for these participants who struggled to find venues that could accommodate the whole class. Kendall (2017) identified similar feelings of frustration among lecturers caused by the environment as they reportedly felt they

were not meeting the needs of students due to physical accessibility issues being outside of their control.

In addition, the design and layout of the lecture rooms on the Howard College campus posed difficulties for student-lecturer engagement during lectures. These participants reported reduced engagement, poor attendance, and further exclusion of these students as a result of the layout and organisation of lecture venues which required these students to be seated separately from their peers. Similarly, Moriña and Orozco (2021) found that students feel misrepresented and excluded in the lecture room in comparison to their peers due to seating arrangements.

Concerns regarding the safety of students with physical disabilities accessing university infrastructure were also raised by these participants. This included concerns regarding the height of staircases inside lecture venues and other buildings. Correspondingly, Moriña and Morgado (2018) found that the organisation and layout of structures and spaces within the institution, namely stairs inside lecture venues were an obstacle for these students.

In the instance where university spaces had been modified to accommodate students with physical disabilities, participants regarded these structures as inappropriate and often inaccessible, posing further safety risks for these students. This included the inappropriate design of ramps for wheelchair users and elevators that did not work. Risk and safety concerns regarding infrastructure have been echoed by students in other studies (Braun & Naami, 2021). Additionally, recent research suggests that navigating around broken elevators is not a new experience for students with disabilities in other South African universities (Hlengwa & Masuku, 2022). The findings of this study further suggest that these students are often assisted by lecturers and their peers out of goodwill when circumventing these physical barriers. Similarly, Lord and Stein (2018) found that students were exclusively dependent on

the kindness and helpfulness of others to mediate accessibility issues inside and outside of university buildings.

Moreover, the findings suggest that lecturers' offices are also inaccessible spaces for these students who require individual consultations with lecturers (Mutanga, 2018). Interestingly, the findings in this study suggest that despite this challenge, the participants demonstrated a willingness to arrange alternative consultation venues that were accessible to these students. This contrasts with the findings in other studies which indicated that some lecturers in other African universities either made little effort to organise alternative consultation venues (Mutanga, 2018) or demonstrated an unwillingness to accommodate students who experienced difficulty in accessing their offices (Braun & Naami, 2021).

It appears that lecturers at the UKZN demonstrate empathy and sensitivity toward mediating physical accessibility issues for students with disabilities. However, their experiences confirm that this is an ongoing challenge that promotes exclusion, restricts the opportunities and rights of people with disabilities, and ultimately prevents students from receiving a quality education (Moriña & Orozco, 2021). These findings were further corroborated by the voices of students with disabilities in another study conducted at the UKZN (Singh, 2017). Therefore, it is apparent that considerable progress is required from the university in terms of building inclusive infrastructure and providing appropriate and safe adaptations to existing facilities and buildings at the UKZN. This may increase accessibility and prevent marginalisation and exclusion from a space that claims to be inclusive of students with disabilities.

5.2.3 Lack of Staff Training and Uncertainty

For many of the participants, a lack of awareness and training on issues of disability and inclusive education, and subsequent feelings of uncertainty and confusion emerged as a common experience. This finding appeared to coincide with other research conducted on

lecturers' experiences in South African and international HEIs. For example, it was found that challenges to the inclusion of students with disabilities stemmed from educators' lack of knowledge, responsibility, and understanding of inclusive practices (Mutanga & Walker, 2017), a lack of training on inclusive education (Kendall, 2018; Moríña Díez et al., 2015), feelings of uncertainty, confusion, and a lack of pedagogical resources (Svendby, 2020), insufficient capacity to support students with disabilities (Zongozzi, 2020), as well as a lack of information and awareness on issues that pertain to disability and diversity in higher education (Cotán et al., 2021; Khairuddin et al., 2020; Mayat & Amosun 2011).

This finding also revealed that most of the participants had not received formal external training on inclusive education that equipped them to support students with disabilities. To support these students, half of the participants relied on their teaching qualifications to inform their teaching methods and assessment practices when interacting with students with disabilities. While it is considered advantageous, some participants explained that lecturers in South Africa are not required to have pedagogical training to become an educator in a university setting. This also occurs in many other countries (Aguirre et al., 2021). Despite some participants having attained a teaching qualification prior to becoming a lecturer, these participants deemed their teaching qualifications to be inadequate to support students with disabilities as they did not include training on disabilities and inclusive education.

Other participants reported that their qualifications in disciplines such as psychology or social work, which allowed for an empathic understanding of diversity, in addition to their personal experience of teaching students with disabilities contributed to their ability to accommodate these students. Similarly, findings from a study conducted across several Spanish universities demonstrated that inclusive practices that were employed by academic

staff were propelled by their motivation and their prior experience with students with disabilities (Aguirre et al., 2021).

Moreover, the findings suggested that there was a lack of internal training provided by the university. This may result in lecturers feeling unprepared to interact with students with disabilities, as evidenced in this study and corroborated by Zongozzi (2020). Furthermore, lecturers reportedly experienced a lack of training on the functions of the DSU at the UKZN. This finding converges with the findings of another study conducted at a South African university in which there was insufficient knowledge and information provided to lecturers in terms of the services provided by their disability support office (van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015).

Interestingly, one participant contrasted this finding by explaining that the university conducts in-house disability training. However, there is often poor attendance from academic staff. This finding further revealed that poor attendance may be attributed to underlying attitudes of resistance among some lecturers. Limitations such as time constraints as a result of the administrative burden imposed on academic staff may contribute to their resistance. Similar attitudes of resistance emerged among lecturers in a study conducted at various Spanish universities (Moriña & Orozco, 2021). Langørgen et al. (2020) interpret this attitude among lecturers as ambivalence as opposed to opposition towards interacting with students with disabilities. The resistance that was expressed by some participants toward the attendance of staff training contrasted with the enthusiasm and determined attitudes displayed by lecturers in the findings of other studies. For instance, Aguirre et al. (2021) found that despite the limited disability training programmes offered to staff and insufficient time to attend the training, lecturers still perceived disability training as crucial as it adequately aided them to accommodate every student.

Furthermore, a lack of training among academic staff appeared to have implications for lecturers and students. The lack of training among lecturer's results in confusion and uncertainty in terms of not knowing how to interact with a diversity of students and the type of academic accommodations they required (Langørgen et al., 2020; van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015). Additionally, a lack of staff training and knowledge has direct academic implications for students with disabilities (Majoko, 2018; Moriña Díez et al., 2015). Moriña Díez et al. further explain that a lack of training and awareness is one of the most deep-seated barriers to academic progress for students with disabilities. Hence, disability-specific training for lecturers has been identified as a key element to improve the academic experience of students with disabilities in higher education (Aguirre et al., 2021).

5.2.4 Challenges with Services Provided by the DSU

Challenges with the services provided by the DSU to lecturers were the least cited challenge that was experienced by participants. This included concerns regarding staff within the DSU handling assessments such as tests and examinations and a perceived lack of communication from DSU staff. While there appeared to be a paucity of research that spoke to these challenges, Dutta et al. (2009) corroborated the finding of inconsistent and inadequate communication between these two stakeholders. Additionally, student voices in other studies identified communication between disability service offices and faculty as problematic and motivated for improved communication as a way to better support them (Kim & Crowley, 2021).

This finding suggests that lecturer partnerships with the DSU may produce challenges and one of the ways of alleviating these challenges is to promote effective communication and collaboration between these two stakeholders. Building effective communication and promoting partnerships across departments is crucial to improving services, policies, and processes to meet the demands of both students and academic staff (Sanchez-Rodriguez &

LoGiudice, 2018; Scott et al., 2016). Scott et al. further maintain that it is important for disability service staff to understand the needs of academic staff and actively collaborate with them. Furthermore, the benefits of partnership and receiving support from the DSU have been documented in the findings of the present study which further emphasise the need for ongoing and consistent collaboration between lecturers and DSU staff members in this institution.

5.3 Positive Collaboration in Teaching and Assessment

Collaboration between lecturers and students with disabilities and the DSU emerged as another core theme from the experiences of participants. The positive experiences shared by lecturers were largely underpinned by positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusive education. These experiences were characterised by gratitude displayed by students with disabilities towards lecturers who were perceived as being understanding, accommodating, and supportive of their individual needs. In addition, some participants felt supported by support structures within the university, particularly the DSU when they provided resources and guidance to lecturers in their teaching and assessment practices.

5.3.1 Expressed Gratitude as a Motivating Factor

This finding suggests that students express their gratitude and appreciation towards lecturers when they feel acknowledged, supported, and included in their learning environment, as opposed to negative attitudes such as intolerance, impatience, disregard, or a failure to acknowledge these students during teaching. Similarly, Moriña Díez et al. (2015) and Molina et al. (2016) found that lecturers were particularly appreciated by students with disabilities when they demonstrated positive attitudes towards them. Lipka et al. (2019) concluded similar findings, as empathy, caring, and approachability displayed by lecturers were aspects that were reported to be appreciated by students with disabilities. Other research

has demonstrated a link between greater academic success in students when lecturers display positive attitudes and concern for their students' well-being (Edna, 2016; Stein, 2014).

In addition to the educational impact of positive attitudes displayed by lecturers, how educators communicate may also have an emotional impact on students. The voices of participants suggest that students with disabilities are more comfortable disclosing other personal or academic challenges to lecturers who interacted with them on a personal level. According to the participants, they were able to form a trusting academic relationship with their students. Relationships between students and educators are essential in cultivating an environment of trust and collaboration (Quinlan, 2016). The willingness to engage with these students on a personal level may be further reflective of the lecturers' emotional investment and a desire for these participants to genuinely connect with their students beyond their profession and work. Although limited studies have examined the role of emotions in teaching and learning, particularly in higher education, Quinlan (2016) argues that emotions are a central component to enriching the relationships between educators and students in higher education.

Additionally, increased personal contact and interaction between lecturers and students with disabilities have been identified as a positive factor impacting lecturers' attitudes and their willingness to provide academic accommodations for these students in comparison to lecturers who had limited contact (Leyser et al., 2011). More significantly, the degree of empathic functioning of an individual was identified by Barr (2013) as more important than their degree of personal contact with students with disabilities. Barr explains that although frequent engagement between lecturers and students results in an improved understanding of disabilities, greater empathy facilitates positive interactions and attitudes. Accordingly, cultivating a relationship between lecturers and students that is characterised by positive attitudes such as empathy, closeness, and a willingness to provide support through

reasonable academic accommodations are essential components to improving the quality of the learning experience for students with disabilities (Aguirre et al., 2021).

5.3.2 Support from the DSU

There appeared to be a juxtaposition in experiences among participants in their engagement with the DSU as some participants faced challenges in their encounters with the DSU. However, other participants cited that they felt supported in their teaching and assessment practices when they were guided and informed by the DSU in both face-to-face and online learning settings. In particular, these participants cited assistance from the DSU in terms of the provision of resources and services available to students with disabilities, access to training and information for lecturers, guidance on inclusive pedagogical practices, and assessment concessions. Interestingly, this finding suggests that there has been considerable progress in terms of the support services and information offered to lecturers from the DSU since its implementation at this institution. Participants explained that prior to the implementation of the DSU, academic accommodations during teaching and assessment were left to the agency of lecturers. Literature confirms that disability services have evolved significantly into an established profession in higher education, seeking to meet the requirements of a diverse student body by ensuring access to quality education, advancing technologies, and providing suitable support services (Madaus, 2011).

In addition to the services offered by the DSU, collaboration, and support between DSU and academic staff should be a priority (Cory, 2011). Positive experiences of collaboration emerged in this study when the participants took initiative to partner with the DSU to facilitate access to learning and participation for their students. The benefits of collaboration appeared to extend beyond the lecture room as lecturers not only felt supported in their experiences of interacting with students with disabilities, but collaboration also promoted harmonious interpersonal relationships between academic staff and the DSU.

While academic staff who partner with the DSU may benefit from learning through collaboration, their methods of instruction and own research can also be informed by best practices (Scott et al., 2016). Creating meaningful partnerships across the university ensures a commitment to the academic success of students with disabilities. In conjunction, it supports lecturers and disability service staff to meet the needs of a diverse student body and cultivate a learning environment that is conducive to academic success (Scott et al., 2016).

5.4 Inclusive Pedagogy

Progressive attributes concerning the implementation of inclusive education within the lecture room also emerged from the experiences of participants. Common inclusive practices included individual consultations to identify reasonable accommodations and support during teaching and assessment. Another inclusive practice included the promotion of disability awareness and sensitization of a diverse student population within the lecture room to establish a culture of acceptance and social inclusion amongst all students.

5.4.1 Individual Consultations

Individual or one-on-one consultations between lecturers and students with disabilities were cited as an inclusive measure utilised by all participants. This measure was used to identify their students with disabilities from the outset, understand their academic challenges, and assist with the provision of reasonable accommodations during teaching and assessment. Consultations between students with disabilities and staff allow students the opportunity to define their needs (Claiborne et al., 2011). Moreover, consultations can allow students and staff to address concerns regarding students' learning experiences (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). When students are afforded the opportunity to consult with an educator, they are able to contribute to improving pedagogical practices (Tancredi, 2020). Therefore, individual consultations with lecturers must be accessible for students with disabilities.

As a result of engaging in individual consultations, some participants noted the establishment of a student-lecturer relationship. This relationship appeared to be characterised by rapport which may increase confidence for both the lecturer and the student during teaching and learning. Similarly, educators in other studies reported that providing support and establishing rapport was vital for creating positive relationships with students with disabilities (Reddig et al., 2021). The findings from Reddig et al. further confirm that establishing rapport with students allows educators to feel more comfortable in the lecture room and enabled students to take risks with their studies.

Subsequently, this study argues that not only do individual consultations allow lecturers and students with disabilities to establish a relationship, but it may also be an effective and mutually beneficial measure to promote inclusivity during teaching and assessment. The importance of relationships in contributing to the success and retention of students with disabilities has been identified in the literature (Kilpatrick et al., 2017). In agreement, other studies have found that a positive student-lecturer relationship was a key component to enhance the learning experience of students with disabilities (Aguirre et al., 2021).

5.4.2 Disability Awareness and Sensitisation within the Lecture Room

The promotion of disability awareness and the sensitisation towards disability and diversity emerged as another component of inclusive pedagogy in the lecture room. This finding suggests that disability sensitisation and being aware of the heterogeneous student population among lecturers was important and prioritised by these participants. In line with the theory of Differentiated Instruction, educators need to be aware of the commonalities and differences among students (Tomlinson, 1999). This allows academic staff to use this information effectively to plan appropriate instructions.

However, the promotion of disability awareness and sensitisation by participants in the findings of the present study contradict the findings in other local studies which cite a lack of disability awareness among lecturers (Mayat & Amosun, 2011; Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Similarly, international studies have requested increased disability awareness among academic staff (Fossey et al., 2015). This is required as a lack of awareness and sensitisation of the individual needs of students with disabilities among educators poses a barrier to learning for these students (Redpath et al., 2013).

Moreover, the promotion of disability awareness and sensitisation towards diversity in the lecture room was also important among the student population. This was achieved by educating the class on inclusion, the various types of disabilities, the needs of each student, and the use of inclusive language. Promoting disability awareness among peers is essential as it has been found to enhance peer acceptance and foster relationships between students with disabilities and their peers (Wardany et al., 2018). In addition, sensitisation among other students during group activities was identified as another strategy for inclusion. This strategy appeared important to promote an understanding of differences within the lecture room. Peer rejection and a lack of empathy displayed by students towards their peers with disabilities, particularly during group work can produce marginalisation and further harm for these students (Moriña & Orozco, 2021). Consequently, Moriña and Orozco maintain that lecturers should seek to foster groups that are more unified, sensitive, and accepting of differences.

Despite the promotion of awareness and sensitivity displayed by some participants towards issues of disability and diversity, increased and ongoing awareness is still required within the institution. International findings corroborate that raising awareness about disability issues among all stakeholders, including students, lecturers, and other academic staff should be imperative (Saksena & Sharma, 2015). Saksena and Sharma explain that a lack of awareness and insensitive attitudes may pose an invisible barrier that negatively

impacts inclusion and the performance of students with disabilities. This emphasises the pressing need to educate university stakeholders.

5.5 Recommendations

The participants provided various inclusion strategies as a recommendation based on their unique experiences in their interaction with these students in teaching and assessment. In addition, another recommendation that emerged from the findings was centred on the importance and necessitation of collaboration and shared responsibility among all stakeholders within the university to provide holistic support and be inherently inclusive of students with disabilities.

5.5.1 Inclusion Strategies in Teaching and Assessment

Availability and accessibility to lecturers appeared to be a common inclusive strategy that was recommended in teaching and assessment. In terms of teaching, it appeared that increased availability and accessibility to lecturers could be achieved through conducting individual consultations and ensuring contact between students and lecturers through an accessible communication platform. Availability during assessments was also noted in the findings. Some participants made themselves available to their students who completed their examinations at separate venues such as the DSU to ensure fairness and support for all students. This appeared to be an important strategy as a previous study conducted by Fuller et al. (2004) demonstrated inequity and stigmatisation arising from the physical separation of students receiving academic concessions during assessments. Furthermore, these strategies may allow lecturers to establish and maintain a relationship with the students. Establishing a positive relationship and maintaining communication throughout the academic year is important for lecturers and students with disabilities (Sukhai & Mohler, 2016).

In addition, access to assistive devices and technology was recommended by some participants as an inclusion strategy in online and traditional face-to-face settings. In

particular, the participants noted that in terms of technology, the use of audio and video recordings as well as the conversion of these recordings into transcripts appeared to be a useful and relatively simple strategy during teaching to accommodate students with disabilities. According to the theory of Differentiated Instruction, it appeared that lecturers had initially employed the diffusion approach to differentiation, in which students received the same course content that is delivered through various media formats to allow the student to access the most suitable format for their learning needs (Rasheed & Wahid, 2018).

However, some students also provided feedback to the participants regarding their preferred method of differentiation which informed the academic accommodations that lecturers provided. This illustrated a self-directed approach to differentiation (Rasheed & Wahid, 2018). According to Rasheed and Wahid, both approaches to differentiation may produce benefits for lecturers and students. The diffusion approach is more suitable for larger institutions such as the UKZN as it can accommodate a large heterogeneous student population. Conversely, the self-directed approach allows the student to provide the educator with more appropriate and relevant feedback that is tailored to their individual needs, further promoting student-lecturer engagement (Rasheed & Wahid, 2018).

Moreover, access to assistive devices and technology can improve the quality of learning and encourage the engagement of students with disabilities both inside and outside the lecture room. In a recent systematic review, McNicholl et al. (2021) conclude the academic, psychological, and social benefits of students with disabilities accessing assistive technology and devices in HEIs. However, the findings in the current study may suggest that the UKZN has insufficient assistive devices and technological resources for students with disabilities. Previous research suggests a consistency in the lack of adequate assistive technology and assistive devices, particularly in the South African context (Ndlovu, 2021). This is problematic as inadequate technology-based access can prevent or obstruct students

from accessing and effectively interacting in their learning environment (Zorec et al., 2022). Inaccessible technologies are as problematic and frustrating as inaccessible buildings and infrastructure (Shaheen & Watulak, 2019). Subsequently, the current study argues that insufficient assistive devices may pose a barrier to inclusion and should be addressed by the university.

Overall, it appeared crucial that inclusion strategies in teaching and assessment are predominantly informed by the voices of students with disabilities. The inclusion of wider stakeholder voices is important in planning and decision-making. However, Sukhai and Mohler (2016) confirm that students are experts on information regarding their learning needs and the required academic accommodations to facilitate their success. It is integral for these students to be viewed as partners in the development and decision-making regarding inclusive pedagogy and technology throughout all domains of the HEI (Zorec et al., 2022). Similarly, Walton (2016) cites an extensive body of literature that emphasises the inclusion of students' voices in curriculum design and decision-making and the importance of employing a participatory approach to liberate these students by including them as partners in their learning. Conclusively, the accounts provided by the participants in the current study demonstrate the need for the UKZN to incorporate the voices of students when developing inclusive teaching and assessment methodologies.

5.5.2 Collaboration and Shared Responsibility among Stakeholders

Collaboration and shared responsibility among stakeholders to promote and ensure access to inclusivity in the university was another consistent recommendation that emerged in the findings. More specifically, collaboration and ongoing engagement with the DSU appeared to be necessary recommendations provided by some participants. This finding suggests that collaboration with the DSU could be enacted in various ways. Namely, it was recommended that the DSU facilitate the process of individual consultations and initial

engagement between lecturers and students from the onset of the academic year by providing a platform for students with disabilities and lecturers to engage in a dialogue and voice their experiences. These students should be provided with a safe space to communicate their needs and experiences (Zorec et al., 2022). This would allow lecturers and staff within the DSU to identify their needs and support the views of students with disabilities, particularly regarding teaching, assessment, assistive technology, disability services, face-to-face and online learning, and accessibility barriers (Zorec et al., 2022).

The theory of Differentiated Instruction appears to support the need for lecturers to collaborate with students as this theory maintains that the nature of the student-lecturer relationship should be reciprocal and collaborative (Tomlinson, 2004). However, Tomlinson maintains that within this relationship, the responsibility of enabling inclusion is assigned first to the educator, then to the student. Furthermore, the Sociocultural learning theory which informs the Differentiated Instruction framework promotes an understanding of the importance of collaboration between lecturers and students with disabilities. This learning theory maintains that learning and cognitive development occur through social interaction as knowledge is attained through interacting and engaging in dialogues with more knowledgeable or capable others, namely educators (Vygotskij, 1986, as cited in Ginja & Chen, 2020). In line with an understanding of the Zone of Proximal Development, as outlined in Chapter 2 of this study, effective learning can be achieved when educators collaborate with students with disabilities by guiding appropriate instruction in teaching and assessment, while simultaneously encouraging students to engage in tasks independently. Conclusively, educator guidance and support in the form of purposeful instruction is crucial for student development and independent learning (Subban, 2006).

In addition to the DSU facilitating the collaboration between lecturers and students, it was advised that the DSU facilitate compulsory staff training and workshops, focusing on

social justice training and critical pedagogy. In accordance, Lalor et al. (2020) concluded that collaboration across the university is a crucial aspect of disability service offices. Lalor explains that through collaboration and engagement in creating awareness, student advocacy, and staff development, this support unit can have a greater impact on its campus community, fostering an inclusive and accessible environment for students with different abilities. Similarly, other scholars have argued that it is essential for staff within disability service offices to collaborate and problem-solve with other staff across campus to provide appropriate support as adjustments for these students also need to be provided outside of the lecture room (Korbel et al., 2011).

Interestingly, the findings suggested that despite the accessibility of training and workshops made available to staff, there was a trend of poor staff attendance and engagement with the DSU. This may signal the need for academic staff to assume personal and shared responsibility in creating inclusive and accessible learning environments for students with disabilities, as highlighted by the voices of participants in the current study. In agreement, van Jaarsveldt and Ndeya-Ndereya (2015) argue that individual responsibility is vital to create an inclusive institution. Individual responsibility from stakeholders forms the foundation of efforts to enhance inclusivity at HEIs. In line with the theoretical framework of the current study, Differentiated Instruction promotes continuous and committed personal and professional reflection, discussion, and action to be undertaken by academic staff (Tomlinson et al., 2003). Furthermore, addressing inclusion in higher education both collectively and individually is key to ensuring access for all students (Bunbury, 2020). The findings in this study, therefore, underscore the importance of collaborative effort and personal responsibility that is required from academic and non-academic staff to promote inclusivity in the institution.

The voices of participants further indicate that more progress in terms of collaboration and shared responsibility is required to ensure that the university is inherently inclusive. One of the ways to achieve this may be for the DSU to be fully integrated into the institution, as opposed to being viewed as a separate unit from the university. For some participants, disability services and addressing disability-related matters felt like an ancillary component of the university, causing frustration and hardship for both lecturers and their students. The voices of students and stakeholders in other studies have supported the view that a reconstruction of disability services is required to achieve shared responsibility for inclusive education (Zorec et al., 2022).

In traditional contexts of higher education, it was the responsibility of non-academic units such as disability service offices to support students with disabilities (Pearson, 2015). However, this study argues that all academic and non-academic staff in the university have a shared responsibility to create inclusive and equitable learning experiences for all students. Similarly, the application of Differentiated Instruction may encourage lecturers in higher education to assume responsibility for adjusting their current teaching methods and assessment practices and ensuring the successful inclusion of students with disabilities and other diverse groups of students. Conclusively, collaboration and shared responsibility among all university stakeholders is crucial to foster inclusivity in teaching and learning at this institution and promote student success (Korbel et al., 2011; Langørgen et al., 2020; van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015).

5.6 Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendations

This research study provided informative insights into the experiences of lecturers in teaching and assessing students with physical disabilities in the College of Humanities at Howard College campus, UKZN. However, this research study was limited in its scope as the sample was restricted to lecturers within the College of Humanities at Howard College

campus. Future studies should preferably focus on the perceptions and experiences of academic staff from different disciplines and colleges, as well as staff that work at the DSU. This will provide broader insights into the challenges of teaching and assessing students with disabilities in different programs that require different skills.

In addition, the sampling method such as purposive sampling and snowball sampling may have also been a limitation in this study as it resulted in participant bias in the responses that were provided to the researcher, as well as selection bias of the researcher when selecting participants. However, these sampling methods proved effective in eliciting rich and descriptive data. It was also noted that the limited sample size of eight participants was not statistically representative of all lecturers in HEIs in South Africa. Despite this, the sample size was deemed adequate for qualitative research to allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of lecturers' experiences in teaching and the assessment of students with physical disabilities within the South African context. Furthermore, the inclusion of lecturers who had been employed at the university for a range of years also proved effective to illustrate that despite evidence for progress at this institution, there is an imperative for the university to address ongoing challenges experienced by lecturers.

The research findings could be developed further for future research. The insights attained from the findings suggest that the incorporation of, and access to, inclusive pedagogy, as well as increased awareness and sensitisation within the lecture room for purposes of promoting a culture of shared responsibility and collaboration among all university stakeholders, are key components to inclusivity. Therefore, despite the limited scope of this study and an inability to generalise the findings, its implications may be useful in enhancing inclusive education in the university.

5.7 Conclusion

This research study sought to identify the experiences of lecturers in teaching and assessing students with physical disabilities in a South African HEI. The findings of the study demonstrated an emphasis on deficit thinking in higher education. In addition, the findings revealed both challenging and positive experiences that lecturers encountered with these students during teaching and learning. However, more challenges than positive experiences emerged in the findings, indicating that despite considerable progress in terms of South African policy implementation regarding inclusive education, more progress is required to support lecturers and their students. The findings suggest that this may be achieved through the incorporation of, and access to inclusive pedagogy, greater awareness, and sensitisation, reducing attitudinal and physical accessibility barriers, and promoting shared responsibility and collaborative effort among relevant stakeholders within the institution.

In conjunction with further engagement with pre-existing literature, this study elicited interesting and helpful information regarding inclusive pedagogy and recommendations for best practices. Although the recommendations provided by the participants in this study are not exhaustive to achieve comprehensive inclusive education, their implementation may promote inclusion and access to quality learning for students with physical disabilities. The findings in this study were further supported by the student-centred theoretical framework of Differentiated Instruction which facilitated a deeper understanding of the student-lecturer relationship and the role of lecturers in providing inclusive education. This pedagogical framework encourages lecturers to assume responsibility for adjusting their current teaching methods and assessment practices and engage in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to increase the inclusion of students with disabilities at this institution.

Conclusively, this study sought to contribute to the body of knowledge focused on exploring the voices of lecturers in providing inclusive education, which appeared to be an

understudied area in South African research. This study further emphasised the importance of understanding the experiences of lecturers in higher education as their voices revealed the relationships and experiences with relevant stakeholders at the UKZN. In conjunction, this study seemingly validates some of the experiences of students with disabilities which has been the predominant focus of research. Further research could explore the relationships between other university stakeholders and their experiences to improve inclusivity and access to higher education for students with disabilities.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2022.2114885>

APPENDIX A: Gatekeeper's Permission



29 March 2021

Ms Kelly Leahy (SN 219044004)
School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities
Howard College Campus
UKZN
Email: 219044004@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Ms Leahy

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"A qualitative exploration of lecturers' experiences in teaching and assessment of disabled students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with staff members from the Howard College campus (Taking in account the regulations imposed during the lockdown ie restrictions on gatherings, travel, social distancing etc. ZOOM, Skype or telephone interviews recommended)

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance approval letter;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the PAIA and POPI Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely,



DR KE CLELAND
REGISTRAR

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX B: Ethical Clearance



13 September 2021

Miss Kelly Louise Leahy (219044004)
School Of Applied Human Sc
Howard College

Dear Miss Leahy,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003115/2021

Project title: A qualitative exploration of lecturers' experiences in teaching and assessment of disabled students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 16 July 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

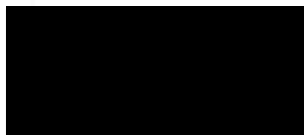
This approval is valid until 13 September 2022.

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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

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

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

APPENDIX C: Information and Informed Consent

INFORMATION SHEET



Dear Prospective Research Participant

My name is Kelly Louise Leahy. I am a Masters' student in the Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Science – University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus. **My proposed research title is, 'A qualitative exploration of lecturers' experiences in teaching and assessment of students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal'.**

The research is being supervised by Mr L. Makhaba (031 260 7729; makhabav@ukzn.ac.za).

You are being invited to consider participating in this study that seeks to explore and understand the experiences of lecturers in their teaching methods and assessment procedures of students with a physical disability or overt impairment enrolled in a higher education institution. This study seeks to further understand the role of lecturers in creating an inclusive learning environment. The aim and purpose of the research is to provide possible recommendations to address any challenges in curriculum access to improve the quality of the learning experience for students with disabilities. The results of this study may provide useful information for various stakeholders in implementing and providing appropriate support to address the academic needs of students with disabilities in higher education institutions, such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The research is expected to include 8 participants. Your participation in this research study will involve a semi-structured interview conducted by the researcher using a semi-structured interview schedule. Interviews will be conducted individually, and appointments will be made for each interview. The duration of your participation in this research study is expected to be approximately thirty minutes to an hour long.

The study will not provide any direct benefits to you, but it will add to the existing literature and may benefit lecturers by providing possible recommendations of appropriate accommodations and support to create an inclusive learning environment for students living with a disability. As a result, this research may also benefit students with disabilities enrolled in a higher education institution.

Although there are no risks involved in the participation in this study, your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequence. Your responses will be treated confidentially by using coded names and not identifying you in the thesis or the dissemination of the research findings. However, confidentiality will need to be breached if the researcher identifies that you pose an imminent risk of harm to yourself or others. Confidentiality of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained and securely stored by the School for a period of five years, after which such documents will be disposed of in accordance with supervisors/School/Ethics Committee.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to this research.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003115/2021).

In the event of any problems or concerns/queries you may contact the researcher at:

Email: kellyleahy97@gmail.com

Or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Tel: +27 31 260 4557 Fax: +27 31 260 4609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, have been informed about the study entitled *A Qualitative exploration of lecturers' experiences in teaching and assessment of students with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu Natal* by Kelly Louise Leahy.

I fully understand the purpose and procedures of the study and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study where clarity was required, and I have been answered adequately.

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

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher on kellyleahy97@gmail.com.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about any part of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

HUMANITES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
 Research Office, Westville Campus
 Govan Mbeki Building
 Private Bag X 54001
 Durban
 4000
 KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
 Tel: +27 31 260 4557 Fax: +27 31 260 4609
 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby consent to:

Audio-record my interview

YES ☐ NO ☐

Signature of participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Signature of witness: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX D: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Interview questions:

Title/Position held at the University: _____

Campus: _____

College: _____

Discipline: _____

School: _____

1. To identify and evaluate lecturer's understanding of disability and their experiences of teaching and assessing students with disabilities at this university.

- What is your understanding of the term 'disability'?
- Have you ever taught a student/s with a physical disability on the Howard College campus?
- What kind of physical disability did the student/s in your lecture room present with?
- Can you explain your experience/s in teaching students with disabilities studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
- Can you explain your experience/s in assessing students with disabilities studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
- Can you explain the impact of these experiences on the student-lecturer relationship?

2. To identify ways in which the lecturer's teaching methods and assessment procedures at this university consider the needs of students with disabilities.

- Do you think you accommodate or cater for the individual needs of students with disabilities in your lectures?
- If students have difficulty understanding content, do you use different techniques to assist these students? If so, kindly explain the techniques you used to cater for these students.
- What special considerations for students with disabilities are usually implemented during exams or tests?
- What training did you receive with regards to inclusive education?
- Do you think that your training prepared you to teach students with disabilities? Please explain how?

- What support from other departments within this institution have you received as a lecturer of students with disabilities?

3. To make possible recommendations to address any challenges to improve the quality of the learning experience for students with disabilities.

- What sort of challenges did you face when interacting with a student/s with a disability in your lecture room? How did you address these challenges?
- How do you think you could adjust your teaching methods and assessment practices to accommodate the diverse range of student's needs in the lecture room?
- Are you aware of a policy on inclusive education in this institution? Can you think of any ways in which university policies can be improved to effectively accommodate students with disabilities in their studies?
- Please discuss your views on the necessary approaches for promoting inclusive practice in the lecture room for students with a disability.