EDUCATING LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

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By

SIBONGILE MATEBESE

Supervisor: Mr. Jan Knoetze

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Declaration

I, Sibongile Matebese declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

Signature

S.Matebese

Date

June 2021

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all the teachers who took time out of their busy schedules to share their experiences with me. This study would have not been possible without your participation. Thank you for your time, responsiveness, enthusiasm, and interest in this project. I have learnt a lot from you all and I understand what it is like to do the kind of work you do. Thank you for your hard work and dedication towards the education and future of learners with special educational needs.

Abstract

In 2001, the Department of Education introduced a policy known as White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System. This policy was a response to the worldwide call for inclusive education. It aimed to ensure that all learners with special educational needs (LSEN) and who experience barriers to learning are accommodated and taught in mainstream schooling contexts. Implementation of this policy in South Africa has been a challenge, and special schools continue to exist.

While research has explored the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN, such studies have focused on teacher experiences in mainstream schools. A few international and South African studies have explored teacher experiences of teaching LSEN in special schools; however, these explore specific aspects of teacher experiences and are outdated. Based on this premise and drawing on a phenomenological approach, this study sought to explore and understand the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools. Using the semi-structured interview, eight teachers teaching in special schools in a city in the Eastern Cape were recruited and interviewed.

Five superordinate themes emerged from the shared experiences, namely, 'personal commitment and the need for a balance', 'recognising the learner at the centre', 'the importance of a holistic approach', 'the ups and downs of teaching LSEN', and 'support is available but limited'. Within these themes, the teachers experienced teaching LSEN as involving more than teaching, as a role guided by the learner, as collaborative, associated with positive experiences and challenges, including an endeavour that they are adequately supported in but simultaneously require more support for. In reflecting on this analysis, this study argues that special schools are necessary; teaching LSEN in special schools is important to teachers, and they feel a responsibility for it.

Recommendations for future research include repeating the present study with a different population and methodology, interviewing parents of LSEN and LSEN themselves to gain further insights into special schooling. The study makes key recommendations for special needs education to help ensure that such an educational system is sustained as inclusion is a long way from being realised.

Keywords: education, experiences, interviews, IPA, LSEN, South Africa, special schools, teachers

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List of Acronyms

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBST	District-based Support Teams
DOE	Department of Education
ECDOE	Eastern Cape Department of Education
EDO	Educational Development Officers
ESS	Education Support Services
IEP/IEPs	Individualised Educational Program(s)
ILST	Institutional Level Support Team
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LSEN	Learners with Special Educational Needs
RPERC	Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee
RUESC	Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee
SASL	South African Sign Language
SSI/SSIs	Semi-Structured Interview(s)
TP	Teaching Practice
WP6	White Paper 6

Chapter One: Introduction and Context

1. Introduction

The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 established a national schooling system in which two categories of schools were recognised: public and independent (McKay, 2015). Public schools are state-controlled, and independent schools are privately governed. Within these two categories of schools exist mainstream schooling (also referred to as general or ordinary schooling) and special schooling (McKay, 2015; Naicker, 2000). Mainstream schooling is a system that generally includes learners with no special educational needs[1]. The special schooling system caters for learners who have special educational needs due to neurodevelopmental disorders, learning difficulties, physical difficulties, or emotional and behavioural problems. This schooling system is further divided up into three categories. It includes specialised schools which offer customised programmes for learners who are inclined towards hands-on and practical learning, vocational schools whose goal is to deliver skills for a particular kind or type of job, and remedial schools which cater for learners who have average to high intellectual abilities but are not performing well at school as a result of difficulties with reading, writing or mathematics (McKay, 2015; Naicker, 2000, 2004). Special schools are designed to help give learners the individual attention they need to build their skills and confidence so that they can be able to live up to their potential (Naicker, 2004; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003).

This division in the schooling system has resulted in numerous criticisms, with the most prominent being the fact that a lack of equal educational opportunities for learners who experience barriers to learning exists (Human Rights Watch, 2015; National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training [NCSNET], 1997). As such, calls for a single or inclusive education system (also referred to as mainstreaming) where the practice of placing LSEN in general education classrooms or mainstream schools have been made and a policy referred to as White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (WP6) was introduced to help drive this call. (Department of Education [DOE], 2001; Naicker, 2004).

Most research conducted on the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in South Africa and internationally has been devoted to exploring the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in inclusive

[1]I am aware that the term 'special needs' is now frequently being replaced by the term 'disabilities'. In this thesis, I utilise the term 'special needs' as schools currently existing in the South African context for learners with diverse educational needs are referred to as special schools (or dialogue is often about special schooling) rather than schools for learners with disabilities.

contexts or mainstream classrooms. In addition, some international research has explored the experiences of LSEN in special and mainstream schools. Research has also explored the challenges faced by teachers who teach LSEN that contribute to and shape their experiences.

In this introductory chapter, I provide a brief overview of the literature that speaks to the state of special needs education within the South African context. I start off by looking at the history and the present state of special education in South Africa, followed by the education policy, WP6, which was introduced to help guide the call for inclusive education. In discussing this policy, I speak to what it entails, its purpose, and its limitations. Drawing from this discussion, I then focus on the challenges of inclusive education, followed by a brief description of teacher training within the South African context including special needs educators' roles and expectations. I also provide a rationale for this study, followed by a brief explanation of the terms I use in this thesis. Lastly, I provide an overview of the chapters in this thesis.

2. The history of special education in South Africa

Much like the history of our country, the history of special needs education reflects massive deprivation and lack of educational provision for most people (Naicker, 2000, 2004; NCSNET, 1997). In the 1700s and early 1800s, little provision of any special education was seen. Naicker (2004) highlights that people with special needs (this includes adults and children) in the country were regarded as a sign of "divine displeasure" (p.400). This attitude influenced the negative treatment of people with special needs. It involved the chaining, killing, and imprisonment of people who were later regarded as persons with emotional disturbances, hearing impairments, intellectual and physical disabilities, and visual impairments. From 1863 to 1963, the nature of special education in South Africa was oppressive – the state increasingly favoured 'white'[2] learners with special needs even though the DOE from 1900 onwards began to take responsibility for children's special education (Engelbrecht, 2006; Naicker, 2004). As such, no provision for special education was made by the South African state for 'black' or African learners. During this time, the church played an important role as it initiated the provision of special education to both 'white' and non-white learners. Many teachers who taught in 'black'/non-white schools did not have

[2] In this thesis, I acknowledge the socially constructed nature of 'race' and utilise single quotation marks to connote this signifier. Nevertheless, I use racial categories in some sections of the thesis as is done within the South African context, given that much of society is still constructed by these categories.

specialist training or qualifications in specific special needs or disabilities as universities, like the schools, were segregated, and provision was made for 'white' teachers (Naicker, 2004).

Numerous Acts were passed during the abovementioned period, which allowed for various kinds of progress in special education to ensue (Naicker, 2004; Naicker & Naicker, 2018). In 1928, the White Education Act was passed and enabled the South African State Education Department to establish vocational and special schools for 'white' learners with special needs. With this Act passed, the state increasingly favoured 'white' students with special needs. It passed the Special Schools Amendment Act in 1937, which created provisions for hostels in special schools for 'white' learners to be established, allowing these learners to live in the schools they attended. The church and other private associations and societies continued to support non-white children establishing a school for blind Coloured and Indian Children and a school for Coloured children with epilepsy (Naicker, 2004). The White Education Act of 1928 further provided models for special education in South Africa and laid the foundation for South Africa's Special Education Act of 1948. This Act made provision for separate special schools for several special needs categories, including the deaf, hard of hearing, blind, partially sighted, epileptic, cerebral palsy, and physically disabled. As a result of these separate schools, it was suggested that this Act operates on the assumption that LSEN were deficient and their deficiencies were pathological – a perspective mainly influenced by medical thinking of professionals at this time (Naicker, 2004). Further, having a special need was associated with impairment, and the individual was viewed as helpless or dependent, and systemic factors were not considered.

The separate development of special schools lasted for almost half a century and quality special needs education was provided to a few (NCSNET, 1997). A great disparity between rural and urban resources existed – more privileged divisions of society received the best services while South Africa's disadvantaged segments received or had little to no access or support (Engelbrecht, 2006; Naicker & Naicker, 2018). 'Coloured' and 'black' children with special needs had almost no pre-school facilities. In addition, a lack of trained professionals (educational and clinical psychologists, occupational therapists, and others) existed. In the middle of the 20th century, a shift in the approach to special needs education took place. Instead of focusing solely on the individual, the importance of seeing LSEN within a social context was emphasised (Naicker, 2004). As such, most of South Africa's post-apartheid governmental policies regarding special education have been shaped by this premise.

3. The present state of special education in South Africa

Historically, special education in South Africa, as highlighted above, has had negative connotations. Presently, it is becoming more accepted and encouraged and embodies a much larger spectrum of what special needs are.

According to Yates (2019), a total of 464 special schools exist in South Africa. These consist of both public and private schools and are spread across the nine provinces, with certain provinces (Gauteng and the Western Cape) having more special schools than others. Despite the number of available special schools, access remains limited and racialised. Numerous reasons exist for this.

Compared to mainstream schools, special schools have higher tuition fees as teachers and staff who are adequately equipped (though some teachers may not be trained) to work with LSEN need to be hired. As such, some parents cannot afford special schooling for their children. Another challenge is that some parents struggle to find special schools for their children (Macupe, 2020). Parents who have the means to opt for a private special school often contemplate moving to another province where they will find a school, while those who are unable to do so have their children stay at home. Macupe (2015) evidenced the latter in a story she wrote about children with special needs in Orange Farm, an area located south of Johannesburg. A parent of one of the families she interviewed expressed how she struggled to find a special school for her daughter, who had to drop out of a mainstream school because she was a slow learner and struggled to read and write. The parent stayed at home to look after her daughter. Similarly, a group of children with special needs such as autism, cerebral palsy, and other physical disabilities from Daggakraal, a rural area in Mpumalanga, did not attend school as there were no special schools in their area (Macupe, 2017). One of the children, a boy with a mental illness who was also physically disabled was called names by his peers. According to Human Rights Watch (2019), although the government has published no accurate data, 600 000 children in South Africa with special needs are estimated to be out of school.

While some children remain at home due to there being no schools in their areas, others have to wait on long waiting lists to be placed at a school (Charles, 2017). Given such, most children grow older and thus start school late or end up not going to school as many special schools have an age limit. The difficulty of finding a special school and having to wait for a long time before being allocated to a school have been accompanied by calls for more special schools in South Africa. Although special schools have been opened in rural areas in some of South Africa's provinces and LSEN have access, some challenges remain for children who manage to get into these schools (Macupe, 2020). For example, in a Northern

Cape school, no transport is available for learners to attend school. Facilities at schools are inadequate, not enough for all learners, and unsupportive of learner needs. In Limpopo, some schools are overcrowded, have inexperienced teachers and a shortage of specialists and staff (Masweneng, 2020). A school in Mpumalanga transforms classrooms into bedrooms for learners in the evening as the school does not have a hostel. The Department had promised the school mobile classrooms for the year 2020 (Mahlangu, 2019). Therefore, it is evident that despite the introduction of WP6, which sets the policy for special needs education in the South African context, special needs education continues to follow the historical pattern described above, and the goals set out in this White Paper are a long way from being realised.

4. White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System

White Paper 6 makes provision for learners with diverse educational needs to be catered for and taught in mainstream primary schools (Potterton, 2003). The premise of this policy is to eventually convert all mainstream primary schools into full-service schools that will cater for the full range of educational needs. In contrast, special schools will be converted into resource centres over time and cater for learners who require high levels of support. In essence, WP6 (DOE, 2001) is the guiding document for implementing inclusive education in South Africa. The Department's approach to inclusive education is geared to promote the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution (Government Communication Information Systems [GCIS], 2010). Therefore, the vision of the policy is to remedy past injustices and discriminations by promoting the principles of human rights, social justice, equity, and equality. WP6 purports a move away from the medical model, which focuses on intrinsic barriers to a system that focuses more on extrinsic barriers such as the school, teachers, pedagogy, curriculum, and other societal factors (DOE, 2001; Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). Following the introduction of the policy, inclusive education in the South African context has not been successfully implemented (Engelbrecht, 2006; Ntombela, 2006), and as such, special schools still exist. Various reasons have been cited for this in the literature.

Donohue and Bornman (2014) highlight two main factors hindering the successful implementation of WP6:1) ambiguity regarding the goals for inclusion and how inclusion will be achieved and 2) poor implementation protocols of the policy. Campbell, Gilmore, and Cuskelly (2003) found that, although teachers often report that they agree with the idea of inclusion, they believe that the needs of LSEN are best met in separate classrooms. Consistent with this, Ntombela (2006) and Weber (2015), in studies conducted in KwaZulu-Natal (Durban), a province in South Africa, among teachers in inclusive

classrooms, evidenced that many teachers regard inclusive education in mainstream schools as challenging. Teachers reported that they lack the skills needed for working with LSEN due to inadequate training and a lack of support and resources to help facilitate inclusive education. Furthermore, teachers described experiencing the educational system as unsupportive, unconcerned, and dismissive of their requests regarding improving schools to enhance inclusion for LSEN. An additional factor is that South African teachers were trained to teach either general education or special education. This practice has, in turn, produced many teachers without the necessary skills to teach LSEN. Ntombela (2006) further argues that this also created attitudes regarding the separate education of LSEN that have become strongly embedded in the South African teaching culture. What further complicates matters is that a large proportion of the South African teacher workforce is over 50 years old; hence, reorienting teachers to new ways of educating learners after many years in the profession remains a significant challenge to inclusive practices (Armstrong, 2009). Although this may be the case, it is important to acknowledge that these older teachers were trained when there was some provision of special education training. Due to policy changes, these qualifications may have been discontinued.

Polat (2011) suggests that resources and improved infrastructure are necessary but not sufficient for inclusion and that "[c]hanging attitudinal barriers among school professionals and in the wider community is one of the essential aspects of making inclusive education happen in low-income countries" (p. 57). Positive and negative attitudes and beliefs about inclusive education exist among teachers (Allison, 2012; Levins, Bornholt, & Lennon, 2005). Positive attitudes include arguments that integrating LSEN into mainstream schools improves their self-esteem, increases their socialisation skills, promotes acceptance, and creates awareness about special educational needs, thus precipitating patience and tolerance towards LSEN. Negative attitudes are based on teachers' inability to provide each learner with individual attention due to extended class sizes, increased workload, lack of training and knowledge about LSEN and the likelihood that inclusive education may perpetuate the discrimination LSEN face in their communities.

Despite the difficulties and challenges associated with implementing the aims of WP6, the call for inclusive education persists. Several scholars have, however, opposed the call for inclusive education. In the section that follows, the various reasons inclusive education is being doubted and questioned are delineated.

5. The challenges of inclusive education

Despite the internationalization of the philosophy of inclusive education, Mitchell (2004) argues that for a range of historical, cultural, social, and financial reasons, its implementation has been uneven across the world. Cortiella (2009) maintains that some scholars view inclusion as a practice that is philosophically attractive yet impractical. It has also been a particularly problematic concept in developing countries where resources are limited (Eleweke, 1999; Engelbrecht & Green, 2007).

WP6 contends that the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and Outcomes Based Education (OBE) are congruent with inclusive education (DOE, 2001). This statement is questioned by the many conflicting voices on the practicality of including LSEN in mainstream classrooms without equipping teachers with the necessary skills and resources. Educationists such as Cigman (2007), Clarke (2005), Kauffman (2005), Poon-McBrayer and John Lian (2002), including Rayner and Ribbins (1999) question whether inclusive education is the best way to address the education of learners who have diverse educational needs. This position is based on the view that LSEN are a significant challenge for all, and as a general rule, demand greater attention from teachers and other professionals who have specialized skills and knowledge.

The fact that the policy neglects to acknowledge that LSEN require individualized instruction and/or highly controlled environments has resulted in strong criticism (Cortiella, 2009). Fuchs (2003, as cited in Mitchell, 2004) challenges the view that the mainstream can incorporate LSEN when it has so many difficulties in accommodating existing learner diversity. Low (2005, as cited in Cigman, 2007) argues that children with a visual impairment have specific difficulties that require specialized help and specific kinds of assistance. These include instruction in Braille and mobility skills, the provision of materials in accessible formats, and a high degree of specialist teaching support. Deaf and blind learners, although there could be nothing cognitively wrong with them, require specialized teaching for which teachers have to receive specialized training. Teachers will also have to be trained to handle highly technologically advanced assistive devices (Mitchell, 2004), *which they know nothing about* (emphasis mine). Research shows significant gains measured by performance tests of deaf children who attend schools for the deaf, which are not found in deaf children who attend mainstream programs (Cohen, 2007, as cited in Ross, 2009). Cohen (2007, as cited in Ross, 2009) thus contends that inclusion denies many deaf students the right to be educated in the least restrictive environment due to communication barriers that may impede their education. Jim Sinclair, an autistic man, states that there are concerns within the disability

community that inclusion is not always the best option for every person with every special need (Cigman, 2007).

Several educationists (Cortiella, 2009; Crawford, 2005; Ross, 2009; Thompkins & Delaney, 2008; Tomsho, 2007) oppose inclusion because of the complexity and the challenges that such a system induces. Thompkins and Delaney (2008) argue that inclusive education is a complex issue as it involves an "overhaul" of the entire educational system. This could be why, after many years of implementation, inclusive education is still posing a challenge for many developed countries. Britain, for example, is now rethinking their inclusive education policy, and other countries are now uncertain as to whether inclusion is an appropriate approach for all LSEN (Clarke, 2005).

Warnock (2006, as cited in Cigman, 2007) is of the opinion that some LSEN fail to get quality education in a mainstream school, and no adaptation of the school can turn it into an environment in which such children can learn. Mitchell (2008) argues that a consequence of inclusive education is deterioration in the quality of lessons. He argues that by including LSEN in regular classes, the quality of their education will deteriorate since, in special schools, they attend classes with fewer pupils; the teachers are better equipped with teaching aids and have qualifications in special education. He expresses the concern that there will be less successful learners with increasing inclusive education, both among LSEN and regular learners.

Another main issue identified by Tomsho (2007) is behaviour. In support of Tomsho's (2007) objection to accommodating LSEN in mainstream schools, he describes an anecdote of a girl who was assigned to a regular kindergarten class after attending a pre-school program for special needs learners. There, she disrupted the class, ran through the hallways, and lashed out at others, and at one point giving a teacher a black eye. According to the mother of the child, she did not learn anything that year. Ross (2009) argues that due to disruptive behaviour, inclusion may cause distractions to other students. Inclusive education may also frustrate LSEN because they may feel they are competing with mainstream education learners.

On the other side of the spectrum, Ross (2009) asserts that inclusion can also negatively impact the learning experiences of learners who are considered "gifted and talented". Gifted and talented learners do not benefit from mainstreaming because the pace of the curriculum holds them back. Programs for gifted and talented learners utilize large amounts of independent study and curricula that allows for more specialized, challenging assignments, which prepare these types of learners for bigger and better challenges. Mainstreaming is the opposite of this. As argued by Ross (2009), it is an absolute disservice for these gifted learners to be treated like every other learner.

For some learners, the special need does not affect their academic skills. However, it does prevent them from feeling comfortable in a big classroom setting with thirty-five learners and above and only one teacher available to help them all (Tomsho, 2007). Tomsho (2007) asserts that some LSEN could perform academically well had they been placed in a smaller setting with an educator who had special training and experience for how best to reach them. Similarly, Cortiella (2009) argues that a child with serious inattention difficulties may be unable to focus in a classroom that contains thirty or more active children. Ross (2009) argues that where classes are bigger, there are more ability levels, resulting in not enough time being spent reviewing a concept for learners who require review, repetition, and/or instruction at a slower pace. Learners may also not feel comfortable asking questions in fear of judgments from classmates.

Crawford (2005) bases his opposition for inclusion on the fact that full inclusion of a wide range of abilities into general education classrooms makes direct systematic instruction nearly impossible. He further argues that given the diversity in the classroom, teacher-led, whole-group, or small group instruction simply becomes impossible. In addition, once full inclusion is implemented, teachers are forced to change their teaching methods to more child-directed, discovery-oriented, project-based learning activities in which every learner works at his or her own pace. He argues that these methods have never produced high levels of achievement anywhere where they have been tried.

6. Teachers and special education: training, roles, and expectations

Teacher training requirements within the South African context require teachers to hold a four-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) teaching degree or a three-year Bachelor's degree followed by a higher education diploma or Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2019). Once completed, both routes lead to classification as a professionally qualified teacher. Upon qualifying, individuals register with the South African Council for Educators (SACE). Before considering teaching as a profession, an individual must consider which age range they would like to teach and thus choose the phase (level of schooling) they would like to specialise. One can be a foundation (grades R-3; ±5 – 9-year-olds), intermediate (grades 4-6; ±10 – 12-year-olds), senior (grades 7 – 9; ±13 – 15-year-olds) or a further education and training (FET) (grades 10-12; ±16 – 18-year-olds) phase teacher (DBE, 2019). Some higher education institutions (HEIs) allow for a combination of phase specialisation. In such instances, one specialises in two consecutive phases. For the intermediate, senior, and FET phases, one is given the opportunity to choose what subjects they wish to specialise in and this includes fields in business and management, the humanities, languages, mathematics, and the sciences.

As the above phases evidence, special education is not an area of specialisation for teaching in South Africa. Rather, it forms part of teacher training packages at most universities (Naicker, 2004). Specialist training in areas of special needs is lacking in South Africa, with very few specialised training programmes on offer. Universities in the country are currently working on these programmes in collaboration with the DBE.

In each of the South African universities, teaching practice (TP) at schools is mandatory. Each student has to complete TP for six weeks, and this usually takes place at a mainstream school (DBE, 2019; Naicker, 2004). During their time at these schools, although acknowledged in WP6, there is a teaching shortage in South Africa regarding the different categories of special needs. This shortage also includes teachers of the visually impaired and South African Sign Language (SASL) teachers. Steps have been taken to address such a challenge; however it will take some time to address the backlogs. The DOE, for example, is collaborating with South Africa's major universities to train prospective teachers in specific disabilities (Naicker, 2004). An agreement for example has been concluded with the University of South Africa (UNISA) for teachers to be trained to teach learners with visual impairments. Other areas, including SASL are being looked at.

The roles of special needs educators vary depending on the setting they teach in, learner special needs, and teacher speciality (Allison, 2012; Lavian, 2015). Generally, special needs educators work as part of a team that usually includes general education teachers, counsellors, school superintendents, and parents. As a team, they develop individualised educational programs (IEPs) specific to the needs of each learner. An IEP outlines each learner's goals and services, such as their sessions with the school psychologist, counsellors, and special education teachers. Teachers also meet with the parents of LSEN, school administrators, and counsellors to discuss any changes and updates to IEPs (Jobling & Moni, 2004; Lavian, 2015). Some special needs educators work in classrooms or resource centres that only include LSEN. In these settings, teachers are responsible for planning, adapting, and presenting lessons to meet learner needs. The learners are taught in small groups or on a one-on-one basis. LSEN may also attend classes with general education or mainstream learners. The role of a special needs educator changes in such a setting and mainly involves spending a portion of the day teaching classes with general education teachers (Ntombela, 2006; Weber, 2015). Further, special needs educators in this context help present the information in a manner that LSEN can better understand. They also assist general education teachers in adapting lessons that will meet the needs of LSEN in their classrooms. Special needs educators also collaborate with teaching assistants, psychologists, and social workers to accommodate the requirements

of LSEN (Jobling & Moni, 2004; Lavian, 2015). They may, for example, show a general teaching assistant how to work with a learner who needs particular attention.

A special needs educator's overarching role and expectation is to help LSEN with severe special educational needs to develop essential life skills such as responding to questions and following directions (Naicker, 2004; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003). Those who teach learners with moderate special educational needs teach them various life skills necessary to live independently such as finding some form of employment and managing their time and money. Within the South African context, general education teachers often take on the role of special needs educators, and a few if any of our teachers are trained specifically as special needs educators (Ntombela, 2006; Weber, 2015).

7. Rationale for the present research

While the South African studies, reports, papers, and other literature discussed in this chapter highlight important findings, a need for more research in the area of special needs education from the perspective of teachers who are currently teaching in special schools still exists. A better understanding of their experiences relating to their teaching, the educational system, and the various contextual (psychological and social) factors contributing to their experiences is needed. Such insights will allow for the possibility of making sense of these experiences and help improve the support provided to special needs educators and their learners.

Using an interpretative phenomenological approach, this study explores the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools. To collect the data, semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with teachers teaching in special schools were conducted. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) interpretative phenomenological approach enabled an analysis of the experiences shared by the teachers. In analysing the experiences shared by the teachers, an understanding of how they made sense of teaching LSEN became evident.

8. Terminology used in this thesis

Given that this study is conducted within an interpretative phenomenological approach, I situate it within a social constructionist paradigm as I am interested in how teachers who teach at special schools make sense of teaching LSEN. In relation to this, social constructionism examines how, in particular contexts, social reality can be constituted in various ways (Burr, 1995; Willig, 2013). As Willig (2013) argues, this paradigm examines what conditions allow for particular constructions of reality and what the consequences of these constructions are for human experience and social practice.

A number of terms are used in this thesis that need to be explained to the reader before engaging further with the thesis. Briefly, I use the term experiences as is done by Smith et al. (2009) to refer to the stories people construct around and/or about an important life event. With reference to this study, this term encompasses the teachers' practical interaction with LSEN, which stems from what they do (their teaching) and observe, including their resultant feelings, perceptions, and needs. The term learners with special educational needs (LSEN) is utilised broadly to refer to and include all learners who experience barriers to learning. The needs could be of a medical (cognitive and sensory), pedagogical, societal, or systemic nature (DOE, 2001). I use the term special school/special schools to refer to schools that cater for LSEN, which are usually based on some special need (Engelbrecht, 2006).

In this thesis, I refer to myself in the first person. I do this to keep in line with the tradition of qualitative and social constructionist research and to emphasise that I see myself as located in, rather than objective or separate from, the research process of knowledge production. Instead of using the term 'research subjects', I use the term 'participants' to highlight that I saw the teachers who took part in this study as actively involved in this study (although there were limitations to their involvement) rather than regarding them as people I observed. There are instances where I refer to the 'participants' of this study as 'teachers' or 'special needs educators'. In doing so, I do not mean that the teachers are a homogenous group or have similar experiences. I use the term to foreground identity and as a general description of the participants of this study.

9. Overview of chapters

In the chapter that follows (chapter two), I review the literature on teachers' experiences of teaching LSEN in special schools. The chapter begins by looking at the various reasons for becoming special needs educators as provided by teachers and thereafter engages with the support structures existing for teachers who teach LSEN in special schools. The role of parents as a source of support for teachers is also explored. Literature mostly pertinent to the present study will then be presented. In this section, studies that speak to teacher attitudes regarding teaching LSEN are explored. I also discuss the challenges highlighted in the literature experienced by teachers who teach LSEN in special schools, focusing particularly on resources and facilities, role complexity and a heavy workload, including stress and burnout.

Chapter three provides a detailed explanation of the steps involved in conducting this study. This chapter includes details about the sampling and recruitment strategies, the methodology I used to collect the

data/experiences of the teachers, its strengths and limitations (which I ground in the observations I made during data collection), and the methodology used to analyse the collected data. In discussing the method of analysis, I also speak to each of the key theoretical foundations related to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), including phenomenology, idiography, and double hermeneutics. In referring to each of these theoretical foundations, I outline how they are relevant to this study. The chapter includes a section on reflexivity and validation in which I speak to my involvement in the research process and the strategies I used to ensure trustworthiness in this study.

Having reviewed the literature on teachers' experiences of teaching LSEN in special schools and provided a detailed description of the methods used to conduct this study and the overarching theoretical framework guiding the study, I present the results/findings. In chapter four, the various superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged from the data that speak to and provide a better and more comprehensive understanding of the teachers' experiences of teaching LSEN in special school are provided and discussed in depth. I start by outlining the superordinate theme of 'personal commitment and the need by a balance' followed by the superordinate themes 'recognising the learner at the centre' and 'the importance of a holistic approach'. I then turn to focus on the superordinate theme of 'the ups and downs of teaching LSEN'. Finally, I discuss the superordinate theme of 'support is available but limited'. The findings are linked to literature discussed in earlier sections of this thesis and existing literature associated with a particular theme.

In chapter five, I conclude the study. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the research process followed by a summary of the findings in which I discuss what has emerged from the data about the teachers' experiences of teaching LSEN in special schools and the meaning(s) they associate with this role. I then pick up on certain aspects of the findings and use these to make recommendations for special needs education and how teachers who teach LSEN can be better supported. I end the chapter by discussing the limitations of this study and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

1. Introduction

Most research conducted about the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN to date has focused on experiences of having and teaching LSEN in mainstream school classrooms (e.g., Allison, 2012; Ntombela, 2006; Weber, 2015). These studies have often been conducted to improve teacher experiences and better accommodate LSEN within an inclusive educational system. While demonstrating important findings, there is minimal research that concentrates on providing an in-depth understanding of the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools. Although WP6 explicitly promotes inclusive and mainstream education for all learners despite barriers to learning, these schools continue to exist. In addition, research that speaks to such experiences is outdated. On an international level, a few studies have explored the practice of teaching LSEN in the context of special schools from the perspective of teachers currently being trained as special needs educators and those who have already qualified. Very little research has been conducted in South Africa that explores the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools.

Forming part of the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools are the support services and structures available for them at their schools, the attitudes held about teaching LSEN, and the various challenges teachers experience during their teaching. In this chapter, these factors will be discussed as they have featured in research about the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools and emerged as influences that shape teacher experiences.

This chapter begins with a discussion about becoming and being a special needs educator. The support services and structures available for teachers who teach LSEN in special schools are then discussed together with the role of parents in supporting teachers. The chapter closes with research pertinent to the present study, which homes in on the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools. In this section, literature that focuses on teacher attitudes regarding teaching LSEN and the challenges encountered by teachers who teach LSEN in special schools is presented.

2. Becoming and being a special needs educator

A search for literature exploring why individuals decide or choose to become special needs educators revealed no existing studies. Rather, various reasons for becoming a special needs educator have been cited in studies that have explored the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN. In a study conducted by Jobling and Moni (2004) in Australia among student teachers seeking certification as special needs

educators and their experiences of the training process, participants were asked about why they chose to become special needs educators. The most common reason reported by the participants was because, within their families, there was someone with a special educational need. In such instances, becoming a special needs educator was framed as a way of giving back and ensuring the appropriate treatment of others with special educational needs. For other student teachers in the study, becoming a special needs educator meant that they would be granted the opportunity to learn and better understand those with a special educational need. Some teachers shared that their decision to become special needs educators was influenced by the fact that a degree in special education, particularly in an international context, offers multiple career paths. Special needs educators can also build exciting and meaningful careers outside of a school setting. Once a person qualifies as a special needs educator, opportunities in a wide selection of private, public, and non-profit organizations devoted to special needs are within one's reach. Opportunities include starting a special school or non-profit organisation for people with special needs, becoming a social worker, school counsellor, behavioural analyst, or educational consultant.

In reflecting on their practicums teaching LSEN, student teachers (pre-service special needs educators) who were due to start teaching in special schools in a study conducted by Nonis and Jernice (2011) in Singapore highlighted that being a special needs educator is an occupation that requires one to be understanding. The teachers described the practicum as an opportunity that helped them better understand the educational needs of learners and identify the challenges learners faced in the classroom, which further helped teachers develop a better understanding of their social needs. Some teachers who took part in the study described being in special needs education as having enjoyable aspects, while others described it as challenging. The main factor that helped the teachers have an enjoyable experience was being supported by their supervisors (at the schools they were placed and those from their universities) who provided strategies and techniques for organising and delivering lessons, constructive feedback which aided in improving lesson plans as well as receiving affirmative support consisting of cooperation, mentoring and rapport. Teachers who found the practicum challenging cited having to handle a lot of paperwork, feeling stressed due to being observed during class times, sticking to lesson plans, setting too many objectives, and not having opportunities to engage with learners before starting the practicum. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Toreno and Iliyan (2008) among beginner teachers in Arab schools in Israel. Teachers shared that they had limited time to observe and understand learners' needs to prepare an appropriate lesson plan and difficulties handling pupils who had diverse educational needs or were uncooperative. Additional challenges raised included receiving limited support from the staff at the schools they were placed in and their cooperating teachers to prepare for the

practicum. Work overload was also cited by some of the teachers in this study as a factor that made being a special needs educator challenging.

Pre-service special needs educators who would teach in special schools after their practicums in a study conducted by Buck, Morsink, Griffin, Hires, and Lenk (1992) in Florida mentioned that due to the smaller class sizes, they truly got to know each learner individually. In contrast to the experience of some teachers in Toreno and Iliyan's (2008) study, students in this study spoke to how having a wide range of LSEN in their classrooms taught them that when they qualify to do their job, there will never be a "one size fits all" way to teaching LSEN. The participants also emphasised that the more they worked with LSEN, the more adept they become at seeing things through their eyes. Other teachers described teaching LSEN as a rewarding and fulfilling experience. Such an experience was mainly associated with helping learners reach their potential. Teachers reported feeling great knowing that LSEN have learned something new because they were able to teach them in a way that made sense to them and also contributed in some way to help them on their path to future independence. Highlighted in these studies, therefore, is that being a special needs educator is associated with both positive and negative experiences.

3. Support available for teachers who teach LSEN

Numerous scholars within the South African context (e.g., Davidoff & Lazarus, 1997; Eloff & Kgwete, 2007; Moore, 2008; Pottas, 2005; Potterton, 2010; Swart & Pettipher, 2005; Walton, Nel, Hugo, & Muller, 2009) emphasise that teachers who teach LSEN be it in special or mainstream schools are facing an increasingly demanding task and cannot accommodate all learners effectively without support. Continuous support and assistance to teachers by others, as argued by Nel (2011), is a necessary condition for successful work in schools.

WP6 (DOE, 2001) acknowledges the challenges faced by special schools and those which will emanate from the ideal to create inclusive schools. Broad networks of support systems that are supposed to work as an integrated unit to support special and general education teachers who teach LSEN are postulated in WP6. Following is a discussion of the objectives and efficacy of these support systems.

3.1 District-based Support Teams (DBST)

WP6 (DOE, 2001) makes considerable reference to a team of professionals that functions as the District-based Support Team (DBST). This team is at the centre of Education Support Services (ESS). It consists of a core of education support personnel comprising staff from the provincial, district, regional, and head offices and special schools. The primary function of the DBST is to provide a coordinated professional

support service that draws on expertise in further and higher education and local communities, targeting special schools, as well as full service and ordinary primary schools.

According to WP6 (DOE, 2001), the DBST is supposed to build the capacity of schools to address severe learning difficulties and accommodate a range of learning needs. To achieve this, the team has to help teachers develop good teaching strategies that will benefit all learners by providing pre-service and in-service education and training to them. A report by the Eastern Cape Department of Education ([ECDOE], 2009), however, found that Education Development Officers (EDO's) and other DBST officials lacked understanding of the needs of learners who experience barriers to learning or had special educational needs. They complicated matters for teachers as their expectations were often at odds with LSEN concessions and curriculum adaptation issues. There was also a lack of support and understanding of LSEN-related issues by other sections in the District and Provincial Department of Education. These findings could indicate that district officials are uncertain about their role and/or lack the skills to perform it. This finding is affirmed by Magadla (2008), who argues that the department has had difficulties implementing and managing the requisite educational programs; therefore, it is crucial that it looks into ways of improving the capacity of its personnel in order to ensure that service delivery benefits the children of the province and that their rights to education are not infringed upon.

3.2 Education Support Services (ESS)

Education Support Services (ESS), as stated in WP6 (DOE, 2001), are designed to help schools with various aspects of organizational development; support teachers around all aspects of the curriculum, curriculum development, including support in particular subjects; direct learning support for learners who require it; psychosocial support for learners, teachers, and parents; and medical support for learners who require it (DOE, 1997; DOE, 2001). By focusing on developing competencies necessary to address severe learning difficulties and effectively reduce barriers to learning, these barriers will be strengthened.

In a study conducted by Leatherman (2007) among eight teachers teaching LSEN in a special school in the South-eastern part of the United States to explore their perceptions of the services provided in their school, teachers highlighted that the availability of support services was a factor that they perceived as important in order to have successful classrooms. The types of services considered beneficial by the teachers are consultation with psychologists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists (Foreman, 2008; Stubbs, 2008). In terms of WP6, support services will mostly operate from outside the school as part of the DBST, which, as highlighted above, seems to be experiencing major challenges regarding service delivery. Several scholars (e.g., Engelbrecht & Green,

2007; Mitchell 2004; Walton et al., 2009; Nel 2011; Torreno, 2011) indicate that appropriate support from specialists is essential to making education possible for LSEN in a special schooling context. This support would enable teachers to focus more on educating children than being overly involved with other aspects of a child's special needs.

3.3 Institutional Level Support Team (ILST)

WP6 (DOE, 2001) refers to a group of educators stationed at schools expected to establish a committee referred to as the ILST. The main purpose of this committee is to support the teaching and learning process for all LSEN in special and mainstream schools (DOE, 2005). The ILST will have to inform all stakeholders when dealing with LSEN. This includes playing a role in the admissions process, assigning learners to suitable classes, and informing the DBST of the relevant support required by the learner(s). The ILST, in addition, evaluates and monitors the progress of the learners. Though not relevant within the context of this study, it is important to highlight that this team is considered the first port of call when barriers to learning are encountered within mainstream schools. In such cases, the ILST has to look for ways of minimizing these barriers within the school and to develop strategies to meet the needs of those learners whom the class teacher has identified as experiencing barriers to learning. The idea is that district support teams will provide the full range of education support services, such as professional development in curriculum and assessment, to the ILST. This support and support from the community, are viewed as crucial for the effective functioning of school-based support groups (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007).

The challenges experienced by ILST's mainly relate to mainstream schools where LSEN are included, an aspect aligned with WP6 on inclusive education. These challenges are delineated in a report on the status of inclusive education compiled by the Psychosocial Section of the East London District (ECDOE, 2009). The report states that there is a lack of buy-in and lack of cooperation from colleagues concerning the development of ILST's because they regard it as extra work. This resulted in difficulty motivating fellow educators in implementing practical lessons for LSEN. ILST coordinators were also pressured to handle all administration and referrals. The dual role of the ILST coordinator as actual teacher versus coordinator led to further stress. Principals and EDO's did not play a supportive role, and the lack of direction from them made the implementation of LSEN programs difficult. Walton et al. (2009) point to the fact that in most independent schools in South Africa, the functions of the ILST coordinator are performed by a qualified special needs coordinator. This person is trained in learning support, either a special needs teacher or even a psychologist or other therapist and is supported by other teachers, usually qualified remedial teachers. The situation in public schools, however, is vastly different from that

described above. There was no research available that spoke to the limitations of the ILST in special schools that continue to exist despite WP6's policy move to inclusive education.

3.4 Parents as a source of support for teachers

Landsman (1978) argues that in the 1970s, the nature of the relationship between special needs educators and parents of LSEN was regarded as circular. This was mostly based on the fact that teachers expected parents to co-operate, parents constantly disappointed teachers whereby teachers sent parents implicit or explicit messages that they are 'bad parents' with the subsequent negative impact on parents (who already are coping with having a different child), parents take out their frustrations on the teachers, and the cycle continues.

Numerous research has been conducted about the importance of parental involvement in education. Beattie, Jordan, and Algozzine (2006), Rodriguez (2005), and Thurston (2011) argue that if parents are actively involved in their children's education, this does not only positively impact learner achievement but also contributes to better quality education. As highlighted by Bronfenbrenner (as cited in Mitchell, 2004), intervention strategies involving parents effectively improve a child's academic performance than those not including parents. Various reasons have been cited in the literature for involving parents in children's education, specifically when a learner has a particular educational need.

Beattie et al. (2006) argue that parents know more about their children than any other individual, and this information could be helpful to teachers and the school. Rose and Grosvenor (2001) assert that parents also have expert knowledge that could allow teachers to draw accurate and appropriate conclusions about their children's educational needs. Parents also play a central role in their children's developmental and educational activities and can therefore offer insight into their child's abilities and needs (Mitchell 2004). Cummins (as cited in Rodriguez, 2005) argues that when teachers involve parents in their children's education, a sense of self-efficacy develops in them, resulting in positive academic outcomes. Furthermore, when parents of LSEN are involved in their children's educational processes, they develop a more positive attitude towards their children and the educational system (Mitchell, 2004).

Contrasting findings have been yielded by studies focusing on the role of parents in supporting special needs educators. A study conducted by Eloff, Engelbrecht, Swart, and Forlin (2000) among ten special needs educators who teach at special schools for learners with Down Syndrome from the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces of South Africa to identify the stressors associated with the work they do revealed that there was a lack of communication between special needs educators and parents of LSEN. As a

result, teachers indicated that they found the lack of contact with parents stressful as this meant that they lacked information about the learners' needs and felt as if they were not attending to specific learners. Most of the participants who took part in a study conducted by Swart and Pettipher (1999) in South Africa to explore the barriers special needs educators experience in teaching LSEN in special schools stressed the important role of the parent community at the school and the educators' relationships with the parents of LSEN. Teachers emphasised that their need to work as partners with parents of LSEN was closely associated with providing them with quality education while ensuring that what is done at school is done at home. This could be made possible through parents scrutinizing (in a constructive manner) the impact of system-level factors including administrative and organisational variables, curricula, teachers and related personnel, and the availability of required services for their children and making suggestions for improving certain aspects of the special education system. Parents could thus help facilitate the experiences of their children and teachers and the development of special education as a whole. Though most teachers in this study (Swart & Pettipher, 1999) perceived parents as a valuable resource, a few teachers indicated that they prefer them not to be involved in their children's education or volunteer to help in the classroom. Teachers reported that in such instances, learners tended to focus more on their parents than the learning process and often become more dependent on their parents. While different viewpoints about the role of parents in supporting special needs educators exist, the literature proves that it could well be in the best interest of teachers and learners to involve parents as partners in educating LSEN as there are many benefits in such a relationship.

4. The context of teaching LSEN: Teacher attitudes and challenges encountered

Teacher experiences of the support services and structures available to them inform their experiences of teaching LSEN in special schools. These experiences have also informed teacher attitudes about teaching LSEN in special schools. In the following section, I review research focusing on these attitudes and the challenges influencing teacher experiences of teaching LSEN.

4.1 Attitude research on teaching LSEN

Most research conducted in the international and South African context to explore and determine attitudes towards teaching LSEN has focused mainly on teacher attitudes towards the inclusion of LSEN in mainstream classrooms (e.g., Allison, 2012; Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Bothma, Gravett, & Swart, 2000; Donohue & Bornman, 2015; Levins et al., 2005; Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Malinen, 2011). South African studies have also focused on teacher attitudes in mainstream schools towards the policy of inclusive education, WP6 (e.g., Ntombela, 2011; Oswald & Swart, 2011). Though

minimal, research in international contexts focusing on the attitudes of special needs educators teaching LSEN in special schools has explored the various factors that influence teacher attitudes and yielded various results.

A study conducted among pre-service special needs educators who would be teaching at special schools by Beh-Pajooh (1992) in England revealed that while the teachers were optimistic about teaching LSEN due to the further learning that they highlighted would take place in their teaching careers which would thus enable them to adapt to their roles, these special needs educators held negative attitudes. These attitudes were mostly associated with feeling as if they did not get enough training as their teaching practicums were short and further feeling that they left not being fully aware of the appropriate strategies to succeed in teaching LSEN. A quantitative study conducted by Jobe, Rust, and Brissie (1996) with 162 special needs educators at special schools in the United States evidenced that teachers held neutral attitudes regarding teaching LSEN. That is, the teachers neither felt positively or negatively about teaching LSEN. Research conducted in Western Australia (Forlin, 1995) and Arizona (Thomas, 1985) with special needs educators qualified to teach in special schools evidenced positive attitudes. Teacher attitudes were strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the special need presented to them (child-related variables) and less by teacher-related variables such as the teacher's age, gender, years of teaching experience, contact with persons with special needs, and other personality factors. Further, educational environment-related variables such as the availability of physical and human support were consistently found to be associated with positive attitudes towards teaching LSEN. With regard to child-related variables, teachers in both studies felt that teaching a homogenous group of learners positively influenced their teaching experiences, thus promoting positive feelings towards teaching LSEN amongst teachers. In contrast, teachers who had a heterogeneous group of learners described their experience as overwhelming, thus promoting negative attitudes towards teaching LSEN, a finding consistent with the experiences of participants in Torreno and Illian's (2008) study discussed earlier in this chapter. In a study conducted by Shimman (1990) in Uxbridge, special needs educators teaching in special schools were found to have mixed or both positive and negative attitudes about teaching LSEN. Positive attitudes were associated with enjoyment of the job. In contrast, negative attitudes were linked with support services and structures not being as effective as policy and educational authorities proposed.

4.2 Challenges encountered in teaching LSEN

4.2.1 Resources and facilities

The importance of proper resourcing for special schools is highlighted in the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2003). This call was first mentioned in the United Nations General Assembly on the 4th of March 1994, where it was resolved that education in mainstream schools presupposes the provision of interpreter and other appropriate services and that adequate accessibility and support services designed to meet the needs of persons with various special educational needs should be provided (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). Numerous researchers (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2011; Engelbrecht & Green, 2007; Florian, 2008; Foreman, 2008; Mitchell 2004; Potterton 2010; Stubbs, 2008; Walton et al., 2009) highlight that teaching resources and materials, as well as the school facilities, are part of the contributing factors in supporting the special education system. As Stubbs (2008) argues, the special education system will collapse unless there is more grassroots participation and effective allocation of resources. Magadla (2008) further asserts that more resources such as classrooms, laboratories, learner and teacher support material, and quality instruction need to be directed to the Eastern Cape education sector in order to solve the problems experienced by teachers and ensure that LSEN in both special and mainstream schools learn effectively. Walton et al. (2009) argue that when schools are well equipped with basic teaching and learning resources, it makes teachers' jobs more manageable, and the children's learning outcomes will improve.

In Eloff et al's. (2000) study referred to earlier in this chapter, teachers indicated that sourcing and/or locating age-appropriate educational resources for the learner's ability level and securing appropriate resources for the classroom was stressful. The other stressors that emerged pertained to the services of occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, support teachers, and teacher aides. Other needs that the participants identified in the study by Swart and Pettipher (1999) focused on classroom assistants, the development of effective record-keeping systems, individual support for learners, manageable class sizes, and time for collaboration with other professionals. The teachers also shared that they struggled to find time for non-academic-related activities for their learners amongst their already busy schedules and realised the importance of time as a resource.

Another factor that impacts successful special education according to Torreno (2011) is the use of assistive technology. Many LSEN (those who are hard of seeing or hearing, for example) may need to rely on technology to facilitate access and participation in the classroom. This technology is available in

the form of assistive devices. Some of these resources are sophisticated and expensive computers and word processors that offer learners independence and the opportunity to enjoy maximum success. Learners may also benefit from using digital personal organisers, multi-media such as film clips and assistive devices such as microphones and Braille translators (Walton et al., 2009). Even if these resources were available, Torreno (2011) and Walton et al. (2009) argue that teachers would not be able to use them because they lack the required expertise.

4.2.2 Role complexity and a heavy workload

Ainscow (2000) argues that teaching LSEN requires a lot of commitment from a teacher, be it a special or general educator. Similarly, Stubbs (2008) argues that as a whole, teaching and special needs education, in particular, are complex professions as both involve working with people under the constraints that reality imposes. In his study with 40 special needs educators in Israeli special schools, Lavian (2015) found that teachers described their role as complex. That is, teachers were expected to fulfil several expectations at once. Teachers highlighted how, as a result of this role complexity, they took up multiple roles and multitasked, which involved being clerks (duplicating and photocopying), social workers, parents (as families or parents of LSEN were not supportive of their learning or uninvolved), and teachers all at the same time. As teachers in special schools focus on the individual needs of each learner, this inevitably means that there is more planning and preparation required to meet the needs of a diverse range of abilities and thus a large workload. Coupled with the multiple roles and multitasking, teachers thus experience an increased workload which participants in Lavian's (2015) study reported led to them experiencing stress and burn out which are discussed in the subheading that follows. Prochnow, Kearney, and Caroll-Lind (2000) however state that not all LSEN require additional work from teachers. These scholars further elaborate that the nature of the special need is a factor to consider and that different special need levels (mild, moderate, severe, or profound) give different levels of exhaustion for teachers trying to meet learner's needs. This implies that preparing work for children with mild special needs would be less exhausting than for children with moderate and severe to profound learning difficulties.

Generally, the workload of teachers worldwide in special and mainstream schools has received significant attention in the past few years. Collett (2010) asserts that teachers feel angry, confused, and helpless when faced with the task of getting through the required learning programs, meeting attainment targets, providing individualized attention to learners who have a range of learning needs as well as taking on other tasks which have to be carried out by other individuals. This heavy workload has

contributed significantly to teachers' high stress levels and subsequent illness (Tromin & Woods, 2001). According to the Education Labour Relations Council [ELRC] and the Human Sciences Research Council [HRSC] (2005), many teachers in South Africa have left the profession because of the exorbitant workload, high enrolment figures, and behavioural problems. In relation to the present study, Miller, Brownell, Smith, and Stephen (1999) conducted a study in Florida in which a random sample of 1576 special needs educators was examined to explore what factors influenced their decision to leave or remain at a special school or transfer to a general or mainstream school. Results showed that some teachers left or quit their jobs at special schools mainly due to insufficient certification, unmanageable workloads, and stress. Those who remained did so as a result of their passion associated with teaching LSEN. Teachers who transferred from special to general or mainstream schools did so due to improved salaries and more manageable workloads. Some of the findings from this study (Miller et al., 1999) as suggested by the ELRC and the HRSC report seem to be prevalent in the South African context.

4.2.3 Stress and burnout

According to Cosgrove (2000), stress is an emotional condition that builds in a person from having increased or ongoing pressure from related factors. Viljoen (2001) argues that stress in the workplace is the impact of working under extreme pressure and can be regarded as an effort-reward imbalance. In a special schooling context, this could imply that teachers are doing everything in their power under challenging conditions to facilitate effective education for the learners with minimal reward. The factors that impact teachers' sense of efficacy have been well researched (Mitchell, 2004; Nel, 2011; Roffey, 2011; Torreno, 2011).

Eloff et al. (2000) in their study identified four areas that teachers experienced as the most stressful, namely: administrative issues, the behaviour of learners, the teacher's perceived lack of self-competence, and problems with LSEN parents. The above scholars argue that all these stressors point to the lack of effective teacher preparation and support to meet the needs of diverse learners within the educational system. Research conducted by the British Health and Safety Executive in 2000 amongst a combination of teachers (those teaching in special and ordinary schools) in the United States found teaching to be the most stressful profession, with 41.5% of special needs educators reporting to be "highly stressed" (Harrison, 2011). Stress-related symptoms described in the survey included increased alcohol consumption, anxiety, exhaustion, lack of sleep, low self-esteem, overeating, relationship problems, under-eating, and in some cases, thoughts of suicide.

Teachers generally seem to be suffering from a lot of stress due to their working conditions. Swart and Pettipher (1999) and Viljoen (2001) argue that the difficulties teachers face in the classroom, together with other systemic constraints, have pushed up their stress levels and demoralized them greatly. Additionally, the fact that teaching is fraught with conflict that often emerges between teachers and pupils, teachers and parents, teachers and colleagues, and teachers and the educational establishment adds to the stress experienced by teachers. Engelbrecht and Green (2007) suggest that stress is prevalent for teachers because they are constantly under considerable pressure to meet all their learners' academic, social, and emotional needs . As such, Cosgrove (2000) asserts that teachers usually suffer from various stress-related psychological problems such as anger, frustration, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, Harrison (2011) suggests that stress-related illness is widespread and more likely to end a teacher's career than any other cause. These pressures also have the potential of contributing to teacher burnout (Moore, 2008). Studies carried out in the Western Cape province of South Africa indicate that teachers experience stress when teaching LSEN in a special schooling context but that appropriate and quality pre-and in-service programs and the necessary support enable them to deal more effectively with learner diversity (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). This is supported by Collett (2010) who argues that the well-being of teachers could be supported if they knew how to effectively work with learners who have barriers to learning.

A study by Williams and Gersch (2004) with special needs and mainstream school educators who teach LSEN in East London, England both in mainstream and special schools evidenced that both teachers reported high degrees of stress. Teachers who taught LSEN in special schools highlighted that their stress was a consequence of various factors – the poor attitudes of some LSEN towards completing their academic work, lack of time to spend with individual learners, modifying the curriculum, planning IEPs, shortage of equipment and resources, the non-support of specialists to provide assistance for children with moderate and severe disabilities, and the parents' unwillingness to provide assistance to both teachers and learners. Lavian's (2015) study further supports these findings. Scholars (e.g., Mitchell, 2004; Roffey, 2011; Stubbs, 2008; Walton et al., 2009) also indicate that teaching learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties is likely to cause pressure for teachers. This is usually due to a lack of learner discipline and behavioural issues. In the East London district of the Eastern Cape province of South Africa for example, the presence of over-age special education learners in special schools is common. Sometimes learners as old as 17-27 years pose a challenge for teachers. They are of concern as they do not benefit from the formal academic program and resort to behavioural and social problems such as criminal behaviour, gangsterism, sexual misconduct, vandalism, and intimidation of learners and

educators (ECDOE, 2009).

Research has thus proven that special needs educators teaching in special schools in South Africa and internationally are working in severely stressful environments. The challenges that they face could impact their quality of life and the quality of education received by LSEN. If teachers are experiencing the above highlighted challenges, it is unlikely that they will adapt to change effectively; therefore, they could find it challenging to be optimistic about special and even inclusive education.

5. Conclusion

Like all other practices, teaching LSEN is a social practice constructed in certain ways and invested with specific meanings. As suggested by Lavian (2015) and Jobling and Moni (2004), the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools cannot be considered in isolation from the various factors and challenges which inform and influence them.

This chapter started off by looking at the reasons why individuals become special needs educators. Three main reasons have been cited in the literature: having a family member with a special need, wanting to learn from and have a better understanding of people with a special educational need, and a degree in special needs education offering other career opportunities besides working within the context of a school. Studies focusing on being a special needs educator in training or during a practicum highlighted that teaching LSEN is a varied experience. For some teachers, a better understanding of their learner needs was possible while for others, the experience was enjoyable and challenging.

The discussion then turned to research on the support existing for teachers who teach LSEN in a special schooling context. As discussed in this chapter, existing support in South Africa comes from the DBST, the ESS, and the ILST. Although these support structures were designed to work collaboratively and enhance the teaching experiences of special needs educators and LSEN in special schools, reality does not reflect this. Research on the role of parents as a source of support for teachers who teach in special schools was also discussed.

The chapter then looked at research most relevant to the present study which focuses on the context in which the teaching of LSEN takes place and started off by reviewing research about attitudes towards teaching LSEN in special schools. These studies evidenced that teachers who teach LSEN in special schools hold negative, neutral, positive, and a combination of both positive and negative attitudes about teaching LSEN. Lastly, the chapter looked at the various challenges experienced by teachers who teach LSEN. These included a lack of resources, role complexity and a heavy workload, including stress and

burnout which, as evidenced by the literature reviewed, hinder the ability of special needs educators in special schools to do their work effectively and productively. While some of the studies discussed in this chapter are outdated, they remain relevant. As has also been highlighted in this chapter, some of the findings from international studies are similar to those conducted in the South African context.

In the following chapter, I provide a detailed explanation of the steps involved in conducting this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

1. Introduction

As described by Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005), an interpretative phenomenological approach is an inductive (‘bottom up’ rather than ‘top down’) one that does not test hypotheses, and prior assumptions are avoided. Two main principles underpin IPA (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Reid et al., 2005). The first is that IPA aims to explore and capture the meaning that participants assign to their experiences (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Reid et al., 2005). This means that this approach focuses on how individuals make sense of their major life experiences. The second principle is that those taking part in a study are the experts of their own experiences and can offer researchers an understanding of their commitments, feelings, and thoughts by telling their stories in their own words, in as much detail as possible (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Reid et al., 2005). Simply put, researchers recruit participants in an IPA study because they have expertise in the phenomenon being explored.

From the above, an interpretative phenomenological approach is useful because firstly, it allows for questions related to how individuals make sense of accounts of their experience of teaching LSEN in special schools that are particular to their lives to be addressed. Secondly, it is also useful in describing, exploring, interpreting, and understanding the shared and differing experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools. It is for these reasons why the overarching research design of the present study is IPA. A number of decisions were taken regarding how to carry out a study with the abovementioned aims. Given such, this chapter provides a detailed description of the procedures and steps (including the motivations behind them) involved in carrying out this research.

I begin this chapter by providing the aims and research questions guiding this study. The methods followed for recruiting participants are discussed, followed by a discussion of the data collection and analysis procedures used. The core ethical principles underpinning all research studies as they relate to this study are discussed. I have also included a section on evaluation and validation in which I discuss the criteria and strategies used to ensure trustworthiness in carrying out this research.

2. Research questions and aims

The main aims of this study were to explore the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools, the negative and positive aspects of their teaching, their experiences of the education system,

and the various contextual factors impacting their teaching experiences. In order to achieve these aims, the following research question and sub-questions were used as a guide:

Main research question:

How do teachers who teach at special schools experience teaching LSEN?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the negative and positive experiences of teachers who teach LSEN?
2. How do teachers experience the education system?
3. What contextual factors impact how the teachers experience teaching LSEN?

3. Methods

As suggested by Willig (2013), "A good qualitative research design is one in which the method of data analysis is appropriate to the research question, and where the method of data collection generates data that are appropriate to the method of analysis" (p.103). In the section that follows, I discuss the sampling strategies used for recruiting participants, the teachers who took part in this study. The procedure followed for recruiting participants is explained in-depth.

3.1 Sampling

Due to the availability of participants and the need for a particular kind of participant, purposive sampling was the strategy used in this study (Durrheim & Painter, 1999). Often contrasted with random sampling that aims for representativeness and generalisability, purposive sampling is described by Teddlie and Yu (2007) as a strategy involving selecting specific cases or participants for particular purposes.

In this study, purposive sampling was used to select teachers who were 18 years and older (for reasons related to the ability to give consent), teachers who were teaching at a special school for two years or more (to provide rich, in-depth experience), and teachers who were willing to share their experiences in the context of a research interview. While it was preferable that the teachers be specifically trained as special needs educators, the majority of teachers in South Africa do not receive special needs training due to the existence of WP6. As such, recruiting teachers who taught at special schools was regarded as sufficient to obtain the experiences required for the present research. Given an interpretative phenomenological analysis's emphasis on homogeneity (Larkin & Thompson, 2011) in a sample, the aim was to recruit teachers who taught at schools that catered for learners with specific educational needs.

3.2 Recruiting participants

A two-phase approach was followed in recruiting participants from the special schools. An e-mail was sent to the principals of the various schools accompanied by a letter (Appendix A), providing a brief outline of the present research and a request to share information about the research with the school's teachers. A research information card (Appendix B) was also attached. The principals were asked to share or forward the e-mail to the teachers at their schools to notify them about the research. Teachers who wished to participate as indicated on the research information card were required to contact the researcher directly for additional information about the research rather than notify their school principal. This method of recruiting participants was ideal as it helped limit the possibility of teachers being coerced to participate in the study. However, it did not come without any limitations.

Recruiting participants for this study was challenging. A total of eleven special school principals were contacted as outlined above. Three special school principals forwarded the sent email (which I was copied into) to their staff members. Only one teacher from one of the three special schools contacted me, was provided with more information about the study, and agreed to participate. A decision was made to ask this one participant to inform other teachers who teach at special schools she knew about the research. This snowballing approach enabled an additional teacher to reach out. However, this potential participant had been teaching at a special school for a few months. After a month, no further potential participants had reached out. Given such challenges, a decision was made to share information about the research on social media platforms (Facebook and LinkedIn), and users were asked to reshare the post. Recruiting participants in this way was more productive than the initial approach as numerous teachers reached out and asked for more information about the study. Furthermore, homogeneity in the sample was possible as the teachers recruited taught at schools that cater for learners with specific educational needs.

3.3 Participant information

A total of seventeen potential participants were recruited for this study. One teacher was recruited through the two-phase approach, and the remaining sixteen reached out after being '*tagged*' or coming across my post on Facebook or LinkedIn. From the group of sixteen potential participants, seven agreed to participate in this study. Together with the one teacher who was recruited through the original recruitment strategy, a total of eight teachers took part in this study. Merida disclosed on the day of her interview that she had taught at a special school previously. My supervisor and I decided to use her interview for this study. Six of the potential participants expressed interest to participate after the interviews were

conducted, while the remaining three did not respond to the researcher regarding their decision to participate.

Below, I include a table that provides information about the participants. It includes the age, racial identity, the group of LSEN the school they teach at caters for, the number of years they have been teaching at their special school, the type of special school their school is and whether or not they received formal training as a special needs educator. The table is arranged in alphabetical order according to pseudonyms. I provided seven of the eight teachers with a pseudonym, with one participant deciding on their pseudonym.

Table 1: Characteristics of participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Racial Identity	Number of Years Teaching	Group of Learners	Type of Special School	Training[3] (Yes/No)
Aladdin	26	Male	Black	3 years	Various special, physical, and psychological challenges	Combination - remedial offered in primary	Yes
Ariel	23	Female	White	2 years	Intellectual disability (severe), some are physically disabled	Specialised	No
Bell	46	Female	White	3 years	Learning disabilities/barriers to learning	Remedial	Yes
Mamush	24	Male	White	2 years	Intellectual disability	Combination	Yes
Merida	61	Female	White	11 years	Intellectual disability	Combination	No
Moana	37	Female	Coloured	16 years	Autism spectrum, general developmental delay, down syndrome, attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, apraxia, speech delays, and hearing impairment	Combination	Yes
Pocahontas	25	Female	White	4 years	Hearing impaired and learning difficulties	Combination (Specialised and remedial)	Yes
Rapunzel	30	Female	White	2 years	Autism spectrum disorder	Specialised	Yes

[3] Three teachers (Aladdin, Mamush, and Pocahontas) regarded the modules they received at university pertaining to teaching LSEN as training. Bell, Moana, and Rapunzel have formal training in teaching LSEN. Ariel and Merida do not have formal training to teach LSEN.

4. Data collection

In their paper on methods of data collection in qualitative research, Gill, Steward, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) argue that "The purpose of the research interview is to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters and provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena " (p. 292). In this regard, the semi-structured interview (SSI) is particularly useful. The use of SSIs in this study, the way the interviews were conducted when data was collected, and the limitations of using these interviews are discussed in the following section.

4.1 Semi-structured interviews

The method of data collection used for this study was the SSI. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) describe SSIs as a dialogue between researcher and participant guided by a flexible interview protocol and supplemented by follow-up questions, probes, and comments. Similarly, Adams (2015) adds that SSIs are conducted with one respondent at a time and employ closed and open-ended questions, accompanied by why or how questions. Described simply, SSIs are a method of data collection in which the researcher and participants are engaged in a conversation where the questions asked by the researcher encourage the participant to talk. Researchers often use this kind of qualitative interview to gather information from individuals who have attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and personal experiences related to the topic of interest, which in the context of this study includes teachers who teach LSEN in special schools.

Smith et al. (1999) argue that as interpretative phenomenological researchers wish to analyse in depth how participants make sense of and perceive things happening to them, the best way to collect data for any IPA study is through SSIs. In terms of this study, SSIs were deemed suitable as they have been suggested to provide the researcher with an opportunity to hear participants talk and provide detailed insights about a particular aspect of their experience or life (Gill et al., 2008; Willig, 2013). As a data collection method, SSIs are also regarded as flexible as the questions asked during the interview are modified according to the participants' answers (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). SSIs allow for empathy and rapport, thus enabling the researcher to understand the emphatic meaning of the participants' experiences. Compared to the structured interview, the SSI is non-directive, though it is important to acknowledge that the researcher's research question directs the interview (Gill et al., 2008; Willig, 2013). Further, qualitative interviewing provides a deeper understanding of social phenomena than quantitative methods such as a questionnaire. SSIs are also appropriate for exploring sensitive topics that participants may not feel comfortable talking about in the context of a group, and instances where

little is known about the topic under investigation, such as that of the present study. For these reasons, SSIs were very suitable for the present study.

4.2 Conducting the interviews

Before conducting the interviews, I had two key tasks to engage in. Firstly, I e-mailed each of the participants an informed consent form (Appendix C) and an audio and video-recording consent form (Appendix D) to read through, sign, and return to me. Teachers were also asked to provide a day/date and time suitable for them for their interview. Upon receiving these forms from each of the teachers, I signed where applicable then scanned and e-mailed these back to them to ensure that they had copies for their records. A participant demographic form (Appendix E) was also sent, and participants were asked to fill this in. For the second task, teachers were sent an invitation for their interview, which contained a meeting ID and password that they would use on the day of their interview.

A total of eight SSIs were conducted for this study. Initially, the interviews were planned to take place in person at a location each teacher was comfortable with in the city in which the special schools are located. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom video-conferencing – a cloud-based, collaborative video-conferencing service offering features that include group messaging services, online meetings, and secure recording of sessions (Zoom Video Communications Inc, 2016). The interviews took place in the afternoon with teachers either in their classrooms or their homes. Six of the eight teachers allowed for an audio and video recording of their interview. One experienced difficulty with the video (although the video was started, the participant was not visible), and one opted to have an audio recording of their interview. I conducted the interviews predominantly in English as all the participants could converse in this language. However, some of the teachers combined English with some isiXhosa or Afrikaans during their interviews. The interview guide that was used for the interviews is provided in Appendix F.

Even though the participants had seen a photo of me on the research information card and I had had individual conversations with each of them when I provided additional information about the study, before proceeding with the interviews, there were a number of things I did. I reminded each teacher of who I was, explained my role as the researcher, reminded them about the purposes of this study, and the consent and audio and video-recording forms they signed. I also explained what would happen during the interview and reminded them that the interview would be recorded.

I started each interview by asking the teachers to tell me a bit about themselves. Most of the participants were willing to share aspects of themselves with me. This also helped facilitate rapport, easing both the researcher and participant into asking and responding to questions on the interview guide and questions asked based on responses given. While responding to questions, I encouraged the teachers to continue by providing prompts such as 'uh-huh' or 'yes', which also indicated that I was listening and following the accounts. I allowed responses to continue until participants indicated they had nothing more to say by going silent and saying 'and yeah' or 'I hope that answers the question' at the end of their response. As I was uncertain if the silence was an indication of having nothing more to say or a space in which the participant was thinking, I decided to continue with the interview as it was difficult not to feel awkward during these silences. In listening to the audio recordings of the interviews, I realise that I should have allowed more or long silences to provide participants with a chance to say more. My inability to do this means I may have lost some opportunities for gaining good quality data by not allowing participants to think and speak more in these instances. Following an indication of nothing more to say, I would clarify what was said or make interpretations that participants confirmed or disagreed with. In this case, participants would clarify or explain to me what they meant. The interviews ranged from an hour and fifteen minutes to an hour and fifty minutes. All of the teachers were open to responding to questions asked and sharing their experiences. They all provided in-depth responses to questions, elaborated where necessary (at times they needed to be prompted, and at other times this was unnecessary), and supported responses with examples. The interviews were enjoyable, fun, and a learning experience for me. I learnt something new from each of the teachers, shared laughter with each of them, and was able to gain insights into what it is like to teach LSEN in a special school. Due to time constraints and the challenges experienced in arranging interviews with the teachers, follow-up interviews were not conducted.

4.3 Limitations of semi-structured interviews

While utilising SSIs comes with several advantages as outlined above, there are a number of limitations associated with this method of data collection. Adams (2015) and Smith et al. (1999) argue that preparing and conducting SSIs is a time-consuming process, and they tend to be conversational . Given such, SSIs are open to the possibility of the researcher forgetting to ask valuable questions and getting "carried away" in conversation, further leaving room to go off-topic.

In preparing and arranging the interviews with the teachers, some took a while to get back to me with the research documents referred to above and a day/date and time for their interview. While some teachers managed to return the forms and provide a day/date and time for their interview, they forgot about the

interview, which necessitated a reschedule. Though we were able to work through and address this collaboratively, some teachers found it challenging to provide a day/date and time as they had other commitments or their schedules were busy. This came with some frustration and anxiety for me. In negotiating this situation, I reminded myself that with the 2021 school calendar changing due to the pandemic and as this change coincided with my participant recruitment and data collection process, teachers were busy and needed to settle in.

Willig (2013) argues that while rapport between the researcher and participant can be established quickly in a SSI and significantly impacts on how much the participants share, it can easily be disrupted during the interview. An example of this could be when the researcher needs to attend to the recording device, reminding the participant that he/she is being interviewed. Given this limitation, SSIs have been argued to be ambiguous. This is because they combine features of a formal interview (e.g., fixed roles for the researcher and participant, a time limit, an interview protocol) and an informal conversation (e.g., the open-ended nature of the questions asked and emphasis on narrative and experience). As with all other qualitative methods of data collection, SSIs are open to interviewer bias or the "interviewer effect" as the researcher may, consciously or unconsciously, influence participants' responses by asking questions that yield preferred responses. Large amounts of data are obtained from SSIs which, in addition to the amount of time required to prepare and conduct these interviews means that transcribing and analysing data from SSIs is often a long process (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Data analysis for this study was a long process as various processes were engaged in (I elaborate on this in the section that follows). During this time, I felt overwhelmed by the data. There were also times when I felt that I was not speaking or making reference to all the aspects of the teachers' experiences of teaching LSEN. With the help of my supervisor, who provided very useful feedback for the first draft of my analysis chapter, I was able to manage the data better and ensure that the chapter reflects all the teachers said in their interviews about teaching LSEN in a special school.

In qualitative studies, in-person interviews are the traditional means of generating data. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic and as technology advances, new opportunities for conducting research in the qualitative community have emerged. As the interviews for this study were conducted virtually, it is important to reflect on this experience. Studies by Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, and Lawless (2019) and Gray Wong-Wylie, Rempel, and Cook (2020) explored the perceptions and experiences of research participants using Zoom for qualitative data collection (interviews) and revealed advantages and disadvantages. Both researchers and participants found the platform to be accessible, convenient, and easy to use. The video-conferencing service was also described as cost-effective and time-saving as it

does not require participants to travel. Technical difficulties that mainly involved difficulties connecting and getting disconnected during interviews were identified as a disadvantage of using Zoom.

Using this platform for the present study as a tool for data collection, I found that it enabled participants to have their interview where they preferred, thus allowing them to be comfortable. Most importantly, the platform provided participants and me with safety from COVID-19 exposure. With regard to the disadvantages, there were times when either myself or the participants had an unstable internet connection which led to certain parts of the interview being inaudible or disconnecting from the interview. Two of the interviewed teachers were unfamiliar with Zoom which made it difficult for them to connect at the arranged time for the interview. This non-familiarity did not have any impact on their overall interviews.

5. Analysis and interpretation

In the following section, the procedure I followed in analysing and interpreting the teachers' experiences of teaching LSEN in special schools is described. Willig (2013) states that "It is important to understand that the research question, data collection technique and method of data analysis are dependent on one another. They cannot be considered separately and they should not be chosen independently from one another" (p.103). In line with this argument and based on this study's research questions and data collection method , I employed Smith et al's. (2009) interpretative phenomenological approach for analysis.

5.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

An interpretative phenomenological approach to analysis is based on a social constructionist assumption that there is no objective reality and that "all knowledge and beliefs about the world are active human constructions and, as such, are mediated by the social, historical, institutional, and economic conditions within which these constructions occur" (Freeman & Mathinson, 2009, p.1). It takes into account that participants are active in the co-construction of meaning and understanding. In this work, an interpretative phenomenological approach was used as it is consistent with the research question framing the study, which probes how individuals (in this instance, teachers in special schools) experience teaching LSEN. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is committed to examining how people make sense of their major life experiences (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). The outcome of an IPA study includes an element of giving voice; by capturing and reflecting upon the principal claims and concerns of the research participants and by making sense of these by offering an interpretation of this

material, which is grounded in the accounts but may use psychological concepts to extend beyond them (Smith et al., 2009). The approach has been used in work by Kendall (2008) to explore the shared and differing experiences of primary school teachers who have children diagnosed with ADHD in their classrooms, by Githaiga (2014) to explore the lived experiences of a sample of bereaved cancer caregivers in Nairobi, by Flannigan (2016) to explore and describe the experiences of 'black' isiXhosa speaking individuals who have an adult with a serious mental illness as well as Williams (2016) to explore and describe the lived experiences of caregivers of children with disabilities.

IPA is a relatively new approach that initially gained momentum within health psychology, and its utility has since been demonstrated within clinical psychology research (Pearce, Clare, & Pistrang, 2002; Rhodes & Jakes, 2000). It comprises three underlying qualitative approaches which make up its theoretical foundations, namely: (1) phenomenology; (2) idiography; and (3) double hermeneutics. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience, which means that experiences are examined in the ways in which they occur and in their own terms (Smith et al., 2009). Van Manen (1997) describes phenomenology as the study of lived experience or the 'life world'. The 'life world' is understood as what we experience pre-reflectively, without resorting to categorisation or conceptualisation, and quite often includes what is taken for granted or those things that are common sense (Husserl, 1970). The emphasis of this inquiry is on the world as lived by a person, not the world or reality as something separate from the person (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). The current study is therefore concerned with attending to the ways things appear to participants in their lived experience and how participants perceive and talk about teaching LSEN within their own life world. According to Husserl (1970), researchers should endeavour to focus on each and every particular thing in its own right. Phenomenology involves stepping outside everyday experiences and natural attitudes and into a phenomenological attitude, which requires a reflexive move to direct information inward towards our perceptions of objects (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenological research uses descriptions and focuses on the structure of experience, the organising principles that give form and meaning to the life world. It seeks to elucidate the essence of these structures as they appear in consciousness to make the invisible visible (Kvale, 1996; Osborne, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1983). IPA has an interpretative phenomenological epistemology that is interested in understanding a person's relatedness to the world and the things in it that matter to them through the meanings they make (Larkin & Thompson, 2011).

The second foundation of IPA, idiography, is concerned with particular experiences of particular people in a particular context (Breakwell, Smith & Wright, 2012). IPA has thus been used in the present study

to understand specifically how special needs educators experience teaching LSEN in special schools in a South African city. This is in contrast to an attempt either to produce an objective statement of the event in itself or to examine special needs education among teachers in terms of pre-existing conceptual and scientific criteria. This research aims to provide an explorative and interpretive understanding or insight into the teachers' experiences when there are LSEN in a particular context for particular people; the interpretation is focused on meaning-making. The way in which particular contexts are understood thus adds to meaning-making, which is in line with idiography.

The third and final approach underlying IPA is the theoretical stance of double hermeneutics, which can be understood as follows according to Smith and Osborn (2008, p.53): "Participants are trying to make sense of their world, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world". The works of the hermeneutic theorists Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer (1999, as cited in Smith et al., 2009) are influential. These theorists highlighted that access to another person's experience depends on and is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions, emphasising the importance of an awareness of one's own biases and preconceptions and maintaining a spirit of openness (Smith et al., 2009). This perspective recognises that the production of an interpretative account is a function of the relationship between a researcher and participant and is constructed and shaped by this encounter.

As suggested by the above theorists, including Smith et al. (2009), the production of an interpretative account is no different from other qualitative methods of data analysis as it is not a step-by-step process. Rather, it is best described as iterative, or in IPA terms, it is based on the concept of the hermeneutic circle (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010). In other words, during the analysis process, one moves back and forth through a range of different ways of looking at the data (Holloway & Todres, 2003). In order to understand any given part, one looks at the whole, and to understand the whole, one needs to look at the parts. Therefore, reflexivity plays a significant role in double hermeneutics, as the researcher has to be aware of his/her own biases. The process of analysing the data begins with the verbatim transcription (Bryman, 2012) of the audio and video-recorded interview material, followed by three tasks described in detail below.

5.2 <u>Transcription</u>

After conducting the interviews with the teachers, I engaged in the verbatim transcription of each interview. In transcribing the data, I used Parker's (1992) transcription conventions (Appendix G) due to

the level of detail required (although minimal) and appropriate when the focus is on content compared to the minute workings and structure of interaction as is the case with conversational analysis for example. I preferred transcribing the interviews myself because it immersed me in the data. As such, I became familiar with the text and was able to gain a firm grasp of the details and nuances within the discussion. After I had completed transcription, I read through each of the interview transcripts while listening to the recordings to ensure accuracy. This also allowed me to reflect on the content of the interviews, familiarise myself with the data, and conduct a preliminary analysis of the transcripts.

5.3 The analytic process

A necessary first step in data analysis is transcription (Bryman, 2012; Willig, 2013). This step, as noted by Bryman (2012) and Willig (2013), not only enables the researcher to conduct a complete analysis of the data but to engage in a close reading of the data and start thinking about how the data are related or not related to the research questions.

Three tasks are completed during an interpretative phenomenological analytic process (Smith et al., 2009). In the first, the focus is on note-taking, which involves examining the content (what is discussed) and language use (features such as metaphors, pauses, repetitions, and symbols) to examine how participants understand, talk, and think about teaching LSEN. Working with these notes, the researcher, in the second task, reflects on the participants' original words and thoughts to transform the notes into emerging themes. The third and final task involves searching for connections across the emerging themes, clustering them according to conceptual similarities, and providing each cluster with a descriptive label.

6. Ethical Considerations

In his paper on ethics and qualitative research, Shaw (2008) discusses various approaches to qualitative research ethics. Focusing only on codes and principles, one approach isolates ethical aspects from the research process, thus treating them as something that should be considered at the end of the research process during the compilation of the research report. The approach which Shaw (2008) argues for and is adopted in this study positions research ethics within the research process recognising the fact that ethical aspects need to be considered in all stages of the research process, from gate-keeping and recruitment to data collection, including data analysis. In the following section, I discuss the qualitative research ethical aspects related to this study.

6.1 Gatekeepers and recruitment

Before approaching gatekeepers from the principals of the selected schools, ethical clearance from several bodies was required (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Initially, ethical clearance was sought from the Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) of the Rhodes University Department of Psychology. Following approval of the proposal and ethics protocol form by the departmental ethics committee, this study was referred to the institutional ethics committee, the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC). See Appendix H and Appendix I for the ethical clearance letters from these committees.

After ethical clearance was obtained from this committee, permission to conduct the research with teachers from the various schools was required. Permission to conduct the research at the schools was granted by the provincial Department of Education and the principals of the various schools after reviewing the proposed research. Once entry into the schools was granted, teachers were recruited to participate in the study.

6.2 Respect for participants

The ethical principle of informed consent is related to the need to respect the autonomy of individuals (Shaw, 2008). Bryman (2012) defines autonomy as the right of an individual to determine what activities they will or will not participate in. Informed consent therefore based on the above, refers to consent given voluntarily by the potential participant after being informed about the study's purposes, including the form and nature of his/her participation in the study.

To respect participants' autonomy, consent to participate must consider the right to withdraw participation (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). In relation to this point, Shaw (2008) raises a question around the consent given particularly the "genuine voluntariness of the consent" (p.405). Where gatekeepers facilitate introduction to the research and participation requests, this is particularly questionable as consent given in such situations can be influenced by gatekeepers (Watts, 2006). Given the possibility of this occurring in this study, the principals were notified that their involvement in the recruitment process ended after they had shared the e-mail sent by the researcher to them. Further, I made sure to emphasise the voluntary nature of participation with all the teachers who contacted me to request further information about the research. In addition, attempts were made to assure the teachers that their participation or non-participation would in no way affect their relationship with their schools, their school

principals, and the DOE. Following this, the teachers were asked whether they wanted to participate and were encouraged to answer freely.

Informed consent was obtained from the participants in writing to protect the participants and the researcher. Informed consent forms contained in-depth information about the study, the nature of their participation, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw including the present study's purpose. Informed consent forms also included my contact details and those of my supervisor for the participants to use if they wished to. The forms were signed by the participants and me. To protect the participants' privacy and anonymity, they were encouraged to provide a pseudonym (Bryman, 2012; Orb et al., 2000) where the form required their name. The teachers were also given an audio and video-recording consent form that asked for their permission to audio and video record their interviews in conjunction with the informed consent form.

6.3 Benefit and harm

As argued by Watts (2006), the researcher can cause harm in the research process as a result of seeing participants in utilitarian terms. In cases where participation in a study in which any method of data collection in qualitative research (be it an interview or a focus group discussion) causes distress, Orb et al. (2000) argue that the researcher's response amounts to a statement on the value placed by him/her on the participants' well-being compared to the value of the data for the research. Deciding to continue with data collection without having checked on the participant's well-being shows that the process of gathering data outweighs the distress of participants (Orb et al., 2000).

Before data collection, a decision was made that if any of the teachers became distressed during the interviews, the interview would be stopped, and the researcher would aim to contain the situation. Thereafter, affected participants would be asked whether they would like to receive counselling services from the service provider NGO I was working in close collaboration with.

Orb et al. (2000) argue that "researchers have the obligation to anticipate the possible outcomes of an interview and weigh both benefits and potential harm" (p. 94). In this study, one way this was done was considering possible distress caused by discussing sensitive issues around teaching LSEN. Another is related to the need to be aware that talking through their experiences of teaching LSEN might (with or without the interviewer's intention to do so) result in embarrassment or lead to some of the teachers becoming upset. Keeping this in mind, the research aims were explained to participants clearly, emphasising that they would not be judged in any way and that there were no right or wrong answers.

This was further facilitated by the data collection method used in this study which meant that the interviews could be conducted in a way that is sensitive to the issue of teaching LSEN yet enabling for sharing personal experiences and reflecting on these (Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010).

In a context like South Africa, where the educational system is less supportive of teachers who teach LSEN in a special school and stigma about being a learner or teacher at such a school persists makes it difficult to speak about being in this position. The opportunity to speak to a researcher who is willing to listen and is non-judgemental may have been of benefit to the participants.

6.4 Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of data

The pseudonyms used to identify participants in the interview transcripts were also used in the analysis chapter which follows in order to protect the rights to privacy and anonymity of the participants (Orb et al., 2000). Furthermore, any information that was personally identifiable such as names of schools, learners, teachers, other school personnel. and places mentioned during the interviews were omitted from the data and do not appear in the extracts.

With regard to confidentiality of the data, the only person who had access to the audio and video recordings was myself. Regarding access to the transcripts of the interviews, my supervisor will have access. The interview recordings (audio and video) and transcripts will be stored in a password-protected computer belonging to the researcher for five years. When this period has passed, the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

In any research, ethical issues are present due to the tension that emerges between the researcher's aims and/or goals, the emphasis placed on the anticipated contribution that his/her work can make in knowledge production on the one hand and on the other, the need to consider the well-being of those participating in the study (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Orb et al., 2000; Watts, 2006). The ethical considerations discussed above thus cannot be ignored in the research process.

7. Reflexivity

Reflexivity in critical qualitative research according to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), "involves critical reflection of how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research process – what sorts of factors influence the researchers construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the planning, conduct, and writing up of the research" (p.275). Reflexivity, therefore, refers to the process by which the researcher explicates his or her involvement in the research process and the implications of

this involvement in shaping the collected data and the knowledge produced. This is achieved by self-reflecting and reflecting on or disclosing the researcher's own subjectivities, being transparent, and opening the researcher's practises and processes to scrutiny, revealing its messiness, pitfalls, and problems. Elliot, Fischer, and Rennie (1999) argue that another critical part of reflexivity particularly for a study utilising IPA is owning one's perspective. In doing so, the reader is able to evaluate the researcher's position and interpretation of the data. To achieve this, below, I provide a statement of my own assumptions and beliefs in relation to the present study.

I am a 27-year-old Rhodes University student. I was born and bred in a town called Makhanda (formerly known as Grahamstown) in the Eastern Cape. There are only two special schools in our city – one is for learners with intellectual disabilities and the other is for learners with behavioural and psychological problems. I believe in the possibility of an inclusive educational system as purported in WP6. However, I do not think that South Africa will be able to achieve inclusivity given the challenges associated with the implementation of WP6. I am a novice researcher and I do not have a lot of experience of the special needs educational system. I have a personal interest in the research that I am conducting. I have a cousin with Autism Spectrum Disorder. His mother has placed him in several special schools and after a week or two, she would take him out of the particular school he was in at the time, claiming that she was not seeing any difference and the teachers were not doing their job. After deciding to stop taking my cousin to any special school, a family member advised her to take him to a mainstream school. At the school she decided to apply at, the principal told her that there is nothing the school would be able to do for my cousin because he is different and there has never been a learner like him at the school. Despite this, my cousin was admitted at this school. His mother removed him from this school as well for the same reasons she did at any special school he was in. She experienced the process of finding my cousin a school as one that was discouraging and a sense of hopelessness was evident for her. As a result, she stopped looking for a special or mainstream school to send my cousin to and kept him at home for most of his schooling years. In the process of finding my cousin a school, I experienced my aunt as impatient, unsupportive, and critical of teachers, particularly those in special schools. The way she spoke about these teachers upset and frustrated me. I have felt guilty for not sharing this with her as it may have prevented my cousin from experiencing the schooling process as well as providing her with an opportunity to understand the process of teaching LSEN. This entire experience saddened me.

Despite being exposed to negative perceptions of others about the special needs educational system, going into this research I was well aware of this and conscious of the way in which I asked the interview questions. I approached this study with openness to multiple constructions although it may have been the

case that my own experiences may have influenced how I approached the data. I also did my best to reflect on my interpretations and not overlook positive experiences. To encourage reflexivity in this study, I kept a research diary to document my experiences and thoughts during the research process. In this section, I draw on extracts from this journal.

7.1 Positioning the researcher

Watts (2006), drawing on her own research experience with women who do not identify with feminist aims explains how assumptions made about the researcher, including how the researcher is positioned, has implications for how the research is conducted. As outlined in the section on recruiting participants, the principals from the various special schools were relied upon to introduce this study to their respective teachers. Teachers were also relied on to introduce this study to other special needs educators through the snowballing approach, and social media users when I posted on the two platforms about this study. This meant that the way my purpose, particularly that of my research was described (despite there being a research information card which I compiled) would have implications for, firstly, whether or not the teachers would want to participate and secondly, what their expectations were when they were provided with further information about the study. To illustrate this point, I use an example.

In individually providing further information about the study to the potential participants, I noticed that some of the teachers were concerned about whether their school principals and members of the DOE would know or be told what they said during the interview and whether the DOE would know who they are and what schools they taught at. Given these concerns, I explained the aspects of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality to the teachers (see earlier discussion in this chapter) as they relate to this study. Further, teachers were also informed that the role of their school principals in this study was only to assist with recruitment and provide additional permission to participate and that of the DOE was to approve the study and give me as the researcher "the go-ahead". I also informed the teachers that a copy of my thesis would be shared with them and the DOE and appear on their website. However, no identifying information (e.g., names of schools, teachers, and other mentioned individuals) will appear. I then asked the teachers if they had any questions for me before asking them if they were interested in participating. None of the teachers asked further questions.

Although useful for this kind of study, the two-phase, snowballing, and social media approaches employed in recruiting participants described earlier in this chapter may have conferred outsider status to me as the researcher creating suspicion among some of the teachers who participated in this study. Among others, it may have conferred insider status due to the study being endorsed by the provincial

education department, thus providing it with 'credibility' and 'validity' (see Watts, 2006). While this may have been the case, it is important to note that this may have been problematic when it comes to the difficulty some teachers may have had when it came to deciding to participate in this study. With reference to the literature on insider/outsider positions below, I take this discussion further.

7.2 Insider/outsider positions

There were aspects of my identity that gave me insider status, while others meant that I occupied the position of an outsider during the process of data collection. Being 'Black' and an isiXhosa speaker meant that I was similar to one of the participants who took part in this study. My socio-economic status made me different to most of the teachers who participated in this study. As a student, an identity of mine that was foregrounded by this study, I was different to most of the participants, majority of whom had qualified in a particular field and were employed. An identity of mine I was most aware of was that of being a researcher, which positioned me as an outsider and an expert (Bhavnani, 1990, as cited in Macleod, 2002). However, the methodology I used to collect data for this study allowed me to place the participants rather than myself in the position of expert because even though I had entered the interviews with predetermined questions, these were merely used as a guide. Further, allowing the teachers to share their experiences with me and using their experiences to guide my questioning ensured that they could maintain this position. I elaborate on the researcher's position as the expert below when discussing the relationship between the researcher and participants.

While occupying an outsider position might come with disadvantages, Collins (1986) argues that there are some benefits. One of these benefits includes "the tendency for people to confide in a 'stranger' in ways they never would with each other; and the ability of the 'stranger' to see patterns that may be more difficult for those immersed in the situation to see" (Collins, 1989, p. S15). In conducting the interviews, some of the teachers shared personal experiences with me despite being a stranger. Aladdin, for example, shared that his relationship with his daughter differs from that which he has with his learners. Bell shared how her divorce impacted her when she was unable to find a teaching job. Some of the teachers also shared future plans. Bell shared some plans for her school, while Mamush and Aladdin shared their plans related to their education and their teaching careers.

7.3 Relationships in the research process

In his chapter on reflexivity, Parker (2005) emphasises that attention to the different relationships between those involved in the research process is important when the researcher aims to critically account

for the influence of various aspects of the research in knowledge production. Parker (2005) speaks of three relationships: 1) between the researcher and participants; 2) between the researcher and co-researcher, and 3) between the researcher and supervisor. As I conducted this research by myself, without a co-researcher, I only discuss the first and third relationships Parker (2005) refers to.

7.3.1 Between the researcher and participants

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) emphasise the close connection between ethics and reflexivity, arguing that the manner in which the researcher manages the relationships between himself/herself and his/her participants is a reflection of the way in which the participants are viewed. There were times during the research process where I found myself relying on the privileges linked to my position as a researcher (I illustrate this with an example below), although I had intended to manage the relationship in a way that treated the participants as equals. Bhavnani (1990, as cited in Macleod, 2002) suggests that one of the power relations within a research relationship, especially between the researcher and his/her participants in the data collection process, is that of the researcher occupying the expert position, which often guards the researcher against being checked or questioned.

During Ariel's interview, I asked a question that was unclear to her. She asked me what the question meant and requested that I ask it again. I had recorded the following in my research diary about this incident:

I finally started with my interviews today and I am really excited for the upcoming ones. When doing this interview, something that stood out for me was when Ariel asked what a particular question meant. I was very surprised by this because I did not expect this to happen as I thought all of the questions were straightforward and clear.

To mitigate this, I rephrased the question for the participant during her interview, which was useful. As I had not expected my participants to question certain aspects of the research, I assumed they would trust my judgement. As such, I had slipped into the position of the researcher as expert.

7.3.2 Between the researcher and supervisor

A number of decisions between the researcher and his/her supervisor are made in conducting a research project. These decisions include (but are not limited to) the topic and aims of the research, the research questions, the theory, or theories that will be used to guide both the research process, including data analysis and interpretation, who the participants will be, the strategies to be followed in recruiting them

including the methods to be used for data collection and analysis. This study has been shaped by an interactive decision-making process between my supervisor and me.

The decision to conduct this particular project was mine. The aims, approaches to data collection, and analysis were also developed by me. Although this was the case, the relationship between my supervisor and I was conducted in a way that my input and that of my supervisor in the decision-making process was encouraged, as I will demonstrate below by way of examples. As I was aware of my supervisor's knowledge in conducting research and guiding students in this process, I would defer to his expertise when I was uncertain about how to solve a particular problem related to this study.

Following my decision to conduct this study, my supervisor and I had initial discussions, for example, about which teachers would be included in this study, whether they all had to be teaching at the same school or different special schools, how long they should have been teaching for (a year or two years), and whether focus groups or SSIs would be used as the method of data collection. We jointly decided against focusing on special needs educators who taught learners with a particular educational need, teachers who had taught for a year, and individual interviews. As the research process unfolded, I decided that I wanted to do interviews instead of focus groups as some of the teachers who agreed to participate in this study expressed discomfort with sharing their experiences in the context of a focus group discussion. In addition, given the fact that the group discussion was going to be conducted virtually, it seemed that it would be one that would be difficult to facilitate and thus open to the possibility of experiences not being wholly shared. My supervisor supported this change following a discussion with him. Our initial discussions also dealt with decisions around how and from where the teachers would be recruited. Recruiting utilising the two-phase approach discussed earlier in this chapter was an idea I had suggested. My supervisor suggested we look at ways to limit the involvement of principals beyond the recruitment process. When I had experienced challenges with recruiting in this way, I informed my supervisor about the process of snowballing, which I had initiated. The decision to advertise the research on social media platforms is one I made independently. With regard to the research questions guiding this study, these were compiled by me. In the process of putting this thesis together, my supervisor provided very useful advice and feedback.

7.4 The researchers' expectations

After having read and critically engaging with the literature on special educators' experiences of teaching LSEN in special schools as well as research that has been done to highlight some of the positive and negative aspects associated with teaching LSEN, I believed I was prepared and open-minded enough to

listen to the experiences of the participants. When I read over the reflections I had made after some of the interviews, a different picture emerged. Below, I include a reflection from the research diary I kept and comment on how my expectations influenced data collection. The reflection is taken from a journal entry of my last interview with Mamush. As evident below, I comment on the length of the responses and the absence of detail:

Today I did my last interview and I enjoyed it as well. Like all the previous ones, the participant provided a unique experience. A number of times, the participant provided very short or single-word responses, which was a bit frustrating as I had to probe a lot. However, as the interview progressed, this got better, and the participant provided more detailed/in-depth responses.

In reflecting further on the above, I now realise that in conducting the interviews, I expected the teachers to provide in-depth experiences. When I listened to the audio-recording of this particular interview, I realised that I was listening for a particular kind of experience; I had not expected an account of teaching LSEN where the participant would need to be probed as much. I also acknowledge that previous interviews with the other teachers may have possibly influenced this and that rapport with Mamush may not have been established sooner than with the other participants, leading to minor detail being given.

8. Evaluation and validation

A number of scholars (Mays & Pope, 2000; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010) have argued that the criteria used to ensure the quality of a quantitative research study which include generalisability, objectivity, reliability, and validity cannot be used to assess the quality of a qualitative study. Rather, researchers have suggested that qualitative researchers speak about ensuring trustworthiness through the use of criteria like credibility, confirmability, and transferability, which are more appropriate (Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). The way in which trustworthiness was ensured in this study is discussed below.

8.1 Credibility and confirmability

Shenton (2004) defines credibility as the researcher's "attempt to demonstrate that a true picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny is being presented" (p.63). On the other hand, confirmability involves the researcher taking certain steps to ensure that the study's findings emerge from the dataset rather than from his/her own interpretations (Shenton, 2004). To ensure these two criteria in this study, three strategies were used: member checking, participant orientation, and peer debriefing.

Member checking as a strategy for ensuring credibility and confirmability involves constantly checking the interviewer's understanding of the participants' experiences with the participants (Agbedahin, 2012; Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004). This process can continuously take place both during and after data collection. In this study, member checks took place during the interviews providing me with an instant opportunity to clarify, correct, and confirm my understanding of the participants' experiences with them in the moment.

Another strategy for ensuring credibility and confirmability useful to this study was participant orientation or using the participants' own phrases and words (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In this study, participant orientation involved the transcription of the interviews, which were conducted including providing and using extracts from the transcripts to support the conducted analysis.

The third and final strategy used to ensure credibility and confirmability was peer debriefing. This strategy involves the researcher engaging in dialogue with colleagues who have experience with the same topic, population, and methods utilised in the research to find out if he/she is on the right track (Agbedahin, 2012; Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004). Access to my supervisor and other staff members within the Department of Psychology who have conducted research utilising the same or a similar methodology and conducted research of a sensitive nature were very helpful every time I had questions and was confused, offering guidance where necessary. It is hoped that my use of the above strategies has, in some way, contributed to ensuring trustworthiness in this study.

8.2 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the applicability of the findings or research to other contexts and populations other than those within which the data and findings were obtained (Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004). According to Tracy (2010), this strategy "is achieved when readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation" (p. 845). Thick descriptions of the context of participants and the participants themselves, including examples of their own words, which I have provided, need to be offered by the researcher for transferability to be achieved (Tracy, 2010).

9. Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the steps and procedures I followed to make his study possible. I started by discussing the method of purposive sampling I employed for recruiting the teachers who participated in this study. This discussion was followed by a detailed explanation of SSIs, which constituted the method utilised to collect data. Steps taken in analysing and interpreting the teachers' experiences were also

outlined. Using an approach to research ethics that views them as evident in all stages of the research process (Shaw, 2008), I discussed the ethical considerations related to this study. Thereafter, I discussed the various strategies used to ensure trustworthiness in this study with reference to the criteria of credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010).

Having outlined the methodology of this study, I will now present my findings. The next chapter is the results and discussion chapter and provides a description and interpretation of the superordinate and subordinate themes which emerged from the dataset.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present the analysis and interpretation of my research findings. The focus of this chapter is on the superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged from the eight SSIs in which the teachers shared their experiences of teaching LSEN in special schools. Five superordinate themes emerged from the data: 'personal commitment and the need for a balance'; 'recognising the learner at the centre'; 'the importance of a holistic approach'; 'the ups and downs of teaching LSEN', and 'support is available but limited'. The superordinate themes together with their respective subordinate themes are provided below in Table 2.

Table 2: Superordinate and subordinate themes

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate themes
1. Personal commitment and the need for a balance	Emotional investment
	Responsibility to teach
	Difficulties finding a balance
2. Recognising the learner at the centre	Letting the learner lead
	Every learner is unique
	Special needs vs. mainstream education
3. The importance of a holistic approach	Laying the foundation
	Putting the puzzle together
4. The ups and downs of teaching LSEN	Positive experiences and highlights
	Challenges
5. Support is available but limited	Proximal support
	Distal support
	"We would always love more support"

The superordinate and subordinate themes will be presented in turn. Although the themes have been separated, many of them are related which is apparent throughout the chapter. Therefore, it is important to consider each theme in relation to the holistic experience and the hermeneutic circle (see chapter three). In discussing each of the superordinate themes, verbatim extracts from the SSIs will be referred to throughout to support the findings. I have aimed to sample the extracts proportionally across participants to ensure that individual voices can be heard and individual experiences can be illuminated. Throughout

this chapter, I have aimed to explore both depth and breadth while also highlighting both shared and distinct experiences, therefore, capturing divergence and convergence in experiences.

According to Smith et al. (2009), the process of finding themes is based on the researcher engaging in a double hermeneutic (see discussion in chapter three). As such, it is important to note that the themes presented in this chapter are one possible construction of the phenomenon of teachers' experiences of teaching LSEN in special schools. I also acknowledge that the themes are a subjective interpretation that may have been interpreted differently by another researcher.

2. Personal commitment and the need for a balance

In line with the argument made by Ainscow (2000) that teaching LSEN requires a lot of commitment from teachers, this superordinate theme captures the importance of teachers being committed, driven, and motivated to teach LSEN in special schools. This endeavour however is apparently impeded by the work becoming overwhelming. The teachers therefore appear to need to find a balance in order to ensure that they persevere. The following subordinate themes of emotional investment, responsibility to teach, and difficulties finding a balance comprise this theme.

2.1 Emotional investment

Yoo and Carter (2017) argue that emotions are a central part of teaching as teachers heavily invest themselves in their work through building relationships with their learners and colleagues. This was evident in the present study. Majority of the teachers demonstrated a sense of emotional investment and commitment to LSEN. A sense of personal ownership was apparent in most of the experiences of the teachers who took part in this study. In the extracts below, we see the teachers use words and phrases such as *my*, *mine*, *my children,* and *my own* suggesting that they regard LSEN as their own children and possibly an important part of their lives and/or families.

Extract 1

Bell: *My kids are important to me Sibongile (.) they are mine from 8-1 [o'clock] but they are still my children even when they go home to their own families*

Extract 2

Pocahontas: *I know they have their own parents and families but they are my children too*

Extract 3

Ariel: *I don't have children of my own yet (laughter) (.) the learners are my children and even when I eventually do have my own children they will still be my kids*

Extract 4

Moana: *The learners are not just little and big people I teach and forget about at the end of the workday (.) they are my children and I always have them in mind like my own kids*

Some of the teachers shared experiences of a strong emotional connection and attachment to LSEN:

Extract 5

Pocahontas: *You become (.) you become so (.) so attached to them during the year and they become attached to you too and that just helps with the learning and just helps the learners to easily approach you about things they are struggling with and share problems they are having at home for example (.) sometimes you don't want to pass them on (.) even if I prepare myself for it and tell myself 'they will be leaving soon' I get very sad at the end of the year when I have to let my kids go*

Extract 6

Bell: *I love my kids Sibongile (.) I really love them (2) uhm I get emotional just thinking about some of them (.) I was actually thinking about my (.) my first three boys [that I worked with when I started the school] (.) they are matriculating this year (.) one of them I've worked with from grade six (.) and I kept on hearing him making little comments like he said 'well maybe he [I] can come and teach CAT in the FET next year' you know (.) and I think 'yho[4] this child is (.) he's (.) he's gonna [going to] find it hard to leave and I'm gonna [going to] find it hard to let him go because they (.) we work from a point of relationship with the kids and this helps a lot with the learning and the learners can be open about anything (.) school related or not school related (.) we don't work from (.) the teacher here's the board (.) do what I say (.) we work [from this point] so yeah (.) see now I'm getting emotional (participant crying) (10) like I'm <u>emotional</u> about these kids moving (.) leaving school at the end of this year*

In her paper discussing emotional investment in teaching, Xia (2016) argues that this experience is teacher-centred and plays a crucial role in improving learners' academic performance and caring about their emotional attitude. Contrasting findings were yielded by the present study. In experiencing an

[4] An isiXhosa term used (depending on the context) when reacting to something to express disgust, shock, or surprise, used throughout South Africa.

emotional connection and attachment to their learners Pocahontas and Bell show that this is a dual experience – the emotional connection and attachment is experienced by both the teacher and the learner. It appears that the connection and attachment developed by teacher and learner aid in the learning process and promote learner openness about personal difficulties, as both teachers show. However, it can make transitions difficult. Pocahontas shows how the transition brings her feelings of sadness despite preparing for it and solely affects her. In contrast, Bell shows that the transition affects both her and one of her learners, whom she has worked with for a long period of time. A sense of loss is also evident for Bell, given her physical tears during her interview.

Hocschild (1983) argues that teaching is regarded as a caring occupation/profession due to the interaction between teachers and learners. As such, teachers are positioned as caregivers in relation to their learners. In line with this argument, Moana and Ariel highlighted how possibly because of the emotional connection and attachment they experienced with their learners; a parental role is evident in teaching LSEN. They said:

Extract 7

Moana: *So because I treat them like I would my own kids (.) I <u>teach</u> them like I would my own kids (.) I love them the way I would as (.) and (.) and I also <u>mother</u> them you know so there is that emotional attachment*

Extract 8

Ariel: *I kind of just realised that with special needs it's a lot more (deep breath) (.) how do I explain it (.) like it's not a teacher-child relationship it's a (.) it's more like a (.) like a (.) like a mother-child relationship (.) yes I'm still a teacher but the children create such a <u>bond</u> with you because they're not there just to necessarily learn maths and science and whatever children learn (.) they're there to feel safe and feel loved and feel comfortable and learn (.) when you show them the care and the love the bond just obviously grows but it's obviously not like that with all of the children*

As seen in the above extracts, Moana takes up a maternal role in relation to her learners. Ariel on the other hand experiences a motherly relationship with some of her learners. Though their experiences differ, both teachers suggest that they care for, love, protect, and nurture their learners' physical, emotional, and social development while teaching them or being their teachers. This, however, was not without its challenges.

Extract 9

Moana: *I sometimes find it difficult to discipline the learners or telling them that something they did is wrong (.) to be honest sometimes I feel a little bad and I think it has to do with the mothering side of things (.) their behaviour is sometimes a challenge but if I have to tell a learner '[…] don't bite or kick […] it's not right' I do that but I do it like a mother would (.) gently and not in a rude way so the way I do it [discipline] is important (.) and its necessary because if I don't discipline (.) they will think it's okay to kick or bite others but it's hard*

Moana speaks to how she finds it difficult to discipline her learners because of the maternal role she takes up. Despite this difficulty, however, she acknowledges the importance of disciplining her learners and shares that the manner in which she disciplines, *like a mother would (.) gently and not in a rude way*, is also important. It is suspected that this way eases the difficulty and possible guilt that Moana experiences when disciplining her learners. Challenging behaviours were highlighted by majority of the teachers who took part in this study and are discussed further in superordinate theme four, 'the ups and downs of teaching LSEN'.

Reflections on teaching LSEN being an emotional investment were also evident in the data. Rapunzel and Moana sum this up below:

Extract 10

Rapunzel: *It is also emotionally taxing at times because you invest so much of yourself every second of the day uhm its go go go from eight until one uhm there isn't a moment where you're [you are] sitting still*

Extract 11

Moana: *<u>Emotionally (.)</u> you also get very drained uhm emotionally because you just sort of (.) not that you wanna [want to] fix the child but you wanna [want to]do everything you can to <u>help</u> them so sometimes when you do this and nothing changes that takes a toll on you*

Day and Kington (2008) argue that teaching is an emotionally demanding venture. In the above extracts, the two teachers speak to the emotionally demanding nature of teaching LSEN. In dedicating herself to teaching, Rapunzel finds herself constantly working and unable to pause or take a break during the teaching day. Moana suggests that teaching LSEN and investing in this process can be stressful for her,

particularly when she goes the extra mile to help her learners and no difference or change is seen, which has a negative impact on her.

2.2 Responsibility to teach

A contribution made by this study is that the role of special needs educators goes beyond teaching. This subordinate theme explores how the teachers perceive the role that they play in teaching LSEN and the responsibilities they feel they have to enable this. During their interviews, Aladdin, Pocahontas, Rapunzel, and Ariel shared the following:

Extract 12

Aladdin: *It is a:: very big responsibility (.) it's not just the State making sure that there is someone in front of kids but it is me taking the responsibility as a person to do my job to the best of my ability every day with a passion to make sure that they grow up to be independent so that they are able to free themselves and live (.) I don't just teach (.) I go beyond the label that I've also been assigned to [that has been assigned to me] (.) I also build relationships with the learners to know them as individuals because the (.) the (.) the (.) I am safeguarding and enabling their future (.) it's basically in my hands and that's something I have to sleep with at night*

Extract 13

Pocahontas: *I don't think people realize how big that responsibility is to have parents trusting you with the education of your [their] child (.) it's a very big responsibility (.) it's not said enough that 'you are responsible for the child's education in your class' (.) the future of my kids is in my hands so I give my work my all everyday (.) I also (.) I don't just teach my kids how to count or read or write and all of that but I (.) I build their confidence and help them realise that they are capable of doing things*

Extract 14

Rapunzel: *The work we do is our responsibility as the teachers (.) it is a huge responsibility uhm (.) every day you spend with them is a responsibility to make sure that they're getting as much from that day as possible which is why every day I give my work my all*

Extract 15

Ariel: *Oh my goodness! (.) I am responsible for every single one of my kids*

Being a special needs educator for Aladdin is more than standing in front of his learners as he is required to given the fact that he is qualified to be a teacher. It is about protecting and supporting their future to ensure that each of his learners live independently. Pocahontas's role as she states, is to prepare her learners for the future. Rapunzel suggests that her role as a special needs educator is to ensure that her learners learn as much as they can in a day. While Rapunzel explicitly speaks to her responsibility as a teacher, Aladdin and Pocahontas in respectively saying *it's basically in my hands* and *the future of my kids is in my hands* speak to their responsibility or the fact that the future of their learners is in their control.

All four teachers (with Ariel doing so ardently) expressed the magnitude of this responsibility through the emphasis on words such as big and huge. To ensure that the future of his learners is protected and supported, Aladdin suggests that he does his job at a high standard and goes above and beyond what he is expected to do as a teacher. By putting their energy and effort into their teaching on a daily basis, Pocahontas and Rapunzel work toward fulfilling their respective roles as special needs educators. Also important to note in extracts 12 and 13 is that Aladdin and Pocahontas saying *I don't just teach*, suggest that they have an extended role in teaching LSEN.

2.3 <u>Difficulties finding a balance</u>

In her study with four teachers teaching in Title 1 mainstream schools in Indiana to explore the personal and professional challenges they experience, Durham-Barnes (2011) found that these teachers experienced difficulties creating a work-life balance. Teachers reported struggling to work towards achieving this balance despite teaching for over ten years. A new insight of the present study is that special needs educators also share this experience. However, they work towards establishing ways of achieving a work-life balance.

In being committed, dedicated, and motivated to teaching LSEN, the participants shared experiences of finding it difficult to balance their professional and personal lives. Rapunzel spoke about how she gave too much of herself or spent most of her time on her work possibly when she started teaching LSEN and could not do things she was used to doing in the afternoon. In the extract below, she shares her experience.

Extract 16

Rapunzel: *It is <u>so</u> important to find balance between your personal life and work you know (.) initially I think uhm I maybe (.) I (.) maybe it's me maybe its everyone but I was super consumed by my job and making sure that I was doing the right thing (.) that I started to lose the balance of [with] my personal*

life (.) it starts to blur when you're doing so much work (.) so much of school related stuff that you're not doing what you're used to in the afternoon

In continuing with the conversation around balance during her interview, Rapunzel shared how she has now managed to find a balance and also spoke to why this is important for her.

Extract 17

Rapunzel: *I just got to a point where I said 'these are my working hours (.) this is my preparation time after work and (.) the rest of the time I (.) is family time or its hobbie time or its nap time (laughter) whatever I want it to be time' and I had to get to that point to make sure that I could (.) sustain the longevity of this career to make sure that I could keep coming back day after day week after week year after year because if it becomes all-consuming I would burn out and I don't want to (.) I want to get to a point where I can have the balance and keep doing it for longer and love it for longer and I think that's true for anything in life (.) I mean if it's too much (.) you can't do it for very long you know so yeah (.) I think I had to make a decision like 'come on [....] like (.) balance'*

In the extract above, Rapunzel speaks to how she established a balance by making a personal decision of how she would spend and/or manage her time. She acknowledges that if she gives too much of herself or spends most of her time on work, there is the possibility of burnout. In establishing a balance between her personal and professional life, Rapunzel thus suggests that she may avoid burnout and also be able to continue teaching LSEN for a longer period of time as this is something she loves.

Two teachers who took part in this study manage (this also involves being the school principal) and teach at the schools where they work. The schools are both registered as businesses. The teachers described their experiences with balance.

Extract 18

Bell: *It's a big challenge to say this is me time and this is work time (.) I have not entirely found ways to maintain the work-life balance because my school is registered as a business so there's lots to do (.) there's all the business things and then the teaching related things which I must balance and it's a lot (.) I do have people who help but I do most of the work but I think the balance comes in waves for me (.) I do do things and take time off (.) I do have (.) I'm involved in my church and I'm involved in my worship team (.) I write songs (.) I sing (.) I play the piano and that is my (.) probably my biggest joy and outlet and the thing that (.) is for me (.) that keeps me going (.)*

Extract 19

Moana: *There's a lot to do and deal with cause (.) it's (.) it's the teaching aspect and making sure that the curriculums and things is [are] in place (.) the parents uhm all of those (.) and then there's the* <u>*business*</u> *side uhm and (.) and of course it goes hand in hand so there's a lot to do and deal with uhm (.) it's a challenge (.) I need to sort of* <u>*also*</u> *have a balance uhm in my career life and my personal or family life (.) uhm that's also quite hard to do because obviously I still come home to be a mom and come home to be a wife (.) I must (.) I still come home to* <u>*homework*</u> *and teaching and stuff so I tend to forget about* <u>*me*</u> *uhm and that's what I (.) I (.) I (.) I slack (.) sort of lack the most uhm I put work and everybody first and so I've just learned this year that 'you know what (.) I need to do stuff that's act (.) actually gonna also* <u>*help me*</u> *and still be able to give out there' (.) yeah so I do things I enjoy like read (.) go for walks and hikes with friends (.) spend time with family and stuff just to have some me time or time with people I care about and value*

Both Bell and Moana share how balancing the business and/or management components of their schools with teaching is a challenge for them as it is a lot of work. Bell acknowledges that she has people to support her. However, majority of the work is done by her. She describes the balance as one that comes in waves, possibly suggesting that there are times where the work is overwhelming, thus bringing about limited balance and times when it is manageable, and a balance is possible. For Moana, the challenge of balancing the two components of the school comes with an added difficulty of balancing her career with her personal life in which she has other roles such as being a mom, a wife, and a teacher to her own two children. She acknowledges that in finding it difficult to balance the various aspects of her life (business and teaching, career and personal/familial), a sense of self-neglect is evident for Moana when she says *I tend to forget about me*. Although balancing the two components of their schools is challenging, both teachers appear to put in the effort to ensure that they take a break from work or have some personal time for themselves or others to do things they enjoy. In doing so, both teachers can continue with the work they do at their respective schools and possibly reset and enhance their personal relationships.

Aladdin's experience differed from that of Rapunzel, Bell, and Moana. He shared the following with me during his interview:

Extract 20

Aladdin: *I have no life besides this [teaching] (.) I know from half seven [half past seven] till three [o'clock] I have no personal life uhm I am now living here at school so I offer uhm a study here at the*

hostel for the kids so it's (.) it's (.) it's like again (.) I have no personal life (.) I am here (.) I live here man (laughter) yeah (.) so (.) I find not (.) I don't even want to (.) to (.) to separate the two and say 'okay (.) now I can turn a switch and say I am […] and then turn the switch and say I am Mr […]'

In the above extract, Aladdin's dedication, drive, and commitment to teaching LSEN is evident. It appears that his personal and professional identities are intertwined, and he prefers not to distinguish between himself as an individual and a teacher. Despite this, the repetition of *I have no personal life* possibly suggests that the professional identity is prioritised more. Aladdin's laughter possibly suggests that he is aware of this and comfortable with it as well. In his interview, Aladdin shared that one of the challenges he experiences as a special needs educator is feeling as though he does not have enough time to do all that he needs to as a teacher within a day. Special needs educators in Arab schools in Israel in the study conducted by Toreno and Iliyan (2008) discussed in the literature review reported similar experiences. Aladdin's experience with balancing his professional and personal life may also possibly be tied to this factor.

3. <u>Recognising the learner at the centre</u>

For a number of years, teaching has been regarded as supportive of hierarchical and authoritarian systems (Boud, 2006; Sidwell, 1992). In recent years, there has been a shift of emphasis towards putting the learners needs at the centre of the learning/teaching process. In line with this argument, this superordinate theme explores and aims to capture how teachers experience teaching LSEN in special schools as a practice that predominantly involves shifting instruction from the teacher to the learner and paying attention and responding to the differences and needs of LSEN. This theme is built up from the following subordinate themes: letting the learner lead, every learner is unique, and special needs vs. mainstream education.

3.1 <u>Letting the learner lead</u>

In international contexts such as Denmark and the USA, calls for education at all levels to be learner-led persist (Antón, 2002; Iversen, Pederson, Krough, & Jansen, 2015; Yeh & Swinehart, 2017). According to Iversen et al. (2015), such an approach is based on the assumption that each learner has their preferred way of learning and therefore has the potential to design a learning process that is meaningful to them. Furthermore, it removes the focus in the learning process from the teacher to the learner. A new insight in this study is that this group of special needs educators in the South African context have responded to

this call. A shared experience amongst most teachers is that of their teaching moving in the direction that the learner desires. In the extracts below, Moana, Pocahontas, and Rapunzel share their experiences.

Extract 21

Moana: *So (.) so what I've learnt is that we (.) I always tell my staff that we need to plan our goals (.) so we have goal setting plans which obviously helps [help] us to have control of our sessions or our class therapies but you can set out those (.) those activities and if that child <u>is led</u> to a (.) painting activity (.) let's go to that painting activity and we get them to play and mess so you're setting out the goals for them uhm but they [are] leading you to what they feel like doing first uhm because I find that if you <u>force</u> them to do something it just becomes a wall that you constantly knocking against then they shutdown (.) then they have meltdowns (.) then they (.) not wanting to learn so if you sort of make it fun and you (.) you <u>go</u> according to sort of what they [are] interested in doing (.) <u>you get a lot more out of them</u> because they [are] interested in it (.) in t (.) they wanna do it you know (.) it's exactly the same like you and I (.) if you could force me to do something that I don't like I'm not gonna do it (.) I'm not gonna end up doing it (.) I always tell my (.) my teachers to <u>have</u> a plan of the day (.) have your plan (.) your week set up (.) plan (.) have your activities planned but have it set out that they are able to choose still what they want but we [are] still getting the (.) the (.) the (.) the outcome that we want <u>by them</u> completing those tasks*

Extract 22

Pocahontas: *The child is in charge (laughter) I follow their lead (.) they show me what they want to learn (.) when they want to learn it and how (.) my role as a teacher is to pay attention and do it their way (.) in the end they <u>definitely</u> learn something*

Extract 23

Rapunzel: *I am not in charge of the learning (.) the learner is (.) if they want to learn to count by painting or hopping or using blocks this is how I will teach them because <u>this [teaching LSEN] is not about me and what I think is best for the child (.) it's all about the child and what they need or want to learn</u>*

In the above extracts, we see the teachers highlighting how, in teaching LSEN, the learner is responsible for deciding what and how they want to learn. In doing so, the learners also decide on the methods and materials used to learn and possibly how long they spend on a particular lesson. Moana (extract 21) speaks to the importance of this when she emphasises that *you get a lot more out of them*, which suggests that in deciding how and what they want to learn, the learning process is more productive, and an outcome is obtained. Moana also acknowledges and emphasises the importance of planning a teaching day or

week and having activities, goals, and outcomes associated with the plan. However, she also emphasises that learners, like herself and me, should not be forced to do things or engage in the learning process the teacher's way. Rather the teacher follows the learner's lead and lets them choose what they want to learn. In cases where learners are forced to learn in a particular way, various challenges can be experienced by the teacher. As Moana points out, learners may not be responsive or cooperative, and the learning may be difficult or impossible. Similar findings were highlighted in a study conducted by Antón (2002) in special schools in France in which the impact of teacher and learner-centred approaches to teaching were investigated among teachers in a second language classroom in Indiana. Participants emphasised that learner-centred approaches create an environment favourable for learning while teacher-centred approaches provided limited learning opportunities .

Pocahontas (extract 22) and Rapunzel (extract 23) both acknowledge that the child is in control of their learning. As the teacher, Pocahontas speaks to the fact that her role is to notice how the child wants to learn and teaches them the way they want. Her laughter possibly suggests that this is unusual in teaching. However, her emphasis on the fact that learners do learn something suggests that this way or manner of teaching does work and is useful. When she says *this [teaching LSEN] is not about me and what I think is best for the child (.) it's all about the child and what they need or want to learn*; Rapunzel emphasises that teaching LSEN is centred around the learner's needs and wants rather than what she as the teacher regards as the best way for him or her to learn.

3.2 Every learner is unique

Findings from studies conducted by Forlin (1995) and Thomas (1985) to explore teacher attitudes towards teaching LSEN found that teachers who had a heterogeneous group of learners in their classrooms described their experience as overwhelming, thus promoting negative attitudes towards teaching LSEN. The present study yielded contrasting findings. This subordinate theme speaks to how the teachers recognise that their learners are different and the important role this plays in their teaching. Some teachers described experiencing feelings of frustration about the differences among learners. Others shared that in the differences of their learners, there were things they learnt. The extracts below capture some of these findings and experiences.

Extract 24

Ariel: *Every single child receive (.) receives a different (.) I wanna say like daily type of thing that they do because they can't all do the same things (.) they are all so different*

Extract 25

Pocahontas: *Uhm they (.) they're all different kids like you (.) you can't (.) you can't teach them all the same*

In speaking to LSEN being different, the two teachers above speak to the importance of difference in teaching LSEN. Ariel (extract 24) shares that because the learners are different, they receive various tasks to do daily. Pocahontas (extract 25) emphasises that because her learners are different, she cannot teach them the same, possibly suggesting that each learner is taught differently. This is consistent with Toreno and Illian's (2008) findings in their study discussed in the literature review that in teaching LSEN, there will not be a "one size fits all" approach to teaching.

Rapunzel and Moana, in the extracts below, account for the fact that difference among learners is also evident in their learning styles. They said:

Extract 26

Rapunzel: *My little one's now (.) they also have very different learning styles (.) some are visual some are auditory some are hands on some are all three uhm so your lessons are constantly being adapted for your learner specific needs (.) each learner learns things differently but their learning style helps me know how to teach that specific child how to count for example*

Extract 27

Moana: *I mean there's (.) children (.) each one learn (.) has a different learning style (.) so some is [are] auditory (.) some is [are] visual (.) some is [are] through touch (.) some is [are] uhm kinetic so we need to move but while we [are] moving (clicking fingers) I can be teaching you things (.) while we [are] listening to auditory stuff (.) you can be you know (.) getting something out of that*

In the above extracts, the teachers highlight how LSEN (as with all other learners) have preferred ways of absorbing, processing, comprehending, and retaining information. Rapunzel emphasises that the learning styles of each of her learners guide her teaching. It is also evident that she is aware that she has to adapt her lessons in line with the learning styles or needs of her learners to possibly ensure that each learner is accommodated to learn the way they prefer. This in line with special need educators' roles outlined by Allison (2012) and Lavian (2015). Moana's experience differs from that of Rapunzel. Irrespective of a learner's learning style, she highlights that teaching and learning happen simultaneously.

Though the differences among LSEN are important, as highlighted above, some of the teachers experienced some frustration. Pocahontas, who acknowledged this, shared a recent experience of hers.

Extract 28

Pocahontas: *I've been teaching biggest to smallest for about three weeks and my kids still don't get it and I'm about to pull my hair out but I (.) <u>I can't (.) I can't move on you know (.) I can't (.) I can't let it go (.) I have to figure out what (.) what is going to make it work for each of them to get it</u>*

The teacher in the above extract shares how she has been teaching a concept for some time, and her learners have struggled to grasp it. Pocahontas expresses her frustration regarding this when she says *I'm about to pull my hair out*. Though this is the case, her repetitive use and emphasis on the words *I can't* suggests that it is important for her to ensure that her learners can grasp the concept of biggest to smallest, and it is important for her to find a way for each learner to *get it*. Pocahontas thus points to two possibly contradicting but simultaneous experiences: having to accommodate each learner in teaching LSEN can be frustrating, but it is important.

Like Pocahontas, Aladdin shared a similar experience. He said:

Extract 29

Aladdin: *Sometimes the kids might give examples that are not related to things [we are speaking about in class] (.) you tackle that and help the learner and the class see why it was unrelated then there will be another hand that's going to tell you another unrelated example based on <u>that</u> first one that was unrelated which made that person think of another unrelated example and:: <u>that</u> would frustrate me a lot because I am like to myself (.) 'but I just explained this' but I quickly have conversations with myself and remind myself that 'okay [....] (.) these kids are different so you need to have different examples when you teach' because if I do this (.) this will be something they do too*

Aladdin's frustration, as evidenced in the above extract when he says to himself *'but I just explained this'* is a result of getting examples from his learners that are not related to a topic they may be discussing even though he may have addressed why a previous example was unrelated to the topic at hand. While frustrated, it is evident that this teacher engages in self-talk through which he reminds himself about the differences among his learners, and therefore, the importance of providing various examples to them. It also appears that Aladdin learns that by doing this, it will enable his learners to do the same and possibly think about related examples.

Some of the teachers who took part in this study shared some of the things they have learnt from having different LSEN in their classrooms.

Extract 30

Ariel: *In my time at [….] I have learnt that because every child in my class is different I* <u>*have*</u> *to teach without pushing them and putting pressure on them (.) if it takes three weeks to learn something (.) it takes three weeks*

Extract 31

Aladdin: *When I teach I* <u>*always*</u> *remind myself of something I have learnt over the years (.) my learners are different so patience is a virtue (.) in their own time my learners will get it (.) they will understand and give relevant examples*

Extract 32

Moana: *I have been teaching for many years and the biggest lesson is you can't just sort of be static and (.) and rigid in your teaching style (.) you cannot do this job if you are [static and rigid] and you have different little people in your class*

Ariel, who has been teaching LSEN for two years suggests that it is necessary not to force her learners to learn, as was previously highlighted by some teachers in extracts 21 to 23. She also expresses acceptance of the fact that things may take time to learn in saying *if it takes three weeks to learn something (.) it takes three weeks*. Being a special needs educator for three years, Aladdin has learnt that he needs to wait for his learners to understand when they are ready and/or able to without being frustrated, as seen in extract 29. Moana who has been running and teaching at the school where she works for sixteen years, suggests that she has learnt about being flexible. Each of these lessons, as evident in the above extracts has been informed by the fact that each of the learners in these teachers' classrooms is different.

Merida, a teacher who taught at a special school three years ago, shared a lesson she learnt during her eleven years at the school where she worked. In the extract below, she speaks of learning about the importance of thinking creatively, being creative, and coming up with new ways of doing things or teaching when working with LSEN. She said:

Extract 33

Merida: *The (.) my learners were so different and they taught me that I need to think out of the box (.) teaching special needs [learners with special educational needs] is about thinking out of the box the whole time (.) think outside the box when you teach special learners (.) you* <u>*have*</u> *to*

This was shared by one teacher in this study. She said:

Extract 34

Pocahontas: *One of the things I've learnt because my kids are different is that I've [I have] got to think out of the box daily (.) I can't do things the same everyday*

Though the teachers spoke about these as lessons they learnt in working with LSEN, in conducting the analysis, it became apparent that there was a sense among the participants that these lessons are also attributes that participants believe are important in teaching LSEN. Pre-service special needs educators due to start teaching in special schools in the study conducted by Nonis and Jernice (2011) discussed in the literature review highlighted the importance of being understanding as a special needs educator. The findings from this study thus contribute to these attributes - it may therefore be important for special needs educators to be patient, flexible, and creative.

3.3 <u>Special needs vs. mainstream education</u>

Majority of the teachers who took part in this study started their teaching careers in mainstream schools before moving to a special school. The teachers made comparisons between special and mainstream schools, particularly with regard to teaching. Ariel, Bell, and Moana shared the following:

Extract 35

Ariel: *In a special school I've found that there's no pressure to do something in a day uhm (.) whereas with mainstream its very much (.) in my opinion (laughter) if (.) if you don't understand something (.) oh well (.) we're gonna [going to] carry on even if you get it or not*

Extract 36

Bell: *Nobody has the time to sit down and work with these learners (.) uhm (.) one-on-one in a mainstream classroom (.) in our school this is what we do (.) everyday*

Extract 37

Moana: *In a special ed school you [are] adapting everything according to that child so you're adapting the environment* <u>*to fit the child*</u> *where in the (.) in a mainstream school you (.) you are adapting* <u>*the child*</u> *to fit the environment*

In the above extracts, the teachers highlight differences related to teaching in a special and mainstream school. From her experience, Ariel speaks to how in a special school, learners are not expected to do or learn things immediately or in a day. In a mainstream school, she shares that whether learners understand something or not, the teaching continues. Ariel thus suggests that there is an element of pressure in mainstream school teaching. However, her use of the phrase *in my opinion*, which is followed by laughter, suggests that this experience is not necessarily a fact. Bell highlights how, in a special school, individual attention is given to each learner daily, and in a mainstream school, this is not the case. For Moana, teaching in a special school is about accommodating the learner or ensuring that the environment they learn in is suitable for them and can thus meet their needs. Like Warnock (2006) suggests, in a mainstream school, the manner in which the learning takes place is already established, and the learner has to follow it despite their needs.

In comparing special and mainstream schooling, teachers also shared their thoughts about inclusive education.

Extract 38

Mamush: *That would be (.) that would be catastrophic (.) I don't think that's a good idea because ultimately you have top achievers and you have uhm (.) you have competition amongst learners (.) the learner with a special need will obviously (.) they are identified as the (.) as someone with (.) with issues or problems (.) the teacher might not even pay attention to them because remember mainstream classes are huge so I think that would not be so (.) so great*

Extract 39

Pocahontas: *I* <u>*don't*</u> *agree with the whole inclusive education thing (.) I really don't agree with it I (.) I find children need (.) children with special educational needs get (.) get pushed aside uhm in an inclusive education scenario (.) I think it's (.) it's much easier for a teacher to focus on the kids who can do everything uhm and just move on because also CAPS* <u>*is a lot*</u> *(.) there's* <u>*a lot*</u> *of curriculum that we need to get through and so* <u>*I can't stop (.) I can't wait (.) I can't help that person I have to keep moving*</u> *uhm and so that child gets (.) gets pushed aside and they either repeat [the grade]*

Pocahontas and Mamush in the above extracts seem to disagree with the inclusion of LSEN in mainstream schools. Both teachers provide various reasons for this. Both teachers suggest that LSEN may not be given the attention they need in a mainstream schooling context as teachers direct their attention to top performers or achievers. As noted previously in the introductory chapter of this thesis in chapter one, a number of educationists (Cigman, 2007; Clarke, 2005; Kauffman, 2005; Poon-McBrayer & John Lian, 2002; Rayner & Ribbins, 1999) speak to a similar challenge associated with inclusion. As argued by Ross (2009), a repercussion of this is that LSEN may feel as if they are competing with fellow learners, an aspect Mamush also speaks to. Inclusion may also lead to the stigmatisation of LSEN as Mamush suggests, like Allison (2012) and Levins et al. (2005) in their discussion of negative attitudes associated with inclusion. This is in contrast with WP6, which maintains that inclusion will end the stigmatisation of LSEN. Pocahontas, similar to arguments put forward by Ross (2009) about the limitations of inclusion adds that LSEN may get overwhelmed by the intensive CAPS curriculum, and the fast passed nature of mainstream schooling may be a disadvantage to them.

Moana and Aladdin had different thoughts about inclusion from the rest of the teachers. They said:

Extract 40

Moana: *I think it is a great idea (.) I think that if the teacher in a mainstream school is properly equipped and trained it could work (.) uhm the only thing that I've found is that other 'normal' children don't always necessarily accept kids with special needs or you know (.) they can bully them or they feel excluded (.) things like that uhm so I think firstly we need to sort of <u>make our children aware</u> of kids that are different to address the stigma and the stigma about special schools too so they understand that it's okay to be different uhm (.) so the inclusiveness I think it's great (.) I think our kids needs [need] to be included so that they grow and know they belong to a bigger world too and people will know about and accept individuals who are different*

Extract 41

Aladdin: *I know we already have special and mainstream schools nhe [right] but I'd say rather we seek for all schools to be inclusive (.) so our mainstream schools must be inclusive and special schools must be inclusive (.) to achieve that we invest in our schools and we invest in our teachers (.) that way we also invest in making our world inclusive (.) not special or mainstream or boxed so that I (.) when I (.) when a parent looking for a school for their child wakes up (.) the nearest school is one that can accommodate their child*

In contrast to Pocahontas and Mamush, we see Moana acknowledging the possibility of inclusion. As she suggests, including LSEN in mainstream schools will encourage growth and a sense of belonging for them. Inclusion will also possibly provide an opportunity for other learners and individuals in society generally to learn about and accept individual differences. This is consistent with the reasons delineated in WP6 (DOE, 2001) regarding why inclusion is important, as well as arguments put forward by Allison (2012) and Levins et al. (2005) in discussing positive attitudes related to the inclusion of LSEN. Aladdin does not agree nor does he disagree with inclusion. Rather, he suggests that all schools (mainstream and special schools) be inclusive to ensure access to schooling and promote an inclusive society. Both Moana and Aladdin suggest that in order for inclusion to work, teachers need to be trained or invested in. The importance of schools being well resourced to ensure inclusivity is also raised by Aladdin. These suggestions put forward by the teachers are also acknowledged in WP6 as necessary for building an inclusive education system (DOE. 2001). However, it appears that this is still a challenge in implementing inclusion. Like Polat (2011), Moana also speaks to the importance of addressing the stigma associated with LSEN and special schools as a necessary endeavour to help with inclusion. WP6 fails to speak to such an aspect and rather, as mentioned earlier in this section, maintains that inclusion will end the stigmatisation of LSEN.

4. The importance of a holistic approach

With a shift from an individualised special needs education system in the South African context as outlined in the introductory chapter, the importance of regarding LSEN within a social context is consistently emphasised (Naicker, 2004). Due to this shift, an added emphasis was collaborating with others in teaching LSEN (Jobling & Moni, 2004; Lavian, 2015). In line with these shifts and emphases, this superordinate theme captures the importance teachers placed on working with other professionals such as audiologists, occupational therapists, pastors, physiotherapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and speech therapists adopting a team approach to teaching LSEN.

At some schools, these professionals are located in-house (on the school premises) and others offsite. That is if a learner needs to see a speech therapist, for example, the parents (if they can afford this) or the school sources this professional themselves. Parents were also regarded as an important part of the team. This finding contrasts those of Ellof et al. (2000) in their study discussed in the literature review in which special needs educators experienced a lack of communication with parents of LSEN. Concurrently, it points to the fact that parents serve as an important source of support in the teaching of LSEN, as

suggested by Beattie et al. (2006), Mitchell (2004), Rose and Grosvenor (2001) as well as Swart and Pettipher (1999).

There was a sense that teachers cannot work with or educate LSEN in isolation, and instead, they rely on a number of other people to help them do this, which contrasts with findings from Elloff et al's. (2000) study discussed in the literature review in which working with other professionals was regarded as stressful by teachers. The subordinate themes of laying the foundation and putting the puzzle together make up this theme.

4.1 Laying the foundation

Half of the teachers spoke about the importance of developing relationships with the professionals mentioned above, and this appeared to be the foundation to a holistic approach to teaching LSEN. It was apparent that establishing relationships and consolidating links required teachers to invest time and engage in prolonged contact with the professionals. Ariel said:

Extract 42

Ariel: *Our in-house physio [physiotherapist] and (.) and uhm speech therapist we have (.) that we've got at the moment (.), they've been at the school for a very long time and in my two years at [...] I've got to know them well (.) we basically know each other well and as much as we know each other they know each of my kids too*

Developing relationships with other professionals, as is seen above, is regarded as a process that first involves gradually getting to know each other. Without this, teachers can experience a barrier to collaborative working:

Extract 43

Mamush: *I don't know a lot of people at the moment (.) that could be an issue (.) so I'll have to (.) I think I'll have to get to know people apart from the one professional we have even if its outside the school*

Teachers gave the impression that by getting to know other professionals and doing so personally , relationships could progress to a higher level in which openness and trust were evident. This appeared important to ensure open lines of communication:

Extract 44

Bell: *You develop a kind of relationship with the other professionals which for me I think because they see me attend meetings always and being vocal (.) they know who I am and all (.) I think they're more likely to pick the phone up and speak to me about more than the kids (.) we do get close*

The teachers employed several interpersonal skills to aid in the development of positive relationships with other professionals. These skills resonate with the humanistic paradigm, specifically the work of Rogers (1951), and appear to place personal responsibility on the teachers to ensure the formation of relationships. Ariel emphasised the importance of actively listening to the views, suggestions, and opinions of others about the learners. Bell spoke of the importance of being accommodating and providing a comfortable space where everything, the positive and negative, can be discussed when meeting as a team. Moana highlighted the importance of equality, confidentiality, and respect.

Extract 45

Ariel: *It's important to pay attention to what each person in the team says (.) their suggestions and opinions (.) professional opinions about the learners need to be taken seriously*

Extract 46

Bell: *When working with a team you have to be welcoming and the space where everything is discussed must be [a]comfortable one (.) the nice and not so nice things must be shared*

Extract 47

Moana: *In the team (.) we are all equals and what each person has to say is important and must be treated as confidential (.) we have to respect each other as well because without this nothing would come out of the meetings*

Contributing to an understanding of the relationship between parents and teachers, it appears that the nature of the relationship between parents of LSEN and teachers who teach LSEN in special schools has changed from a circular one as suggested by Landsman (1978) to one that is collaborative. When working with parents, teachers appeared to go the extra mile to develop relationships by reducing the possible power imbalance and placing the teacher in an expert position. Rapunzel and Moana said:

Extract 48

Rapunzel: *I always tell the parents at the very* *<u>first</u>* *parents meeting that 'please call me by my first name (.) call me […] not teacher […] or Miss […]'*

Extract 49

Moana: *To avoid the parents seeing me as the person that knows everything about their child (.) I tell them to refer to me by my first name the moment we meet and always ask them to share things with us about the little ones (.) no matter how small because the parent is your biggest resource*

4.2 Putting the puzzle together

The teachers highlighted the importance and benefit of sharing information amongst the team. Ariel summed this up below.

Extract 50

Ariel: *Working in special needs is like a puzzle and (.) and as a teacher I can only provide a piece of the puzzle and (.) and of course when the child leaves the school we drop out of the puzzle uhm (.) but each of us plays a part (.) the parents are part of the puzzle (.) the social worker is part of it (.) the psychologist is part of it (.) the audiologist is part of it but who is part of the puzzle depends on each individual child so I think once you have so many different professionals uhm other than like the teachers of the children (.) if you have all those other professionals that can weight in like on the on (.) like give their thoughts (.) give their opinions and tell you what's happening with for example the physical development of the child or the emotional well-being of a child they help you so much and you understand the children that you're dealing with uhm so yeah*

Ariel utilizes the analogy of a puzzle to describe working in special needs and possibly also with a team and/or other professionals. She gives the impression that various individuals work towards understanding a learner. Without having holistic information or working holistically, she would be working with "big holes" and would be unable to see the bigger picture and fully understand the child.

The above is taken further by Moana, Rapunzel, and Bell. They said:

Extract 51

Moana: *We [are] a team and (.) and also I (.) I do believe that if we* <u>*all*</u> *on the same page and we* <u>*all*</u> *have the same goals for that child it sort of just* <u>*helps*</u> *uhm to be working towards things (.)*

Extract 52

Rapunzel: *Yeah so the children have access to quite a few things uhm we also communicate quite intensively with occupational therapists (.) speech therapists (.) they come to the school (.) if the child is in a specific programme with them we will try and incorporate that into their IEDP[IEP] which is the individualised programme just to make sure that there is a thread of common learning happening at school (.) at their extra therapies and at home uhm so that no one's confusing anyone and we're on the same page working towards the same goal so (.) yeah*

Extract 53

Bell: *Though other professionals are not on site (.) we encourage working together as a team because it's in the best interest of the child (.) it helps us understand learners better*

For Moana and Rapunzel, working holistically allows every professional on the team to have the same knowledge and understanding of the learner and his or her needs and work towards the same goals. Rapunzel also suggests that a holistic approach ensures that there is no confusion between team members and a similar idea or theme is present in the different domains of the learner's life. Bell regards a holistic approach as beneficial for LSEN as it promotes a better or enhanced understanding of learners.

One teacher who took part in this study shared that he works in a school where working holistically is not possible as there is only one other professional who takes on a dual role. He said:

Extract 54

Mamush: *We don't have any other people we work with apart from the social worker who is also a psychologist (.) she has a masters in psychology and has a social work qualification too (.) she is the only one at our school for 320 learners so I wouldn't say we work as a team (.) the parents are not that involved too due to circumstances but I try my best to learn about the learners from them to make sure I know each of them well to at least not be in the dark*

In the above extract, it appears that Mamush works without holistic information. Although this is the case, it is evident that by getting to know his learners himself, he avoids not knowing anything about them because of the absence of a holistic approach to working at his school.

5. The ups and downs of teaching LSEN

This superordinate theme aims to capture the participants' positive experiences and highlights reported in relation to their work. These experiences are portrayed in the form of the meaningfulness of the work done with LSEN. It also explores the challenges faced by the teachers in working with LSEN. Two subordinate themes make up this theme: 1) positive experiences and highlights and 2) challenges. Together with its associated subordinate themes, this theme, supports and extends the findings from Nonis and Jernice's (2011) study that being a special needs educator is an enjoyable and challenging experience.

5.1 Positive experiences and highlights

In their study discussed in the literature review, Buck et al. (1992) found that teachers described teaching LSEN positively as a rewarding and fulfilling experience. Similar findings emerged from the present study.

5.1.1 Positive emotional reactions related to teaching LSEN

A common experience shared by the participants is that of enjoying and loving their work despite the challenges they face. In the extract below, Aladdin describes witnessing a learner understanding or grasping something and the growth and development of his learners as highlights of his work. Such experiences possibly serve as a reminder of why he is a teacher. He describes loving the interactions between him and his learners. For Aladdin, even though teaching LSEN has its challenges, it appears that he looks beyond these and enjoys the work. He said:

Extract 55

Aladdin: *Witnessing a face just light up when I teach which shows that they get something (.) seeing my kids blossom to become like the best yet of themselves and like just getting out of their shells is the best thing about what I do (.) like it gives me a sense of hope that 'okay maybe after the schooling process has taken place they will be (.) independent' (.) the work has challenges and everything but these things just remind me of how much I truly love teaching*

In the extract below, Ariel describes experiencing the work she does as fulfilling for her. It appears that she perceives her contribution as meaningful because it allows her to make a difference and improves the quality of life of her learners. Ariel further regards her contribution as one of the primary reasons why it is necessary for her to continue with her work, despite it not being easy.

Extract 56

Ariel: *Uhm (.) it's an extremely rewarding job to have (.) I get to contribute (.) to help and prepare my learners to perform out there in the world and enable them to have a better and improved quality of life (.) I think it's very important for many of them coming out of our school (.) it's not an easy job but the fact that I can make a difference in a child's life is the reason why I keep coming back to school daily*

5.1.2 Positive interactions with parents

In their relationships with the parents of their learners, teachers had positive experiences to share. Swart and Pettipher's (1999) findings that parent and teacher relationships could facilitate teacher experiences become evident here. In the extract below, Moana describes how a compliment from a parent enables her to see the significance of the work she does as a special needs educator and possibly serves as a source of encouragement for her to continue teaching. She said:

Extract 57

Moana: *A parent coming to you and saying 'you know what? I'm so happy your child (.) my child is in your class' or 'I'm so happy that your child (.) my child is uhm at your school and I'm seeing differences' that's a huge positive for me (.) that makes realise the importance of our work and that I need to keep doing it*

Bell in the extract below shares how she still meets some of the parents of the learners that she used to work with unexpectedly. It is suspected that parents and teachers develop and share a strong bond that is sustained over time. Bell seems to experience meeting parents, being recognised by them and their warmth towards her which is accompanied by dialogue about the learner's progress as an acknowledgement of her contribution towards the families she worked with and their children. She perceives this as an indication that her contribution might have had an impact on the parents for them to show her affection whenever they see her. She said:

Extract 58

Bell: *I still bump into some of our parents at the store or the supermarket (.) I'll see someone and we walk towards each other so that we can greet each other or (.) or share a hug (.) they will tell you about how their child is doing and thank you for the work you did you know (.) I love it because it shows me that as a school we helped or did something*

Like Bell, Merida also describes forming a bond with the learners she worked with that they can recognise her later in life when they are older. She describes viewing herself as part of their lives and it appears that being recognised by them emphasises her contribution in their lives and this is experienced as rewarding. She said:

Extract 59

Merida: *You know now (.) what is the best is (.) if [when] I walk in town and I would hear <u>juffro</u> (.) juffro [teacher teacher] and my small […] learners all grown up will come to me and come and give me a hug (.) this is perfect (.) and I cherish that (.) I really cherish that because to me that feels like I (.) I mean something to them. or when I (.) I mean it's so many years (.) uhm some of them have children of their own uhm (.) and I would see them in town and they would walk as a family and I would feel proud for that family you know (.) it's nice to be part of their lives and you build up a special bond you know*

5.2 <u>Challenges</u>

The challenges experienced by teachers who teach LSEN in special schools are well documented. In the literature review, three challenges related to resources and facilities, role complexity and a heavy workload, and stress and burnout were discussed. The teachers who took part in this study added to this list and shared two different challenges they have and continue to experience, behavioural problems and a lack of training and experience. The absence of the challenges discussed in the literature review in this study does not mean they are not experienced by the teachers who took part in this study, including others in different contexts. The challenges discussed here are those most common among the teachers.

5.2.1 <u>Behavioural problems</u>

In Eloff et al's. (2000) study discussed in the literature review; behavioural problems were identified as a source of stress for teachers. In contrast, behavioural problems among learners in this study emerged

as the most dominant challenge experienced by most of the teachers. Moana, Mamush, and Ariel share their experiences in the extracts below.

Extract 60

Moana: *Challenges (.) let's see (.) I sort of dislike the behaviour stuff uhm even though I've dealt with it for a lot and things like that and uhm I can deal [with such issues] and I can handle it (.) it's not always the easiest thing (.) so handling challenging behaviours uhm is hard especially if the child is physical or bites or pinches because you (.) you tend to lose your calm you know cause if you* <u>*physically*</u> *hurt you automatically (.) your fight and flight kick in you know (.) you react uhm in a way that you wouldn't normally react you know what I mean so (.) and I don't like getting angry with the child (.) or sort of losing my cool uhm so that would be I think the hardest thing (.) is the (.) the challenging behaviour (.) I sometimes find that if a learner doesn't behave well the other learners are affected and they become restless so it just disrupts the teaching day and takes away from the learning process but it's all in a day's work*

Extract 61

Mamush: *I've had problems with a child trying to* <u>*stab another*</u> *(.) I've had problems with learners that use drugs but I do have a social worker and a psychologist so it's very easy following the right channels to get that sorted out immediately but it's a challenge because the learners get so scared to come to school (.) parents get alarmed and may worry that the school is not safe and we lose time*

Extract 62

Ariel: *Uhm (.) a challenge that I have always faced is behaviour problems (.) personally (.) every year I have one uhm (.) last year I did have a somewhat difficult child and (.) uhm (.) not difficult in the sense that I couldn't control the child or anything like that but just difficult in the way that (.)so this child was extremely difficult uhm (.) running up and down the passages (.) in and out of my classroom I had to lock my door to my classroom so that she could stay inside uhm it was just extremely difficult and although I did receive (.) uhm a lot of support from the staff at school (.) there are so many steps that the department requires you to take before you can actually* <u>*do*</u> *something about a child (.) I was so frustrated cause it happened everyday but yeah it's just (.) yeah that's a bit of a challenge actually for me that I would say is like the biggest challenge being a special needs teacher because you're* <u>*always*</u> *gonna [going to] have one or two children that are like that and yeah (.) it's just extremely frustrating because that child ends up getting all your attention and the other children don't get your attention and teaching is so slowed*

down so much and it's really sad because you want to do the best that you can for them uhm (2) so that's a challenge

Moana and Ariel acknowledge that behavioural problems are a usual part of teaching LSEN, affecting both the teacher and other learners in the classroom. For Mamush, they mostly affect other learners. All three teachers highlight various reasons why behavioural problems are a challenge. Moana shares that they can disrupt the teaching day and take away from the learning process. Mamush speaks to how behavioural problems may cause parents to worry about the safety of their children and lead to possibly a loss of teaching time. For Ariel, behavioural problems slow down the teaching process as the teacher is possibly mostly concerned with the learner with behavioural problems. Both Mamush and Ariel appear to receive support from school staff in cases where there are behavioural problems. Ariel receives additional support from the department. However, she raises the concern that a teacher needs to do multiple things to get help for a learner with behavioural problems.

In their interviews, teachers spoke about how behavioural problems among learners were exacerbated by the closure of schools due to the pandemic (COVID-19). In the extract below, Moana sums this up and speaks to how frustrating this had been for her. Despite this experience, she appears to demonstrate an understanding of why more behavioural problems became evident.

Extract 63

Moana: *After we came back from lockdown we had more behavioural problems from most of our learners (.) even a child that didn't have behaviour issues before now all of a sudden had been an issue so there was definitely that huge challenge (.) I was about to pull my hair out (.) but they were out of routine (.) a lot of challenging behaviours came*

While no studies have been published about the impact of the pandemic on teachers who teach LSEN in special schools, participants in this study offered some insights into the pandemic's impact on them and their schools. The following experiences were shared:

Extract 64

Bell: *COVID obviously put us back a bit and teaching online was very stressful and (.) and very long hours (.) I did have to ask some families to leave because of non-payment for a long period of time which isn't nice but it's gotta [got to] be done and so you know (.) I mean there's no subsidy (.) it's all school fees*

Extract 65

Moana: *I did have a very bad uhm (.) uhm (.) dip in (.) in depression you know just after lockdown with having to run the business and keeping things together*

Extract 66

Pocahontas: *When we had to close during lockdown (.) it was (.) <u>it was so depressing</u> (.) actually (.) for me I (.) I didn't know (.) <u>I couldn't do my job</u> (.) I felt like (.) I (.) almost (.) you [are] sitting at home every day you (.) you [are] sending messages on WhatsApp and (.) and you're trying to teach to a tiny video but that's not what teaching is (.) it's all about <u>interacting with the kids</u>*

In the above extracts, the teachers share the various ways in which the pandemic affected them. Bell describes experiencing a possible sense of being behind in her teaching and experiencing online learning as an anxiety-provoking process that required her to possibly work for longer than usual. Due to possible financial difficulties resulting from parents not paying school fees, Bell shares that she had to ask some families to leave her school. Though difficult for her to do, this was necessary as is seen in extract 64 as her school operates on the school fees paid by parents instead of funds from the DOE given its business registration. Moana reports mental health difficulties resulting from having to ensure that the school she manages and teachers at remained operational during the lockdown. This may have been possibly stressful for her. In saying *it was so depressing*, Pocahontas suggests that the closure of schools due to the pandemic made her feel unhappy and without hope, as she was unable to teach in the way she usually does, leading to limited interaction with her learners, which is important in the teaching process.

5.2.2 <u>Lack of training and experience</u>

Teacher training requirements within the South African context are delineated in chapter one of this thesis. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, majority of the teachers who took part in this study started their teaching careers in mainstream schools before moving to a special school. At the universities where they studied, the teachers shared that they had a dedicated special needs module they did, supporting the argument by Naicker (2004) that special education forms part of teacher training packages and is not an area of specialisation in South Africa. The teachers in this study regarded these modules as a form of training. According to van Vuuren (personal communication, March 10, 2021), these modules *qualify* (emphasis mine) teachers to teach LSEN and are not training. Participants shared how their lack of

training and experience in special needs education became evident when they first started teaching in special schools. Ariel and Pocahontas shared the following experiences:

Extract 67

Ariel: *I didn't receive special needs training in my teaching uhm studies so not really being trained for special needs in varsity [university] was a very big challenge for me (.) actually we did have a remedial module at uhm […] (.) but remedial is very different to special needs (.) when I started teaching I didn't feel prepared (.) I did my prac [practical] in a mainstream school but ended up working in a special school (.) working in special needs is a completely different ball game (.) when I started it was scary because I didn't feel prepared and I still am but I learn more along the way (.) a (.) a mistake that I even made when I went into special needs was just (.) I thought that (.) I thought it was going to be similar to mainstream in the way that you can just give them work and be like 'okay (.) do the work like I've taught you now do it' if that makes sense and when I got here I realised that <u>every single child</u> is so different that you can't (.) you can't do that (.) you literally have to plan for every separate child*

Extract 68

Pocahontas: *Working in special needs is a different ball game (.) uhm when we were at varsity [university] though we (.) we got one module (.) we did psychology in between so that gives you the developmental side of it uhm and so <u>you learn</u> about IQs and uhm mentally retarded [intellectually disabled] children and what kind of signs they have growing up that (.) that maybe they've missed uhm and then uhm we did a module called uhm teaching learners with special educational needs and it was like (.) was nothing (.) you don't know enough to go into class [with children with special educational needs] […] did send me on a course for Makaton which is a type of speech therapy for autistic children which was great so I learn new things as I go*

In the above extracts, the two teachers suggest that despite doing modules at university that dealt with aspects of special needs education, these did not prepare (Ariel) and provide them with enough knowledge (Pocahontas) for the actual work they are now doing at their respective special schools. This possibly points to the fact that little to no training in special needs education is available for teachers (Naicker, 2004) in the South African context, as is also acknowledged in WP6. As a result of feeling unprepared, Ariel experienced a sense of fear about teaching at a special school which is still present for her, possibly because of her lack of training. She however finds comfort in the fact that she learns new things as she continues to teach LSEN. Both Ariel and Pocahontas in saying *working in special needs is*

a different ball game seem to acknowledge that special needs education or rather teaching at a special school is completely different from teaching in a mainstream school. As is seen in extract 67, Ariel possibly became aware of this as she made mistakes in her teaching and possibly learnt that she cannot be directive in her teaching as she was in a mainstream school but rather that every learner in a special school is different thus, an individual plan for each learner is compiled. Pocahontas appears to be provided with learning opportunities at the school where she works due to her lack of training and experience.

Despite having training in special needs education, Rapunzel shared her experience.

Extract 69

Rapunzel: *I trained in mainstream and because of my previous experience abroad and with the other little boys here at home which made me interested in special needs education (.) I decided I wanted to be a special needs teacher (.) I then did an independent course in […] with the franchise owner of our school (.) when I started teaching I would say I doubted myself as a teacher (.) I didn't know if I was doing it right or if I was doing enough or of the kids liked me or they didn't like me (.) I didn't know if I was being a positive influence in their lives but as time passed I saw progression and I saw (.) you know they were happy which helped but when I started (.) I read and researched and everything because I didn't know enough (.) even now (.) I don't think you ever know enough (.) the more I do my work the more comfortable I'm becoming and everything but I don't know if I'll ever be done with learning and training to be honest because every single child is a unique child uhm and there's often different barriers with each child that comes into class uhm so I think that learning and training will always carry on*

As seen in the above extract, Rapunzel experienced self-doubt when she started teaching LSEN and a sense of not knowing enough despite being trained. This contributes to possible limitations of training in special needs education which are not reported elsewhere in the literature. Over time, her self-doubt improved as she saw progress and positive emotional states among her learners, which may have possibly reassured her. Doing further reading and research appears to have assisted in gaining more knowledge about teaching LSEN. Despite becoming comfortable in her role as she continues to teach LSEN, Rapunzel suggests that the sense of not knowing enough is still present for her. As seen in extract 69, this is possibly because teaching LSEN is a continuous learning process given the differences among each learner.

6. <u>Support is available but limited</u>

The term support is defined in a variety of ways. Others view support as information that reassures subjects that they are loved and cared for, esteemed, valued and part of a network of communication and mutual obligation (McLanahan, Wedemeyer, & Adelberg, 1981). Another type or form of support is social support from community members and the community in which one lives. This superordinate theme focuses on the support available for teachers who teach LSEN in special schools and the important role this support plays. It is based on the subordinate themes of proximal support, distal support, and "we would always love more support".

6.1 <u>Proximal support</u>

Proximal support refers to any support that is closest or immediately available to teachers. Vygotsky's (1978, as cited in Antón, 2002) concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) becomes relevant in this instance. Though relating to educational practise and primarily to learners, in the ZPD, a learner cannot complete tasks without assistance. This assistance can come from an individual with skills and knowledge beyond those of the learner, a tutor or other necessary therapist, and through supportive activities provided by the teacher. Similarly, teachers cannot teach LSEN without assistance. In teaching LSEN, participants shared experiences of receiving support from their families and loved one's including the schools where they teach.

Extract 70

Moana: *Uhm my family's my biggest support system uhm that is (.) that is my biggest thing uhm being able to speak to them uhm for them to understand where I'm coming from uhm and I think they keep me grounded (.) they keep me grounded because I can runaway (.) with myself (.) I can (.) I spread myself very thinly (.) uhm I bend over backwards for people uhm for my kids for everybody so they keep me grounded as in like 'listen just kind of remember (.) priorities' so definitely prioritising and that (.)* uhm *(.) and definitely my husband who reminds me to pause often*

Extract 71

Bell: *I also have friends who support me (.) I do have friends that I'll talk to you know about the school and how things are going (.) I've got a couple of friends but I've also realised I've gotta be careful who I confide in and probably (.) I'm a lot more picky now than I used to be in terms of (.) of talking to (.) who I talk to about what and of course I have my son who cheers me up often and I also have my old (.) my parents who are ageing rapidly who are always willing to lend an ear*

In the above extracts, the two teachers speak of their sources of proximal support. Moana speaks of her family and her husband who have different roles to play in supporting her. Her family, as she suggests, reminds her of other things that are important in her life, most likely apart from work. Moana demonstrates awareness of the reasons why her family do this – she attempts to do multiple things by herself all at once, engages in numerous activities that she may not be able to all do, and works very hard to accomplish things for others, such as her children and possibly her family members as well as her learners and the school. Her husband, as Moana suggests, reminds her to take breaks regularly. Bell's proximal support consists of her friends whom she can talk to regarding the school and its progress (though she raises some concern regarding who of her friends she can trust), her son who makes her more cheerful and happier, and her parents who are willing to listen possibly to some of the challenges she experiences with the school and the business.

Merida shared a similar experience with Bell in alluding to her proximal support during her interview. She said:

Extract 72

Merida: *Even though I had no support from the school I had my son who always cheered me up when I felt down with his jokes and my family who always gave me words of encouragement on difficult days*

Like Bell, Merida had her son who made her more cheerful and happier through joking and her family who supported her during her time teaching LSEN.

For most of the teachers who took part in this study, proximal support mainly came from their schools, particularly from colleagues and other staff members.

Extract 73

Ariel: *So support for me as the teacher uhm::: (7) yho so there's obviously all the therapists (.) the social workers which are a massive help uhm (.) we have two deputy principals which (.) uhm one of them is extremely involved with uhm the HODs and uhm giving us advice in different situations and things like moving a child to a different school so how to do that (.) what to do and who to talk to and stuff (.) uhm (3) I find this weird but like the actual teachers themselves like full on are (.) they've just been the support staff at the same time because the school isn't that big so every (.) every teacher knows almost every child uhm so if you need help with something you can go to talk to someone about it (.) you can basically got to anyone and people can kind of relate to you because we're all teaching the same type of child uhm*

it is a child that struggles to learn uhm that needs extra help that might have a disorder or a disability or anything like that so we all relate to each other and we [are] all there for each other

Extract 74

Moana: *As the staff (.) we have uhm weekly meetings to make sure that we [are] obviously discussing things you know (.) what's happening in class and uhm changes we need to make so we support each other as the staff*

Extract 75

Rapunzel: *We often have uhm monthly meetings (.) so there is another school in […] (.) another branch and there are therapists widely across South Africa but then also in the […] so we have monthly meetings with the schools and the ELS therapists uhm (.) where we exchange methods uhm ideas (.) other ways of approaching a topic uhm so (.) loads of workshops (.) uhm the lady who uhm set up the franchise (.) the school that we run (.) the educational psychologist (.) she trains us often in brain plasticity in the programme (.) how she's adapted it (.) do we need to make changes? (.) do the pictures work that we're using or should we be using different ones?(.) so it's very interactive with the teachers and with her (.) uhm also the staff at school (.) we (.) we have meetings we discuss strategies uhm we try and find ways for example if a child hasn't potty trained in a period of time (.) 'well what else can we do? 'How else can we approach it?' (.) uhm handwr [handwriting] (.) anything you will discuss with your colleague and then of course the owner of the school uhm she's super supportive*

Extract 76

Aladdin: *Support structures would be I'd say (.) is this [there's this] virtual (council guide) yeah (.) we'd receive training before this hit [COVID hit] and it was like just (.) like presentations and stuff about teaching learners with special needs*

In the above extracts, we see that the teachers receive support from various individuals and in various ways at the schools they work. Ariel shares that she receives support from the therapists who, as discussed earlier in this chapter, aid in promoting a holistic approach to teaching LSEN. The social worker and the two deputy principals at her school who provide advice and possible guidance when a learner is being moved to a different school also serve as sources of support for her. Though she finds this strange, Ariel shares that her colleagues are also a source of support as they have a similar role, and as she suggests, they work in a small, intimate environment which allows for the staff to know one another and possibly develop relationships in which experiences are shared. Moana and Rapunzel like Ariel regard their

colleagues at their respective schools as a source of support. The weekly and monthly meetings these two teachers speak about are possibly a supportive space for them, including their colleagues as progress and alternative teaching methods are discussed, inquiries into changes that need to be made to teaching methods are brought up, and ideas are exchanged. Rapunzel also receives support for the work she does through workshops at her school. Aladdin receives support from his school in the form of training which involves presentations related to teaching LSEN.

Unlike the above teachers, one of the teachers who took part in this study reported receiving limited support from his school. He said:

Extract 77

Mamush: *We don't have anyone apart from the social worker slash psychologist to support us and the teachers do what they want (.) we don't support each other*

Mamush's experiences are different from those of other teachers in more than one instance (see extracts 31, 49, and 54). During his interview, he spent time explaining his school culture to me which appears to impact the support he receives at his school. According to Fullan (2007) the term school culture refers to the attitudes, expected behaviours, and values that impact the operation of a school. Mamush shared that at the school where he teaches, majority of the teachers he works with were trained many years ago when children with intellectual disabilities were regarded as mentally retarded and therefore unable to do or achieve things. As such, majority of the teachers at his school focus on what the learners cannot do as opposed to what they can such as their sports and drawing abilities. He added that the teachers focus on their postgraduate studies during school hours, giving learners pictures to colour in daily. Furthermore, the teachers come to school unprepared, arrive late, and dress inappropriately. This suggests that Mamush works in an individualised, unsupportive, and possibly stigmatising context in which LSEN are viewed negatively.

Although he works in such a context, Mamush shared that he does things differently with his learners – no colouring in is done in his class and because his learners want to be tested, the teaching day starts with a maths exercise daily, the learners watch movies which allow them to learn about things such as drug use and abuse and conversations about things happening in the world like gender-based violence are engaged in. It appears that Mamush not only recognises the importance of the work he does as a special needs educator but the potential of his learners despite his school's teaching culture and the limited support he receives.

6.2 <u>Distal support</u>

In contrast to proximal support, distal support is any support received from further away. The main source of such support for the teachers in this study is the DOE. The teachers receive various forms of support from the department. Ariel, Mamush, and Aladdin shared the following experiences:

Extract 78

Ariel: *We receive a lot of uhm help from the department uhm (.) I know that our school is well supported (.) well-funded by the department and I know that we (.) one of the people from the department sometimes come for meetings to listen in about things we may need and stuff and they're involved with the children because the social workers the psychologist and stuff are uhm directly like (.) what's the word (.) in contact with people at the department with regards to all of those things they work with (.) sometimes someone from the department does come to our school uhm quite often and like checks in and sees what's going on at the school*

Extract 79

Mamush: *We get so much from (.) from the Department of Education (.) we get funding (.) we're a quintile one school so we get a lot of money (.) we get sports equipment but the person that's in charge of it doesn't know what to do with it (.) we get interactive whiteboards but the teachers don't actually work on the interactive whiteboards so we don't use what we have for improving the edu [education] (.) the learning experience*

Extract 80

Aladdin: *I often attend workshops organised by the department for special needs educators which I regard as support from their side for me nhe [right] but I'd attend a workshop and I think to myself (.) 'Ey this is just to tick a box to say that there's been a workshop like this' uhm I'm not talking about someone pressing buttons on a PowerPoint presentation (laughter) think about it (.) yeah (.) we need to engage in workshopping as the word implies (.) I find less of that on [in] the Department (.) I have (.) I find that they (.) they just (.) yeah (.) officiating everything instead of help or support our growth and development as teachers*

At the schools where Ariel and Mamush work, financial support is received from the department. In an attempt to support learning experiences, resources for teaching and learner activities (interactive whiteboards and sports equipment) are provided by the department to the school where Mamush works.

Despite their availability, these resources are not utilised due to a possible lack of expertise, a finding similar to that of Torreno (2011) and Walton et al. (2009). At Ariel's school, it appears that the department, through involving some of its members at the school is actively involved in supporting the school as they work collaboratively with other team members, attend meetings to possibly find out how they can better support the school, its staff, and the learners as well as to conduct departmental checks to get a sense of how the school is operating. Aladdin regards the workshops he attends organised by the department as a source of support for him to grow and develop as a teacher. However, it appears that he is not satisfied with how the workshops are done. In saying *Ey this is just to tick a box to say that there's been a workshop like this*, Aladdin suggests that the department does workshops because it is a requirement instead of something necessary for special needs educators. His laughter possibly points to the fact that the workshops are pointless as they only involve going through a presentation instead of engaging in intensive discussions about matters related to teaching LSEN.

The two teachers whose schools are registered as businesses shared that they got their support mainly from the Education Support Center, which forms part of the ESS (DOE, 2001). They said:

Extract 81

Moana: *I learnt to get to <u>know</u> the Education Support Center which helped me or us to be known and eventually get supported by the Department (.) uhm for example (.) the (.) the lady that facilitates (.) coordinates things related to special schools (.) we got close and I know her and I can say to her 'look […] I (.) I have this problem and she'll help me out (.) I've now (.) the (.) uhm a psychologist and a [an] occupational therapist came to see me about a month ago [in March] from the Department wanting to put our kids on the database (.) we now get curriculums that they (.) they (.) uhm that they (.) they draft (.) we get better communication about <u>workshops</u> things like that it's so much better now*

Extract 82

Bell: *We get most support from the support center [the education support center] (.) the SA-SAMS [South African School and Administration Management System] lady in […] <u>is amazing</u> (.) she is so supportive. I can take (.) we (.) we (.) we'll go into her office and sit there if she's got WIFI and she'll work through (things with us) and she'll team view in and help us fix up our system and do what we need to do cause it's a complicated system (.) it's <u>very</u> complicated (.) I do also have a few business mentors who support me with the business side of things*

In the above extracts, we see that Moana and Bell both know particular individuals at the Education Support Center whom they can turn to when they need support. Bell mainly requests and receives support related to the SA-SAMS system, a computer application designed to meet public schools' administrative, governance, and management needs in Southern Africa (Western Cape Government, 2021). She also receives distal support from business mentors. Moana requests support when she needs it from the individual she knows at the center. Unlike Bell, Moana has started receiving support from the department in the form of curriculums and communication about workshops. It appears that support for her learners is also a possibility from the department, given the recent visit from the psychologist and occupational therapist. A possible reason why Moana is only receiving support from the department now is because it took her school nine years to be registered as she shared during her interview. Last year was her school's first year of registration and this she said *has improved our support*. Though known to the department, Rapunzel also shared that the school where she works is currently experiencing difficulties with being registered. She described this as frustrating because they *would like to expand and get bigger and provide education to more children who need special education*, possibly because of an awareness that many children in the South African context who have special needs are on long waiting lists and remain at home due to this (Charles, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2019; Macupe, 2020).

One teacher shared that her school has a contact in the department for certain matters. However, no support is received from the department. She said:

Extract 83

Pocahontas: *Our deputy principal has a contact (.) I think her name is […] at the Department of Education and she informs her of uhm the kid that we have that we will be sending to a different special school and so we've got this child (.) we've done the applications uhm and so we think that (.) that child should be placed at […] or […] then the Department of Education passes it on to […] (.) apart from that I'd say we get no support to be honest (.) we have a lot money concerns at […] it's not the most well-off school (.) I would say it's like an in betweener (.) it's not great (.) it's not bad you know but we would appreciate some money to help learners who can't afford assessments with psychologists to get those you know*

The contact Pocahontas's school has in the department as is seen in the above extract mainly assists with applications made for learners to other special schools depending on their IQ as she shared during her interview. In sharing that her school receives no support from the department, Pocahontas points to some of the support needed by the school, such as funding.

Merida also shared her experience with the department from when she worked as a special needs educator. She said:

Extract 84

Merida: *Talk talk (.) talk talk talk is cheap (.) easy to talk (.) but to do is not that easy (.) and I think this is still the case for the school and some other schools (.) uhm (.) a lot of things were (.) at […] a lot of things were like* <u>*promised*</u> *(.) promises were made linked to financial support which if we had financial support (.) with that (.) other support could have been provided such as having a physiotherapist (.) having a psychologist available for the school (.) having all those uhm (.) uhm very important [people] for [a] special needs school (.) a nurse on the premises would have been (.) absolutely [helpful] because if a child has a fit (.) there (.) there are certain procedures that need to be followed but we never had that uhm support that was supposed to come through the Department of Education (.) I as a teacher I got little from the department (.) there were workshops and things but in the last 3-4 years of my teaching I received nothing*

In her experience, Merida shares that it was easy for the department to say they will do things for the school where she worked. She suggests that this could still be the case for her school as well as others. The school where she worked was promised financial support, and it appears that this was never received. Merida lists other sources of support from the department that could have been useful to both her as a teacher and her learners and possibly promote a holistic approach to working with LSEN. She reports receiving limited support from the department in the form of workshops and then no support a few years before she moved from a special to a mainstream school. Miller et al. (1999) in their study discussed in the literature review, explored various reasons why special needs educators may move from special to mainstream schools. In contrast to the findings of this study (Miller et al., 1999), Merida shared that she left special needs because of the dynamics that emerged between herself and her colleagues.

6.3 <u>"We would always love more support"</u>

This subordinate theme is consistent with Magadla's (2008) argument that more resources need to be directed to the Eastern Cape education sector. According to Nel (2011), continued and improved support to teachers in special schools and schools in general, is important for successful work to continue. Though support is received from the department in various ways as is seen in the above extracts, the teachers who took part in this study expressed a need for more support for various reasons other than successfully

continuing their work as special needs educators, thus providing further insight into why teachers require more support.

In the extract below, Pocahontas shares her experience of uncertainty related to teaching LSEN, although it appears she does what is required of her. As such, she highlights some support that she as a teacher would like from the department, including departmental checks, workshops, and possible connections with other teachers who work in the field of special needs to get a sense of whether she is doing her work appropriately and possibly note areas of improvement. It however appears that she finds comfort in the fact that because her deputy principal has not raised any concerns or complaints about her work, she is on the right path. She said:

Extract 85

Pocahontas: *I would like some support too (.) I would like someone to come and check that I am planning and teaching (.) I would love to know about workshops happening (.) I would love to hear from somebody else who [does the same work I do] (.) how they do their things compared to me (.) it would be <u>great</u> to (.) to have someone to talk to other than my colleagues and hear what works and what doesn't (.) just to be reassured that you're doing the right thing I mean half the time (.) I mean I know my c [curriculum](.) I am learn [teaching] (.) I am teaching them in the curriculum and I know I'm giving them what I'm told to but some days I do wonder if I'm doing the right thing (.) I mean my (.) my deputy principal and (.) I've got no complaints so <u>I must be doing it right</u> you know*

Moana and Bell also shared what support they would like for their schools and learners in the extracts below. They said:

Extract 86

Moana: *I think the Department uhm provides support but its limited so what is (.) what we would like is sort of uhm (2) providing us with (.) with therapists uhm or (.) or funding therapist because other therapists that we have are private therapists so parents has [have] to pay them separately over and above our school fees (.) if we had therapists <u>on our team</u> it would help <u>so much more</u> because then the child gets an [a] holistic approach no matter the income or the background or whatever it may be because not all parents can afford it (.) so definitely having uhm subsidised therapies (.) therapists (.) subsidised <u>teachers would be amazing</u> because (being a business) we don't get any grants from them, so we literally do fundraisings and stuff (.) uhm we (.) possibly a school building that would be amazing (laughter) even if it's just us using uhm (.) even if it is just using an old school building somewhere*

because right now we literally just funding it on our own (.) renting a property we (.) you know so just some sort of support on that side (.) also training and stuff (.) training on the (.) training on the curriculums and things uhm is important so (.) because we basically just wing it (.) we (.) we obviously <u>*get*</u> *the curriculums off the systems and we use it accordingly uhm or how we best can see but just getting the (.) the Department to actually have us trained and stuff*

Extract 87

Bell: *I think as special schools (.) we would always love more support because its limited but for my school (.) it would be* <u>*great*</u> *to have the resources to be able to employ another staff member that eventually I need to be overseeing all the programmes (.) taking care of the staff but not necessarily teaching so much (.) you know (.) even just offering to pay a salary or two salaries would be helpful or (reserve) some paper and books and (.) it's (.) yeah (.) it's a lot (.) I'd love to have more counselling available on site uhm (.) it would also be lovely to have the department* <u>*listen to what we as special needs teachers are saying*</u> *(.) for example that the curriculum (.) the content is too heavy (.) we are in some cases giving work to children who [are] not cognitively ready to handle work that we're giving them and there's (.) there's overassessment there's (.) a lot but we know how things are and we need to be heard*

In the above extracts, it appears that both Moana and Bell would like support from the department in the form of subsidised therapists and teachers. Subsidised therapists at Moana's school will, as she suggests, help promote a holistic approach to teaching learners who may come from underprivileged backgrounds and thus cannot afford private therapists. The subsidised teachers in Moana's case may be needed to cut down on costs due to finances, whereas for Bell, an additional teacher will possibly help lighten the workload. Moana also highlights the need for training related to the curriculum at her school, possibly to ensure that she and her staff teach in line with the department's requirements. She also speaks to the possibility of getting a school building, although her laughter possibly suggests that she feels that this request related to support may be too much. Support for Bell, it appears, would also include being provided with resources such as paper and books. Given that she feels that special needs educators are unheard within the education system, the department listening to what teachers have to say about certain aspects pertaining to the educational system is another form of support Bell deems necessary.

7. <u>Conclusion</u>

In this chapter, I outlined, described, and explored the five superordinate themes which speak to the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools. The importance of personal commitment

and the need for a balance was apparent throughout the participants' experiences, and this was crucial to support the teachers to persevere with their endeavour to teach LSEN. The teachers appeared to emphasise the importance of recognising the child at the centre to guide and inform their teaching. Though this comes with experiences of frustration, valuable lessons are learnt about teaching LSEN. The teachers also stressed the importance of a holistic approach in working with LSEN and emphasised that they cannot teach LSEN in isolation. As such, they prioritise developing relationships with other professionals to facilitate communication and mutual support for themselves and their learners. A holistic approach allows teachers to understand their learners fully. Teaching LSEN is also an endeavour that consists of both positive experiences as well as challenges. Positive experiences include positive emotional reactions in relation to teaching LSEN and positive interactions with parents. Behavioural problems and lack of training and experience in special needs education are the main challenges that teachers encounter. Teachers who teach LSEN appear to have adequate support from proximal sources such as family, friends, their children, and the schools they work. The DOE was highlighted as the dominant source of distal support. Though the DOE is experienced as supportive, it appears that a need for more support exists.

In the final chapter, I pull these findings together and discuss what has emerged from this study about the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools and the implications of this for special needs education. I also speak to the limitations of the present study and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five: Concluding Discussion

1. Introduction

In concluding this study, I revisit the research questions I sought to answer. The main research question for this study was: How do teachers who teach at special schools experience teaching LSEN? The following sub-questions were formulated: 1) What are the negative and positive experiences of teachers who teach LSEN? 2) How do the teachers experience the education system? 3) What contextual factors impact how the teachers experience teaching LSEN?

This study was conducted to explore and understand the experiences of teachers who each LSEN in special schools. It was initiated and appeared necessary because special schools exist despite WP6, there is lack of previous research in this area, and existing research is outdated. To the best of my knowledge, the findings of this study contribute to the first detailed interpretative phenomenological account of such experiences.

With regard to the theoretical framework, I used a phenomenological approach and its related theoretical underpinnings of idiography and double hermeneutics. I collected the data for this study from eight teachers using SSIs and analysed it using Smith et al's. (2009) iterative approach to data analysis. In employing these methods, an important and valuable contribution that this study has made is that it has given voice to a group of teachers who are marginalised. Studies on teacher experiences of teaching LSEN mainly concentrate on the experiences of teachers who have and teach LSEN in mainstream school classrooms. In this study, the voices of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools were privileged, and their experiences were heard. To answer the research questions, the analysis and interpretation of the data was presented in a results and discussion chapter in which the superordinate and subordinate themes that capture the experiences of teaching LSEN in special schools were discussed. Similarities and differences in experiences were highlighted with the findings related to existing literature and new insights evidenced.

In this chapter, I start by providing a summary of the findings of this study, then move on to discuss the implications of these findings and make recommendations for special needs education. Finally, I speak to the limitations of this study and make recommendations for future research.

2. Summary of findings

One of the main findings of this study is that teachers who teach LSEN in special schools are committed to their work. A number of key experiences emerge from this commitment. Teachers experience a strong

emotional investment and connection with their learners, leading to them experiencing their learners as more than individuals they teach and as part of their lives and families. In relation to this finding, teachers find themselves being more than teachers to their learners. Two teachers who took part in this study described experiences of a parental/motherly role and relationship in relation to their learners. This implies that special needs educators not only teach the learners in their classrooms but love, care for, and nurture them. One of the two teachers noted that a challenge with taking up a parental role, is experiencing difficulties disciplining learners due to possible feelings of guilt, which are mitigated by acknowledging the importance of disciplining learners and being cognisant of how a learner is disciplined. Noteworthy is that the experience of a strong emotional investment and connection, as the teachers in this study highlighted, is shared with their learners. The implications of this are both positive and negative – such a connection aids in the learning process and promotes openness among learners about their personal lives; however, when the time comes for learners to leave school or move to the next class or grade, feelings of sadness and a sense of loss are experienced by teachers and at other times, the learners as well.

In being committed to teaching LSEN, the teachers shared experiences of going beyond their assigned roles. This was tied to the fact that the teachers felt a responsibility to teach LSEN. A limitation of being committed to teaching LSEN is the work being emotionally demanding and overwhelming. When teaching LSEN becomes overwhelming, teachers experience difficulties establishing a balance between the personal and professional aspects of their lives. This difficulty appears to be tied to the uncertainty that emerges when starting out as a special needs educator and the school structure. Despite this difficulty with balance, teachers who teach LSEN in special schools hold an awareness of the importance of finding a balance between their personal and professional lives and have made personal decisions and efforts to achieve this. This is done in order to avoid burnout and to be able to continue teaching LSEN for extended periods. For one teacher who took part in this study whose personal and professional identities were intertwined, a balance was not deemed necessary due to experiencing time constraints in teaching LSEN. The teacher was comfortable with this.

In the superordinate theme of ‘recognising the learner at the centre’, the teachers in this study highlight that they experience teaching LSEN as child or learner-led due to the differences among learners and their unique nature. While these differences inform the learning process, they were reported to be a source of experiences of frustration for some teachers due to learning and understanding of concepts taking longer and teachers having to explain and repeat things in a variety of ways to accommodate each learner. In experiencing difference as frustrating, teachers learnt that as special needs educators, it is necessary

to be patient, flexible, and creative in teaching LSEN and not force the learning process. There was a shared sense among the teachers that these lessons could translate into attributes special needs educators should have.

The above theme further highlighted that teachers experience the special needs education system as different from the mainstream schooling system. In comparing special needs and mainstream schooling, it became evident that teachers experience the special needs education system as one that is pressure-free, individualised, and accommodating of learner differences. The mainstream schooling system was experienced as the opposite. With such experiences, teachers' thoughts on inclusion emerged. The majority of teachers who took part in this study disagreed with the inclusion of LSEN in mainstream schools because LSEN in such a system may be given little to no attention by teachers, be stigmatised, and overwhelmed by the intensive curriculum. Only one teacher who took part in this study acknowledged the possibility of the inclusion of LSEN in mainstream schools because this will contribute to their growth and sense of belonging and allow others to learn and accept individual differences. Two teachers neither agreed nor disagreed with inclusion. To make inclusion more appealing and possible, teachers suggested that the training of teachers, having the necessary resources to accommodate LSEN in mainstream schools, and addressing the stigma associated with LSEN and special schools may aid in this endeavour and implementing WP6.

The teachers who took part in this study emphasised working with other professionals, including parents, in teaching LSEN in the superordinate theme of 'the importance of a holistic approach'. To facilitate this, the teachers highlighted the need to spend time forming relationships with other professionals through contact time and demonstrating interpersonal skills. Teachers experienced these relationships as crucial to ensuring effective communication channels, that everyone is on the same page and works towards the same goals for the learner. With parents, these relationships aid in limiting power imbalances between teachers and parents and teachers taking up the expert position. Most importantly, these relationships promote a comprehensive understanding of learners. One of the teachers in this study shared an experience of working without holistic information and an absence of a holistic approach at the school where he works. Given the possible knowledge about the importance of working holistically, this teacher makes an effort to get to know his learners by himself.

The teachers reported positive experiences about their work in special schools. The majority of teachers describe their work as meaningful and enabling them to contribute to the lives of their learners and families they encounter. Teachers experience interactions with parents of LSEN as enjoyable, and they

believe that they have established long-lasting emotional connections with LSEN and their parents. The teachers regarded such positive experiences as a source of motivation and encouragement to continue teaching LSEN in special schools, and a reminder of why teaching is important to them despite their challenges. The most dominant challenge experienced by teachers who teach LSEN in special schools is behavioural problems. Though regarded as a usual part of teaching LSEN, behavioural problems negatively impact teaching. Teachers reported experiences of losing teaching time, disruptions to the teaching day and learning process, and concerns from parents regarding the safety of their children. Support for some teachers to address behavioural problems is available from their schools as well as the DOE. Behavioural problems were exacerbated by schools closing due to the pandemic, and although an understanding of why this was the case, this was a source of frustration for teachers. The pandemic affected teachers as well. Mental health difficulties, feelings of being unhappy and without hope, being behind in teaching, and anxiety due to online learning were shared by teachers. One of the teachers whose school is registered as a business shared that she had to ask families and learners to leave school due to non-payment of fees.

Teachers also spoke openly about their experiences of a lack of training and experience in special needs as a challenge for them. Though teachers do modules related to special needs education at the universities where they do their teaching degrees, teachers feel unprepared and regard themselves as possessing limited knowledge regarding teaching LSEN. As a result, teachers often experience fear and uncertainty in relation to their work; however, this is mitigated by the schools at which the teachers work, providing them with learning opportunities. Teachers also make mistakes in teaching LSEN and learn from these. One teacher who took part in this study who received formal training in special needs shared that despite being trained, she experienced self-doubt and a sense of not knowing enough, which is still apparent for her as she continues to teach LSEN. Together with the above experiences, this shows how teaching LSEN is a continuous learning experience that perhaps teachers will never know enough about.

Teachers who teach LSEN in special schools have proximal and distal support available to them. Proximal support comes from family, partners, their children, parents, and friends. This support is experienced as valuable and crucial to ensuring prioritising or finding a balance, taking time out from work, and improving one's mood. The main source of proximal support for the teachers is the schools where they work. The team of professionals, deputy principals, HODs and colleagues are a source of support for teachers within their schools. Teachers reported receiving workshops and training in the form of presentations from their schools and having supportive spaces during weekly and monthly meetings in which discussions with fellow teachers to improve teaching occur. This support is experienced

positively as teachers feel supported and understood by fellow colleagues and in their work environments. One teacher shared an experience of receiving limited support at the school where he works due to the school's culture.

Distal support mainly comes from the DOE in the form of financial support, resources for teaching and learner activities such as interactive whiteboards and sports equipment. Some schools have members of the department visiting their schools regularly and who work together with school staff to support learners. Other teachers reported attending workshops organised by the department related to special needs education and teaching LSEN. The standard at which these are done and why the workshops are done is criticised and questioned by teachers. Some teachers reported receiving support from the Education Support Center located in their city and highlighted how knowing individuals and forming connections with people who work within sectors of the department is helpful and assists in obtaining support from the DOE in the long run. One teacher in this study shared that despite the school where she works having a contact at the department who assists with the admission of learners to other special schools, no support is received from the DOE. Two teachers reported experiencing the department as slow, particularly when it comes to the registration of special schools. The teacher who taught in a special school reported how the department made promises related to supporting the school where she worked but never delivered.

Though support is available from the DOE, the teachers expressed a need for more support for themselves, their learners, and their schools. Teachers raised the need for training, workshops, subsidised teachers and therapists, resources (books and paper) as well as having the department listen to requests made by special needs educators regarding the educational system as they have an awareness and complete understanding of what works and what needs to be changed or improved in special schools.

In summarising the findings of this study, a brief explanation can be made: teaching LSEN in special schools is complex and multifaceted; however, the key themes which emerged from the data provide a better understanding of this role and associated experiences. Teaching LSEN is a role that teachers are committed to, allowing teachers to experience this work as more than teaching. It further allows them to experience themselves as more than teachers and their learners as more than individuals that they teach. Teachers recognise the importance of teaching LSEN in special schools and regard themselves as responsible for this. The teaching is guided by the learners and is a collaborative effort. The positive experiences teachers encounter in teaching LSEN, and the lessons from doing such work encourage them to continue with their work despite the challenges they experience. Though teachers are supported by

individuals close to them, within the schools where they work and the DOE, it appears that a lot still needs to improve and be done by the DOE in supporting learners, teachers, and special schools. The data confirmed the fact that different views about the inclusion on LSEN in mainstream schools exist and the implementation of WP6 remains a challenge in the South African context. It further confirmed that teaching LSEN is mostly challenging, however, given the level of commitment of the teachers, there are also positive experiences associated with this endeavour. The possibility of special needs education being inclusive in and of itself given the differences among learners was an aspect of the data which I found interesting. Another interesting element of the data was the level of emotional investment the teachers spoke to which goes into the teaching process and is crucial in teaching LSEN. Furthermore, the role of the school culture in shaping and informing teacher experiences emerged as another interesting aspect of the data.

3. Recommendations for special needs education

The findings of this study provide a number of useful insights into the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in special schools, which could be of great value for special needs education. Firstly and most importantly, regarding the challenge of limited training and experience, teachers could be supported at universities in two ways. Firstly, a comprehensive module on special needs education can be provided to teachers in training that covers the various special needs and aspects of teaching LSEN, such as teaching strategies. This can be taught by an individual who has extensive training and experience in special needs education and teaching LSEN. Secondly, allowing teachers to do their TP in special schools and not only in mainstream schools could be beneficial as some teachers end up working in the special needs education system. This will allow teachers to gain experience in special needs and address experiences of feeling unprepared and scared. I acknowledge that such experiences can never be entirely eradicated as the participants highlighted that teaching LSEN is a continuous learning process. Even if teachers do not end up working in special schools, such exposure will be useful in the mainstream schooling context as there are some LSEN in such schools.

In relation to the finding that more support is required by special needs educators, their learners, and schools from the DOE, school checks can be done by selected members of the DOE, or meetings can be held with school staff at special schools to get a sense of how schools would like to be supported and what is needed at each school. Teachers can raise concerns in such contexts and make requests for specific kinds or types of workshops, training and learning opportunities. This will assist in building on training and experience that teachers will have already acquired from university. To ensure that the

department engages in such activities and remains accountable, a special needs education task team can be put together, responsible for monitoring the process and ensuring that the department supports teachers, learners, and special schools. The department, schools, or teachers themselves can also work towards developing a support network for teachers who teach LSEN in special schools in the form of a support group. This group can be established either at a city or provincial level. Special needs educators can meet monthly and share experiences and ideas regarding teaching, teaching resources, ways to address certain challenges they encounter and other related topics to feel more supported by individuals who do work similar to them other than their colleagues. The support groups could be special needs specific or include teachers who teach learners with various special needs.

As this study was influenced by distinctions between policy (WP6) and practice and the teachers in this study spoke about the inclusion of LSEN in mainstream schools, it is important to make recommendations in this regard as well. The stigma associated with LSEN and special schools may not be abolished entirely; however, the cycle that perpetuates the stigma can possibly be broken. The cycle can be broken by creating awareness in society about special needs. This can be done through educational campaigns and possibly by teachers who teach LSEN in special schools, including learners themselves who have an important role to play here. Another form of education may be incorporating special needs in the Life Orientation subject at school. This will assist with being misinformed and may contribute to alleviating stigma. The training of teachers to work with LSEN in the context of a mainstream school and the provision of necessary resources to accommodate LSEN in mainstream schools is also essential to ensuring the successful implementation of inclusion.

4. Limitations and recommendations for future research

While yielding valuable findings, this study does not come without any limitations. The first limitation revolves around the method of data collection for this study. A mock interview could have been conducted to develop the interview schedule further. Additionally, follow-up interviews with each participant could have been conducted to clarify things that they brought up in their interviews. Both these approaches were not considered for the present study due to time constraints and the scope of the thesis.

The second limitation has to do with me being a novice researcher to the IPA methodology. Although I engaged in extensive reading and supervision about this methodology, the latter could have influenced data collection and the interpretations made. In recruiting participants, as mentioned in the methodology chapter in chapter three, I wanted to keep in line with IPAs' emphasis on homogeneity (Larkin &

Thompson, 2011), and this was achieved. However, this means that the findings of this study cannot be generalised but are transferrable. In collecting data for the present study, participants at times spoke in abstract terms instead of talking about their personal experiences. In retrospect, I should have made it explicit that participants should provide their personal experiences. Therefore, a further limitation could be objective responses participants provided instead of providing subjective experiences at all times.

The main limitation of the collected data is that the information is based on self-report. Though this is not a problem in itself and suggests that I am doubting or questioning the teachers' experiences, no responses without further confirmation can be seen as representing the truth of what happens in teaching LSEN. All experiences shared with me are influenced by the teachers' memory and how, consciously or otherwise, they chose to present themselves to me as the researcher.

In closing, with regard to future research that can be conducted, it would be useful to repeat this study with special needs educators from a different geographical location as well as with a group of teachers who teach learners with one specific special educational need to gain insights into their experiences and whether they are similar or different to those of the present study. Methodologically, given the growing trend of IPA studies being conducted utilising focus group discussions, it would be informative to get a sense of what findings such a study would yield. It would also be interesting to conduct research with 1) parents of LSEN who attend special schools and 2) LSEN themselves. The present study evidenced that parents play a crucial role in the teaching of LSEN; thus, research with them may provide an opportunity to explore their experiences of special schooling. Research with LSEN will provide insights into their experiences of being in the context of a special school and further contribute to changing the trajectory whereby research is conducted about LSEN rather than with them.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter to Accompany E-mail to School Principals

Rhodes University
P.O. Box 94
Makhanda
6140
[Date] 2019

The Principal
[Address of School]

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST TO SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT RESEARCH WITH SCHOOL TEACHERS

I am a Clinical Psychology Masters student in the Department of Psychology at Rhodes University working on a research project under the supervision of Mr. Jan Knoetze. The research is entitled *Educating learners with special educational needs at special schools: An interpretative phenomenological study of teachers' experiences* (proposal appended below). This project is designed to understand the experiences of teachers who teach learners with special educational needs at special schools, the positive and negative aspects of their teaching, their experiences of the education system, and the various contextual factors that influence their teaching experiences.

To conduct this research, we would like to recruit two teachers who teach at your school. These teachers and six others from other special schools I have approached will take part in two focus group discussions which will take between 60 to 90 minutes. We have written up the ethics protocol for this research and it has served before and been accepted by the departmental ethics committee, the Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) of the Department of Psychology as well as the institutional ethics committee, the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC).

I am writing to you to ask that you share this e-mail, together with the attached research information card, with the teachers at your school in order for them to be informed about this research. Should the teachers show interest in the research, they will be required to contact the researcher for additional information about the study. You will not be involved in this process. Should the teachers consent to participate after receiving additional information about the research, they will be required to avail themselves to take part in the focus group discussions. The focus group discussions will take place after/outside of school hours and in a common location that is accessible to all the recruited teachers. As the researcher, I will come to Port Elizabeth and conduct the focus group discussions. All participants' identifying information including the name of your school will be kept strictly confidential and anonymity will be ensured in any project reports and publications.

Yours Sincerely,
Sibongile Matebese

Appendix B: Research Information Card

Dear Potential Participant

My name is Sibongile Matebese. I am a Clinical Psychology Masters student in the Department of Psychology at Rhodes University. I am conducting research on teachers who teach at special schools and asking them to tell me about their experiences of teaching learners with special educational needs. I want to hear **your** experience which you will tell in a non-judgemental environment in which other special needs educators will be present.

The information you share with me and the other teachers will be used to raise awareness about the need for improved support and other services for special needs educators and learners with special educational needs and also serve as a contribution within wider efforts to improve support and other services for special needs educators provided by your school and the Eastern Cape Department of Education for you as teachers as well as your learners. I would really appreciate you sharing your experience with me and other teachers because what you have to say will help others. If you would like to know more about the research, please contact me using any of your preferred medium of communication below.

Thank You

Sibongile Matebese

Cellphone number: 0746496628

E-mail Address: sibongilematebese@gmail.com

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

RHODES UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
AGREEMENT BETWEEN STUDENT RESEARCHER AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I (participant's name) ________________________ agree to participate in the research project of Sibongile Matebese on the experiences of teachers who teach learners with special educational needs at special schools.
I understand that:

1. The researcher is a student conducting the research as part of the requirements for a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology at Rhodes University. The researcher may be contacted on 0746496628 (cell phone) or sibongilematebese@gmail.com (email). The research project has been approved by the relevant ethics committee(s) and is under the supervision of Mr. Jan Knoetze in the Psychology Department at Rhodes University, who may be contacted on 046 603 8344 (office) or J.Knoetze@ru.ac.za (email).

2. The researcher is interested in the experiences of teachers who teach learners with special educational needs at special schools so as to understand what it is like for them teaching learners with special educational needs, to help improve this education system and help ensure that special needs educators as well as their learners are better supported by their schools and the Eastern Cape Department of Education in the work they do.

3. My participation will involve taking part in two semi-structured interviews which will be audio and video recorded. In the interview, I will try my best to share my experience with the researcher. The second interview will take place after the researcher has transcribed the recording from the first interview and I will be asked questions about any missing information and anything that is unclear.

4. In sharing my experience, I will not speak about any of the learners, teachers, and other school personnel in derogatory ways. Further, what is discussed and shared with the researcher in the interview will not be kept confidential – The researcher will not speak about what is shared by any teacher outside of the interview context expect with her supervisor.

5. I may be asked to answer questions of a personal nature, but I can choose not to answer any questions about aspects of my life and my teaching experience which I am not willing to disclose.

6. I am invited to voice to the researcher any concerns I have about my participation in the study, or consequences I may experience as a result of my participation, and to have these addressed to my satisfaction. *A counselling center, REVIVE (041 373 8882), may be contacted for further support.*

7. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time – however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.

8. The report on the project may contain information about my personal experiences, attitudes, and behaviours, but the report will be designed in such a way that it will not be possible to be identified by the general reader.

Signed on (Date): ____________________
Participant: __________________________
Researcher: __________________________

Appendix D: Audio/Digital and Video Recording Consent Form

Rhodes University — Department of Psychology

USE OF AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDINGS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES
—
PERMISSION AND RELEASE FORM

Participant name & contacts (address, phone etc.)	
Name of researcher & level of research (Honours/Masters/PhD)	Sibongile Matebese; Masters Research
Brief title of project	Educating learners with special educational needs in special schools: An interpretative phenomenological study of teachers' experiences
Supervisor	Mr. Jan Knoetze

Declaration ***(Please initial/tick blocks next to the relevant statements)***			
1. The nature of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me		verbally	
		in writing	
2. I agree to be interviewed via Zoom and to allow the session to be recorded		audiotape	
		videotape	
4. The recordings may be transcribed	without conditions		
	only by the researcher		
	by one or more nominated third parties:		
5.1 I have been informed by the researcher that the tape recordings will be kept for five years after the study is complete and the report has been written.			
5.2 OR I give permission for the tape recordings to be retained after the study and for them to utilised for the following purposes and under the following conditions:			
Signatures			
Signature of participant		***Date***	
Witnessed by researcher			

Appendix E: Participant Demographic Form

Please provide a response for each of the questions below. Please do not write your name on this form. The information you provide here will allow the researcher to provide an accurate description of the sample.

1. Age: _______

2. Racial Identity:

   □ African/Black
   □ Coloured
   □ White
   □ Indian
   □ Other

3. Please provide the name of the school at which you teach **(This will be kept confidential)**

   ____

4. Which learners does your school cater for? (Learners who are blind, intellectually disabled etc)

   ____

5. How long have you been teaching at your school ? ____________________

6. What type of a special school is your school? (Specialised, vocational, remedial, combination)

   ____

7. Did you receive training as a special needs educator?
   □ Yes
   □ No

Appendix F: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Prior to starting the interviews, teachers will be asked to tell the researcher a bit about themselves and the school they teach at and what their teaching day looks like to assist with rapport building. The following questions (with possible prompts) will be used to guide the individual interviews. The questions will be adjusted based on shared experiences during the interview.

1. When did you first start teaching learners with special educational needs (LSEN)?
   Possible prompts: What was it like when you started? Did you understand your role?

2. Can you tell me about your experiences of teaching LSEN?
   Possible prompt: How do you feel about it?

3. How would you describe teaching LSEN?
   Possible prompts: What are the negative aspects/things about teaching LSEN? What are the positives?

4. What are some of the challenges that you have experienced while being a special needs educator teaching LSEN in a special school?
   Possible prompts: How have you coped with these challenges?/What have you done to overcome them? Are there any other people who support you through these challenges?

5. What are some of the highlights/best moments you have experienced while teaching LSEN in a special school?
   Possible prompts: What meaning do these experiences have for you? Are there things you enjoy and do not enjoy about teaching LSEN?

6. What support structures are available at your school to support you as a teacher and what support is there for the learners?
   Possible prompts: How would you describe the support? In the time period that you have worked at your school, do you feel that the support you get is enough? To what extent are you involved in decisions around what support is available for you and your learners at your school? Is there anything more you would like your school to do for you better support you and/or enhance your teaching? Anything for the learners? To what extent are the parents of your learners involved in their education and learning?

7. What has your experience of the Department of Education (DOE) in supporting your special school been like?
   Possible prompts: Are you getting enough support from the DOE? Do you feel you have sufficient training to teach your learners? What things would you like the DOE to do for you as a teacher to improve or enhance your teaching experience? Anything for the learners?

8. Are there any specific reasons why you chose to become a special needs educator?

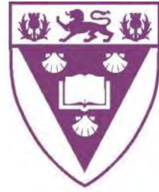
9. What difference is there between teaching in a dedicated special needs school compared to teaching LSEN in a mainstream school?
   Possible prompts: Thoughts on inclusions? Any positive or negative aspects of LSEN attending a mainstream school? Any positive or negative aspects of LSEN attending a special needs school?

10. How has COVID-19 impacted your teaching of LSEN?
    Possible prompts: How has COVID-19 affected your learners? Has it changed the way you teach? Caused other/additional challenges for you? If changes have been made to teaching because of COVID-19, ask: How do you feel about these changes?

Appendix G: Ian Parker's Transcription Conventions (Adapted)

Symbol	Meaning
Round brackets ( )	Indicates doubts arising about the accuracy of material
Ellipses …	To show when material is omitted from the transcript
Square brackets	To clarify something to the reader
Forward slashes	Indicates noises, words of assent and other
Equals sign =	Indicates the absence of gap between one speaker and another at the end of one utterance and the beginning of another
Round brackets with number inserted, e.g. (2)	Indicates pauses in speech with the number of seconds round brackets
Round brackets with full stop (.)	Indicates pauses in speech that last less than a second
Colon ::	Indicates an extended sound in the speech
Underlining __________________	Indicates emphasis in speech
Single inverted commas ‘ ’	Indicates word or phrases which have been quoted; either the participant quoting themselves or quoting other people

Appendix H: RPERC Ethical Clearance Letter



PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT ● Tel: (046) 603 8500 / 85001 ● Fax: (046) 622 4032 ● e-mail: psychology@ru.ac.za

RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

11 October 2019

Sibongile Matebese
Department of Psychology
RHODES UNIVERSITY
6140

Dear Sibongile

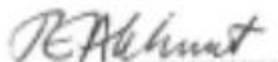
ETHICS APPLICATION: PSY2019/28

This letter confirms that your MCC project proposal with tracking number PSY2019/28 and title, *Educating learners with special needs in special schools: An interpretative phenomenological study of teachers' experiences*, was reviewed by the Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) of the Psychology Department of Rhodes University on 9 October 2019. The committee decision was that this proposal should be APPROVED.

Your ERAS ethics review form was also scrutinized and will have been submitted to the Rhodes University Ethics Standards Committee (RUESC). Once RUESC has granted approval, they will also assign a tracking number on an email that needs to be carefully stored.

Please ensure that the RPERC is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators.

Yours sincerely



CHAIRPERSON OF THE RPERC

Appendix I: RUESC Ethical Clearance Letter

Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8822
e: s.manqele@ru.ac.za
NHREC Registration number: RC-241114-045

https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/

12/04/2021

Sibongile Matebese

Email: g13M2013@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2019-0745-3184

Dear Mr. Jan Knoetze

Title: Educating learners with special educational needs in special schools: An interpretative phenomenological study of teachers' experiences

Principal Investigator: Mr Jan Knoetze

Collaborators: Miss Sibongile Matebese,

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee (RU-HEC). Your Approval number is: 2019-0745-3184

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloging number allocated.

Sincerely,

Prof Arthur Webb

Chair: Rhodes University Human Ethics Committee, RU-HEC

cc: Mr. Siyanda Manqele – Ethics Coordinator