

**How do South African Educator's experiences of  
an online learning course prepare them to adopt  
inclusive education practices?**

**By**

**Ncediwe Mdlulwa**

**Student Number: MDLNCE001**

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**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**

**Supervisor: A/Prof Judith McKenzie**

**Co-Supervisor: Mr Andrew Deacon**

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## Abstract

This research study explored how teachers perceive the potential for online learning opportunities by investigating their experiences of an online course, *Education for All: Disability, Diversity, and Inclusion* Massive Open Online Course (*EFA: DDI MOOC*) on teaching children with disabilities. A key underlying concern is that teachers are not sufficiently trained to teach inclusively within their classroom-based environments. The literature reflects that teachers feel that they have not been provided with adequate skills and knowledge to teach students with disabilities and that a massive gap exists in teacher education, which hinders teachers from providing quality education in South Africa. These assessments of the current state of teacher education regarding children with disabilities in this country highlight a considerable need to upskill teachers, particularly those of children with disabilities.

One of the proposed responses is to offer flexible online courses such as MOOCs that are open to anyone to enrol. MOOCs are a form of online courses with open enrolment delivered on web-based platforms that can support larger numbers of people. They are free courses that offer unlimited online participation, including technological advancement, peer support as well as collaborative practices. In this study, the *EFA: DDI MOOC* informs our understanding of how teachers might respond to and value this opportunity. This study thus sought to investigate “*How do South African educators’ experiences of an online learning course prepare them to adopt inclusive education practices?*”

Semi-structured interviews were employed as a means of collecting data. A qualitative content analysis was used to analyse and interpret the data set. The researcher was able to ascertain how the MOOC was valued by these participants including acquiring information regarding their level of engagement on the MOOC. The collected data was based on South African educators’ experiences of doing the MOOC course and their readiness to implement inclusive education practices for all children with disabilities. The researcher was also interested to ascertain how the online course prepared them to adopt inclusive education practices after completion. This further included establishing how educators perceive MOOCs as being accessible, feasible, and acceptable to their context to develop increased engagement in inclusive teaching practices. The thematic analysis was used to analyse the

data from the in-depth interviews. Finally, participants were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The interviewees spoke of fundamental changes having occurred after participating in the *EFA: DDI* MOOC which led to newer understandings of their conceptualisation of inclusion. The benefits to these individual teachers were diverse, with important aspects including their intrinsic motivation, skills development, as well as the desire for continuous professional development. For some there was also an increased willingness to take up the challenge of adopting inclusive education practices as well as becoming agents of change in their communities. The flexible and low-cost MOOC mode was valued as supporting and complementing inclusive teacher education where few other opportunities existed.

The overall outcome of the study was that online education (MOOCs) appeared as another important option to consider for the successful implementation of inclusive education practices. Teachers were willing to take up the challenge of adopting inclusive education practices as well as becoming agents of change in their communities. Therefore, the findings signified that MOOCs could aid tremendously towards the goal of achieving inclusive teacher education in South Africa.

## **Declaration**

I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and pretend that it is one's own. All citations used that are not mine have been referenced accordingly.

I, Ncediwe Mdlulwa, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university. I empower the university to reproduce for research either the whole or any portion of the contents in any manner whatsoever.

**NAME:** Ncediwe Mdlulwa

**STUDENT NUMBER:** MDLNCE001

**SIGNATURE:**

Signed by candidate

**DATE:** 31 July 2021

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all teachers in South Africa for the enormous work they do towards imparting knowledge, good values and shaping every child's future in the society. Teachers need to be continually empowered within inclusive contexts to give all children the drive to succeed as leaders of tomorrow.

## **Definitions of Terms**

### **Inclusion**

Inclusion is defined by Barton (2003) in three perspectives that are applicable in this study, namely maximising participation, responding to student diverse educational needs as well as inclusion as shaped by the school-level system.

### **Educators**

In this study, an educator refers “to persons who educate other persons or who provide professional educational services or support to schools catering for Grades R to 12 learners”. The term includes classroom teachers, education practitioners, teaching and learning specialists, heads of department, deputy principals, principals, curriculum advisors, education specialists, teacher development officers, education development officers, district and regional managers, and education systems managers (MRTEQ, p.9).

### **Teachers**

“A teacher is a school-based educator whose core responsibility is that of classroom teaching at a school” (MRTEQ, p.9).

### **Inclusive Teacher Education**

Is an approach to equip educators with the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities to improve their quality of pedagogical styles including promoting inclusive practices within their classroom-based environments (Mariga, McConkey & Myezwa, 2014).

### **Inclusive Education**

Phasha and Condy (2016) referred to inclusive education as a concept that is based on enabling all children to be respected and accepted so that they can learn and acknowledging that they need support since all learners learn differently with diverse learning needs.

Mariga et al. (2014) referred to it as a process of identifying and removal of barriers to a child’s learning environment.

## **Sustainable Development Goals**

These refer to the global targets which involve states worldwide with a common ideology of trying together to achieve certain general goals related to future international development such as the 2030 agenda held within these goals (Robert, Parris & Leiserowitz, 2005)

## **Attitudes**

These are belief systems comprised of components, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioural components towards an object. For this study, the object referred to is inclusive education practices (Srivastava, de Boer & Pijl, 2017, as cited in Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000).

## **MOOCs**

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are an educational platform for delivering free online course contents that are accessible to anyone to enrol worldwide (Vivian, Falkner and Falkner, 2014).

## **Online Learning**

Online learning refers to courses that are available on web-based learning platforms that offer flexible pathways including the freedom to study at a chosen time, place, and pace (Ossiannilsson, Altinay and Altinay, 2015).

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBM:	Christoffel-Blinden Mission
CILT:	Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching
CPD:	Continuous Professional Development
DPOs	Disables Peoples Organisation
EFA: DDI:	Education for All: Disability, Diversity, and Inclusion
EWP 6:	Education White Paper 6
FHS:	Faculty of Health Sciences
GDPR:	General Data Protection Regulation laws
HREC:	Human Research Ethics Committee
IE:	Inclusive Education
IPPF:	International Planned Parenthood Federation
MOOC:	Massive Open Online Course
Mphil:	Master's Degree of Philosophy
MRTEQ:	Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications
NGOs:	Non-Governmental Organisations
NQF:	National Qualification Framework
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
SDG 4:	Sustainable Development Goals 4
SGB:	School Governing Body
TCA:	Thematic Content Analysis
TEDI:	Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion
TPD:	Teacher Professional Development
UCT:	University of Cape Town
UN:	United Nations
UNCRPD:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPIAS:	British Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa has made efforts to develop strong policies to achieve quality education. However, little progress has been made regarding the implementation of these policies which has resulted in the lack of specialised training and teacher education programmes focusing on disability and education. Extensive research has proved that learners with disabilities are not fairly accommodated in accessing education on an equal basis with their non-disabled counterparts (McKenzie, Kelly & Shanda, 2018). In addition to that, Kelly and McKenzie (2018) highlighted that formal teacher education in South Africa covers little content relating to the learning barriers experienced by children with disabilities. Yet there are international and national policies implemented for promoting inclusive education for all children with and without disabilities (Engelbrecht, 2006). Furthermore, South Africa has made efforts to roll-out training in the form of short courses via the Disabled People's Organization (DPOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) including university qualifications. However, these strategies have not entirely succeeded to equip teachers with the necessary skills required to teach learners with disabilities.

Teacher education is one of the most important factors that enables children with disabilities to receive quality education (Mariga, McConkey & Myezwa, 2014). However, research shows that there is a massive gap in teacher education that hinders teachers from providing quality education in South Africa. The existing disparities in teacher education not only constrain the successful implementation of inclusive education practices but also learners with disabilities will continue to experience barriers to learning. Considering this, this study aimed to address some of these challenges. There is an urgent need to consider additional opportunities for teachers to learn about inclusive education outside of the formal teacher education programmes. Online courses with open enrolment and flexible scheduling have been proposed as one way of responding to the need to learn about inclusive education. Thus, this study explored how teachers make use of these learning opportunities by investigating their experiences of an online course (*EFA: DDI MOOC*) and how it prepared them to adopt

inclusive education practices. Finally, the positionality and personal reflections of the researcher about this research study were presented.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Globally, various educational policies advocate for the need for education for all learners with or without a disability (McKenzie et al., 2018). According to UNESCO (1994), the Salamanca Statement outlines principles, policy, and practice in special needs education. It has been developed and utilised as a catalyst for change, particularly for promoting inclusive education practices on a global scale (Brandes et al., 2012). Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) highlights internationally a need to ensure that persons with disabilities are entitled to their educational rights in the same manner as their non-disabled counterparts (UNESCO, 2018).

Article 24 of the UNCRPD is further validated by the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) which promotes accessibility to quality education for all and recognises education as a necessity towards achieving other SDGs. According to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) (2016), SDGs are a framework of 17 goals and 169 targets across social, economic, and environmental areas of sustainable development, which the United Nations (UN) set to accomplish over the next 15 years. SDG 4 aims to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In summation, all the above legislation highlights the principles of *education for all*, in that it is regarded as a fundamental right that everyone with or without a disability should obtain.

Despite the efforts and progress made globally, more than 50% of children with disabilities are out of school and are less likely to have opportunities to access education globally (UNESCO, 2018). People with disabilities remain marginalised and their educational rights are overlooked as compared to their non-disabled counterparts. The nature of marginalisation is related to the context and history of the education system. In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid needs to be considered as well.

### **1.2.1 Apartheid and racist education**

During apartheid South Africa, the Bantu Education Act was ratified to ensure that non-whites received limited access to education (Moodley, 2016). Race disparities showed that white persons were more supported by the past education system, which enabled them to achieve a higher level of education than other population groups (Howell, 2006). Only white people

had the privilege of quality schooling, which meant that all other races had schooling of inferior curricula quality, especially black learners with disabilities. The exclusion of learners with disabilities arose from the historical imbalances that occurred in South Africa (Mariga et al., 2014). During the apartheid era, racial discrimination led to the segregation of schooling which gave rise to 18 racially divided education departments (Chisholm, 2004). This arrangement within the education system resulted in black pupils being more marginalised; even more so for learners with a disability. This was further exacerbated by the attitudinal barriers that negatively affected learners with disabilities. For instance, teachers historically understood disabilities as something that does not happen in their classrooms. Howell (2006) states that such learners were perceived not to have a future within the education system.

People with disabilities were also underrepresented in higher education, given the assumption that disabled learners would not succeed at the higher education level (Howell, 2006). It was assumed that they would not cope with courses that included fieldwork and were regarded as not meeting the inherent requirements. Also, South African institutions of learning held the belief that they do not have enough resources to provide for the needs of learners with disabilities (Moodley, 2016). This led to the problem that institutions of higher education and training in South Africa did not provide reasonable accommodation for disabled students. The marginalisation of persons with disabilities contributed to under development, unequal access to resources, and lack of service provision.

### **1.2.2 Segregation of persons with disabilities**

The racial exclusion during apartheid relates to the marginalisation imposed on persons with disabilities in that they were left more vulnerable. They were generally regarded as a medical issue, that is as having an illness or ailment that needed attention (Watermeyer, Swartz, Lorenzo, Schneider & Pristley, 2006). That meant their disability status prevented them from attaining opportunities for economic, social, and political development. The Integrated National Disability Strategy (Government of SA, 2007) stated that school-going aged learners with disabilities were positioned outside the general education and training system. Evidence shows that educating learners inclusively with disabilities in general education classrooms was also a scarce commodity (Soudien & Baxen, 2006). Moodley (2016) also supported these claims by highlighting that people with disabilities experienced challenges in education

ranging from low levels of literacy to high dropout rates due to the discriminatory practices arising from the education system.

The Education White Paper 6 (EWP 6): Special Needs Education; Building and Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001) as well as the Draft National Disability Rights Policy (Department of Social Development, 2015) support the idea of revamping the education system to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners. In addition, these policies identify persons with disabilities as a target group for employment equity and are intended to promote economic inclusion and facilitate access to education. These policies aim to address the needs of persons with disabilities and rectify the existing inequalities. However, the implementation of these policies remains a challenge for reasons such as the lack of qualified and skilled teachers, indicating that training should be provided in public schools, special needs schools, full service, and special schools known as resource centres (Mckenzie, Kelly, Moodley, Stofile, 2020). Moreover, negative attitudes imposed on learners with disabilities admitted in mainstream schools adversely affect their schooling experience (Naraian & Schlessinger, 2018). These challenges seem to suggest that South Africa is far from reaching equal educational rights for persons with and without disabilities. However, if the right support is in place, persons with disabilities can access quality education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. To examine the nature of this support, it might be helpful to look at the social model of disability.

### **1.2.3 The social model of disability**

The social model of disability states that the problem disabled people face lies not in the fact that they have an impairment but rather in the response of society to that impairment (Oliver, 1996). This model argues that people with disabilities are prevented from taking part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers. For instance, in South Africa, teachers are mostly given generalised training that lacks in-depth knowledge and content of the different types of disabilities (Kelly & McKenzie, 2018). The challenges in teacher education are therefore likely cause learners, particularly those with disabilities, to experience barriers to learning. Thus, the social model would rather address the lack of suitably trained teachers as a cause of learning barriers in the classroom rather than the impairment itself.

#### **1.2.4 The right to education**

Education is a human right and each person is entitled to receive their educational right without any form of discrimination (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). The notion of “*education for all*” promotes education as a fundamental human right for all. This reflects in the South African Constitution which shows that all learners with or without a disability should have a right to education and should not be discriminated against based on their disability status (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

In summation, it has been stated that disability has been viewed as a medical issue and that people with impairments were excluded from opportunities for economic, social, and political development. However, it is suggested that if inclusive education were practiced from the onset, the existing challenges, particularly the exclusion of children with disabilities, would not be a key concern. Inclusive teacher education might be a possible solution to deal effectively with the challenges and/or disparities in education arising from discriminatory practices.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

Children with disabilities experience many learning barriers that are not easily addressed (Kelly & McKenzie, 2018). The lack of skills and knowledge and negative attitudes as well as the dispositions of teachers, who often have little or no training in inclusive education, can make an even greater challenge for these children (McKenzie et al., 2020).

The social model of disability and the right to education framework were selected because they both highlight the existing challenges of exclusion imposed on marginalised children particularly learners with disabilities. And so, the fact that children are not receiving their right to quality education shows a great deficit within the education system in South Africa which can be understood through the lens of the social model. Children with disabilities encounter learning barriers in schools which violates their right to education. The adoption of these theories highlights the need to revamp the education system and the need for teachers to be empowered to adopt inclusive education practices.

Teacher training is required to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge for their implementation of inclusive education practices. So, there is an urgent need for a range of additional training opportunities since traditional training opportunities may not be sufficiently flexible for many teachers.

One of the proposed ways to address this gap is through the development of online courses for teacher empowerment. MOOCs are online courses created to support the mission and vision of universities, which is to share and make accessible knowledge for people outside the university (Walji, Deacon, Small, & Czerniewicz, 2016). These MOOCs are often hosted on web platforms such as Coursera and FutureLearn that partner with universities who develop the courses. Universities see MOOCs as part of their strategies to complement formal education and reach a larger outwardly facing audience (Walji et al., 2016). This can help support universities and colleges showcase their research and respond to calls to, for example, alleviate the challenges of teacher education and the barriers to learning experienced by children with disabilities. MOOCs are a convenient, flexible, and low-cost type of online learning (Czerniewicz, Deacon, Fife, Small & Walji, 2014). Participants have greater flexibility in how they choose to make use of the learning opportunities being provided; however, teachers would need to be self-motivated to successfully participate in MOOCs.

Thus, this study investigates the questions involving who might use a MOOC, how this is valued and how they overcome issues of access. The focus is on educators who are willing to use their own time to learn about inclusive education by studying online. Also, the potential impact of MOOCs on training teachers for inclusive education of children with disabilities is unknown. Therefore, this study explores the potential impact of MOOCs on teacher empowerment. Finally, this study illustrates the need for teacher education to enhance the quality of education for all learners including those with disabilities.

#### **1.4 STUDY CONTEXT**

In this segment, the study details the contextual issues from which the research question and problem emanated. To contextualise the issues explored in this study, a brief overview of the education system in South Africa detailing where teachers are working is discussed below.

Extensive research has shown that the education system in South Africa does not adequately cater to the needs of teachers to promote inclusion in schools (Human Rights Watch, 2015). For instance, most teachers in South Africa have little training and no exposure to inclusive education practices (McKenzie et al., 2018). In addition to that, there is a lack of curriculum differentiation to suit learner needs (Kelly & McKenzie, 2018). Research shows that many teachers feel that they do not have relevant skills, knowledge, and abilities to teach inclusively learners with disabilities (McKenzie et al., 2020). This is supported by Stofile (2008) in that many teachers in South Africa have not been trained to cope with the diverse needs of learners admitted in the schools. Yet, most teachers teach large classes comprised of learners with diverse educational needs.

Many teachers are also faced with onerous administrative duties, especially when it comes to filling and processing of admission forms for new learners in the schools (Engelbrecht, 2006). Teachers feel that administration is time-consuming in turn, they have limited time to teach inclusively within their classroom-based environments. Additionally, most teachers feel that learners with disabilities should rather be taken to special schools since they feel teachers from special schools are more capable of teaching learners with disabilities (McKenzie et al., 2020). However, Rulwa-Mnatwana (2014) opposes these claims by arguing that teachers at special schools often lack training in disability-specific skills and/or knowledge. This signifies that this is a misconception that special schools are more capable of teaching learners with disabilities.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) specifies that “*everyone*” is entitled to have the right to education. Yet the school structure, education system, policies, and curricula seem to have been designed to accommodate learners without disabilities (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Therefore, education authorities should ensure that relevant policy implementation effectively deals with the harsh realities of the educational exclusion of disabled children in South Africa.

In post-apartheid South Africa, there has been the development of inclusive education legislation, that is EWP 6 (Engelbrecht, 2006). The EWP 6 policy is specifically known as a tool for the reconfiguration of the provision of education and training in South Africa regarding special needs and educational support (White Paper 6, 2001). This policy attempts to

eradicate the existing disparities within the education system in South Africa (Soudien & Baxen, 2012). The policy has been developed to guide the successful implementation of inclusive education. One of the aims of inclusive education is the removal of barriers in teaching, curriculum, assessment, and socialisation at all levels (Mariga et al., 2014).

Inclusive education in South Africa has been implemented as an educational strategy contributing towards a democratic society to facilitate equal access to education (Engelbrecht, 2006). As part of facilitating equal access to education, the *EFA: DDI* MOOC has been developed as a broader strategy to supplement the issues in teacher education in South Africa. This is an attempt to revamp the education system by building capacity for inclusive education in low to middle income countries amongst parents and teachers. Thus, this forms part of a new future where teachers could develop these skills and acquire this knowledge.

In 2015, the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa launched the first set of UCT Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) funded by the Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Fund. Subsequently, twelve UCT MOOCs were developed, one being *EFA: DDI* MOOC, which is the focus of this study. This course was created by the Disability Studies Division located within the Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Faculty at the University of Cape Town. The goal of the *EFA: DDI* MOOC was to create awareness of disability, diversity, and inclusion and to address an increasing desire for training teachers and other professionals as well as parents with an invested interest in developing inclusive education practices. Furthermore, the scope of this online course is wider than that of other South African teacher courses since it is offered on a global scale through FutureLearn. Lastly, participants were encouraged to contextualise their learning within the education policies of their country.

UCT partnered with a British-based MOOC platform, FutureLearn, to host the MOOC. The CILT department assists with managing the production of UCT MOOCs including working closely with faculties, departments, and academics to conceptualise, design, and deliver MOOC content as well as to research MOOCs. Disproportionally few developing country universities have been involved in creating MOOCs and therefore the general MOOC topics covered do not reflect any local concerns (Czerniewicz et al., 2014). UCT believes that there is an opportunity to share knowledge generated by leading academics and researchers, and to

showcase UCT's intellectual and teaching resources through MOOCs (Czerniewicz et al., 2014). Online learning is known as a learning platform that generates knowledge, skills, and abilities for teachers and other professionals involved to utilise and apply within their classroom-based environment. For this reason, this *EFA: DDI* MOOC course strives to practically help teachers and other professionals as well as parents to tackle inclusion using a context-specific approach. Also, the *EFA: DDI* MOOC acknowledges different types of diversity. However, on this MOOC the learning is tailored specifically on disability as it is often an aspect of diversity that is neglected. Furthermore, this MOOC considers what is the diversity that teachers have anxiety on when it comes to teaching inclusively learners with different impairments.

The social model of disability and inclusive education relates to the fact that teachers do not know about different types of disabilities. And so, teachers need to make adaptations in their teaching by considering the impact of impairment. And so, this is relevant within a social model theory particularly to adapt for impairment and knowing what reasonable accommodations are necessary. Also, the social model of disability and the right to education are based on human right framework. And that, the social model of disability is more concerned about the social barriers that arise from different types of impairments. It is therefore of paramount importance to highlight that inclusive education is not only about disability, but it caters all diverse educational needs of learners.

Finally, it is vital to state that the researcher understands the importance of inclusive education and teaching inclusively all learners the same subject in the classroom. However, it is important that teachers understand all kinds of disabilities in the classrooms which in turn would enable teachers to have more confidence in teaching learners with and without disabilities.

## **1.5 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION**

How do the experiences of an online learning course prepare South African educators to adopt inclusive education practices?

### **1.5.1 Sub-questions**

1. How do educators' understanding of inclusive education and their readiness to implement inclusive education practices for all children with disabilities change through the completion of the MOOC?
2. In what ways do educators perceive MOOCs as being accessible, feasible and acceptable to their context to develop increased engagement in inclusive teaching practices?

## **1.6 OBJECTIVES**

- Explore the perspectives of South African educators regarding their participation within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC platform.
- Identify the willingness of educators to implement inclusive education after doing the *EFA: DDI* MOOC.
- Examine and establish how the MOOC helps South African educators to address teachers' day-to-day difficulties in adopting inclusive education practices.
- Identify experienced barriers to access and strategies that they have adopted in addressing these barriers.
- Explore South African educators' perceptions of the MOOC platform in terms of its accessibility and its feasibility to foster increased engagement in inclusive teaching practices.

## **1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

In the context of the lack of teacher education for inclusive education, this study will make contributions to reviewing online education by understanding educators' adoption of inclusive education after doing the course. Also, this study will contribute to understanding inclusive teacher practices to benefit learners with disabilities. Children with disabilities will

benefit from teachers who adopt inclusive education practices. Also, this work will contribute towards the knowledge creation around the accessibility and feasibility of the MOOCs platform. The increased engagement in inclusive teaching practices will likely enable the promotion of inclusion by teachers of children with disabilities. This further includes accessibility and feasibility and their usefulness for developing online teacher education to address the existing learning barriers in South Africa. Beyond online education, this study will contribute to other spheres of society and education where similar courses are offered. (Creswell, 2009)

## **1.8 POSITIONALITY AND REFLECTIONS OF THE RESEARCHER**

Positionality is a process of examining both oneself as a researcher and the research relationship (O'Leary, 2017). The researcher showed determination and dedication in all aspects of the research study. Also, the researcher is a graduate from the Postgraduate Diploma in Disability Studies from the University of Cape Town (UCT). Disability studies has been an awakening experience which led to the desire to raise awareness around disability inclusion and inclusive education. The researcher became interested in inclusive education and disability studies while working within the Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion (TEDI) project which subsequently influenced the researcher's choice of topic in the Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Disability studies. The TEDI project sought to address the lack of teacher training to meet the needs of children with disabilities. The TEDI project's combination of research and support captured the understanding of disability in context as an issue of social justice.

Also, the Division of Disability Studies at UCT runs a successful MOOC, *Education for All: Disability, Diversity and Inclusion*, which addresses an increasing desire for training in this neglected field of teaching and learning. Thus, the researcher desired to challenge the status quo particularly regarding the difficulties that people with disabilities encounter daily. The experience of working within the TEDI project and pursuing further studies within Disability Studies sparked curiosity around exploring the potential impact of MOOCs on teacher empowerment. This exploration and the researcher's inquisitiveness further raised questions involving who might use a MOOC and how this is valued as well as how teacher education

could potentially enhance the quality of education for all learners, including those with disabilities. For this reason, the researcher took the decision to embark on this study.

Furthermore, the researcher has been a disability activist for more than five years and has been a staff member at the University of Cape Town during the years that this research was conducted. The exposure to the TEDI project possibly might have triggered the participants into thinking that the researcher is an expert in the field, and that they were meant to answer questions in such a way that was most appealing to the researcher. This might have been heightened by the fact that the researcher is not only a graduate from the Postgraduate Diploma in Disability Studies but also has worked previously as a Graduate Intern in the Western Cape Department of Local Government in special programmes, one being disability mainstreaming.

However, the researcher ensured that she did not push her own opinions about disability inclusion, but rather she had the understanding that each person was at a different level of understanding disability inclusion and their implementation of inclusive education practices. Also, the researcher had to restrain from sharing her previous knowledge and understanding of disability and inclusive education practices. Rather, she prioritised reporting on the views and perspectives of the study participants. Finally, the researcher was cautious towards responding to participants' questions because the questions and answers would have to be in a way that did not compromise the outcome of the interviews.

## **1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

### **1.9.1 Chapter one**

This chapter introduces the reader to the study. It focuses on setting the tone and direction for the reader and what the research entails. This includes the rationale of the study and objectives. Also, it includes the background of the study, the research questions, and sub-questions as well as the study context. This helps readers to have a general idea and impression of what the study is about and the motivation or inspiration for conducting such a study.

### **1.9.2 Chapter two**

This section addresses the global and local context from where the study emanates. This chapter reviews the existing body of knowledge around inclusive education and online learning. Thus, this study took a critical view of inclusive education in South Africa and its relevance in teacher education. The literature highlights the massive gap in teacher education that hinders teachers from providing quality education in South Africa. Finally, this chapter highlights the need to upskill teachers and to inform this by exploring the experiences of South African educators in an online learning course and how it prepared them in their adoption of inclusive education practices. This is further based on assessing the potential of an online course (*EFA: DDI MOOC*) on South African teachers, including teachers of children with disabilities.

### **1.9.3 Chapter three**

This chapter describes the methodological framework that guides the research plan and process. Semi-structured interviews are employed as a means of collecting data. The qualitative content analysis (QCA) is used to analyse and interpret the data set. The QCA facilitates the process of exploring and establishing answers to the research question. Furthermore, the inclusion and exclusion criteria are mechanisms used to select participants. The ethical standards are discussed to ensure no harm to any of the participants. Finally, this includes the steps taken to ensure scientific rigor and quality research.

### **1.9.4 Chapter four**

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis from in-depth interviews. The study participants shared their teaching strategies as well as their overall experiences regarding their implementation of inclusive education practices. These findings highlight vividly the fact that each participant's understanding of inclusion had a mind-shift and was strongly influenced by their engagements and/or participation within the *EFA: DDI MOOC*. Also, teachers were dedicated and determined to take the responsibility for their learning to become agents of change. Finally, there were fundamental changes that occurred including the teacher's desire for agency and empowerment which is explored in the next chapter.

### **1.9.5 Chapter five**

The discussion chapter illustrates the outcomes of the study, relating to the existing literature studies. Also, this chapter discusses the three themes that emerged during the analysis phase of the research, namely theme one: “before the course”, theme two: “during the course” and theme three: “after the course”. These themes highlight participants’ experiences before, during and after their participation in the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. This discussion includes the impact of this *EFA: IDD* MOOC on teachers. The key points presented include the role of participants’ intrinsic motivators, skills development, continuous professional development, teacher empowerment and collaboration, positive attitudes towards inclusion as well as suggested improvements. Lastly, the findings indicate that; although there are challenges in teacher education in South Africa, teachers understood inclusive education and thus are willing to take up the challenge of adopting inclusive education.

### **1.9.6 Chapter six**

In this chapter, a summary of all the chapters in the thesis is provided including the recommendations of the study. Furthermore, the possible further research studies that can be conducted are highlighted. Finally, the study limitations are described and concluding remarks are made.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter investigates the role of inclusive teacher education within the South African context and globally. The review further explores how inclusive education practices could enable children with disabilities to receive a quality education. Relevant international and local policies that underpin the successful implementation of inclusive education practices are presented. The discussion on policies begins with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and then moves on to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and explores how these pieces of legislation and/or policies underpin inclusion. Moreover, current challenges in teacher education are reported. Thereafter, the literature investigates the role of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) within the education landscape and how teachers could utilise the online learning opportunities in preparing them to adopt inclusive education practices. The benefits and challenges of MOOCs are reported. Finally, this investigation includes the theory of the social model of disability, and the right to education framework is illustrated.

### **2.2 THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION GLOBALLY AND IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Mariga et al. (2014) state that teachers need to adopt positive perceptions and attitudes to enhance inclusivity. There is a need for inclusive teacher training curricula to develop the willingness to teach inclusively. Savolainen et al. (2012) perceive teacher education for inclusion as an approach to equip teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities to adopt inclusive education practices. However, the lack of inclusive teacher education has resulted in failure to enforce the mandates stipulated by the Constitution of the Republic of South African on the right to education. Mdlulwa (2016) showed that only 14% of teachers in the deaf education system used South African Sign Language (SASL). This means that the deaf learners are taught by educators who are not skilful or fluent in the SASL. This signifies that the lack of disability inclusion in teacher education in South Africa results in the lack of progress and participation for not only deaf learners but also for people with disabilities in general.

According to Barton (2003), teacher education for inclusive learning contributes towards the development of inclusive thinking and practice particularly for children with disabilities. Phasha (2016) states that inclusive teacher education enables teachers to modify their classroom environment, methods of teaching, and other practices to be responsive to all members of the class, including learners with disabilities. For this reason, the idea of inclusion is mandated but teachers' need to be capacitated to promote quality education and inclusive practices in education.

Haihambo (2016) declared that teachers are perceived as the main role players in the school and thus are expected to provide quality education for all learners irrespective of disability, gender, ethnic group, etc. Therefore, teachers need to be presented with opportunities that will prepare them to develop their skills and knowledge towards achieving inclusion in schools. Naraian & Schlessinger (2018) argue that the aspects of disability inclusion training cover a small segment in teacher training whether at the fundamental (basic training) level or through other professional development courses. McKenzie et al. (2018) note that support is required for educators who are employed at special schools because the current state of teacher education regarding children with disabilities highlights a considerable need to upskill teachers, particularly those of children with disabilities. It is safe to assume that the failure to invest in teacher education for inclusive learning will lead to the failure to have an inclusive society that considers diversity in schools. Likewise, Barton (2003) mentioned that the failure to invest in teacher education will continually cause exclusionary values and practices in education. Teachers thus need to be presented with opportunities that will harness their skills and knowledge towards achieving inclusion in schools.

Based on the above discussion on challenges of teacher education for inclusive learning, the comparative study of Sharma and Sokal (2015) in Australia investigated the impact of a teacher education course on pre-service teachers' beliefs about inclusion. Sharma and Sokal (2015) conducted this research to acquire knowledge on how to promote the development of effective inclusive teaching practices and to address limited research on how to influence pre-service teachers' attitudes in a manner that will impact effectively on their practices. They examined attitudes, concerns, and teaching efficacy by conducting surveys at pre and post stages of the course. The study found that participants had improved attitudes and confidence in teaching within inclusive classrooms after doing the course. The study further

suggested the need to ensure those classroom teachers are prepared for and confident about teaching learners with diverse abilities and learning needs. One of the important elements that needs to be addressed is the teachers' understanding of and attitude toward disability. The next segment provides a discussion around the role of policy in teacher education and its implementation.

## **2.3 POLICY FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION**

Globally, the notion of "*education for all*" was reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by the United Nations (United Nations, 1948). Subsequently the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations, 2007) established the concept of "*education for all*" within the human rights framework, portraying education as a fundamental human right for all and the UNCRPD applies this to the context of disability. Stofile (2008) highlights the various educational policies advocate for the need to provide education for all learners with or without a disability globally. This is evident in the following timelines and sources of international instruments relating to inclusive education:

- 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights advocates that "everyone has the right to education and that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms".
- 1989 UN Convention on Rights of Children ensures the right to receive an education without any form of discrimination.
- 1990 The World Declaration on Education for All, Jomtien: focuses on providing all the children with education by 2015.
- 1993 The UN Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Disabled People ensures that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system.
- 1994 The UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education ensures educational development from pre-school to higher education and beyond. It has been delegated to lead the Global Education 2030 Agenda through Sustainable Development Goal 4.

- 2000 Education Forum for Action, Dakar and Millennium Development goals focus on ensuring that the education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled in schools and responding to the needs of all learners.
- 2007 UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities stresses the fact that all persons with disabilities have a right to education. Also, the convention stipulates that people with disabilities have the right to go to school and the exclusion to education is considered an unjust act imposed on learners with disabilities (United Nations, 2015).

All these international policies promote the idea that everyone has a right to education based on the human rights framework. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) also called upon nations to approve the idea of inclusive schools through implementing the practical and strategic changes to accommodate all children, regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and linguistic, or other conditions within mainstream schools. Even though efforts have been made at a policy level regarding the implementation of inclusive education practices, Florian, Young and Rouse (2010) noted that there are persistent beliefs that children with learning difficulties have intrinsic deficits that prevent them from learning.

Contrary to this drive for separation, South African policies have been developed to advocate for the idea of inclusive education of all learners with or without a disability. These policies are noted below.

- The White Paper on Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa (Department of Education, 1995) describes the first steps in policy formation which aims to locate education and training within the national Reconstruction and Development Programme, and outlines the new priorities, values and principles for the education and training system.
- The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996) highlights that all learners including those with special educational needs must be admitted to public schools and they must provide relevant educational support services for such learners without unfairly discriminating practices.

- The White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Ministerial Office of the Deputy President, 1997) recommends the inclusion of learners with special needs in education and training within a single equitable education system
- The National Commission on Special Educational Needs and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services Report (Department of Education, 1997) aim to develop an inclusive education and training system that will uncover and address barriers to learning and recognise and accommodate the diverse range of learning needs.
- The White Paper 6 policy is known as a tool for the re-establishment of the provision of education and training in South Africa (White Paper 6, 2001). This policy attempts to eradicate the existing disparities within the education system in South Africa by considering inclusive education at a systemic level and acknowledges that teacher education is a critical element for bringing about the required system.

These policies are also tied together based on the human rights framework which promotes the principles of education for all. Also, these policies have been developed to guide the successful implementation of inclusive education. Mariga et al. (2014) acknowledged that one of the aims of inclusive education is the removal of barriers in teaching, curriculum, assessment, and socialisation at all levels. Thus, the study of Engelbrecht (2006) investigated the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa after ten years of democracy. The study was conducted to demonstrate the conceptualisation of inclusive education and the challenges of implementing inclusive education strategies within the new democracy in South Africa. Engelbrecht (2006) acknowledged the failure of education to respond to the needs of children due to lack of institutional capacity, the lack of suitably trained teachers, and the lack of resources and administrative systems. It was recognised that teachers lack the knowledge and skills of educating learners with disabilities. Rulwa-Mnatwana (2014) agreed by asserting that there is a massive gap in teacher training in South Africa, observing that even teachers in special schools often do not have training in the disability they are working with. This deficit in teacher education proved to have constrained the implementation of new education policies in South Africa. Lastly, Engelbrecht (2006) highlighted that complex societal changes and management of diversity in schools have impeded the implementation of inclusive education. This signified that the principles of the “*education for all*” approach are not

promoted or implemented effectively as they should. The successful implementation of inclusive education requires teachers to adopt an inclusive curriculum for learning.

Soudien and Baxen (2012) would argue that lack of implementation of this policy reveals the elements of the apartheid-era that have severely affected the education system in South Africa. Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel and Malinen (2012) claim that the apartheid-era is one of the causes of the existing challenges in education; namely, the lack of teacher education, curriculum adaptation towards accommodating diverse learner's needs as well as inadequate resources to ensure quality education.

The EWP 6 is a policy to promote quality education, one that requires all learners and teachers to have the necessary resources for developing skills, knowledge, and abilities. Thus, this policy is a tool in enabling teachers towards being responsive to the needs of all learners with or without disabilities in South Africa. In this context, policy guides the successful implementation of inclusive education using the strategic goals and objectives of the school system to achieve quality education. Hence, establishing an inclusive education and training system within the context of Education White Paper 6 is a priority. Current challenges in teacher education are discussed in depth below.

## **2.4 CURRENT CHALLENGES IN TEACHER EDUCATION**

Stofile (2008) argues that many teachers in South Africa have not been trained to cope with the diverse needs of learners admitted into the schools. A key underlying concern is that teachers are not sufficiently trained to teach inclusively within their classroom-based environments. McKenzie et al. (2018) agree that a massive gap exists in teacher education, which hinders teachers from providing quality education in South Africa. Moodley (2016) acknowledges the past injustices within the education system as one of the causes of the current challenges in teacher education in South Africa. Moodley (2016) states that trained teachers were positioned within a racially and ethnically segregated school system during apartheid. Howell (2006) supported these claims by stating that black learners within the broader community remained extremely disadvantaged in accessing quality education not only in higher education but also in terms of curricula. Given these assessments on teacher education, this signifies that black teachers in particular were not adequately trained to

provide quality education. Within this context, learners with disabilities were more severely affected by these injustices and little has changed to date.

McKenzie (2012) acknowledges the existing negative stereotypes imposed on people with disabilities. Watermeyer et al. (2006) stated that disability has been perceived through the lenses of the medical approach. This model infers that people with disabilities are unable to participate in society due to impairments in their bodies and/or personal tragedy. Generally, teachers historically understood teaching children with disabilities as something that does not happen in their classrooms. So, these misconceptions and stereotypes currently pose a challenge to the promotion of inclusive teacher education. Yet, inclusive teacher education is potentially a solution to deal effectively with such challenges and misconceptions.

In contrast to the medical model, the social model of disability and the right to education are based on human right framework. As stated above, the social model of disability is more concerned about the social barriers that arise from with different types of impairments. And so, it is of paramount importance to highlight that inclusive education is not only about disability, but it caters all diverse educational needs of learners.

Mariga et al. (2014) highlight that negative behaviours and attitudes of teachers make the inclusion of all children including those with disabilities in schools difficult. Engelbrecht (2006) agreed by stating that these negative behaviours are further exacerbated by teachers who blame their pupils for their bad behaviour and teachers' lack of confidence in their abilities to teach inclusively. It has been stated that in South Africa teachers' attitudes and discriminatory practices are racially entrenched, particularly towards those who are perceived as different.

The White Paper 6 has highlighted the need for inclusive education and training by challenging changing attitudes and perceptions: *"Changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula, and environment to meet the needs of all learners"*.

The study of Cook, Tankersley and Landrum (2000) investigated teachers' attitudes towards their students with disabilities. The aim of the study prompted correspondence about attitudinal categories of attachment, concern, indifference, and rejection. The findings showed that those teachers with a considerable amount of experience in teaching within inclusive classrooms had generally positive attitudes towards the students with disabilities.

Thus, this study implied that teachers must be provided with the exposure and space to have experiences and opportunities for working in inclusive environments. Similarly, Mahlo and Condy (2016) have stressed the need for all teachers to be supported towards achieving a positive attitude including new teaching methods. This includes encouraging their involvement in decision making particularly, and how they plan on achieving inclusion within the schools to seek opportunities that enhance their skills. Thus, the above claims signify that teachers are observed as the main role players and agents of change within the school system.

The above challenges can be addressed through the legislation that underpins inclusion as shown from the findings of other scholars. For instance, the study of Haihambo (2016) highlighted that countries that invested largely in legislation that supported inclusion and university programmes specialising in effective and practical inclusive teaching practices had decreased concerns about the adoption of inclusive education practices. The implementation of inclusive education is particularly important within the South Africa context, given our history of social exclusion and segregation. Also, the above discoveries imply that South Africa needs to consider investing extensively in teacher preparedness, policy implementation, and university programmes that promote inclusion.

Evans & Myrick (2015) acknowledge that one of the ways of considering teacher preparedness and inclusion in schools includes supplementing traditional education through the deployment of MOOCs. They define MOOCs as an expanded form of online education, which is a recent initiative aimed at lessening some of the existing pedagogical difficulties, particularly in higher education. In this study, MOOCs are being explored as one possible solution towards addressing the lack of specific skills and knowledge to teach inclusively. The aim is to explore how online education could help inform our understanding of how teachers might respond and value such an opportunity. In doing so, the discussion below explores some literature studies on online education and the role of MOOCs within the education spectrum.

## **2.5 WHAT ARE MOOCs AND HOW CAN THEY BE USED?**

MOOCs are free self-directed online courses with open enrolment which are accessible to anyone worldwide (Vivian et al., 2014). Anderson (2013) and Clow (2013) further highlight

that MOOCs are a form of online courses with open enrolment delivered on web-based platforms that can support large numbers of people. Alzahrani (2018) perceives MOOCs as convenient, flexible, cost-effective and accessible in that participants can work at their own pace through using different media platforms to access the course material such as mobile phones to learn. Daneji, Ayub and Khambari (2019) pointed out that these courses are optional and free as well as open to any individual who wants to learn online regardless of one's place or level of education. Learners have greater flexibility in how they choose to make use of the learning opportunities being provided, which include choosing when to leave the MOOC. Walji et al. (2016) believe that MOOCs are asynchronous which means the online learning platform does not require students and instructors to be online or in person at the same time for instruction. Sullivan, Fulcher-Rood, Kruger, Siple and van Putten (2019) further state that this technology allows instructional designers to create courses that participants can go through on their own with little or no help from an instructor.

Walji et al. (2016) expressed that these courses are known as non-formal learning in that there is no formal qualification for completing the course, although this may be possible in some cases. Walji et al. (2016) further indicate that MOOCs are being created to align with the mission and vision of universities, which may include sharing and making knowledge accessible. This is also to make potential students aware of formal degree programme opportunities which are offered through some of the largest MOOC platforms such as Coursera, EdX, and FutureLearn. The success of these MOOC platforms is in part their usability and functionality. Hew et al. (2018) commended the fact that MOOCs have been created to support large numbers of people across the globe.

MOOCs are intentionally designed with encouraging prompts to continue with a course knowing that anyone can enrol without necessarily being expected to complete the course. The design of MOOC platforms is informed by how people learn and engage online. Yen Chaw and Meng Tang (2019) observe that MOOC participation requires participants to have self-discipline as an essential aspect for successful completion. Also, MOOC completion requires participants to have the self-motivation to participate as online learning portals depend upon self-regulated learning (Ossiannilsson et al., 2015). The study of Bonafini (2017) analysed teachers' engagement in MOOCs and noted that the nature of MOOC learning materials including interactive videos and course facilitators could likely increase the rates of course

completion. Furthermore, positive motivation leads to positive engagement behaviours in learners, which inculcate positive attitudes to complete MOOCs (Yen Chaw & Meng Tang, 2019). This signifies that students' positive engagement in MOOCs is considered an essential aspect of learning.

Hew (2016) argues that participants' willingness and engagement in MOOCs is also reflected through their psychological needs, namely autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Autonomy can be defined as the need for freedom or perceived choice over one's actions (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Bonafini (2017) asserts that MOOC environments afford participants with the autonomy to choose what, when, and with whom they will interact, allowing participants to proceed at their own pace and provide a motivational basis for MOOC participants' behavioural engagement because an individual voluntarily decides to participate. The participant's emotional engagement is influenced by that freedom over course activities that leads to positive feelings towards the course itself. Freedom and flexibility in MOOCs could potentially increase people's engagement level (Hew, 2016).

Regarding relatedness, MOOCs allow participants to become part of a community of practice such as learning from other people's diverse experiential backgrounds. According to Hew (2016) this is referred to as relatedness and is defined as the need for an individual to connect with other people. In the case of MOOCs, participants receive diverse experiential backgrounds by connecting to their peers and the instructor as a means to learn (Hew, 2016). Majid, Kamarudin and Zamin (2019) agree by highlighting that MOOCs enable participants to meaningfully engage and interact with others. Belshaw (2012) also perceived the online platform as an opportunity and space for people to learn from other people. This implies that educators could learn from other educators who possess diverse experiential backgrounds.

In terms of competence, there is a lack of inclusive teacher education to effectively deal with learning barriers experienced by children with disabilities in South Africa. Thus, there is an urgent need for teachers to be trained and capacitated to adopt inclusive dispositions and behaviours. To address this need, MOOCs might be one possible solution and strategy for teachers to benefit from curriculum adaptation and differentiation. Salmon, Gregory, Dona, and Ross (2015) acknowledges the findings from previous research studies wherein it was noted that the process of creating and designing an online course stimulated and influenced

educators to reflect upon their role as educators. Belshaw (2012) also suggests that online learning teaches educators to mimic online learning in offline learning environments. Additionally, Czerniewicz et al. (2014) argued that MOOCs generally enable openness, and synergies within the online space, thereby resulting in inclusive learning and teaching, as well as changing practices. Thus, inclusive teacher education is required as an intervention to alleviate the lack of specific skills and knowledge to teach inclusively. Therefore, inclusive teacher education appears to be an important factor in providing quality education for all children with disabilities.

Even though, there are a proportion of participants who have the time and interest to continue and complete the course. To the contrary, Diver and Martine (2015) have highlighted disadvantages of MOOCs that cannot be ignored, such as student dropout rate resulting in non-completion. Ebben and Murphy (2014) agreed by highlighting that MOOCs are optional and this could be a disadvantage to others because the majority of the people enrolling in a MOOC do not complete for whatever reason. Participants typically drop out before the end of the first week in MOOCs. Other critiques of MOOCs are related to the expectations, access, and time to learn. MOOCs generally have large enrolments over time, so completions can represent a competitively large number when compared to other course formats. In addition, Czerniewicz et al. (2014) mentioned that MOOCs can reach a considerable number of people but there is a smaller number of people who complete the course. Also, Chiu and Hew (2018) recognised that MOOC participants do not know most of their peers, and they are not supervised by the teacher and are under no expectation to complete the course. This signifies that unmotivated MOOC participants would be unable to engage in learning with others resulting in an increase in non-completion rates in MOOCs.

## **2.6 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.6.1 Social model of disability**

This study is guided by the social model of disability and the right to education to conceptualise it. The aim is to provide a conceptual understanding of teachers' experiences of online learning and their adoption of inclusive education practices. The social model of disability is used to guide the analysis of the current state of teacher education in South Africa.

As shown above, this model claims that people with disabilities are prevented from taking part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers. French (1993) acknowledged that the social model theory focuses on the removal of environmental barriers and the promotion of inclusion and participation.

This model was developed by the British Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) to challenge the medical model of disability (Hammell, 2006). The medical model claims that disability is a medical issue based on the premise that the problem lies within the person with an impairment. It is premised on the belief that people with disabilities need to have their bodies fixed by accessing health care services. Following this reasoning, persons with disabilities are perceived as needing help and unable to care for themselves. In this vein, the medical model would claim that bodily impairment is what causes learners to experience barriers to education. However, French (1993) states that the social model of disability denotes that disability is socially constructed which signifies that the environments disable people with impairments.

The UNCRPD defines disability through the lens of the social model of disability, which includes *“those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”* (United Nations, 2012). This means that the social model of disability ascribes the lack of suitably trained teachers as a cause and consequence of learning barriers in the classroom. For instance, Stofile (2008) claimed that in South Africa a key concern is that teachers have not been trained to cope with the diverse needs of learners admitted in the schools. This means teachers are not sufficiently trained to teach inclusively within their classroom-based environments. Also, most teachers are not exposed to courses on the FutureLearn platform and teachers in the rural areas have no access to the internet. Thus, the problem concerning disability is found in the society and/or environmental factors rather than their impairments. The researcher has thus considered the social model of disability to conceptualise this study.

The social model of disability is inherently linked to the right to education framework because they are both based on the human right framework. In addition, the two frameworks move away from seeing the problem within the person but rather in the social system and assert

that a person with a disability is not an object of charity but rather a citizen with rights. This means that all learners including those with disabilities have the right to quality education. Also, the South African Constitution states that education should be adequate and equal to everyone without any discrimination.

The social model of disability and the right to education framework both highlight the existing gaps in teacher education because they promote the idea that all learners including those with disabilities participate equally, and meaningfully to all educational programmes in schools. Although these frameworks are not entirely about teacher education, but they are relevant to teacher education because they seek to raise awareness about the importance of teacher empowerment including the alleviation of any physical, attitudinal, and institutional barriers that prevent students with disabilities from participating meaningfully to educational opportunities. Hence, the rights framework promotes the idea that all human beings have a right to equality, equity, and participation. In response to the gaps in teacher education, inclusive education is about equipping teachers to address barriers to learning to ensure that all children benefit from inclusion. This is achieved by considering the diverse educational needs of all learners in the classroom. In turn, this would effectively transform the school communities hence, inclusive education is not only about disability but involves all forms of diversity.

### **2.6.2 The human rights perspective**

The right to education is also considered to frame this study, in particular the context of teacher education in South Africa. The aim of the rights approach *“is to meet the human rights of individuals and groups by addressing disparity, discrimination, inequality, unjust, exploitative power relations and the exclusion from participation”* (Department of the Premier, 2007:10). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) specifies that everyone is entitled to have the right to education. This means education should be adequate and equal for everyone without any discrimination.

Hay and Malindi (2005) highlight that inclusive education (IE) is a human right and is concerned with the rights of children, including equality, human dignity as well as education. This implies that all learners with or without a disability have a right to education. Hew, Qiao,

and Tang (2018) further state that persons with disabilities should not be discriminated against from accessing quality education due to their disability status. The lack of inclusive teacher education indicates a failure to enforce the mandates stipulated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa on the right to education, and a lack of the right to education may act as a hindrance towards acquiring a better quality of life.

Therefore, teachers must be empowered to ensure that inclusive teaching and learning is practiced holistically. Also, education policies should promote the rights-based approach to achieve equality and equity for all learners including persons with disabilities. Finally, the education and training of teachers should enable them to promote inclusive education practices within their classroom-based environments.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the right to education cannot be achieved without teacher education. Teacher education prepares educators with the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities to improve the quality of their pedagogical styles including promoting inclusive practices within their classroom-based environments. Thus, MOOCs contribute tremendously towards continuous professional development and are one way of bridging the gap in teacher education. This research is intended to support the move towards developing a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences of taking a MOOC to learn about a new topic from such a flexible course mode. In so doing it also considers their motivation and agency in taking their learning into their own hands. The *EFA: DDI* MOOC is explored as an example of an online course. For purposes of this study, we explore firstly, *how do educators' understanding of inclusive education and their readiness to implement inclusive education practices for all children with disabilities change through the completion of the MOOC?* Secondly, *in what ways is the MOOC accessible, feasible, and acceptable to develop increased engagement in inclusive teaching practices?* These questions are intended to inform discussion around the understanding of South African educators' experiences towards providing quality education for children with disabilities.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter details the methodological processes of the research study. This discussion begins with a discussion of the selected methodology after which the research design and the research processes are discussed. Thereafter, the selection of participants based on inclusion and exclusion criteria including recruitment processes is presented. Also, the data collection procedures as well as research instruments are reported. The data management process is explained including how thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the data. Finally, the ethical considerations and rigor of the study will be reported.

### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH**

In this study, the researcher asks the question:

*“How do South African educators’ experiences of an online learning course prepare them to adopt inclusive education practices?”*

A qualitative design was deemed as best suited and relevant for this study. Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as based upon presenting interpretive data to explore and understand people’s behaviours, attitudes, subjective views as well as actions. Creswell (2009) further maintains that qualitative research enables researchers to do a systematic process of describing individual experiences, behaviours, feelings, etc. Thus, this research design enabled the researcher to explore in-depth the questions on the topic under study, that is South African educators’ experiences of online learning (EFA: DDI MOOC) and their adoption of inclusive education practices. Also, this research design assisted to make meaning of the experiences of educators based on their participation within the MOOC. Further, the researcher was able to explore the potential impact of the online course on the study participants.

Qualitative Content Analysis was employed as a method used to analyse and interpret the data set. Cho and Lee (2014) describe this method as a strategy for the analysis of qualitative descriptive studies. Also, Cho and Lee (2014) define qualitative content analysis as a research

method that is based on the naturalistic inquiry for identifying themes and patterns involving rigorous coding. It has been highlighted that qualitative research is generally about exploring and understanding people's behaviours, attitudes, subjective views as well as actions. Qualitative content analysis is a research method that allows subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and generating themes (Cho & Lee, 2014). Thus, this research method was used to do research and analysis of the experiences of South African educators within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. Furthermore, the researcher was able to ascertain how the MOOC was valued by these participants, including acquiring information regarding their level of engagement on the MOOC.

Qualitative content analysis is a flexible method for conducting inductive and deductive coding approaches. However, for this study the researcher conducted the inductive approach which involved generating the codes and categories as well as themes directly drawn from the data set (Cho & Lee, 2014). Also, one of the strengths of qualitative content analysis is the fact that this method focuses on understanding the social reality and/or phenomenon under study through the interpretation of verbal, visual, or written recorded communication materials. Hence, this research method was deemed suitable for this study because of its benefits. The acquired qualitative data from the participants was subject to thematic analysis. Therefore, the researcher was interested in this said MOOC above to explore the research outcomes to assist in answering the research question.

### **3.3 INCLUSION CRITERIA**

The population that the study drew from were all South African teachers who had completed the *EFA: DDI* MOOC using the following selection criteria for inclusion: -

- Qualified South African educators and teachers: working within full-service schools, special schools, and public schools with a minimum of one year's experience. This was to obtain in-depth information on how South African educators' experiences of an online learning course prepared them to adopt inclusive education practices. This information included the participants' background in inclusive education and/or general teaching experiences.

- Current and past participants from the EFA: DDI MOOC: who have participated both in the previous (from 2015) and the current run of the MOOC course for a minimum of four to six weeks.
- Teachers of children with disabilities in home-schooling: teaching children with and without disabilities and with a minimum of one year of experience. Learners with and without disabilities would benefit from teachers and educators who adopted inclusive education practices. Hence, the course mainly aimed to educate and empower teachers and educators in terms of their implementation of inclusive education practices.
- Teachers of children with disabilities: based on the above participant selection criteria, some of these participants were teachers of children with disabilities because children with disabilities would benefit from teachers who adopted inclusive education practices. Hence, the course mainly aimed to educate and empower teachers and educators in terms of their implementation of inclusive education practices.

### **3.4 EXCLUSION CRITERIA**

The population that the study excluded included the following:

- Participants who were currently enrolled for their teacher's qualification including any students who did not have teaching experience/s.
- Students who were enrolled for their education-related qualification.
- Participants who had participated less than four weeks within the MOOC course as per the responses provided in the invitation letter.

### **3.5 PROCEDURE**

#### **3.5.1 Recruitment process**

The researcher recruited participants using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. She initially planned to have twelve participants in this study. However, the sample size was reduced to six participants due to the difficulty of finding suitably qualified teachers/educators. Gaining access to the participants was challenging because most teachers were overwhelmed with the high demands of work. Even though some teachers initially showed interest in this study;

they could not participate because they had overcrowded classrooms with a considerable amount of administrative duties which added to their teaching responsibilities. Given this challenge, these teachers had mentioned that they were unable to participate in the MOOC which also meant that this would nullify their eligibility to participate in the research study. It was thus difficult to find teachers who had completed the bulk of the course as per the inclusion criteria.

Because of the difficulties in the recruitment process, a range of recruitment methods for this research project was adopted, and they are described respectively below:

1. An announcement was made through the *EFA: DDI* MOOC site and researcher network inviting all interested participants to partake in the study.
  - a. This invitation included a link requesting all interested applicants to indicate their details as well as answering questions relating to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Participants were made aware that their details were for purposes of determining those who met the inclusion criteria of the study.
  - b. All participants who expressed interest and were deemed eligible as per the inclusion criteria of the research study obtained the invitation letter via email. Also, the invitation letter explained the research aims and expectations of participants, and that enabled participants to agree or disagree to participate in the study.
  - c. The contact details of the researcher were included in the invitation in case participants wished to contact the researcher for further queries via email and for indicating their interest in the study.
2. Announcement reminders were sent within the MOOC Facebook group site - referred to as "*the Study Group for Inclusive Education*". Meanwhile, the host of the *EFA: DDI* MOOC course was also requested to include in the weekly course reminders the announcement requests to encourage all potential participants who were interested to confirm their willingness to partake in the study. Also, Facebook inbox messenger was used as a means of communication and for purposes of protecting participants' privacy.

- a. Invitation responses were reviewed and those who met the inclusion criteria were subsequently selected and further contacted for arranging face-to-face interviews using the time that was most convenient for them.
  - b. Personalised formal invitations with details requesting participants for their preferred dates, time and venue for the interview session were then sent.
3. Teachers from the Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion<sup>1</sup> (TEDI) project courses were given details inviting them to take part in the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. The researcher subsequently sent out the formal invitation letter (see *Appendix C*) to those who had completed the said MOOC and to those who participated until at least week four, requesting participation in the study interviews. The researcher worked under the TEDI project during the time that this research was conducted.

Before conducting the interview, the researcher shared via email the information sheet with the selected participants and went over the information letter with them, and effectively requested and obtained their consent to participate in this study.

## **3.6 PARTICIPANT SELECTION**

### **3.6.1 The selected participants**

Home-based educators: teaching children with and without disabilities and with a minimum of one year of experience were included.

Qualified South African educators and teachers: working within the sphere of education with a minimum of one year's experience were chosen.

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<sup>1</sup> The Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion (TEDI) project was born in partnership between the University of Cape Town and Christoffel-Blinden Mission (CBM) and co-funded by the European Union and CBM. This project aimed to develop courses tailored at strengthening teaching in South Africa, particularly towards providing quality education for children with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments.

Current and past participants from the EFA: DDI MOOC: two participants from the previous runs (from 2015) were selected and four participants were selected from the current run of the MOOC course with a minimum participation of four to six weeks. These participants had either completed the course or had participated up to the fourth week. Hence, they were perceived as knowledgeable for purposes of assisting the researcher to probe how South African educators implement inclusive education practices. Furthermore, the study participants offered valuable insights towards drawing inferences on what changes occurred because of their participation in the MOOC course. It is vital to highlight that this project strived to acquire information related to what is working and/or not working regarding the MOOC platform. Only participants who had extensively engaged with the course were able to offer these insights. The focus of this study was not based on evaluating the MOOC or how participants were performing in the course, but the researcher was rather interested in acquiring information based on their views and experiences of participating and engaging in the course. This research aimed to make contributions to review online education by understanding educators' extent of adoption of inclusive education after doing the course.

Thus, the interviews comprised of six participants in total. Five were South African teachers and one home-schooling educator. These participants were five females and one male.

### **3.7 DATA GATHERING METHOD**

#### **3.7.1 In-depth interviews**

O'Leary (2017) defined interviews as a method of data collection that involves seeking detailed responses relating to open-ended questions based on a topic of interest. So, in-depth interviews were employed as a means of collecting data. This was to receive in-depth information on the phenomenon under study (O'Leary, 2017). This technique enabled the researcher to probe deeper into the research question. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the South African educators' experiences of inclusive education practices from their perspective (Marie, Sigstad & Garrels, 2018).

To elicit such responses, participants were asked questions about their understanding of inclusive education and the practical strategies that they implemented towards promoting inclusion. Furthermore, the questions inquired about their experiences of disability inclusion

within their professional training, reasons for joining the free online course and their level of engagement in MOOCs, including their insights before and after having completed this free online course (see *Appendix E* for the interview schedule). This assisted to obtain the inputs and outcomes concerning their adoption of inclusive education practices.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to probe and enabled participants to express their subjective viewpoints (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The interviews featured aspects of the conversational model wherein an interviewer could provide clarification of questions for respondents by providing unscripted feedback (Roland & Wicks, 2009). The researcher was cautious and avoided sensitive questions concerning the tension created by the marginalisation of persons with disabilities. The interviews also involved acquiring information from both audio recordings and information that was derived from non-verbal cues. The non-verbal cues played a vital role because the researcher did not want to miss out on important information that comes from nonverbal cues (O'Leary, 2017). An audio recording device was a tool utilised as means of capturing data. The audio recording was supplemented with the written notes to avoid missing something. This added to enrich data as one could capture aspects that were not easily captured by audio alone. However, the disadvantage of the semi-structured interviews was that the participants could easily be side-tracked by unimportant aspects that were not related to the research question (Jong & Jung, 2015). However, the researcher politely guided the interview conversation in relation to the research question and topic to avoid side-tracked conversations.

## **3.8 DATA GATHERING PROCESS**

### **3.8.1 In-depth interview process**

The first and second in-depth interviews were done as a pilot study in April 2019 to establish the functionality and appropriateness of the employed research methodology. Thus, this meant establishing whether the research approach and instruments were suitable techniques. Also, this approach assisted in identifying any potential unforeseen problems when administering the actual main study interviews to assist in answering the research question. Before the data was collected through semi-structured interviews, the researcher had prepared an interview schedule as a dry run (see *Appendix E*). The first two interviews

were conducted with teachers who were not part of the study since it was a pilot study. The results from the pilot interviews were deemed useful in relation to the research question and were thus incorporated as part of the findings of this project. This process enabled the researcher to make amendments to the questionnaire such as phrasing, sequencing, etc. The researcher was able to eliminate repetition and vague or ambiguous questions. Also, the same research processes, procedures, and measures were followed for both the pilot and the main study. The pilot study consisted of two people, namely a teacher and a home-based educator and were part of the pool of past participants from the *EFA: DDI MOOC*.

As a result of the pilot, the researcher made some minor changes such as focusing on keeping the questions on track and well defined. Thus, the interview schedule was slightly refined because of the information and insights gained during the pilot phase. This means the process of data collection did not differ significantly for the subsequent interviews. The questions asked during the pilot phase assisted the researcher to gain a more in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions and experiences of online education and their adoption of inclusive education practices.

The sample size was also reduced to six instead of the original number of twelve participants owing to the difficulty of finding suitably qualified teachers/educators. The duration of all the interview sessions was between thirty minutes and an hour and a half maximum.

All relevant research documents were made available via email to all participants before the interview sessions. Before the commencement of the interviews, the researcher checked with participants if they had any queries regarding the study and the research protocols. Also, the researcher ensured that the participants understood the details provided in the information sheet (see *Appendix D*) which served as a tool to inform participants in terms of how the data was going to be used. Furthermore, participants consented for the interviews to be audio recorded by using a mobile device, and they were assured that their responses were entirely anonymous. Since the researcher could not rely on her memory for remembering everything that was discussed during the interviews, written notes were used as an additional tool to capture deeper meanings from the responses.

During the interview sessions, the researcher introduced the topic of the research and its purposes. Thereafter, the researcher informed all the participants of the reasons they were selected as well as the duration of the interview sessions. The researcher had prepared an interview schedule of questions before the interviews (see *Appendix E*). Finally, the interviews were audio-recorded by using a mobile device that was accessible to the researcher only. The collected data was later transcribed, kept safe and private. The researcher's phone was utilised as a recording device during the interviews. Other means of recording data, particularly field notes, were also employed in this research. Note-taking included the memos from the phone as well as notebooks which were tools that were employed during the data collection process. The data was subsequently transcribed using the *Express Scribe* programme which is a professional audio player software for a computer designed to help transcribe audio recordings at your own preferred pace <https://www.nch.com.au/scribe/index.html>. The pseudonyms were used to protect participants' privacy and the data was edited for grammatical purposes and clarity only. The edited data included removing awkward sounds or pauses which were perceived as irrelevant in the study. Finally, the transcribed data was shared via emails with the participants respectively to ensure accuracy. Participants reviewed the interview transcripts respectively and confirmed that they were accurate and consistent.

The researcher probed participants for purposes of elaboration and clarification. This probing occurred when something new or interesting was stated or aligned with the research question. This facilitated the process of acquiring in-depth information until saturation was achieved. According to Lowe, Norris, Farris and Babbage (2018), saturation is defined when no new information is observed from the data set. The researcher recognised saturation, therefore, when the data set was unable to generate new themes related to the research question. The study participants consented to be contacted if the researcher had further inquiries regarding their responses. After reviewing the data responses, this research study did not have to follow up interviews since the researcher felt the information provided was adequate to fulfil the research objectives as well as for answering the research question. Finally, the venues for the interview sessions (including pilot interviews) were at the Department of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Old Main Building, Groote Schuur Hospital.

### **3.9 DATA MANAGEMENT**

The data management strategy was mainly used to protect the participants' confidential information (Creswell, 2013). So, only the researcher and study supervisors had access to the collected data. This data and any sensitive information were password protected. All transcribed information including the audio recordings were kept confidential and locked up in the researcher's office, including the external hard drive with a code accessible only to the researcher. The backup system on the computer protects the obtained data as a means of ensuring that the data was not manipulated by anyone. Only the researcher and her supervisors had access to the information. The data gathered will be kept for five years and will then be deleted from the data storage.

### **3.10 DATA ANALYSIS**

In this study, data analysis was conducted through the process of thematic content analysis. TCA has been defined as a descriptive presentation of qualitative data (Anderson, 2007). Furthermore, Anderson (2007) states that this process enables the researcher to generate themes and interpretation of raw data. Also, this thematic content analysis process was done to establish conceptual understanding through organising, locating, and defining patterns within the data set (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). An inductive coding process was performed to establish these themes from the data (Saldana, 2009). Braun and Clarke (2012) define thematic content analysis as a method of qualitative data analysis in which the researcher is guided by the following six steps to generate the themes:

#### **Step 1**

In the first step, the researcher created familiarity as an ongoing process in this study. This means that the researcher repeatedly read each of the six interview transcriptions. This was a preparatory phase for the researcher in terms of getting to know the data as well as focusing on the analysis. It was easy to establish familiarity with the data because the in-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher.

#### **Step 2**

The second step was based on generating the initial codes for this study using the data from the in-depth interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2012) this step is about focusing on the analysis, categorising information, and giving codes to the data. This was to determine the patterns by recognising the similarities and differences across the data set (Rule & John, 2011). Furthermore, this was about considering the different types of coding and choosing an appropriate one for the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thus, the researcher established the codes using the *Nvivo* programme which enabled her to encode, recode, rename and delete, including assigning different codes to shorter and longer passages of text.

### Step 3

The third step was the process of searching for and generating themes from the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Patterns (themes) were identified within and between codes and categories across the data set.

### Step 4

The fourth step was based on reviewing the established themes which were based on the interpretation of the potential themes. These themes were scrutinised according to the research objectives and were written as per the research aims.

### Step 5

The fifth step was based on defining and naming the themes.

### Step 6

Finally, the sixth step was based on writing up the themes which were established in relation to the research question.

To eliminate any potential bias in the study, the data was coded and then, these codes and themes were reviewed by supervisor and co-supervisor in terms of how they were related to the research question and topic.

### **3.11 THE SCIENTIFIC RIGOR OF THE STUDY**

The establishment of scientific rigor and trustworthiness in a study is essential to qualitative research methods.

#### **3.11.1 Trustworthiness**

Babbie & Mouton (2001) believe that trustworthiness is key specifically to produce good quality research and stipulated the four criteria, namely credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability.

Credibility is about establishing to what extent the data collected is accurate (Mertens, 2010). Credibility was achieved by obtaining feedback from the study participants regarding the transcriptions. This was to ensure that their voices had been captured and that the transcriptions were accurate. All transcriptions were developed from the audio recordings and were then sent to participants via emails. In turn, participants responded via email to the researcher and they stated that they did not have any changes to be made. In turn, this process of information sharing assisted in terms of establishing credibility and accuracy of information.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the results could be generalised (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Transferability relates to carefully describing the research processes and procedures so that others can replicate them. This also means establishing what the similarities and differences were in this particular context and beyond. Transferability was achieved by providing the details of the background of the study including the context as well as data collection methods. Furthermore, this included a detailed description of the phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made. Transferability was considered an important aspect of the study. So, the researcher considered that it is possible to make use of this study in other spheres of society and education where similar courses are offered, using the same research approaches and concepts.

Confirmability means the extent to which the results could be confirmed by others (Creswell, 2009). Confirmability was achieved through an audit trail which was used to track data sources during data analysis. This was to ensure that the study was executed as per the

research design and plan. Confirmability relates to the reliability and validity of the study which was achieved by adhering to the research plan and procedures. This also meant using the notes and audio recordings of the interviews to keep track of the sequence of activities of the research. The research plans and objectives also acted as evidence of the process of data collection, thereby assisting in answering the research question.

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which the research is documented (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Dependability was achieved by using an audit trail and data observation. As stated above, an audit trail was used to track data sources during data analysis to ensure that the study was executed as per the research design and plan. Also, this included all records, notes on methodology, and documents produced and collected during the research process.

In addition, data observation assisted to ensure that the information obtained was neither biased nor influenced by anything else. Thus, this process was achievable because the study had a small number of interviews as opposed to large study samples. The changes that were implemented involved the expansion of inclusion criteria, namely home-based educators. This participant was selected because she possessed invaluable experiences that aided our understanding of South African educators' experiences of online education. Her home-teaching experiences included both learners with and without disabilities. This was perceived as relevant and beneficial to the study. Also, the sample size was reduced to six instead of the original number of twelve participants due to the difficulty of finding suitably qualified teachers and or educators as per the discussion above.

### **3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study received ethical clearance from the University of Cape Town's Faculty of Health Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (UCT FHS HREC) (see *Appendix A*). This process was for purposes of enabling the researcher to conduct this research study including adherence to the research protocols.

Ethics generally involves the beliefs about what is wrong or right from the moral perspective and so research ethics defines what is appropriate and acceptable when engaged with participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Ethical considerations played a pivotal role in this

study which involved the research codes of conduct and the principles that guided the researcher's behaviour and adherence to the approved ethical research approaches (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

As part of ethical considerations, this study adhered to the principles of the Helsinki Declaration (2014) in ensuring that there was no harm to participants, and this included privacy and confidentiality, risks and benefits, non-maleficence, autonomy, beneficence as well as justice. Helsinki's Declaration is a statement of ethical principles that guides physicians and other participants in medical research involving human subjects (Human & Fluss, 2001). Also, this study adhered to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which was vital for ensuring that the personal information of participants was protected (Voss, 2016). The GDPR aims to protect participants' fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly their right to protection of their personal information (de Hert & Papakonstantinou, 2016). Participants signed the informed consent which was indicative of their permission to take part in the in-depth interviews. Participation was voluntary and study participants were thus not coerced to take part in the study. All participants were free to withdraw any time that they wished to do so.

### **3.12.1 Privacy and confidentiality**

Privacy was protected in that the researcher ensured that there were prior careful assessments of any risks. This included the use of confidential information of participants in the Facebook social media platform. Facebook Messenger was used as a means of communication. Thus, this was perceived as a safe technique to carefully manage and control potential risks. Privacy and confidentiality were always kept and maintained. The personal details of participants such as their residential area, contacts, and names were not shared with anyone unless permitted to do so. Pseudonyms were employed and participants were made aware of this; otherwise, all other details relating to the identity of participants were not disclosed. The privacy of the participants was respected and valued based on the grounds mentioned above. This included privacy and their preferred venue(s) and times for scheduling the interviews. This enabled all participants to feel comfortable in participating in the study with no risks or costs involved. Hence, the participants' welfare was treated as a priority in this study.

### **3.12.2 Risks and benefits**

Facebook Messenger was perceived as another communication tool to maintain privacy. However, there was a risk in sharing confidential data through the social media platform. For instance, some participants might have been reluctant to share their personal information on a public forum such as Facebook. Thus, the researcher created an email address for this research project to urge all participants to provide their details via email. This was also a platform to ask for follow up questions. Study participants did not have a direct benefit from the research. However, the information gathered from them would contribute to strengthening teacher training that focused on meeting the special educational needs of learners with disabilities, which would ultimately help to ensure that these learners received a better education.

### **3.12.3 Non-maleficence**

The researcher strived to ensure ethical standards were always upheld. The information gathered was utilised for academic purposes, and no third party would have access to it. Participants were not made to feel regretful or uncomfortable about their decision to participate in this study. Sensitive questions were always avoided.

### **3.12.4 Autonomy**

Before participants embarked on this study they were given the freedom to participate voluntarily. Each participant was given a consent form requesting their participation. As stated above, the study researcher explained the research to them in-depth as a means to obtain informed consent from the participants. This research was conducted in the English language and this was the language that participants were comfortable with. They also decided on their preferred times and venues for the in-depth interviews.

### **3.12.5 Beneficence**

Children with severe to profound disabilities were the primary beneficiaries of this research, particularly the alleviation of learning barriers they encounter daily. The research will further be of benefit to educators across the different schools, namely private, public, full service as well as special schools. Also, it will benefit focal persons within education departments and

centres of excellence, as well as government officials and educators in private and public sectors. Finally, families living with children with disabilities will benefit from the study, including the broader community.

### **3.12.6 Justice**

Fairness was promoted and no participant was compelled to take part in the study. The researcher demonstrated a character of tolerance and respect even during unforeseen circumstances that might have arisen such as in the case where punctuality for the interviews was not maintained by the participants. If participants were displeased about the outcomes of the research, they could contact the supervisor.

### **3.12.7 Reimbursement**

There was no reimbursement for this study. However, participants who had travelled to their preferred interview venue were reimbursed for their transportation. Also, participants and the researcher had other cost-effective channels of communication such as emails and WhatsApp. Participants were not provided with financial incentives but were thanked for their willingness to participate.

## **3.13 CONCLUSION**

The methodological framework guided the research plan and process. Also, the qualitative content analysis facilitated the process of exploring and establishing answers to the research question. The scientific rigor in this study was the key to producing good quality research. Finally, the ethical standards were adhered to for purposes of ensuring that there was no harm to any of the participants.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the study which are based on the methodological processes described in chapter three and the data collection processes described by the research aims and objectives. The first part of the discussion includes the description and thumbnail sketch of the study participants. Then the second part presents the findings from the interviews including the emergent themes which will be discussed.

### 4.2 DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Six participants were interviewed: five South African teachers and a home-schooling educator. These participants were five females and one male. Of the six participants, two teachers were from the same special school in the Eastern Cape Province in Umtata. Three teachers were from mainstream schools in the Western Cape Province in Cape Town. Four participants indicated that they had experience teaching both in mainstream and special schools. In addition to the participants' descriptions there is a thumbnail sketch based on the pseudonyms that were given to each participant as shown below:

#### 4.2.1 The thumbnail sketch of study participants

Pseudonyms were used by the researcher as fictitious names but with a deeper meaning in terms of participants' traits. Furthermore, these names were based on the researcher's overall impression of each participant. The pseudonyms given included "*Nelson*", "*Winnie*", "*Oprah*", "*Graca*", "*Mamokgethi*" and "*Michelle*". The thumbnail of each study participant is explained as follows:

The first interviewee was referred to as "*Nelson*" who resembles the character of Nelson Mandela. It is because Nelson Mandela believed that "*education is the most powerful weapon that you can use to change the world*". And so, the interviewee strongly identified himself as an education activist as well as an educationist. He has been pro-inclusion and has served within the School-Based Support Team (SBST) and has stated, "*You do not have to wait for your organisation to take initiative, but you have to be proactive and seek opportunities to*

*empower and to capacitate yourself. So why I join this course is to empower myself and because I am also an educationist and education activist.”* Lastly, he is a conscientious proactive teacher with ten years’ experience within this profession.

The second interviewee was named “Winnie” who resembles the character of “Winnie Mandela as a “Mother of the nation” because of the interviewee’s passion for teaching not only her biological children but also those of the community. She has not only been a home educator for 18 years but also an inclusion activist and was quoted saying, “*I feel that inclusion, in all contexts, must be DELIBERATE. Especially in a country that is so divided. We should try to be inclusive, and it's not always easy, but worth it.*” Also, the interviewee’s life purpose and goals for the future are based on her love of teaching the children. She stated, “*The course had inspired me to say when I am finished or when I have completed my children’s education I would like to take this learning and start my school.*”

The third interviewee was referred to as “Oprah” who is a famous media personality, humanitarian, actress and social activist. She is named after Oprah Winfrey who supported education in South Africa. The researcher was inspired by the interviewee’s acts of kindness and care which were demonstrated through her desire to encourage other teachers to enrol in the *EFA: DDI MOOC*. She even stated, “*I even asked the Course Facilitator how can the University assist us especially the Eastern Cape area where the principals of this school can have this course in the future for (a) few weeks just like we did because they know nothing about the inclusivity.*” For this reason, the researcher realised that this interviewee’s character resembled that of *Oprah* in terms of caring for her society and being a change agent.

The fourth interviewee was named “Graca” after Graca Machel who is famously known as an international advocate for women's and children's rights. This interviewee was associated with “Graca” because of her humility and her understanding of the importance of putting her learners as her priority. Even though she has acknowledged the experience of working in both special schools and mainstream schools over the years, she believed that learning within the *EFA: DDI MOOC* taught her substantially about inclusivity. Hence, this would be the learning to give back to the learners within her school and community. This gave the researcher the impression that indeed *humility is not about thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less.*

The fifth interviewee was called “*Mamokgethi*” and this is the name of the current Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cape Town, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, who believes in education and continues to demonstrate a passion for learning and excellence in research as well as leadership within the institution. The interviewee is a novice teacher of three years and has demonstrated her desire to learn more about the implementation of inclusive education practices. She appreciated learning through participation within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. She reported, “*I am enjoying it and wanting to learn more and that’s why I want to even apply for more courses online because I am willing to do more inclusive education courses.*” For this reason, she believed that this is the learning that she would like to model to teach inclusively. She has also acquired new teaching and learning strategies for her pupils through the said online course.

The sixth interviewee was referred to as “*Michelle after Michelle Obama*” who serves as a role model for women and worked as an advocate for poverty awareness, education, etc. The interviewee’s character resembles that of *Michelle* because this interviewee had demonstrated acts of wisdom within her teaching profession, even to the extent of doing tutoring to her learners over the weekends. The interviewee is perceived as wise by the researcher and understood inclusion as a journey (process). She highlighted, “*You need to get your teachers on board, you need to get your community on board and all things that I have learned...*” So, she was associated with the name “*Michelle*” because there are creative ideas of implementing inclusion within her school. Therefore, her experiences of participating in the *EFA: DDI* MOOC course enhanced her wisdom about inclusion.

### **4.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMES**

Three themes emerged during the analysis phase in relation to the research question. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the researcher was guided by the six steps of Braun and Clarke (2012) to generate the themes and sub-themes. An inductive coding process was performed to establish these themes from the data set. The thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the in-depth interviews. Then, the researcher was able to establish conceptual understanding through organising, locating, and defining patterns within the data set. The emerged themes included theme one: “before the course”, theme two “during the course” and theme three “after the course”. Thereafter, the researcher was able to compare

the responses and to recognise the similarities and differences across the different interview transcripts. For instance, the responses often made inferences to different periods such as the participant's acquired knowledge on their understandings of inclusive education.

The sub-themes for theme one (before the course) and theme three (after the course) comprised of the individual (agentic) and systemic (structural) aspects. The individual agentic aspects are related to challenges a teacher generally encounters in the classroom, and the systemic level is about the level of quality of support provided by the education system in South Africa. On the other hand, the sub-themes for theme two are based on the content and process of the course. This includes participants' perceptions of the MOOCs in terms of their affordances in equipping teachers and educators. Finally, the sub-themes and categories for theme three (after the course) are based on the individual aspects based on the educators' experiences (positive or negative) and the impact of online education. The systemic level is based on the study participant's general views on empowering teachers and the highlighted future recommendations within teacher education in South Africa. The sub-themes for each theme are discussed respectively below.

The themes convey the teachers' professional experiences including the impact and views of having participated within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC platform. These themes highlight the context and timelines in which participants operated, in that the themes conveyed narratives around teachers' lived experiences about their teaching practices before, during, as well as after participating in the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. Participants' willingness to implement inclusive education practices before, during, and after the course was highlighted. Finally, further recommendations and suggested potential changes within the sphere of inclusive education are illustrated as well.

**Table 1: Themes and sub-themes of the study**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>
4.4 Before the Course	4.4.1 Individual Aspects	4.4.1.1 Participant Background  4.4.1.2 Motivation to Enrol  4.4.1.3 Attitudes towards Disability
	4.4.2 Systemic Aspects	4.4.2.1 Realities in School  4.4.2.2 Gaps in Teacher Education  4.4.2.3 Lack of Disability Knowledge
4.5 During the Course	4.5.1 Process	4.5.1.1 Social Learning / Adoption of Student Identity  4.5.1.2 Accessibility of the <i>EFA: DDI</i> MOOC  4.5.1.3 Promotion of <i>EFA: DDI</i> MOOC  4.5.1.4 Challenges of Online Learning
	4.5.2 Content	4.5.2.1 Wider Network and Circles of Care (Ecosystemic Model)  4.5.2.2 Lesson Learnt.  4.5.2.3 Teacher Collaboration  4.5.2.4 Course Improvements
4.6 After the Course	4.6.1 Individual Aspects	4.6.1.1. New Understanding of Inclusive Education Practices  4.6.1.2 Goal of Building Continuous Professional Development

		4.6.1.3 Changed Practices and Attitudes
	4.6.2 Systemic Aspects	4.6.2.1 Views on Empowering Teachers 4.6.2.2 The Recommendations in Teacher Education 4.6.2.3 The Assessment of South African Policies and Legislations 4.6.2.4 Featuring the <i>EFA: DDI</i> MOOC within the National Qualification Framework

#### 4.4 THEME ONE: BEFORE THE COURSE

The “*Before the course*” theme relates to the participants’ lived experiences before participating in this online course. This theme details information about participants’ experiences and challenges regarding the lack of teacher training in South Africa. Their assessment of the lack of teacher training included the fact that teachers are unable to effectively teach and or address these barriers to learning.

*“The training of teachers is lacking because they did not train us to be able to deal with learners. We [are] not well equipped” (Mamokgethi).*

*“I find that archaic teacher training is restrictive and narrow and that we are very far behind what education needs - at home, or school” (Winnie).*

Speaking more about their professional background and prior teaching experiences revealed challenging realities in schools due to the lack of teacher training in South Africa. The challenging realities in schools also motivated them to seek new skills and knowledge from the online course. These insights were expressed both on individual and systemic levels. The individual aspects are related to the challenges a teacher generally encounters in the classroom. The systemic level is about the level of quality of support provided by the education system in South Africa.

#### **4.4.1 THEME ONE: Before the course (Individual aspects)**

This section discusses the individual aspects with regards to participants' personal and professional backgrounds before enrolling for the *EFA: DDI* MOOC.

##### *4.4.1.1 Category: Participants' background*

In the interviews, all participants made various references to their own personal, educational, and professional backgrounds referring to a time before they enrolled in the *EFA: DDI* MOOC.

Nelson described the marginalisation imposed on his mother with a disability and how this later inspired him to advocate for disability.

*"My mother has a disability and I mean growing up as a child, I saw how she was marginalized and treated. You know by the family members and the community at large and so forth. I think this is where I drew my inspiration from. I want people with disabilities to be treated as human beings and to be equals the same way as their non-disabled counterparts. They should not be marginalized and should be supported. Also, I have seen a lot of children in my community that are living with disability having a lot of challenges"* (Nelson).

Other participants had had little prior knowledge of inclusive education. This is because there were no modules based on inclusive education and disability inclusion during their teacher training. Subsequently, they had the hope that this *EFA: DDI* MOOC would enrich their knowledge and skills to promote inclusive education practices as illustrated below:

*"I am a teacher at the school where there are many other teachers and they also do not know about this. Some of them never even learn about inclusive education at university"* (Michelle).

Nelson reflected on his teacher training background by highlighting the lack of teacher training in South Africa. He further emphasised the importance for teachers to become recipients of such training, particularly in promoting inclusion. He said:

*“I do not think I was prepared enough and well trained to effectively address various barriers to learning and in promoting inclusion in the classroom. Presently, this is a current challenge encountered by most teachers in South Africa” (Nelson).*

When discussing the kind of support needed, Oprah perceived online education as advantageous towards her teaching profession to provide quality education to both children with and without barriers. Otherwise, the lack of teacher training could potentially leave teachers incompetent to teach learners who experience learning barriers, especially learners with disabilities.

*“Joining for this course means that I will receive the help that I need to effectively teach children with and or without disabilities” (Oprah).*

In summation, participants described backgrounds as positive but also acknowledged the challenges that they encountered within their teaching profession. Participants spoke of how specific events had helped to shape their identities as teachers and inclusive educators. For instance, those who reported the lack of teacher training recognised the importance of capacitating themselves within the platform of online education. As result, these participants emphasised the importance for teachers to become recipients of such training. Another teacher felt motivated and inspired to advocate for disability inclusion because of the marginalisation imposed on his mother with a disability.

#### *4.4.1.2 Category: Motivation to enrol*

The study participants were asked about their reasons and motivation to enrol for the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. Participants were generally enthusiastic about starting the new learning experience. Also, they perceived this online learning platform as an opportunity to further harness their professional skills of teaching inclusively including the commitment to advocacy and activism. One interviewee reported the following:

*“My primary reason for joining the course is mainly for professional development purposes. I believe that the onus lies with you to develop yourself. You do not have to wait for your organization to take initiative, but you must be proactive and seek opportunities to empower and capacitate yourself. So why I join this course is to*

*empower myself and because I am also an educationist and education activist. So, this course I join so that it would be able to help me with my advocacy. So that when I go and help with, I go help people with disabilities at least I would know and would have established networks. So, I would know who to contact if I need a particular thing or help in that particular respect” (Nelson).*

Similarly, *Mamokgethi* expressed her motivation to enrol because of her willingness to learn. The interviewee asserted below:

*“Okay what motivated me, I am always willing to learn when it comes to education because I feel I am still a beginner teacher and so I still have a lot to learn and to develop. So, then I thought let me do this course because I will be learning, and I love learning all the time in terms of education” (Mamokgethi).*

Michelle was inspired to enrol in the online course specifically for purposes of expanding and enriching her knowledge regarding inclusive education. This is expressed below:

*“I thought oh okay it has something to do with inclusive education...maybe...I know a little bit of inclusive education. So, I thought okay I can learn more about it and that is why also decided to do it” (Michelle).*

Therefore, the overarching impression is that participants were self-motivated learners about being equipped with further skills specifically for professional development purposes. On the other side, they were afforded the relevant skills of teaching learners with and without disabilities.

#### *4.4.1.3 Category: Attitudes towards disability*

Participants shared their observations and approaches about the inclusion of persons with disabilities. It was apparent that societal prejudice and discriminatory practices still exist and affect persons with disabilities adversely. This is demonstrated below:

*“The community tells you (person with a disability) Ukuba nguDommie Lo! (This one is a dumb person!)” (Oprah).*

When discussing the negative remarks such as attitudinal barriers, one teacher confessed to having had such a reaction towards her learners with disabilities. The following was raised as an illustration:

*“I am fearful, and I don't know how to deal with learners with disabilities because they also have different personalities. For instance, this learner with Down syndrome and one in a wheelchair; I asked myself how do I deal with this and I had this bad perception about special schools... So, if I could tell you the attitude of teachers when it comes to children with learning barriers, is very much negative” (Mamokgethi).*

However, it is important to acknowledge that other participants' attitudes and willingness to adopt inclusion had occurred before enrolling for the EFA: DDI MOOC as shown below:

*“I have always been pro-inclusive education in my approach as I had indicated that I advocate for inclusive education. I certainly believe that each one of us has potential when it comes to children lies with us as educators to unleash their true potential. And how do we unleash that? This is by making sure that we give them quality. That is adequate and quality education” (Nelson).*

Finally, Graca had a unique view in that her school projected positive attitudes when it comes to the inclusion of learners with disabilities. She described her situation as follows:

*“The school where I teach is a mainstream school and this is a school where there is inclusivity and that teachers are supported and appreciated in the school. In turn, this boosts their self-esteem. So, there is no exclusivity whereby you will be named or labelled” (Graca).*

In conclusion, participants have witnessed negative attitudes that still exist in society towards persons with disabilities. One participant further confessed to imposing negative attitudes on learners with disabilities in the classroom. Even so, there was a unique view from one of the participants that her school had positive attitudes towards learners with disabilities.

#### **4.4.2 THEME ONE: Before the course (Systemic aspects)**

This section discusses the systemic aspects and teachers' lived experiences with regards to their teaching environments before enrolling for the *EFA: DDI MOOC*.

##### *4.4.2.1 Category: Realities in schools*

Contextual factors that educators encounter include crime, violence, and general uncertainties within their area of work (schools). Apart from teachers working in extremely dangerous areas, they are faced with a considerable amount of work to do. Thus, these adverse experiences from the environment make it challenging for teachers to work productively within their classroom-based environments. As reported below:

*“Teachers not coping well, and education seems very meaningless. For this reason, many learners are reluctant and discouraged to come to school. Why? Because of the curriculum that is over flooding and that’s not what teaching or education is about. They should make it more fun and bring in things to suit the learners’ needs...because there are many learners from my school as well as learners that come from very bad backgrounds. The learner’s environmental backgrounds include the exposure to gangsterism” (Mamokgethi).*

Furthermore, the tough challenges facing teachers seeking to enact inclusive education principles were highlighted:

*“And sometimes as a teacher, you feel overwhelmed you know. I mean I am at a school where violence is experienced by all these children and that is what they know. They bring that with them to the school. You know, they seek attention from me because maybe they are not getting enough from home” (Michelle).*

Many teachers are faced with administrative duties, especially when it comes to the filing and processing of admission forms for new learners in the schools. This leaves them with limited time to consider each learner's needs. Also, learners are unsupported by the Department of Education. In turn, this has detrimental effects and interferes with the idea of promoting inclusive education practices. These are the comments made below:

*“...and even the Department of Education just employ people who don’t have the skill. So, it is not easy, and you would see them when they come to our school. They don’t give any support. They just fill in the forms. This is the form you must fill and leave us...and you are told this is the kid that we must place in your school. We have to take this, and they will never come” (Oprah).*

The administration is time-consuming, and teachers have limited time to teach inclusively within their classroom-based environments. When speaking of the administrative duties that teachers face, Winnie similarly raised the following concerns:

*“And hours are spent marking or volunteering at this because teachers are under more and more practical pressure to perform and they are now administrators and they are not as teachers. And that is why we are losing very good educators. Because they say my skill is to educate, my skill is not to administrate. And we have unfortunately put a double burden on teachers...The administrative responsibility of every teacher must follow. You know we have made it so complicated to teach” (Winnie).*

Nelson made his remarks regarding the current status of the education system in South Africa. The comments involve the adverse challenges that teachers encounter and consequently are left unsupported by the Department of Education. These claims are evident below:

*“I think it was in 2012 I realised that there is a problem within the education system. Some children are marginalised and in as much as we have policies that say all children should receive quality education but that is not reflected. Some of the children cannot read or write and they do not possess such basic skills. But the system keeps on putting pressure on them. However, I feel the system is not doing justice to these children and thus no development” (Nelson).*

In conclusion, it was reported that there are contextual factors that educators and learners in schools encounter such as violence, crime, gangsterism, etc. These realities in school adversely affect the daily running of the school programme and teaching activities. In turn, this negatively impacts the performances of learners, and teachers are unable to provide quality education. Furthermore, teachers are overwhelmed with administrative duties and are left unsupported by the Department of Education.

#### 4.4.2.2 Category: Gaps in teacher education

A key underlying concern raised by most participants is that teachers are not sufficiently trained to teach inclusively within their classroom-based environments. According to these interviewees, the lack of teacher training is a massive gap and leads to adverse teaching experiences. This further ruins the teacher-learner relationship within the classroom, particularly their relationship with learners with disabilities. This is evident in the quote below:

*“I feel I had gone to a special needs school which I felt was a good experience but also bad. Why? Because they didn’t train us to be able to deal with learners. We were not well equipped. Yes! We trained for teaching at mainstream but what about me going to the special school, but I have this fear of how do I deal with the situation? How do I deal with the learner that has a disability”? (Mamokgethi)*

Many teachers feel that they do not have the relevant skills, knowledge, and abilities to teach learners with disabilities inclusively. They feel that learners with disabilities should rather be taken to special schools since they feel teachers from special schools are more capable of teaching learners with disabilities. This situation is worsened because of the lack of curriculum differentiation to suit learner needs. Instead, teachers are faced with a substantial number of learners to teach. Teacher education has a limited effect regarding structural barriers which prevent teachers from practising inclusive education such as big classes. Structural barriers reflect the social context in which these teachers work rather than the problem arising from teachers themselves as shown below:

*“So, many learners are sitting in our classrooms. They need to be at special schools because we as teachers are not well equipped and we are 41 learners in the class. And if I know one of my learners can’t read because of the curriculum, I don’t have time to sit with a learner; whereas at special needs school, they would get that support they need” (Michelle).*

However, Michelle believed that novice teachers including herself were perceived as more acquainted with inclusive education through their teacher training than older teachers.

Moreover, the interviewee stressed the point that older teachers are conservative and unwilling to adopt new trends within the evolving education system. She stated below:

*“Because older teachers are very stuck in their ways and they are not willing to do anything new and I have seen this so many times. You know when I go to my colleague and I would say you know we could change this and that on a computer and write it up. And she would say no no no this is not how we do it and this is how we did it for years and they stuck on their ways of doing things”* (Michelle).

Thus, it is apparent that teachers are faced with the reality that they are not well trained to teach and promote inclusion within their classroom-based environments. This also means that they have limited knowledge about inclusion and/or disability knowledge. One interviewee believed, however, that novice teachers are now trained to teach inclusively. Older teachers are reluctant and conservative to model new approaches to inclusion.

#### *4.4.2.3 Category: Lack of disability specific related skills*

When speaking about this deficit of the lack of teacher training in South Africa, it is important to note that participants acknowledged the lack of disability-specific related skills:

*“Teachers that do not have any training when it comes to disability, they become frustrated because they do not know what the problem is and they do not know what the barrier to learning the child is facing. Also, they do not know how to address learning barriers. So, teachers have either limited or no knowledge”* (Mamokgethi).

In the same vein, Mamokgethi confirmed the challenges that were encountered in her teaching profession as a result of the lack of disability knowledge. She stated:

*“I went to a special school and I didn't quite know what to do with learners with disabilities because I was exposed to mainstream schools all the time”* (Mamokgethi).

Participants felt that the lack of disability knowledge had prevented them from promoting reasonable accommodation towards learners with disabilities. Reasonable accommodation measures include assistive devices such as visual aids, audio materials, etc. Nelson noted below:

*“I wasn’t aware in terms of using visuals, but in her learning, she was not intellectually challenged. But I mean I could have done better as a teacher...if I had obtained knowledge before the online course about using audios and just to make sure that it helps her to comprehend and acquire knowledge and information better” (Nelson).*

One participant found it disheartening that the school principals do not know about inclusive education or disability inclusion. Thus, both teachers and learners with and without disabilities are left unsupported. This prevents teachers from upholding the principles of inclusive education within the schools. The following claim was highlighted:

*“If we are being honest, our school we have newly appointed principal and she knows nothing about inclusivity” (Oprah).*

The lack of disability-specific skills has a detrimental effect on learners with disabilities which makes it difficult for teachers to provide quality education. One participant agreed by acknowledging the fact that a school leader, namely a school principal, does not know inclusion. Surprisingly, teachers working in mainstream schools showed interest and determination to promote inclusion for learners with disabilities.

#### **4.5 THEME TWO: DURING THE COURSE**

Theme two *“During the Course”* includes participants’ perception of the MOOCs in terms of their ability to equip teachers and educators. Similarly, it assesses how MOOC is perceived as accessible, feasible, and acceptable to their context of work. Accessibility means that the course is inclusive and available to all users such as accessibility of course materials for visually impaired participants. In this study, feasibility and acceptable means how the *EFA: IDD* MOOC was perceived by participants as viable and satisfactory; particularly in terms of fulfilling their expectation of acquiring knowledge and relevant skills on the implementation of inclusive education practices.

In this context, participants’ successful participation was made possible through access to resources, namely internet data bundles, computer devices, etc., and that they had to find their ways of accessing the course which was not provided by the said course. Further benefits included the fact that participants generally expressed the value of hearing about the

experiences of others and being part of a community of practice. Interviewees enjoyed learning from other people by adopting a learner role (group learning) within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC platform. Thus, they found the MOOC mode particularly empowering and of great value as stated below:

*“I enjoyed doing the course. Also, I enjoyed listening to people’s different experiences and learning from their experiences. One of your lectures from UCT whom; a facilitator of this course. She has a son with a disability. I enjoyed learning from her experience as well as people from different places, different countries, and cultures, people’s context of work as well as professionals from under-resourced communities”* (Mamokgethi).

#### 4.5.1 THEME TWO: During the course (Process)

This segment discusses the participant's views regarding the process involved during their participation within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. The outlined categories below give direction to this discussion:

##### 4.5.1.1 Category: Social learning and student identity

Most participants acknowledged the fact that online education afforded them the platform to learn from other teachers. These teachers come from different contextual backgrounds and geographical areas. The online platform not only enabled teachers to learn from other people, but it also allowed them to assume the role of a learner or student-teacher as illustrated below:

*“I know how to enjoy learning but there is something about learning with other people. You can rub-off and give you their experiences and their time. My background is not the same as someone else and I am poorer if I only sit on my own... I love the formal interaction. I love the fact that there were people from Brazil and they were people from different countries and people from India and older and young people. Strange context like military people...oh wow okay. And people with severe special needs children that they have been educating. I thought this is universal. This is amazing and for the first time, I thought I like the special needs side of it...”* (Winnie).

Michelle appreciated the fact that there were different perspectives on teaching from teachers from diverse backgrounds. This meant they could relate to their teaching experiences including learning new inclusive approaches to teaching. Below is a paragraph that supports these claims:

*“It was also nice of the fact that it was not only South African. And when I was reading the comments there were people from other countries as well. And seeing that they had similar issues and what they are doing at their schools and their curriculums and how different was their curriculum and it would be nice if South Africans could adopt some of those things as well”* (Michelle).

When speaking about teachers learning from other student teachers, Oprah saw the resemblance of online learning relative to the traditional face-to-face learning platform. The following assertions were made:

*“It is really interesting learning online and you get to see the views of other people as we would do on a face to face learning platform. I think it is because really when I see the comments of other people, I am like heeee this thing is making us learn on another level”* (Oprah).

The overarching impression from interviewees is that one of the advantages of online education is learning from other people from different cultural and diverse backgrounds. The participants appreciated this.

#### *4.5.1.2 Category: Accessibility of the EFA: DDI MOOC*

Generally, the course was perceived as accessible with user-friendly resources made available in audio and with transcribed versions as well as sub-titles. This means participants with a sensory impairment, including hearing or visual impairments, would be able to access this inclusive course. Even though all participants did not have impairments, they generally found the accessibility feature for people with disabilities very helpful. This is depicted below:

*“I found it brilliant that I can sit and download when I have free WIFI and take it home, just watch this and read the transcript. I thought you were very inclusive in how you did that. You know”* (Mamokgethi).

There were many little things that they learned and appreciated from taking the *EFA: DDI MOOC* as they developed ways to work around access challenges to continue learning, as reported below:

*“I think this course is already inclusive. I mean we did so well. If you don’t have data, you can download it. You can download low-resolution videos. You can just listen to it as an audio. You had made sure that”* (Winnie).

Finally, participants found the *EFA: DDI MOOC* to be inclusive and accessible as reported below:

*“You are deaf or have deaf friends, you can then read the video transcript if you want. I found the course extremely inclusive. For instance, the document was user-friendly to participants who were visually impaired including a blind and deaf person, etc.”* (Winnie).

All interviewees appreciated doing the *EFA: DDI MOOC* course, especially the fact that the online course was convenient and offered flexibility. Moreover, this meant that the course was accessible and enabled participation at any given point in time. As result, Mamokgethi supported these assertions by stating the following:

*“Yes, it allows learning while lying in bed during your 30 minutes, spare time and reading up the course articles and you don't have to go somewhere to do the course, and it is online and you can do it during your free time”* (Mamokgethi).

#### *4.5.1.3 Category: Promoting EFA: DDI MOOC to others*

Participants spoke about the importance of promoting *EFA: DDI MOOC* and Graca believed that the current and past participants of the *EFA: DDI MOOC* have a responsibility to undertake. For her, promoting *EFA: DDI MOOC* means the opportunity to get buy-in from a wider audience for purposes of knowledge sharing and professional development.

*“Then now, the people who were here are the first people that must go out and bring other people on the same board so that the information can be spread”* (Graca).

As part of promoting the online course to a wider audience, the inclusion of relevant professionals such as policy makers and academics should be targeted. This would contribute to making the course extremely impactful within the sphere of inclusive education and disability inclusion. It was reported below:

*“So, I feel like many teachers should be encouraged to complete this course. Not only teachers but also educators as well including people that have a role within the making decision like policy makers as well as people that have a big role in education so that they can see the importance of inclusive education* (Mamokgethi).

Oprah felt the need to promote the EFA: DDI MOOC to other institutions of learning, namely pupils from local high schools. The aim is to invest in the new generation and for them to be acquainted with the importance of inclusive education through learning from this course.

*“I think raising awareness and it is also vital to target high school pupils to market and advertise this course so that people could enrol for this online course. This new generation can do anything other than the older generation as they are doing WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.” (Oprah).*

Oprah further pointed out that the promotion of this MOOC should involve media advertisements. This is a marketing strategy that would play a significant role in creating increased awareness and viewership of the online course. As stated below:

*“To promote awareness about the online course, it is vital to include television advertisement and or having a slot on a platform like South African Broadcasting Channel on television just it would be an eye-opener so that they could see this is the course I would want to do. I think more people would be interested to enrol really because it's helpful for me and it works for me” (Oprah).*

All participants generally expressed their desire to encourage a large number of people to take part in this online course. Hence Nelson had similar sentiments in that the media outlets should be utilised as a part of advertising the course and stated the following:

*“The EFA: DDI MOOC could be done online and on other platforms such as face-to-face or blended learning platform... Also, what could be done: a lot of awareness could be created using different types of media, newspapers, radio, billboards, and internet these days” (Nelson).*

#### *4.5.1.4 Category: Challenges of online learning*

Generally, most participants spoke fondly about the accessibility of the online course and there was limited information about the potential challenges that impeded their learning online. Hence, the advantages of online learning were highlighted by these participants. However, a few of the participants acknowledged some of the inevitable challenges as stated below:

*“Yes, if people do not have the same resources that I have such as a phone that does not have internet and or these features. Then they could potentially experience barriers of online learning” (Winnie).*

Furthermore, Mamokgethi highlighted additional challenges of learning online related to issues of communication. She believes that it is not possible to have queries answered instantly as opposed a face-to-face learning platform. The following sentiments were mentioned below:

*“The only thing maybe if you are unsure about something it makes it hard to communicate because you are not in a face to face learning platform. And so, if you want a direct question or you want to inquire about something” (Mamokgethi).*

Oprah expressed the difficulty of accessing online courses as middle age people. Furthermore, the interviewee had acknowledged the vital role played by others towards facilitating the process of learning online. Thus, the following quote nicely captures the initial challenges facing teachers in learning online:

*“it’s not easy to go on online courses. We struggle to get on an online course. But! With the help of others, I’ve managed to get online. Then um! I have got a lot of experience right now because I was not aware that I could learn from online” (Oprah).*

Finally, Michelle was quoted speaking about the challenges of internet connectivity within the local schools. This would mean limited convenience, thus causing failure for teachers and learners to access the *EFA: DDI* MOOC during school breaks.

*“Alright, if I look at my school, we had WIFI and that the government implemented WIFI, but they just never came back to sort it out again for the school” (Michelle).*

Therefore, it is vital to acknowledge some of the inevitable challenges of online learning such as internet connectivity in local schools. In turn, this limits the convenience and flexibility of online learning. Finally, one participant expressed the difficulty of accessing online courses as middle aged people. However, the role of networking with other people made learning online pleasant.

#### 4.5.2 THEME TWO: During the course (Content)

This segment discusses the participants' views regarding the content during their participation within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. The following categories below give direction to this discussion.

##### 4.5.2.1 Category: Wider network and circles of care (Ecosystemic model)

The section discusses the relevance of the ecosystemic model (circles of care) about inclusion. The ecosystemic model is based on involving the parents, learners, and the broader community in terms of the approach to inclusive education practices as discussed below:

*“The thing is to be willing to partner with the community, partner with the parents and the learners (circles of care). Then you get an understanding and support when you understand the child and the child’s needs” (Graca).*

Likewise, Nelson agreed by highlighting the need for circles of care that involve the teachers, parents, and communities at large. This is perceived as a strategy for developing an inclusive society.

*“For inclusive education to be feasible I have always said that inclusive education goes beyond the school, so we need to get parents all the stakeholders, the community and I strongly and firmly believe that the education of a child the honours lie with the parent, with the teacher and the community. So, these are the three role players in the early education of the child” (Nelson).*

Also, there are diverse ways these teachers make use of online learning opportunities for their learning and networking. The learning and networking were promoted by the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. Thus, there was the recognition of the value of growing wider networks with the inclusion of parents (primary carers of children). Yet again, this made sense to the teachers in their context of work.

*“Now it gives us the techniques on how to work together with parents to have basics on how to communicate with their kids” (Oprah).*

Generally, the overall impression from all the interviewees is the idea of the ecosystemic model which was importantly emphasised. The idea was to promote inclusive education practices. The key is to first develop an inclusive society, namely the involvement of teachers, school principals, parents and the community as well.

*“Holistically the course speaks about the community, all the stakeholders that play a role...it talks about the social backgrounds as well as resources...because as educators our goal should be to teach learners on a holistic level as well”* (Mamokgethi).

In summation, participants recognised the value of growing wider networks such as partnering with the community, parents and the learners. This was also to establish collaborative intent.

#### *4.5.2.2 Category: Lessons learnt*

In this section, participants reflect on some of the lessons that they had learnt through their participation within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. The overall impression from participants was that they were determined, dedicated, and highly self-motivated about learning online. Thus, this signifies that participants valued the role of online education towards equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge required to teach inclusively and that they were determined and willing to promote inclusive education within their classroom-based environments. The online course also offered inclusive strategies and relevant knowledge for teachers to implement inclusive education within their classroom-based environments as stated below:

*“But I thought to myself that I would benefit a lot as a teacher from this course. I learned so much and not only can you implement this from a special school but even in mainstream school as a teacher. So, I found it very amazing and had a lot of information and strategies that I could use in the classrooms”* (Mamokgethi).

Participants were also exposed to the realities of the lives of people with disabilities, in that it enabled them to acquire new knowledge, skills and experiences. Thus, this new knowledge is perceived as essential and relevant for implementing it within their place of work.

*“Things that stood out to me like different learnings that I could take to the class because for me that didn’t only apply to inclusive or learners at a special school. For me, I could do this with learners in the classroom. And they were different things that stood out to me. Like definitions and or things that I want to implement and create”* (Mamokgethi).

When speaking about the importance of learning and implementing inclusion, Graca valued, and appreciated learning about the notion of inclusivity.

*“As I started that I have learned a lot like inclusive education is something that needs to be...or every teacher in a school must have information and must start inclusivity”* (Graca).

Mamokgethi felt that inclusion is not about the learner with a disability, but it is about making everyone feel included.

*“The experiences that were shared at the school in Pinelands which is a mainstream school and this boy also had a bit of impairment and or disability and they changed the ethos of the school to accommodate and this made the principal also think that it is not just about the learner that’s disabled but the school needs to be inclusive as whole whether its mainstream or special school. You need to be inclusive and welcome and create that because inclusive is not just about learners with disabilities. It is about making everyone feel included and feeling like one and equal and not separated”* (Mamokgethi).

As part of promoting inclusive education, the process involves the establishment of strong partnerships with the broader community. Generally, strong partnerships were highly valued which was one of the lessons that was learnt from the *EFA: DDI MOOC*.

*“You know I had the information about the partnership and strong value. But after doing the course I valued partnership and support for the learners. And the understanding that every learner is unique and has got ability”* (Graca).

From the experiences of others in the course, participants learned that finances did not always prevent one from creating a more inclusive educational environment. This signifies

that they may also have developed skills to get around creating an inclusive learning environment. Part of what participants learned and appreciated from the *EFA: DDI* MOOC is that they do not have to be an expert in a field, but you could use whatever resources available towards promoting inclusion.

*“Yes, but I do think what I learned there, is a perception in me. It is important to look for resources wherever I go. I don’t need to wait for the money. I don’t need to”* (Winnie).

In conclusion, participants reflected on experiences and the acquired lessons from the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. Participants appreciated learning about the conceptualisation of inclusive education. Also, they learned new inclusive strategies that they could implement in the classroom. Lastly, participants learned about the art of improvising and being creative to create an inclusive learning environment without reliance on monetary resources.

#### *4.5.2.3 Category: Teacher collaboration*

As much as the idea of continuous professional development is emphasised, Mamokgethi felt this course is not only for continuous development purposes, but also to influence and encourage school principals to enrol as well. This forms part of teacher collaboration as reported below:

*“I would like to inform my colleagues at school and my principal because we also have to think of inclusive education even if we are mainstream school because what if we have a learner with a disability wanting to come to our school. Does our school accommodate learners with disabilities? That is what we need to take into consideration”* (Mamokgethi).

Also, teachers have desires for the establishment of collaborative intent within the members of School Management Teams (SMTs).

*“So, it makes me step out of my comfort zone, in that I also need to go to my principal and take that step and think and sit down with him and ask: is our school inclusive? What can we do to make inclusion happen at our school? What can we do to our*

*community to encourage them for inclusion to be taking place? So, I feel like it has made a big impact on me as an educator and as an individual” (Mamokgethi).*

The establishment of collaborative intent must exist with all teachers in general. Oprah had expressed the willingness to assist and encourage all teachers within the school to enrol for the *EFA: DDI MOOC* as demonstrated below:

*“I said to them please wait for me I am going to Cape Town on course during the holidays and when I come back to all those who want to register, I will assist them to register” (Oprah).*

Oprah similarly felt empowered to consider networking beyond the course including building systems of support within the University of Cape Town (UCT). Thus, this is evidence of being empowered to ask. So, the desire to encourage other people from her workplace to take part in the course was fostered.

*“...and I even asked the Course Facilitator how you as the University can assist us especially the eastern cape area where the principals of this school can have this course soon for few weeks just like we did because they know nothing about the inclusivity. If we are being honest because in our case, we have a newly appointed principal and she knows nothing about inclusivity...Ja!” (Oprah).*

Most participants revealed the importance of promoting teacher collaboration by ensuring that all teachers and educators enrol for this course. Some participants made attempts of liaising with the *EFA: DDI MOOC* course facilitators to convince them to promote this course to the teachers from other provinces around South Africa. This is also done to promote teacher collaboration within inclusive contexts to provide quality education and alleviation of learning barriers.

#### *4.5.2.4 Category: Course improvements*

Participants reflected on how the course could be improved to make learning online easier. This included specific changes to be implemented within the online space for purposes of ensuring that effective learning takes place. In turn, this online course could increase the productivity of all participants, including achieving its aims and objects. For instance, Oprah

felt that it is vital to include the narratives of people with disabilities during content creation. So, the inclusion of people with disabilities would facilitate the process of knowledge sharing within inclusive contexts. Thus, below is one of the suggestions for improving this online course:

*“When you prepare this course, you must maybe grab more videos of people with special needs...” (Oprah).*

Furthermore, Nelson suggested that the advertisement should target relevant stakeholders (entities) in the field of education such as the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). Thus, this forms part of course improvement specifically around developing increased engagement and visibility of the course. The following sentiments were expressed below:

*“I think a lot of advertising is required and it would be highly recommended to have the course connected with the Western Cape Education Department” (Nelson).*

When speaking of content creation, participants noted that it should be accommodative and inclusive even to people with disabilities such as people with visual impairment:

*“When they posted things like assignment one and assignment two ..., there were somethings that were not clear in the course. For example, when we had to do an assignment activity, they said we must do it on Microsoft word and in a table form. When I did it on table form in Microsoft Word, the work didn’t appear in table form. So, I felt that there is something wrong in the way it was set up” (Mamokgethi).*

It was further suggested that the course should promote accessibility to all participants with or without disabilities such as featuring sign language interpreters. This was perceived as a form of reasonable accommodation.

*“Maybe we could have a sign language interpreter during course delivery for the people that are deaf so that they could be included and to participate in” (Nelson).*

The above findings highlight that the learning material was sometimes not easily accessible which limited their engagement online. This also means others may need even more help

from peers and instructors. Taking these points into consideration could assist in improving *EFA: DDI* MOOC to ensure effective learning.

#### **4.6 THEME THREE: AFTER THE COURSE**

Theme three “After the course” is based on examining how the MOOC helped study participants to address teachers’ challenges within their classroom-based environments. The following assertions were made across the in-depth interviews; all participants expressed their positive experiences as a result of participating in the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. This is supported by the response below:

*“So, I feel this online course will make a positive difference because teachers will have more time to enrol at their convenience time. So, I feel online education should be brought into education as a supplement to the traditional face to face environments. Since it has a positive impact on professionals and people in general” (Mamokgethi).*

Also, these insights were expressed both on individual and systemic levels. The individual aspects are more about educators’ experiences (positive or negative) and the impact of online education. This includes participants’ willingness to further promote inclusive education practices including what strategies to be implemented. Finally, this includes the knowledge shared in terms of whether the *EFA: DDI* MOOC course had facilitated the process of capacitating teachers towards their adoption of inclusive education practices after doing the course. The systemic level is based on study participants’ general views on empowering teachers and the highlighted future recommendations within teacher education in South Africa.

##### **4.6.1 THEME THREE: After the course (Individual aspects)**

This segment discusses the individual aspects such as participants’ positive experiences and their understanding of inclusive education learnt from the online course. These are the participants’ reflections after they participated in the course.

#### 4.6.1.1 Category: New understanding of inclusive education

All participants generally shared their new understanding of inclusive education which changed as a result of EFA: DDI MOOC. Their understanding of inclusive education was influenced by the lessons acquired during the online course as well as their overall professional experiences. Generally, interviewees believed that inclusive education is for everyone and that people's needs, personal traits, strengths as well as weaknesses should be considered.

*"My notion of inclusive education is that education is tailor-made. What I mean by that is education is made for each person, in that education will provide the skills, knowledge, and tools to develop to our maximum potential. Education should be adapted according to people's strengths and interests. To ensure that each person can acquire knowledge skills to develop to their maximum potential" (Nelson).*

When speaking about the fact that inclusive education is for everyone, Michelle further believed that everyone deserves an equal chance to receive a quality education. Everyone is entitled to access inclusive education whether with or without a disability.

*"Um, inclusive education is obviously about including everyone and giving all learners a chance to learn. You know a chance to get inclusive education. And when I say all ...I mean all disabilities, abilities, sight, slow reading, struggle to read fast, smart learner, a learner coming from a broken home ...all learners gain some sort of knowledge" (Michelle).*

Mamokgethi understood inclusion by sharing an inclusive approach. The emphasis is that inclusive education is for every person with or without disabilities. This means that everyone should be a recipient of inclusive education.

*"You need to be inclusive and welcome and create that because inclusive is not just about learners with disabilities. It is about making everyone feel included and feeling like one and equal and not separated" (Mamokgethi).*

Oprah shared the same sentiments around the notion of inclusive education in that learning is for all people. Inclusive education was perceived as an opportunity for all learners to learn.

*“Inclusive education according to me is all kids have to learn” (Oprah).*

As part of making inclusion for all people, other interviewees defined inclusion by adopting the ecosystemic model in that inclusive education involves the entire support system, such as drawing on resources within families. This further involves the need to prioritise inclusion.

*“The thing is to be willing to partner with the community, partner with the parents and the learners (circles of care). Then you get an understanding and support when you understand the child and the child’s needs” (Graca).*

Michelle agreed by pointing out that inclusive education means that every teacher in a school should have information and must start inclusivity even within their curriculum such as curriculum differentiation.

*“But it just that the curriculum needs to go according to the learner needs” (Michelle).*

Other interviewees felt that the country of South Africa should be intentional about inclusion, and that inclusion should be a priority in all contexts, especially in a country that is so fragmented.

*“I feel that inclusion, in all contexts, must be DELIBERATE. Especially in a country that is so divided. We try to be inclusive, and it's not always easy, but worth it” (Winnie).*

However, one interviewee understood inclusion as a long journey (process) to achieve for teachers like herself that is, to learn how to get other teachers and the community to make changes and become more inclusive.

*“You know if there is a learner in a wheelchair... it would be very uncomfortable because there is no measure that’s put in place. But through the course and watching it, you know. They say you do not need finance and all of these... for inclusion to happen. But still, it’s a long journey in a sense that you need to get your teachers on board, you need to get your community on board and all things that I have learned there takes a lot and take a lot” (Michelle).*

Therefore, this section can be summed up by stating that most participants felt that inclusion is for everyone. Besides, all learners with or without disabilities should be allowed to learn

just as stipulated in chapter two of the Constitution of the Bill of Rights. Finally, learning should be adjusted according to learner needs to achieve inclusion.

#### *4.6.1.2 Category: Goal of building continuous professional development*

During their participation within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC, the interviewees expressed the desire to pursue further studies. The further studies mentioned included the Postgraduate Diploma and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Disability Studies including other online courses similar to the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. This was not only for purposes of their pursuit of professional development but also there is a strong desire for advocacy towards developing an inclusive society for all. The *EFA: DDI* MOOC had impacted positively by influencing the interviewees to have the aspirations of promoting disability inclusion as reported below:

*“The EFA: DDI MOOC has led to me pursue my studies. I went on to do four other MOOCs and now Postgraduate Diploma in Disability Studies. So, it was a very special course for me. That MOOC confirmed what I was sure could be done: accessible, inclusive education in poorly resourced communities. I am hoping to start school after the Doctor of Philosophy in Disability Studies. It made me dream widely”* (Winnie).

On the notion of pursuing further studies, Mamokgethi felt that the *EFA: DDI* MOOC promotes the idea of building online lifelong learners. Moreover, teachers expressed their willingness and desire to continue learning in similar courses on inclusive education.

*“And I would tell him how I am enjoying it and wanting to learn more and that’s why I want to even apply for more courses online because I am willing to do more inclusive education courses because I enjoyed this course so much and I feel as an educator myself, I also need to be well equipped in terms of not just mainstream but also inclusive education”* (Mamokgethi).

The online MOOC course had an impact on participants in that this MOOC led to the idea of identifying what they might want in the future. In terms of building lifelong learning, there is evidence that the *EFA: DDI* MOOC had built that foundation for continuous professional development.

*“I mean after doing the course, I was like I want to do that advanced postgraduate diploma in disability studies in education. This course namely EFA: DDI MOOC had laid that foundation” (Nelson).*

Other interviewees shared similar sentiments concerning their pursuit of further studies. The aim is to understand inclusivity, special needs, and the existing policies as stated below:

*“There is a lot that I still need to do, this includes studying inclusivity, special needs, the policies that are there, how to interpret and get to the understanding of inclusive education so that I can implement this new knowledge” (Graca).*

Winnie felt encouraged to dream widely in terms of her future, specifically her personal vision and goals by highlighting the following:

*“It inspired me to say when I am finished...I would like to start my school” (Winnie).*

The impact of the *EFA: DDI MOOC* course has led another interviewee to want to pursue other online courses for the benefit of her continuous professional growth as well as that of her peers and colleagues.

*“What I would like to know as we are learning on this online course and completing are you going to help us to continue with further courses as I do not want us to stop here. Doing so would make it easier for the children to learn as well” (Oprah).*

In summation, all participants showed enthusiasm and determination to do more courses. One interviewee even volunteered to assist the other teachers to enrol. Thus, this participant was even interested to enrol in courses that are not even related to inclusive education.

*“Ja! And I have seen more courses that I am interested in...for instance, I saw an interesting course on clinical psychology, and I said L!! L!! let’s stop there! I just want to see what this course is and google more about it” (Oprah).*

Therefore, participants generally showed appreciation and keenness to do more, particularly their pursuit of further studies. They found learning online to be a positive experience and, subsequently, they acquired more information.

#### 4.6.1.3 Category: Changed practices and positive attitudes towards inclusion

The *EFA: DDI* MOOC positively challenged participants' perceptions and professional ideologies towards inclusion. Participants subsequently had new ways of thinking about inclusion and thus established new goals as individual teachers. This led to the determination to make positive adjustments in their professions as stated below:

*"This course has made an impact in our lives and has changed our lives, the way we think, the way we receive things and...the world might have its views, but we view things differently after the course"* (Graca).

Teachers were generally inspired to assume responsibility for their learning by observing other teachers who had enrolled for the online course. Consequently, participants were influenced positively in terms of their perception towards the implementation of inclusive education. So, they had the desire to pursue more courses within online portals for the benefit of their personal growth, as well as for purposes of building lifelong learning.

*"...you know it inspires me and I wish people would be on my level, as I am learning through this course in that even my colleagues (teachers from my school) also are interested to enrol to this course"* (Oprah).

Therefore, participants had positive experiences of the *EFA: DDI* MOOC in that online education had challenged and changed their perceptions of inclusive education practices. Finally, teachers were inspired to adopt new inclusive approaches to teaching and were encouraged to come out of their comfort zone as shown below:

*"I feel that this course has been an amazing journey for me like really an amazing journey. Like I am telling you how it changed my experiences. I feel if other people were exposed to this course. Like people who also had the same perceptions as me because I am an educator myself. So, it would change how they feel about special needs and inclusive education. It would make this impact on them as well"* (Mamokgethi).

#### **4.6.2 THEME THREE: After the course (Systemic aspects)**

This segment discusses the systemic aspects such as participants' views on empowering teachers and general recommendations on teacher education in South Africa. These are the participants' reflections after they participated in the course.

##### *4.6.2.1 Category: Views on empowering teachers*

Participants had the opportunity to discuss their views on empowering teachers. Through the *EFA: DDI* MOOC, participants planned to go back to replicate some of the strategies employed within the online course. To empower themselves as teachers in their classroom-based environment:

*"... you brought in other people. You got an associate professor; you got a mother of a disabled learner talking and you brought everyone else. And that is how I learned and that is how I would like to do it; that is to draw in other skills" (Winnie).*

Regarding the implementation of strategies towards teacher empowerment, it was strongly recommended that everybody (more so for novice teachers) should do this course. The online course is perceived as a useful learning platform in that it offers theories based on inclusive education as well as an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. The course further includes the conceptualisation of inclusive education and disability inclusion. Most people have limited knowledge of inclusive education and disability matters. In turn, they are unaware of what strategies are required to achieve inclusion, particularly the inclusion of learners with disabilities.

*"I would recommend it even if it's novice teachers or experienced teachers or teachers in training and even parents as well as organisation(s). This course is quite broad and explains inclusive education from various perspectives. It does not only explain inclusive education within the school context. But it looks at the child, the home circumstances, the school, as well as the community. So, I would recommend this course to everyone" (Nelson).*

Some of the interviewees translated what they learnt through the *EFA: DDI* MOOC to their teaching at the schools. It is because they understood what steps were needed to achieve

inclusion. One of the steps involves understanding teacher needs and this means cultivating and developing motivated teachers as a key objective. This is stated below:

*“When I was doing the course, I wrote down what a teacher needs, and the teacher needs motivation you know. If I look at myself, being a young teacher, you know I am going to learn so when there are workshops my name is down and always willing to go and learn these things” (Michelle).*

A suggestion was made to raise awareness and create in-depth training specially tailored for the alleviation of learning barriers to ensure that teachers gain knowledge and relevant skills for addressing learning barriers.

*“And then what we can do is just to make them cognizant. You know to create a lot of awareness and to create opportunities for training them as well as in-depth training...A week of training just tailored specifically to a barrier to learning. So that teachers could have a better and deeper understanding of the issue” (Nelson).*

Nelson further proposed developing a course like this online course that specialises in inclusive education and disability inclusion tailored at empowering teachers. This would afford teachers the opportunity to effectively deal with disability issues and learning barriers within their classroom-based environments.

*“I think in the four years every single year there needs to be a course that focuses on disability and education. So that by the time the teachers complete their studies, they are ready to be able to work in an inclusive context” (Nelson).*

In general, interviewees believed that, as part of teacher empowerment, it is vital for teachers to pursue new opportunities (similar online courses) to learn and acquire wider or diverse experiences. Furthermore, interviewees expressed the need to involve teachers from mainstream schools within this online course, since learners with disabilities are also found in mainstream schools. The following assertion was made:

*“You have to spread your wings and look for...even in a mainstream school, there is a need for the course for people to learn and not just to learn but to be part of what is happening” (Graca).*

#### 4.6.2.2 Category: The recommendations for teacher education

This section discusses the recommendations for teacher education which were derived from the practical inclusive teaching strategies that participants have adopted within their teaching profession. Thus, teachers hoped to practically implement these inclusive ideas which were inspired by their learning experiences from the said online course. Making inclusive teaching adjustments according to each learner needs is considered an inclusive education strategy.

*“You know there were 40 children in one class, and you imagine. If a hearing-impaired learner has difficulty with hearing the teacher in the class... I always try to put her in front and whenever I speak to her...I would go to her. I would repeat the instructions and make sure that I make eye contact” (Nelson).*

Also, other strategies for inclusive teaching to occur effectively involved the need for curriculum differentiation, that is to adjust the curriculum according to each learner’s needs. This is evident in the following suggestion that was made:

*“If you go back to White Paper 6 education policy, it says education is for all, and everyone must be included and all of those things but then you need to change the curriculum to suit the learner needs” (Michelle).*

It is crucial to invest in teacher and parent relationships and partnerships within the school such as conducting inclusive education workshops. This signifies the involvement of the School Governing Body (SGB) which is a statutory body of parents, educators, non-teaching staff members and learners. Also, Michelle further stated that investing in interactive seminars is vital, namely workshops, and having more people involved such as volunteers would assist towards creating an inclusive school as stated below:

*“A lot of the parents are uneducated and so what I have learned from this course and want to take to the school is to get workshops for these parents and some of them and a lot of them are in denial that their children are struggling. We do not have learners with physical disabilities, but we do have learners that are maybe slow readers, you know they take longer to write... also they showed that you can do with volunteers and with volunteers, you can do workshops. We do rely a lot on the government, but they*

*take years to get back to us but maybe if there were more volunteer workshops. That would be nice...ja!" (Michelle).*

As part of inclusive teaching strategies for teachers, Michelle further spoke about the need for adherence to relevant policies to adapt them to learner needs. This is to ensure that learners excel in their grade assessments.

*"So, I do feel the education system what they could do similar to this course; policies to speaks towards adapting the curriculum according to the child, and maybe they could pass on doing verbal assessments and verbal exams and getting a pass to the next grade" (Michelle).*

Nelson expressed a different view by making an illustration of inclusive strategies implemented with his learners in the classroom, namely the multi-level of teaching. This is an attempt at promoting curriculum differentiation and signified his willingness to promote and implement inclusion as stated below:

*In my class, I did differentiation and adaptation. I adapted the curriculum and differentiated using a multi-level of teaching, in teaching children according to their strong points and their interest as well (Nelson).*

In conclusion, teachers are determined and are pro-inclusion, particularly after participating in the online course. Their implementation of inclusive strategies involved mainly the idea of policy implementation, curriculum differentiation and adaptation. Therefore, these strategies imply their increased understanding of inclusive education and their overall commitment to inclusion.

#### *4.6.2.3 Category: The assessment of South African policies and legislations*

Graca expressed the need to assess and invest in relevant South African policies that speak to our contextual factors. This is for purposes of understanding how best to improve inclusivity and the policies that underpin inclusion. It was quoted:

*"The policies that we talked of; the international policies the course gave us information on that but it's not enough and we as South Africans we need not depend*

*on the international policies. We must incorporate them, yes, it is good! We must understand our cultures. Not only our cultures but to understand the South Africans context; that is how do we as South Africans best improve inclusivity and the policy of inclusion in our country as well as the whitepaper six and all those and SIAS and put them together and incorporate them and make them easy to understand for other people who are not educated we are” (Graca).*

When speaking of the need to invest in and assess the education policies in South Africa, Mamokgethi reported the following:

*“So, I feel policy makers need to accommodate the needs of the learners. Because in education, what we want as educators and the actual goal is that we are there for the learners and we want their best interest at heart” (Mamokgethi).*

Furthermore, participants expressed the desire to influence policy makers towards the promotion of inclusive education and teaching strategies. This resulted from the learning and experiences obtained from the *EFA: DDI MOOC* as reported below:

*“I wish I could go to policy makers and also make an impact, not just inclusive education but education as a whole” (Mamokgethi).*

Winnie agreed that the education system in South Africa needs to be restructured and improved to accommodate all children with or without disabilities. This means this restructuring should speak to our policies that underpin inclusion and inclusive education.

*“Our education system needs a revamp, and the way we approach inclusive education will benefit ALL kids” (Winnie).*

#### *4.6.2.4 Category: Featuring the EFA: DDI MOOC within the National Qualification Framework*

When participants were asked about the possible recommendations on teacher education within the context of South Africa, interviewees strongly believe that it is of paramount importance to feature the *EFA: DDI MOOC* course within the National Qualification Framework to get buy-in from teachers to create increased engagement in this online course.

*“This course could be extended and to be made part of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and this could be a course that issues a certificate or advance certification. It could be offered on different levels so that the first level focuses on giving teachers the foundation and just to try to stimulate them. So that they could want to more about it” (Nelson).*

Winnie agreed and stated that it is crucial to encourage the teachers with extrinsic motivators, namely offering NQF credits for doing the MOOCs.

*“I would offer them credits for doing the MOOCs because it’s offering them something outside their paradigm” (Winnie).*

Therefore, featuring the *EFA: DDI* MOOC within the National Qualification Framework (NQF) is vital for these teachers. Teachers further acknowledged the benefits of acquiring disability knowledge within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC, thereby enabling children with disabilities to be the primary beneficiaries of that learning.

*“It clearly shows you these teachers and children need to be educated about disability and they need to be educated about different things like that. And yes, that is how it impacted on me you know” (Michelle).*

Finally, teachers felt that for inclusive education to be feasible an inclusive society must be created. Children’s quality education should consist of the involvement of internal and external stakeholders within education as reported below:

*“I think we need to get different departments getting on board e.g. the department of education, department of social development, the department of health you know different departments including department of art and culture because like I said inclusive education is everyone’s responsibility” (Nelson).*

In conclusion, this analysis shows that fundamental changes have occurred and that participants have expressed their desire to take up the challenge of adopting inclusive education practices as well as becoming agents of change. These results will be explored further in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the three themes that emerged during the analysis phase of the research, namely theme one: “before the course”, theme two: “during the course” and theme three: “after the course”. The themes conveyed participants’ professional experiences including their views and the impact of having participated within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. The in-depth interview responses included accounts regarding the role and impact of online education, that is, whether teachers could be capacitated within inclusive contexts. This relates to the research question “*How do South African educators’ experiences of an online learning course prepare them to adopt inclusive education practices?*” It was noted that fundamental changes had occurred which led to a newer understanding of their conceptualisation of inclusion. Also, the findings demonstrated that teachers are willing to take up the responsibility of empowerment by being agents of change.

These results from the in-depth interviews will be discussed in relation to the literature. This is to facilitate the process of obtaining the overall outcome of the study. Also, this is for purposes of understanding South African educators’ adoption of inclusive education practices. This chapter also helps to understand the controversies around inclusive teacher practices and how such practices will benefit learners with disabilities. Furthermore, similarities and differences in the outcomes of this research project will be explored against the existing body of knowledge. This work will revisit the research framework to enhance the analysis of these findings.

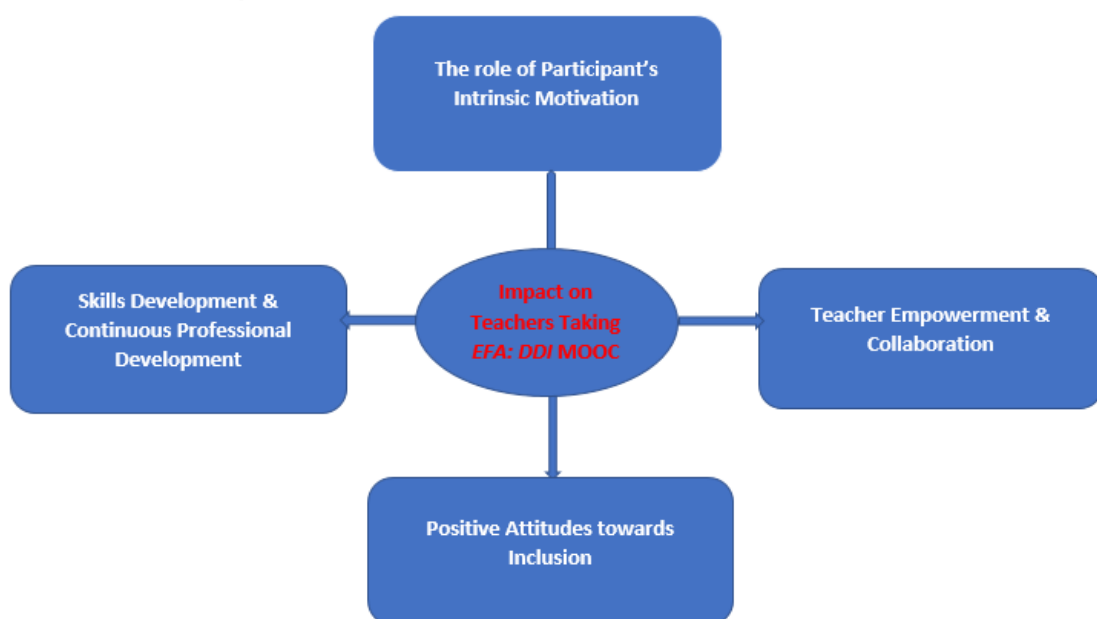
The research question and sub-questions structure the discussion in this chapter of the three themes that emerged in the previous chapter. Furthermore, participants’ perceptions of the MOOC platform in terms of its accessibility and feasibility to foster increased engagement within inclusive teaching practices will be reported. Finally, inclusive strategies that participants have learned and adopted in addressing learning barriers in their classrooms will be included. All the discussion points will be aligned with the research objectives and will be analysed against the findings from the literature. The research objectives along with the

themes and sub-themes will give direction to this discussion. Finally, a summary of the discussion will be illustrated.

## 5.2 IMPACT ON TEACHERS TAKING EFA: DDI MOOC

This segment discusses the impact of the participants' online experiences and what they valued about the course. In doing so, the guiding discussion points include the participants' intrinsic motivators, skills development, the desire for continuous professional development, teacher empowerment and collaboration in communities, as well as positive attitudes towards inclusion. This segment begins with considering teacher motivation that comes from within which influenced these participants towards their pursuit of developing new individual skills. These individual skills assisted them to work more collaboratively with others in the communities. Finally, the development of collaborative intent within the communities assisted them to change their attitudes in the broader society which was evident in the participants' different experiences observed during the interviews. Thus, these discussion points will serve as a structural guideline around participants' understanding of inclusive education and their readiness to implement inclusive teaching practices within their work environments.

*Figure one: Impact on Teachers Taking EFA: DDI MOOC*



### 5.3 THE ROLE OF PARTICIPANTS' INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Participants had positive experiences from this online course. The researcher recognised that these participants were already motivated before enrolling in the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. Ossiannilsson et al. (2015) highlight that motivation plays a pivotal role for participants to enrol and complete MOOCs. The study participants acknowledged that their willingness was influenced by intrinsic motivation such as participants' interest in learning more about inclusivity. This signifies that intrinsic motivation is driven by internal rewards since it is an act of doing something without the expectation of external rewards. This assisted them to stay engaged with the course learning material until completion. The research findings also identified that the intrinsic motivation was manifested within participants' attitudes, expectations and professional goals. Majid et al. (2019) pointed out that one of the characteristics of adult learners is their motivation, which is often driven by intrinsic and instrumental factors. The above assertions signify that these study participants were more motivated and committed to developing professionally based on intrinsic motivators.

Intrinsic motivators include the fact that teachers engaged in activities to provide inclusive quality education do so because they inherently enjoy it and get personal satisfaction from doing this. These participants were not offered higher salaries or positions to do this course. They desired to deal with the identified challenge and to become better teachers. Donaldson (2011) believes that quality education is achieved through determined efforts to support teachers towards capacity building and to take the responsibility to build their pedagogical expertise as well as to engage with the need for change. Participants thus perceived their enrolment within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC as an opportunity to further harness their professional skills of teaching inclusively. Misra (2018) perceived MOOCs as a tool that has the potential to provide a solution towards assisting teachers to enhance their teaching skills. For this reason, these participants committed themselves to take up the responsibility to seek opportunities for learning and development.

The researcher also observed that participants' motivation to learn translated into the motivation to implement inclusive education practices. The study of Garrido, Koepke, Andersen, Mena, Macapagal and Dalvit (2016) sought to analyse the MOOC landscape in developing countries and to better understand the motivations of MOOC users and afford

insights into the advantages and limitations of MOOCs for workforce development outcomes. Garrido et al. (2016) discovered that the main motivation of MOOC users was found to be based on learning and gaining specific job skills. Similarly, this study finding suggests that participants, especially novice teachers, had the desire and willingness to learn more about inclusive education practices to improve their pedagogical endeavours.

These results also suggest that participants projected positive attitudes towards building themselves within inclusive contexts. For instance, Mamokgethi said, *“I signed up to this course not intending to receive a certificate but rather the eagerness to learn and it was great personally and was very affirming.* Another participant stated the following:

*“The experience was very amazing and when I first learnt about the course and found out about the courses, obviously as a teacher you have a lot of things to do. But I thought to myself that I would benefit a lot as a teacher from this course... So, I found it very amazing and had a lot of information and strategies that I could use in the classrooms”* (Mamokgethi).

These participants were intrinsically motivated as they focused on obtaining useful resources and desired to learn newer strategies to adopt in their classroom to provide quality education. These participants showed that extrinsic motivation such as obtaining a certificate was less important but, instead, they were determined and motivated to learn despite their busy work schedules.

The results provide new insight into the relationship between teachers' challenges in the classroom and their intrinsic motivation on inclusion. Also, their self-motivation towards inclusion encouraged them to pursue further studies as stated by Winnie *“The EFA: DDI MOOC has led me to pursue my studies. I went on to do four other MOOCs and now Postgraduate Diploma in Disability Studies. So, it was a very special course for me”* Thus, these results have implied that participants valued the online learning space and appreciated acquiring new knowledge within an inclusive context.

Misra (2018) states that MOOCs support teachers to remain professionally competent and educationally relevant continuously. This assertion coincides with these results because the *EFA: DDI MOOC* supports teachers and various education professionals to be educationally

competent to teach children with and without disabilities. For instance, one participant confessed to having taken inclusion lightly before enrolling in the *EFA: DDI* MOOC but, given the insight of the MOOC facilitator on the importance of inclusion, it challenged her attitudes and subsequently she acquired more knowledge to effectively work within an inclusive context. Participants' willingness to continue using MOOCs is also based on their perceived usefulness and satisfaction with the course activities and outcomes (Daneji et al., 2019). The issue of alleviating attitudinal and/or perceptive barriers was emphasised by participants. It is because they learned and understood that negative attitudes and dispositions hinder the implementation of inclusion in schools.

Previous research focused on the attitudinal barriers imposed on learners with a disability as a major challenge that constrained these learners from obtaining quality education on an equal basis as their non-disabled counterparts (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Research shows that teachers hold the belief that learners with disabilities in mainstream schools would not cope academically and socially in the classroom (Bornman & Donohue, 2013). Given the state of affairs, teachers could easily feel that it is not their responsibility to teach learners that experience barriers and that learners with disabilities should be in special schools. Initially, some of the study participants related to the above sentiments, but gradually learned the importance of inculcating positive perceptions and attitudes to enhance inclusion. This signifies that the participants were able to understand inclusion better.

As part of inculcating positive perceptions and attitudes to enhance inclusion, these results stressed the importance of participants' advocacy for teacher empowerment within inclusive contexts. King (2018) similarly pointed out that MOOCs influence teachers to try new learning and teaching approaches which subsequently challenge teachers to break old, repetitive teaching habits. Belshaw (2012) also believes that online learning teaches educators to mimic online learning in offline learning environments. In the context of teacher education for inclusive teaching, participants felt the need to intervene to influence relevant authorities towards promoting inclusive education practices. In a nutshell, the results presented evidence that these participants were willing to assume the responsibility of becoming agents of change within the sphere of education.

Also, these participants play a significant role within the education system in South Africa. Misra (2018) believes that a teacher is a key agent in any education system. Haihambo (2016) also argues that teachers are the main role players and are expected to provide quality education for all learners irrespective of disability, gender, ethnic group, etc. Thus, their desire to improve their pedagogical practices means that these participants understand the importance of providing quality education. Misra (2018) noted that teacher professional development leads to fundamental changes in teachers' practices, one being the increase in student learning in the classroom.

In summary, the results implied that participants were intrinsically motivated to enrol in the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. Moreover, their motivation to learn in MOOCs also became their motivation to implement inclusive education practices. So, they demonstrated their readiness and willingness to adopt inclusion and to effectively identify and address barriers to learning. Previous studies stressed the point that teachers are key agents in any education system. These teachers understood that, as they have an important role to play within the education system, they desired to improve their pedagogical practices.

#### **5.4 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

Participants acknowledged that the *EFA: DDI* MOOC supplemented not only their skills and knowledge related to their advanced technological skills but also their pedagogical approaches to inclusion. This means participants were able to find appropriate knowledge and support online that was useful for their pedagogical approaches in the classroom. For instance, Oprah acknowledged that, *"It is really interesting learning online and you get to see the views of other people as we would do on a face to face learning platform... this online course is making us learn on another technological level"*. This is supported by Abdel-Maksoud (2019) and Wambugu (2018) who asserted that MOOCs improve teachers' pedagogical skills including technological advancement. Daneji et al. (2019) concurred by stating that teachers should be supported and kept abreast of the rapid pace of educational innovations and technologies for learning. This means professional development programmes such as MOOCs help teachers to keep abreast of the changing trends within the sphere of education.

As part of supplementing participants' pedagogical skills, participants were able to learn new inclusive education strategies to implement in their schools. For instance, participants were taught that learning should be adjusted according to learner needs to achieve inclusion. These findings coincide with Phasha and Condy (2016) in terms of their definition of inclusive education which is about considering each learner's needs to promote inclusion. The Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) recognises that teachers should be professionally trained and be knowledgeable about inclusive education to identify and address barriers to learning using curriculum differentiation (DHET, 2015). The results signify that participants acquired valuable insights in terms of their understanding of inclusive education such as the strategy of curriculum differentiation.

Some participants taught learners with diverse educational needs and that made them willing and confident to mimic their online learning experiences within their classroom-based environments. Similarly, Sullivan et al. (2019) state that participation in a MOOC allows individuals such as teachers and professors to adjust their teaching and learning strategies they use in their daily work. Wambugu (2018) also stated that MOOCs equip teachers with the skills to effectively teach inclusively such as using different learning material, namely the use of video formats with subtitles including audio materials as well as electronic documents accessible to all learners with and without disabilities. Belshaw (2012) believes that this is the kind of online learning experiences that teachers could mimic within their offline teaching environments.

Also, these participants appreciated learning not only about the notion of inclusivity but also about the realities of the lives of people with disabilities. Participants spoke about having learnt relevant disability-specific knowledge and skills. Misra (2018) suggested that the use of MOOCs for teacher professional development (TPD) and its content involves becoming a better teacher, including disability support, awareness as well as attainment of academic integrity. These results implied that there are two levels of skills, namely the general inclusion skills and the disability-specific skills. For instance, the general inclusion skills were involving teaching big classes inclusively, confidently and innovatively, characterized by learners who have diverse educational needs (Wambugu, 2018).

On the other hand, the disability-specific skills involved the idea of a curriculum differentiation strategy wherein learning was adjusted according to learner needs as illustrated above. McKenzie et al. (2020) supported these claims by suggesting the need to prioritise the requirements of impairment-specific teaching approaches and strategies. McKenzie et al. (2020) further believes that adapting the curriculum to meet impairment-specific needs indicated in the UNCRPD needs to be developed within the South African education sector to promote the principles and skills of reasonable accommodation.

Promoting inclusive education would also mean promoting the principles detailed in UNCRPD 24 and SDG 4 respectively. Also, human rights principles involve giving people their rights and entitlement to education. In addition, UNCRPD promotes the need to ensure that persons with disabilities are entitled to their educational rights in the same manner as their non-disabled counterparts. Article 24 of the UNCRPD is further validated by the SDG 4 which is based on ensuring access to quality education for all persons with and without disabilities. One of the participants understood the significant role of the convention and related education policies by further stressing the importance of establishing our South African policies that speak to our context and needs. The educational policies should include dealing effectively with the harsh realities of the educational exclusion of disabled children in South Africa.

One of the participants developed his inclusive strategies due to the impact of the lack of teacher training in South Africa. This participant relied on pairing the learners who experience barriers to learning with learners who did not experience these barriers. These results coincided with the situational analysis of the perspectives of learners on the educational needs of learners with Severe to Profound Sensory or Intellectual Impairments (SPSII). Kelly and McKenzie (2018) discovered that learners with more severe impairments relied on those pupils with less severe impairments. In turn, McKenzie et al. (2018) discovered that learners who experience barriers felt it was not the responsibility of other learners in class to educate them. This signified that teachers were perceived as lacking appropriate knowledge and understanding of inclusive teaching.

Similarly, the findings show that teachers are faced with the reality on the ground that they have not been equipped with relevant skills to effectively teach to identify and address

barriers to learning. This experience of a deficit in teacher education is further supported by Engelbrecht (2006) who argues that education authorities have failed to respond to the needs of learners due to the lack of institutional capacity in the form of suitably trained teachers. In addition, participants felt disgruntled by the lack of exposure to teaching learners with disabilities. So, these participants appreciated learning within the *EFA: DDI MOOC* for the benefit of their commitment towards their advocacy and activism. Their commitment to advocacy and activism signified their resilience within their teaching profession. In turn, these participants felt the need to enrol for the *EFA: DDI MOOC*, hoping to learn more about inclusion to effectively identify and address barriers to learning. One participant further stated that his motivation to enrol within the *EFA: DDI MOOC* was due to the marginalisation of people with disabilities. This participant recognised an opportunity to grow professionally for the benefit of his commitment to advocacy and activism. So, these teachers took the agency to resolve the challenges existing in teacher education and disability matters.

A massive gap in teacher education in South Africa was identified in Kelly and McKenzie's (2018) research wherein they stated that the lack of appropriate pre- and in-service training and preparation for inclusive classrooms constrained the implementation of inclusive education. The consequence of the lack of teacher training led one participant to think that learners with disabilities should rather be taken to special schools. Haihambo (2016) argues that the lack of knowledge and skills influenced teachers to feel that it is not their responsibility to teach these children who encounter learning barriers, including learners with disabilities. On the contrary, Rulwa-Mnatwana (2014) asserted that teachers at special schools often lack training in disability-specific skills and knowledge. This signifies that this is a misconception that special schools are more capable of teaching learners with disabilities.

The result also suggested that this gap in teacher education is further exacerbated by the lack of ongoing support from the Department of Education. Florian et al. (2010) felt that the lack of an inclusive curriculum and trained teachers within an inclusive context are some of the factors that cause difficulties in learning. So, this data contributes to a clearer understanding of the reality that most teachers in South Africa have little training and no exposure to inclusive education. In turn, these results suggest that, if teachers are not well trained within inclusive contexts, learners including those with disabilities will continue to experience barriers to learning.

The massive gap in teacher education is much wider and more systemic in nature and MOOCs appear as one possible intervention. However, it is necessary to highlight that the gaps in teacher education cannot be resolved entirely by taking the *EFA: IDD* MOOC. But this MOOC acts as a supplement in bridging the gaps in teacher education because it introduces some important skills for teachers, including challenging their perspectives around participants' ways of thinking about inclusion. For instance, participants' active presence and engagement on the *EFA: IDD* MOOC was an opportunity to enhance their pedagogical skills and they were able to learn new inclusive education strategies to implement in their schools. Similarly, Sullivan et al. (2019) state that participation in a MOOC allows individuals such as teachers and professors to adjust their teaching and learning strategies they use in their daily work. MOOCs can provide a good environment for the participants to learn and improve their knowledge and skills (Mongkhonvanit, Kanopka & Lang, 2019). In addition to this, MOOC offers several features such as interaction, self-reflection, collaboration, and evaluation that support learning experiences (Albelbisi & Yusop, 2019). The literature shows that the requirements for successful participation in the MOOC include teacher presence, quality of the learning material covered as well as interaction among participants (Ossiannilssona et al., 2015). Abdel-Maksoud (2019) also noted that the main elements of MOOC adoption were found to be the course material, the MOOC structure, and the flexibility of learning activities that supported the participants' learning.

In sum, the *EFA: DDI* MOOC enabled them to further develop not only general skills but also relevant disability-specific knowledge and skills. These results implied that participants valued and appreciated acquiring new knowledge within an inclusive context. Also, participants acknowledged the advanced technological skills acquired within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. The positive impact of MOOCs was supported by previous authors regarding the advancement of technological competency. Previous authors and this study also acknowledged the challenges of the massive gap in teacher education in South Africa. Even though this gap cannot be necessarily solved by taking the *EFA: DDI* MOOC, it introduces some important skills for teachers and ways of thinking about inclusion, giving perspectives from researchers and educators in the field where this knowledge is important in the South African context.

## 5.5 CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

Wambugu (2018) defines continuous professional development as the process of constantly strengthening and enhancing one's professional skills and broadening academic knowledge and teaching abilities. Wambugu (2018) further argued that the quality and effectiveness of teaching depends largely on the extent to which educators are regularly acquiring and upgrading knowledge and skills. The participant reported that the *EFA: DDI* MOOC has had a positive impact which led to their desire to pursue further studies such as postgraduate studies as well as other similar online courses.

The results also showed that these participants felt equipped with new knowledge related to the implementation of inclusive education. This study further found that participants reported improved attitudes and confidence in teaching within inclusive classrooms. This means CPD is a tool to assist teachers to promote inclusive education and provide quality education for all learners. Calonge, Shah, Riggs and Connor (2019) state that MOOCs are not only flexible but are an accessible platform for acquiring new knowledge and relevant practical skills. In the same way, Sablina et al. (2018) further articulated that people use MOOCs to supplement or complement their formal learning to expand their knowledge. For instance, this MOOC is about individuals who seek to pursue further studies including developing skills for curriculum planning and design. Formal degree opportunities such as a Master's programme differs from MOOCs in terms of course design and delivery. Formal degrees are accredited courses with adherence to the traditional admissions processes. Also, students are subjected to the course's fixed schedule and timeline. However, formal education complements MOOCs because MOOCs are typically offered by accredited universities as an alternative to attending classes in person and the idea is to make knowledge accessible. Both formal education and MOOCs are for purposes of promoting personal enrichment and lifelong learning opportunities. In the context of teacher education, MOOCs support teachers' transition into further postgraduate study as well as raising awareness of other study opportunities. As Nelson stated, *"After doing the course, I was like I want to do that advanced postgraduate diploma in disability studies in education. This course namely EFA: DDI MOOC had laid that foundation."* Oprah demonstrated her determination to pursue online courses by enquiring more about other opportunities of professional growth by asking

the following “... are you going to help us to continue with further courses as I do not want us to stop here”. For this reason, Majid et al. (2019) observed MOOCs as having a great potential towards promoting lifelong learning to ensure equity and quality education.

Also, the results of this study showed that *EFA: DDI* MOOC promotes the idea of building online lifelong learners. It is important to that there are more formal continuous professional development programmes and that MOOCs are less formal. However, they complement formal education with the aim of making knowledge accessible to everyone across the globe. MOOCs further make people more aware about the value of formal degree courses and other learning opportunities. Thus, this study imparts knowledge around the fact that participants are empowered to describe pathways for themselves so that they can become better trained teachers by taking continuous professional development courses or Masters’ degrees, etc. Likewise, MOOC completion was perceived as a demonstration of the participants’ commitment to life-long learning as well as the desire for increased self-esteem (Sablina, Kapliy, Trusevich, & Kostikova, 2018). These results coincide with the findings of this study regarding the participants’ commitment to lifelong learning and their increased level of engagement in this course.

The study of Misra (2018) demonstrated that traditional professional education is not always viable because of costs and time constraints. Wambugu (2018) mentioned that there are constraints associated with professional teacher development, including time, training and coaching, materials, equipment and facilities, travel and university tuition, and conference fees which are often overlooked. Yet, MOOCs could potentially respond to such challenges by offering a low-cost learning platform. The findings of this study confirmed that the above mentioned MOOC benefits were offered by the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. Also, the results appeared to suggest that online education could be used as an additional platform for learning in a way similar to traditional educational environments.

The study of Misra (2018) investigated the challenges of teacher professional development (TPD) including making reflections regarding the experiences and promises of using MOOCs for TPD as well as suggestions on actions for promoting the use of MOOCs for TPD (Misra, 2018). It was discovered that nearly 40 percent of learners who take open online courses are teachers. Furthermore, Misra (2018) believed that MOOCs offer numerous opportunities for

teachers' professional development and that the use of MOOCs for teachers is increasing in different parts of the world, particularly in those countries that have a shortage of means and methods to provide continuous professional (CPD) opportunities.

Stofile (2008) noted that the lack of relevant teacher training would make teachers incompetent to teach learners who experience learning barriers, including those learners with disabilities. For this reason, Misra (2018) strongly advocated that teachers need additional training beyond the initial teacher training to keep them abreast of the changing trends in technology and within the education system. Based on this assertion one participant appreciated gaining more knowledge within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC for purposes of implementing inclusion with the learners in the classroom. As a result, all participants believed that teachers should take the responsibility of seeking opportunities to develop themselves.

One notable observation is that MOOCs are not established as part of CPD or formal processes but are complementary in nature. The CPD or formal process helps participants to manage their own development on an ongoing basis. Participants were able to review and reflect on what they learnt in MOOCs as well as their professional experiences. The result suggests that online education could potentially be a solution to support teachers to implement inclusion. One notable observation is that Individuals made reflections about succeeding and being positive as a form of professional development. Similarly, the findings of Kang and McKelroy (2015) highlight that MOOCs are a useful online platform for professional development. This means that MOOCs are useful for many working professionals who seek to learn new skills and knowledge. Participants showed keenness to update their knowledge and skills, especially when such opportunities and resources are offered for free. In turn, participants study pathways could be better described as becoming a trained teacher. Also, MOOCs may potentially be used as a more formal part of CPD in the future.

Misra (2018) suggested that the government should play a role to promote the use of MOOCs, providing financial support to achieve some of the educational goals. Wambugu (2018) further believed that partnering with the government has been a strategy implemented by international organisations for teacher professional development (TPD) purposes. Moreover, the partnership with the government also means that governmental policies will motivate

individual institutions to develop their own MOOCs for TPD policies (Wambugu, 2018). Wambugu (2018) believe that policies offer guidelines to organise and implement teacher professional development programmes. In turn, these policies will ensure the commitment and seriousness of government and educational institutions towards supporting teachers' professional development (Wambugu, 2018). Malaysia was the first country in the world to implement MOOCs for all public universities and the only country where MOOCs were applied on a national scale through government initiatives (Daneji et al., 2019). This shows government plays a pivotal role in the successful development of MOOCs for teacher professional development.

Wambugu (2018) asserted that these policies also empower teachers to realise that professional development is their right and that government and relevant institutions must afford them with such opportunities to fulfil their professional development needs. Similarly, Alzahrani (2018) believes that state universities and colleges should support this new learning method by providing the MOOCs with qualified instructors, free resources as well as training programmes. The involvement of the government could be utilised as a broader strategy to support the implementation of teacher professional development.

## **5.6 TEACHER EMPOWERMENT AND COLLABORATION**

The results suggested that participants have the determination and agency for teacher empowerment, particularly where inclusion is concerned, and that their desire to promote teacher empowerment was further influenced by their participation in the online course. For instance, participants have learned the value of empowering other teachers to pursue diverse learning experiences such as considering online education. One of the participants also believed that if more people were to enrol and participate within the *EFA: DDI* MOOC, it would change their perceptions and knowledge, especially within the context of special needs and inclusive education. Their commitment towards teacher empowerment was also evident when one participant approached the *EFA: DDI* MOOC course facilitators to convince them to promote this course to teachers from other provinces around South Africa.

This coincides with the assertion made by Mariga et al. (2014) that inclusive education is not just about schools but also about society, since inclusion depends on families, local

neighbours, general community organisations, etc. The results implied that promoting inclusive education is a process that involves the establishment of strong partnerships within the broader community. To most participants, this meant networking beyond the course such as building systems of support. Mariga et al. (2014) asserted that establishing partnerships with different people and groups in the local communities promoted inclusion. Hence, the African proverb states that *“it takes a village to educate a child”* (Mariga et al., 2014).

Also, participants learned the importance of encouraging teachers from mainstream schools to participate in this online course. Ossiannilssona et al. (2015) defined MOOCs as a new online learning environment. For instance, the constructivist cMOOCs foster collective knowledge through collaboration whilst FutureLearn promotes the idea of social learning. This was not only to establish collaborative intent but also to aid in building an inclusive society, since learners with disabilities and those who experience barriers are also found in mainstream schools. For this reason, most participants felt that inclusion is for everyone. Thus, the results showed that participants perceived online learning as a positive and viable platform for learning to educate and empower teachers. Also, these findings stressed the importance of South African educators’ determination for agency towards teacher empowerment. So, these participants proved themselves to be agents of change.

## **5.7 POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSION**

The results implied that *EFA: DDI* MOOC has made positive changes towards participants’ perceptions and professional ideologies towards inclusion. It is evident from the results that participants have learnt new ways of thinking about inclusion. One notable observation was that participants demonstrated their desire to promote inclusion for all learners with or without disabilities in the classroom. The results also suggested that participants had enthusiasm and determination to do more courses irrespective of their teaching commitments.

The findings also revealed that participants generally had positive attitudes towards inclusion regardless of their level of experience within inclusive contexts. However, the study of Rulwa-Mnatwana (2014) discovered that those teachers with a considerable amount of experience in teaching within inclusive classrooms had generally positive attitudes towards learners with

disabilities. In line with this premise, Koay, Lim, Sim and Elkins (2006) highlight that educators who had received the most training and experience in special needs education had positive perceptions about inclusion. Contrary to the hypothesised association between the amount of experience in inclusive classrooms and teachers' attitudes, the study findings suggested that these teachers might have been teaching for a long time but not necessarily within inclusive classrooms. Also, one novice teacher in this study stressed the point that older teachers in her school are conservative and unwilling to adopt new trends within the evolving education system. This meant that these teachers were reluctant to learn about the new inclusive teaching approaches but rather preferred their traditional teaching approaches. On the other side, the study of King (2018) highlights that MOOCs influenced teachers to try new learning and teaching approaches which subsequently challenged teachers to break old, repetitive teaching habits.

Historically, teachers understood teaching children with disabilities as something that does not happen in their classrooms. Thus, educating inclusively learners with disabilities in general education classrooms was regarded as a scarce commodity (Brandes et al., 2012). This is also evident in the study of Florian et al. (2010) that children with learning difficulties or with disabilities are perceived as not belonging in mainstream settings because their needs are different, and the curriculum was not suitable for them. Florian et al. (2010) note that the lack of an inclusive curriculum and trained teachers within an inclusive context is one of the factors that causes difficulties in education.

The social model of disability similarly states that persons with disabilities are excluded because of social barriers that hinder them from participation in society on an equal basis with their non-disabled counterparts (Oliver, 1983). The marginalisation of persons with disabilities is mainly due to the attitudinal barriers which make it difficult for pupils with disabilities to attain quality education. This is supported by the findings of this study in that Oprah indicated that, *"When we came and enrolled for this course, we understand that let's take out that deaf and dumb and make the kids equal! And use the resources that we have to make the learners have access to education..."*. Participants clearly recognised the significant role that the *EFA: DDI* MOOC played in terms of challenging these existing attitudinal barriers imposed on persons with disabilities. Thus, most participants reported having had a mind-

shift in terms of their perceptions of inclusive education. This also meant being more pro-inclusion in their places of work.

Other authors like Engelbrecht (2006) argue that in South Africa teachers' attitudes and discriminatory practices are racially entrenched, particularly towards those who were perceived as different. The exclusion of learners, especially those with disabilities, arose from the historical imbalances that occurred in South Africa (Mariga et al., 2014). However, this research did not explore the relationship between teachers' attitudes and their discriminatory practices as embedded and entrenched in race.

While previous research has focused on the negative attitudes and dispositions of teachers (reluctance to adopt inclusion) in the classroom towards inclusion (Mariga et al., 2014), these results implied that participants were more optimistic and willing to promote inclusion to address their day-to-day difficulties within the classroom. Moreover, participants understood that they are the main role players in the lives of learners in their schools. So, these participants have adjusted their personal and professional goals as individual teachers by being agents of change for teacher empowerment.

However, it is also evident from the results that one participant initially had negative dispositions and perceptions towards learners with disabilities in her classroom. Mariga et al. (2014) believed that the negative attitudes of teachers towards the inclusion of learners with disabilities would make it difficult to teach inclusively and that the failure to teach inclusively would mean the failure to provide quality education. The point is that teachers are not uniformly negative and show a willingness to change even if they initially project negative dispositions. In addition, MOOCs are voluntary, and so one tends to find people doing it who already have positive dispositions. This is an advantage because MOOC participants generally encourage one another even though one may not be reaching those who might resist learning on this topic. Misra (2018) agreed by stating that MOOCs are perceived as a tool to help teachers to acquire competencies, knowledge, and skills needed to participate successfully within political, economic, and social spheres.

In summation, the *EFA: DDI* MOOC has had positive changes towards participants' perceptions and professional ideologies towards inclusion. Also, the results suggest that

online education could potentially be a solution to support teachers to develop positive attitudes and perceptions to implement inclusion. It was evident from the results that participants were determined to promote inclusion for all learners within their classroom-based environments. These results were supported by previous studies regarding the negative attitudes which generally posed a challenge and difficulties towards the promotion of inclusive teacher education. Also, these results demonstrated that teachers' positive attitudes led to their determination to capacitate themselves to promote quality education, since they are the main role players and agents of change in the lives of pupils within their school environments. Finally, Individuals made reflections about being agents of change to promote teacher empowerment, particularly within inclusive settings.

## **5.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The results showed that participants had made reflections for course improvement. For instance, one participant suggested that during content creation the course should be designed to promote accessibility to all participants with or without disabilities. Likewise, de Freitas, Morgan and Gibson (2015) agreed by suggesting that future MOOCs would do well if they consider incorporating additional tools, including automatic translation tools. It is vital to state that this is the role of MOOCs to achieve accessibility because the vision of *FutureLearn* (MOOCs provider) is to “*make education accessible to everyone*” [www.futurelearn.com](http://www.futurelearn.com).

Furthermore, one would suggest that MOOC designers should partner with the UCT Disability Services Unit to assist in terms of curriculum design as per their mission “*remove any physical, policy, information and attitude barriers that might prevent students and staff from fulfilling their potential*”. In turn, this would assist with responding to the issues of accessibility and the imposed challenges of accessing information while promoting ease of course delivery. Thus, these assertions signify that the *EFA: DDI* MOOC should be available to persons with and without disabilities as well. The results showed too that additional suggestions were based on involving more videos of people with special needs as well as focal persons from underdeveloped school backgrounds.

In this research study, there were three themes that emerged during the analysis phase of the research, namely: theme one: “before the course”, theme two: “during the course” and theme three: “after the course”. In theme one, participants acknowledged specific events that had helped to shape their identities as teachers and inclusive educators. For instance, most participants reported the lack of teacher training and subsequently recognised the importance of capacitating themselves within the platform of online education. In theme two, participants confirmed the positive and successful experiences of learning within the *EFA: DDI MOOC*. Furthermore, all participants appreciated doing the *EFA: DDI MOOC* course, especially the fact that the online course was convenient and offered flexibility in terms of participation. In theme three, some participants developed an interest to pursue further studies. Other participants further acknowledged the additional pedagogical skills that were acquired through their learning in the *EFA: DDI MOOC*. So, these participants were able to learn new inclusive education strategies to implement in their schools. Thus, interviewees spoke of fundamental changes that occurred after participating in the *EFA: DDI MOOC* which led to deeper understandings of inclusion. The value to these individual teachers were diverse, with important aspects including developing their intrinsic motivation, skills development, and desire for continuous professional development. For some there was also an increased willingness to take up the challenge of adopting inclusive education practices as well as becoming agents of change in their communities.

In sum, these results implied that study participants had positive and successful experiences of learning within the *EFA: DDI MOOC*. As a result, all interviewees appreciated learning online and felt that the course was a viable tool to learn about and support implementing inclusive education practices. In addition to knowledge and good practices, MOOC participants spoke about how they were empowered through their participation to go beyond what was covered in the course. Finally, literature studies highlighted the idea of involving government entities to promote the use of MOOCs, including providing financial support. The involvement of the government would mean the right support is given towards the successful implementation of teacher professional development.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the summary of the thesis, implications and contributions of the study, possibilities for future research and the recommendations of the study. This study has demonstrated that, although there are challenges in teacher education in South Africa, teachers understood inclusive education and thus were willing to take up the challenge of adopting inclusive education. However, if teachers received adequate support towards their professional development, they would be able to become agents of change within the education sphere. So, this study investigated one of the proposed responses involving offering teachers the opportunity to take flexible online courses such as MOOCs to learn more about inclusive education practices.

### **6.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

This research aimed at exploring how teachers make use of these learning opportunities by investigating their experiences of an online course (*EFA: DDI MOOC*) and how it prepared them to adopt inclusive education practices. The first sub-research question focused on how educators' understanding of inclusive education and their readiness to implement inclusive education practices for all children with disabilities changed through the completion of the MOOC. The second sub-research question investigated the extent to which MOOCs are accessible, feasible and acceptable towards developing increased engagement in inclusive teaching practices. In doing so, the researcher was interested to find out whether MOOCs could potentially be a solution towards addressing the lack of specific skills and knowledge to teach inclusively in South Africa.

For the first sub-research question on educators' understandings and readiness to implement inclusive education participants felt empowered to promote inclusion. They all spoke about gaps in their own understandings and perceived the course as an opportunity to learn about inclusive education practices. These teachers to varying degrees also spoke about their willingness to take up the challenge of becoming agents of change in their communities. In addition, these participants expressed their determination towards promoting inclusion.

Hence, the participants pursued opportunities for collaboration within the broader community. About four participants expressed an interest to pursue further studies to harness their professional skills for the benefit of their commitment to advocacy and activism.

The literature suggests increased engagement involves the following: teacher presence, quality of the learning material covered as well as interaction among participants (Ossiannilsson et al., 2015). Thus, the findings for the second sub-research question on the extent to which the MOOC was developing increased engagement suggested that MOOCs were perceived as accessible, feasible and acceptable. Motivation appeared to be the driving force of engagement to participate in MOOCs. This statement signifies that participants had increased engagements in MOOCs which subsequently enhanced their motivation levels.

MOOC completion required participants to have the self-discipline to have successful participation. In addition, participants perceived the online course as a convenient course in that it offered flexibility, including the use of mobile phones for learning. The MOOC enabled participants to meaningfully engage and interact with others, interaction which enabled them to receive feedback as part of the learning process for improving their teaching practices. The results implied that collaboration in MOOCs enabled participants to learn new approaches and skills needed in their class-based environment. Their learning experiences could thus be mimicked within their classroom-based environment for inclusive teaching.

### **6.3 THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY AND POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study can inform our understanding of South African educators' experiences towards providing quality education for children with disabilities. Also, this study aimed to inform our understanding of improving inclusivity, including deepening our understanding of teachers' motivations for taking agency of learning in MOOCs. This is to inform policies that underpin inclusion about the role of MOOCs within the education landscape. Furthermore, this study's aim was to enhance teacher empowerment and teacher collaboration in communities. This is a practical way to assist teachers in relation to their aspirations of becoming agents of change. In turn, all learners, especially those with disabilities will be recipients of quality education.

Also, this study can be compared to other similar studies in South Africa to attest to the effectiveness of MOOCs in preparing South African educators to adopt inclusive education practices. Furthermore, this study can make contributions to reviewing online education using the obtained study findings of the educators' adoption of inclusive education after doing the course. This work can contribute as well towards knowledge creation around the accessibility and feasibility of the MOOCs platform. Further research can also be done around addressing the gaps in teacher education in South Africa. This research can be done by scholars within the disability studies as well as education professionals within the disability and education sectors.

## **6.4 STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Below are the outlined recommendations for future research to alleviate some of the existing disparities in teacher education in South Africa. These recommendations are classified as per the thematic areas that were revealed in the previous chapter.

### **6.4.1 Intrinsic motivators**

Based on these findings and conclusions, the educators' successful participation in MOOCs depended on their intrinsic motivation which was aligned to their personal and professional goals. Thus, participants felt that successful participation in MOOCs requires motivated people (teachers). Therefore, motivated teachers mean empowered teachers. Furthermore, one of the characteristics of adult learners is their motivation, which is often driven by intrinsic and instrumental factors. Participants felt that their intrinsic motivation and willingness to participate in the *EFA: IDD* MOOC also influenced their increased level of engagement within the online course. In turn, this online course assisted them to improve their teaching practices and to address their day-to-day difficulties within the classroom. Therefore, an effective learning programme is recommended and should be made widely available for teachers to choose their learning pathways depending on their own specific needs and motivation. A top-down approach that forces teachers to undergo specific training at specific times might be less effective in harnessing intrinsic motivation.

#### **6.4.2 Skills development**

There are two levels of skills that participants have acquired through the *EFA: DDI* MOOC, namely general inclusion skills and disability-specific skills. The online learning space offered participants general inclusion skills such as technological skills, innovative and self-regulated learning skills that could be utilised to empower themselves online. On the other side, disability-specific skills included adjusting learning according to learner needs. This was a process of curriculum differentiation as an inclusive strategy which assisted these teachers in improving their pedagogical approaches. Therefore, based on these findings, teachers are recommended to make use of online learning opportunities to further enhance their teaching skills and knowledge in both general and specific disability-related skills.

#### **6.4.3 Continuous professional development**

The study participants highlighted different experiences that showed their determination regarding their pursuit of continuous professional development. For instance, some of the participants expressed the desire to pursue further studies. Their further studies mentioned included the Postgraduate Diploma and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Disability Studies as well as other online courses similar to the *EFA: DDI* MOOC. Other participants expressed their willingness and desire to do similar courses on inclusive education. Some new opportunities were opened by the MOOC. The MOOC complemented formal education and degree opportunities because it was evident that the *EFA: DDI* MOOC had led some participants to the idea of identifying what they might want in the future in terms of building lifelong learning. This MOOC built that foundation for continuous professional development. This was not only for empowering teachers but also to ensure that they remained professionally competent and educationally relevant. The results showed that participants had adjusted their personal and professional goals concerning their pursuit of building their lifelong learning. Thus, this means MOOCs can be utilised as an effective and alternative mode of learning for teacher professional development. Therefore, teachers should be encouraged and supported to pursue their professional rights such as capacitating themselves through MOOCs and more MOOCs should be made available.

#### **6.4.4 Teacher collaboration in communities**

Participants felt the need for the establishment of teacher collaboration in communities. It is because they learnt the importance of creating strong partnerships within the broader community. To most participants, this meant networking beyond the course such as building systems of support. Teachers need support and training within inclusive contexts, and this means establishing healthy relationships with relevant education authorities, families, and learners in the schools. Therefore, if the support system is in place, teachers would feel empowered to become agents of change, particularly towards addressing the alleged learning barriers in schools.

#### **6.4.5 Promotion of positive attitudes towards inclusion**

Previous research has focused on the negative attitudes and dispositions of teachers (reluctance to adopt inclusion) in the classroom. However, this study highlighted that participants were more optimistic and willing to promote inclusion to address their day-to-day difficulties within the classroom. Furthermore, one of the notable observations was that the MOOC participants are willing participants who had chosen to do the MOOC and had completed it. It is not surprising that these participants are much more likely to be positive. Generally, positive attitudes assisted these participants to promote inclusive education practices for all learners with or without disabilities. Indeed, teachers need to be supported by education departments and other relevant authorities to inculcate positive attitudes and dispositions to enhance inclusivity. Participants have learnt new ways of thinking about inclusion and they have changed in their professional ideologies towards inclusion.

#### **6.4.6 Developing policy context for inclusive education practices**

The findings of this study illustrated the need to develop additional inclusion policies concerning the South African context. Context-specific disability policies were suggested as they were envisioned to inform our understanding of improving inclusivity and the policies that underpin inclusion. Participants felt that disability-related policies were limited in South Africa and if these policies are in place all learners with and without disabilities would generally have access to educational opportunities. These policies would ensure as well that

teachers especially those of children with disabilities would be rightfully capacitated to implement inclusive education practices.

## **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY**

- To create increased engagements and motivation in MOOCs facilitators of MOOCs need to ensure that the requirements for successful participation in the MOOC include teacher presence, quality learning materials as well as regular interaction among participants.
- There is need to feature the *EFA: DDI* MOOC course within the National Qualification Framework to get buy-in from teachers to foster increased engagements in this online course.
- There is a need to explore how specialist MOOCs are used differently than general MOOCs and how people (in particular curriculum pathways for teachers starting at different points and having different goals of building lifelong learning) transition from one MOOC to another. Among other considerations within this recommendation is what is done with the acquired knowledge afterwards.
- There is a need to promote teacher empowerment and collaboration in communities to ensure that teachers adopt inclusive education practices. In order for inclusive education to be feasible, an inclusive society must be created. Children's quality education should consist of the involvement of internal and external stakeholders within education. For instance, there is an opportunity for online communities such as the existing MOOC Facebook group and local schools partnering with universities towards offering online education on inclusive education.
- There is a need to develop additional inclusion policies within the South African context for promoting inclusive education practices. Among other considerations within this recommendation is how these policies respond to disability issues to ensure teachers are adequately empowered to promote quality education for all learners including persons with disabilities.

- State universities and colleges should support this new learning method by providing the MOOCs with qualified instructors, free resources as well as training programmes. Thus, the involvement of government entities could be utilised as a broader strategy to support the implementation of teacher professional development.
- Future research can also be done around considering different practical strategies of participation and accessing MOOCs such as doing the online course in groups rather than individually.

## **6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The research study does not provide any information about people who did not find the MOOC useful. The selection criterion for participation sought participants who had completed a minimum of four to six weeks of the MOOC. This implied that the researcher only selected people who found the online course sufficiently worthwhile and motivated to complete it. Furthermore, this research study does not provide information about those who decided not to complete it because they were deemed ineligible to participate. Thus, the research findings do not have information related to what ineligible participants did not like about the online course. There was a very limited sample which was only from those who had the motivation, interest, access and time to do the course. In turn, the researcher had difficulty finding enough participants who were deemed suitable for the study. This was because in MOOCs participants are anonymous and the MOOC platforms do not share contact information. Also, MOOCs are limited to surveys that feature in the MOOCs which generally have low response rates.

Other limitations include the fact that MOOCs are often done anonymously and therefore the researcher doesn't know the participants intimately which makes it somewhat hard for people to express themselves on such topics. As this study topic was often difficult to generalise. This requires continually asking questions to seek people's broader experiences about the phenomenon under study.

## 6.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research study explored the experiences of South African teachers and their efforts to learn about and adopt more inclusive education practices. The study aimed at investigating one of the proposed responses which involve offering teachers the opportunity to take flexible online courses and learn more about inclusive education. The questions included how teachers make use of these learning opportunities and how they prepared them to adopt inclusive education practices. A qualitative content analysis of the interviews with six South African educators who completed the *EFA: DDI* MOOC was done. The analysis of the study findings considered their intrinsic motivation, skills development, their desire for continuous professional development as well as positive attitudes towards inclusion. For some participants, there was also an increased willingness to take up the challenge of adopting inclusive education practices as well as becoming agents of change in their communities. For these participants, online education (MOOCs) appeared as another important option to consider for the successful implementation of inclusive education practices.

A massive gap in teacher education was acknowledged both in literature and in the findings of this study as participants felt that teacher training was limited. Furthermore, these teachers were not always getting support from their school or department. For this reason, they had experienced difficulty in terms of connecting with others who shared their interest in inclusive education. The experiences and circumstantial factors vary from participant to participant in MOOCs but these participants were willing to take up the challenge of adopting inclusive education practices as well as becoming agents of change in their communities. Therefore, the findings signified that MOOCs equipped participants with the concept of inclusivity in particular in response to some of the identified gaps in teacher education. Thus, this meant that MOOCs could potentially assist as a supplement towards the goal of achieving inclusive teacher education in South Africa.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: ETHICAL APPROVAL, UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
Human Research Ethics Committee



Room E53-46 Old Main Building  
Groote Schuur Hospital  
Observatory 7925  
Telephone [021] 406 6492  
Email: [sumayah.ariefdien@uct.ac.za](mailto:sumayah.ariefdien@uct.ac.za)  
Website: [www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms](http://www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms)

04 March 2019

**HREC REF: 042/2019**

**A/Prof J McKenzie**  
Department of Health & Rehab Sciences  
Division of Disability Studies  
F-Floor  
OMB

Dear A/Prof McKenzie

**PROJECT TITLE: HOW DO SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES OF AN ONLINE LEARNING COURSE PREPARE THEM TO ADOPT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES (MASTERS Candidate N. MDLULWA)**

Thank you for your response letter dated the 26 February 2019, addressing the issues raised by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

It is a pleasure to inform you that the HREC has **formally approved** the above-mentioned study.

**Approval is granted for one year until the 30 March 2020.**

Please submit a progress form, using the standardised Annual Report Form if the study continues beyond the approval period. Please submit a Standard Closure form if the study is completed within the approval period.

(Forms can be found on our website: [www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms](http://www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms))

***We acknowledge that the student: Ncediwe Mdlulwa will also be involved in this study.***

**Please quote the HREC REF in all your correspondence.**

Please note that the ongoing ethical conduct of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.



Please note that for all studies approved by the HREC, the principal investigator **must** obtain appropriate institutional approval, where necessary, before the research may occur.

Yours sincerely

*M. Blockman*  
**PROFESSOR M BLOCKMAN**  
**CHAIRPERSON, FHS HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Federal Wide Assurance Number: FWA00001637

## Appendix B: FHS 016: ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT/RENEWAL

17 APR 2021

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES  
 HEALTH, BEHAVIOUR & SOCIETY  
 UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

**FHS016: Annual Progress Report / Renewal**

HREC office use only (FHS0001437; FHS0001438)			
This serves as notification of annual approval, including any documentation described below.			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved	Annual progress report	Approved/unrenewed date	30.03.2021
<input type="checkbox"/> Not approved	See attached comments		
Signature Chairperson of the HREC	<i>M</i>	Date Signed	17/4/20

**Principal investigator to complete the following:**

**1. Protocol Information**

Date (when submitting this form)	04 April 2020		
HREC REF Number	042/2019	Current Ethics Approval was granted until	30 March 2020
Protocol title	HOW DO SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES OF AN ONLINE LEARNING COURSE PREPARE THEM TO ADOPT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES (MASTERS CANDIDATE N. MDLULWA)		
Protocol number (if applicable)			
Are there any sub-studies linked to this study?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X		
If yes, could you please provide the HREC Ref's for all sub-studies? Note: A separate FHS016 must be submitted for each sub-study.			
Principal Investigator	A/Prof. Judith McKenzie		
Department/ Office Internal Mail Address	Health and Rehabilitation Sciences		

21 February 2019
Page 1 of 5
FHS016

(Note: Please complete the Closure form (FHS015) if the study is completed within the approval period)



1.1 Does this protocol receive US Federal funding?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
1.2 If the study receives US Federal Funding, does the annual report require full committee approval?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Note: Any annual approvals for Full Committee review MUST be submitted on the monthly HREC submission dates. (Please send electronic copy for full committee review to <a href="mailto:hrec.enquiries@uct.ac.za">hrec.enquiries@uct.ac.za</a> )		
If yes in 1.2 please complete section 1.3 below for invoicing purposes		
1.3 Annual Approval for full committee review	- R 3460 (inclusive of vat)	
For invoicing purposes, please provide:		
Sponsor's name		
Contact person		
Address		
Telephone number		
Email Address		
<b>2. List of documentation for approval</b>		
None – no change, an extension of time is requested		
<b>3. Protocol status (tick ✓)</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Open to enrolment	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Closed to enrolment (tick ✓)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Research-related activities are ongoing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Research-related activities are complete, long-term follow-up only	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Research-related activities are complete, data analysis only	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Main study is complete but sub-study research-related activities are ongoing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Study is closed -> Please submit a Study Closure Form (FHS010)	
<b>4. Enrolment</b>		
Number of participants enrolled to date	6	
Number of participants enrolled, since last HREC Progress report (or continuing review)	N/A	
Additional number of participants still required	N/A	



**5. Refusals**

Total number of refusals (participants invited to join the study, but refused to take part)	N/A
---	-----

**6. Cumulative summary of participants**

Total number of participants who provided consent	6
Number of participants determined to be ineligible (i.e. after screening)	0
Number of participants currently active on the study	0
Number of participants completed study (without events leading to withdrawal)	6
Number of participants withdrawn at participants' request (i.e. changed their mind)	0
Number of participants withdrawn by PI due to toxicity or adverse events	0
Number of participants withdrawn by PI for other reasons (e.g. pregnancy, poor compliance)	N/A
Number of participants lost to follow-up. Please comment below on reasons for loss of follow-up.	N/A
Number of participants no longer taking part for reasons not listed above. Please provide reasons below:	N/A

**7. Progress of study**

Please provide a brief summary of the research to date including the overall progress and the progress since the last annual report as well as any relevant comments/issues you would like to report to the HREC:

The study is based on *how South African Educator's experiences of an online learning course prepares them to adopt inclusive education practices?* and has been approved until 30 March 2020. The researcher has been busy with the analysis and still waiting for supervisor comments. The researcher is also busy with the write-ups of chapters for the thesis. So far progress has been made with writing revising the methodology chapter; but more time is needed in order to sufficiently write-up all the chapters.

**8. Protocol violations and exceptions (tick ✓ all that apply)**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No prior violations or exceptions have occurred since the original approval
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prior violations or exceptions have been reported since the last review and have already been acknowledged or approved
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unreported minor violations that have occurred since the last review, as well as significant deviations not yet reported, are attached for review



**9. Amendments (tick ✓ all that apply)**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No prior amendments have been made since the original approval
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prior amendments have been reported since the last review and have already been approved
<input type="checkbox"/>	New protocol changes/ amendments are requested as part of this continuing review (See note below)

Note: If new protocol changes are being requested in this review, please complete an amendment form (FHS005). Specific changes in the amended protocol and consent/assent forms must be bolded, italicised or tracked and all changes must include a rationale.

**10. Adverse events**

10.1 Please provide below or attach a narrative summary of serious adverse events and/ or unanticipated problems since the last progress report. Please indicate changes made to the protocol and informed consent document(s) as a result (if not already reported to the HREC). Please comment on whether causality to any study procedure or intervention could be established.

Initially, the researcher had made timelines in terms of reviewing and finalizing each chapter of the thesis and subsequently anticipated to have the final submission by end of February 2020. However, due to the unanticipated amount of time it took to find participant including data collection and analysis took longer than expected. Hence, there was the delay with the writing up of chapters and this impacted in the research process to stay within initial time frames set out. Thus, an extension on the initial approval date of 30 March 2020 is sought.

10.2 Have participants received appropriate treatment/ follow-up/ referral when indicated (e.g. in the case of abnormal or incidental clinical findings, distress or anxiety)?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable
------------------------------	-----------------------------	--

If yes, please describe:

--

**11. Summary of Monitoring and Audit Activities (tick ✓)**

11.1 Was this study monitored or audited by an external agency (e.g. SAHPRA, FDA)?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable
------------------------------	-----------------------------	--

11.2 Did a Data and Safety Monitoring Board publish a report?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable
------------------------------	-----------------------------	--

11.3 If yes, please identify the agency and attach a summary of the findings.

Agency Name	Report attached	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable
	DSMB report attached	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable



11.4 Has there been any agency, institutional or other inquiry into non-compliance in this study, or any finding of non-compliance concerning a member of the research team?

Yes  No

If yes, please explain:

**12. Level of risk (tick ✓)**

12.1 In light of your experience of this research, please indicate whether the level of risk to participants has:

Increased

Decreased

Shown no change

If there has been a change, please explain:

12.2 Please provide a narrative summary of recent relevant literature that may have a bearing on the level of risk.

N/A

**13. Statement of conflict of interest**

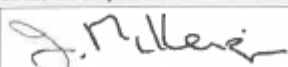
Has there been any change in the conflict of interest status of this protocol since the original approval? (tick ✓)

Yes  No

If yes, please explain and if necessary, attach a revised conflict of interest statement (Section #7 in the New Protocol Application Form FHS013):

**14. Signature**

My signature certifies that the above is complete and correct.

Signature of PI		Date	04 April 2020
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## **Appendix C: INVITATION LETTER**

### **Research Question:**

*How do South African Educator's experiences of an online learning course prepare them to adopt inclusive education practices?*

### **Request for Participation: DSD MPhil - AHS6007W, 2017/18 Masters of Philosophy (MPhil) in Disability Studies Thesis**

Dear participants

My name is Ncediwe Mdlulwa and I am a Masters Student at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. As part of my research, I am doing a study to ascertain the experiences of South African educators towards providing quality education for children with disabilities. It is also evident from literature that there is a considerable gap in teacher training in South Africa. Thus, I have full confidence that this study could be used as an advocacy tool and will add value to the existing body of knowledge in future particularly around the adoption of inclusive education practices.

As participants of the past and or current run of the MOOC course, I therefore request you to participate as interviewee in my research study, which will require approximately 45-60 minutes.

The data collected will be for purposes of doing an exploratory research to analyse qualitatively the data indicators. This will be made possible through the interview responses from participants. The researcher perceives this information as useful particularly for purposes of answering the research question. Thus, it will be an invaluable experience acquiring more information from participant's particularly their level of engagement in this course.

Should you wish to take part in the study or have any further questions you would like to ask before making a decision, please feel free to call me on 0724017754 or alternatively, email [ncediwe.mdlulwa0@gmail.com](mailto:ncediwe.mdlulwa0@gmail.com) / [ncediwe.mdlulwa@uct.ac.za](mailto:ncediwe.mdlulwa@uct.ac.za)

If you decide that you would like to participate in this research study please respond by completing the consent form. Should I not hear from you I will assume that you do not want to take part and I will not contact you again.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my academic endeavours. Your participation is much appreciated.

Kind Regards

Ncediwe Mdlulwa (Student Researcher)

Master's Student in Disability Studies

University of Cape Town

## **Appendix D: INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Information sheet for the study**

Dear Participants

My name is Ncediwe Mdlulwa and I am a Masters Student at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. As part of my research, I am doing a study to ascertain the experiences of South African educators in providing quality education for children with disabilities.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers see the learning opportunities offered on an online course (“Education for All” MOOC course) on teaching children with disabilities. The findings of this study will make contribute to our understanding of the role of online education in educator’s adoption of inclusive education.

### **Procedure**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire based on whether you fit the criteria for people that we want to participate. The criteria for the face to face, telephonic and or Skype interviews targets

- Participants who have participated both in the previous (from 2015) and current run of the MOOC course for a minimum of four to six weeks
- Qualified SA Educators/teacher working under the sphere of full-service schools, special schools and public schools with a minimum of one year’s experience
- Teachers of children with disabilities
- It is advantages for participants with one or more years of experiences of working with children with disabilities?

The recording will be destroyed post study use. Each interview with participants will take approximately 60 minutes to complete.

The research will generally ask you questions that focus on your attitudes towards disability inclusion, and your general experiences of being a participant on the free online course.

Importantly, your real name will not be used: The answers that you give in the interviews will not be shared with anyone and the researcher and study supervisor will have access to it.

### **Voluntary participation**

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If you wish to stop or not answer a question you are free to do so without any negative repercussions.

### **Confidentiality**

We will not be using your real name when reporting on the information from your interview. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name and only the researcher and study supervisors will know this number. Further, your name and this consent form will be kept separately and will be stored in a password protected folder on a computer. We will also not be sharing information about you to anyone outside of the researcher and study supervisor.

### **Risks**

In general, this study has low risks in nature towards the participant. You are free to decide not to answer a question or to stop participating in the study at any time. If you are uncomfortable about anything arising from the research you can contact the study supervisor, A/Prof. Judith McKenzie (see contact details below).

### **Benefits**

There is no direct benefit to the study however, the information gathered from you and others who participate will contribute to strengthening teacher training that focuses on meeting the special educational needs of learners with disabilities, which will ultimately help to ensure that these learners receive a better education.

### **Questions**

If you have any further questions you would like to ask before making a decision, please feel free to call me on 0724017754 or alternatively, email [ncediwe.mdlulwa0@gmail.com](mailto:ncediwe.mdlulwa0@gmail.com) / [ncediwe.mdlulwa@uct.ac.za](mailto:ncediwe.mdlulwa@uct.ac.za)

If you have general questions and concerns about the research or about your own role in the study, please feel free to contact A/Prof Judith Mackenzie on email address: [Judith.mckenzie@uct.ac.za](mailto:Judith.mckenzie@uct.ac.za) (or) on 0214066318

If you have any other questions or concerns about the way the research is done and how it affects you then you can contact: Associate Professor Marc Blockman at the Human Research Ethics Committee c/o Ms Lamees Emjedi.

Room: E52.23

Old Main Building, GSH

Tel: 021 406 6338

Fax: 021 406 6411

[Lamees.emjedi@uct.ac.za](mailto:Lamees.emjedi@uct.ac.za)

If you read and agree to take part, please kindly sign below: -

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### Interview Schedule

1. How did you come to know about the MOOCs? What motivated you to take this course and what value do you think free online course has for you as a teacher?
2. Are you perhaps hoping to use the free online course as part of professional development?
3. What is your level of engagement and duration of your participation in the MOOCs?
4. What impact do you think this free online course has on teachers specifically in promoting disability inclusion?
5. Do you think the education for all promote the principles of education for all as stipulated within the education policies?
6. How can this free online course be improved in increasing accessibility, feasibility and acceptability to develop increased engagement in inclusive teaching practices?
7. What do you think you have benefited from participating in this online course? Please comment on what you did not know and what you learnt after doing the course.
8. Do you think as a teacher it has equipped with adequate skills to implement inclusion within your classroom-based environment?
9. What is your experience of disability inclusion within your professional training?
10. what is your understanding of inclusive education?

## **Appendix F: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

I ..... Confirm that the research procedures and processes have been explained within the invitation letter and information sheets. I know and understand that participation is on voluntarily basis and I could withdraw at any time in the study and that I am not compelled to participate. I have been informed that my personal information is kept confidential and that only the researcher, supervisor and the research ethics committee will have access to it for purposes of fulfilling the objectives of the study. Therefore, I hereby accept to participate in this study based on the following listed conditions below:

### **The participant is agreeing to:**

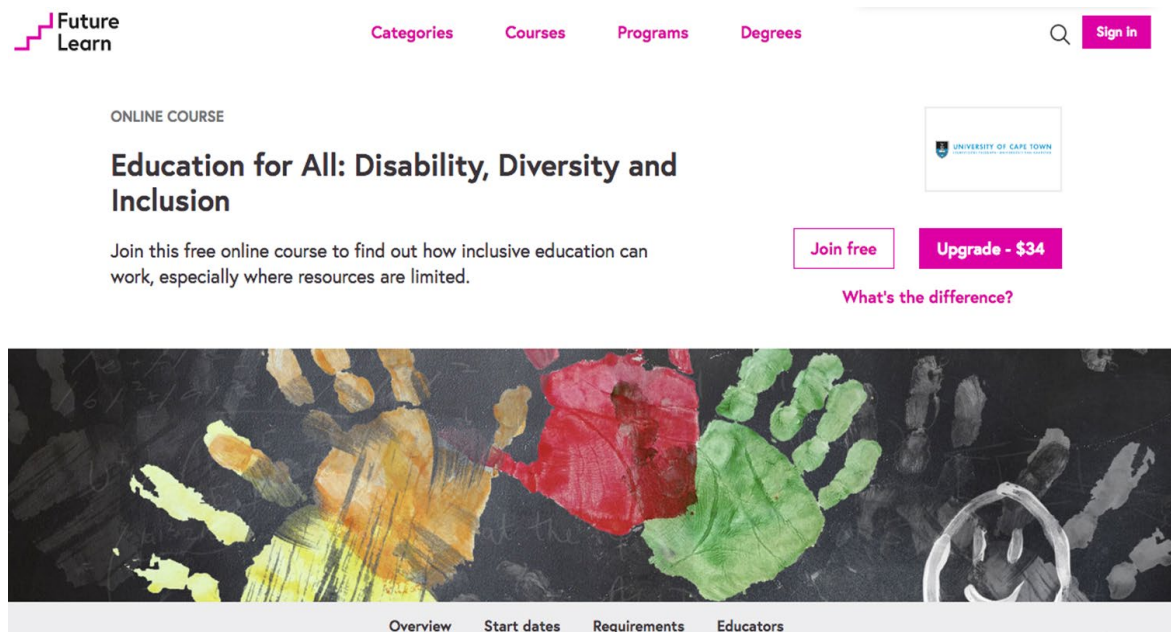
- The participant has read the information sheet and knows what the study activity is about.
- The participant knows who to contact if he has any questions
- The participant understands what is required to participate and all questions have been answered.
- The participant does not feel forced to take part in this study and is doing so on his own free will.
- I know that the participant may withdraw at any time and that it will have no bad consequences for me or him.
- The participant is happy to have the information recorded.
- Participant does not have to answer any questions they do not feel happy with.
- Participant agrees that the researcher will respect what is discussed during the interview and that it will stay at the interview space.
- What participant says will be kept private and confidential.

- The participant agrees to take part in this project.

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G: DESCRIPTION OF THE *EFA: DDI* MOOC



The screenshot shows the Future Learn website interface. At the top left is the Future Learn logo. Navigation links for 'Categories', 'Courses', 'Programs', and 'Degrees' are visible. A search icon and a 'Sign In' button are on the right. The main content area features the text 'ONLINE COURSE' followed by the course title 'Education for All: Disability, Diversity and Inclusion'. Below the title is a brief description: 'Join this free online course to find out how inclusive education can work, especially where resources are limited.' To the right of the description are two buttons: 'Join free' and 'Upgrade - \$34'. Below these buttons is a link that says 'What's the difference?'. A large image of colorful handprints is displayed below the text. At the bottom of the image are navigation tabs for 'Overview', 'Start dates', 'Requirements', and 'Educators'.

URL <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/education-for-all>

The division of Disability Studies at the University of Cape Town runs a successful MOOC, 'Education for All: Disability, Diversity and Inclusion' (*EFA: DDI*), which addresses an increasing desire for training in this neglected field of teaching and learning. As millions of children around the world are excluded from access to education because of a disability robbing them of their potential and diminishing our society. Thus, this course is aimed at teachers, other professionals and parents interested in developing inclusive education. The *EFA: DDI* MOOC course is a university programme designed for higher institution particularly for continued professional development purposes. This *EFA: DDI* MOOC course applies a strategic approach with the aim to invest in teacher and or educator development.

In this course participants are taught in depth around the notion of disability inclusion. Furthermore, participants in this course learn about inclusive education, understanding what barriers there are to learning and how to challenge them. This broadens teachers and educators understanding of disability inclusion to adopt inclusive practices for the children with disabilities. This fosters educators to reflect on their experiences of working

with the learners. This MOOC covers a larger scale of participants from around the globe wherein professionals are able to learn from one another's experiences. Also, this is an opportunity and a space for student teachers to learn practical strategies for making education inclusive as well as learning from other teachers coming from different and diverse contexts. The MOOCs promote multiculturalism while treating disability as diversity. The MOOC platform thus influences the educators' considerations of how they structure their teaching and educational resources. This is a platform that enables professionals to acquire new skills particularly on structuring assignments, students' engagement with the lectures, etc. As a result of openness, and synergies brought on the online platform, it is clear that the MOOCs have the potential towards creating innovation in inclusive learning, teaching, as well as changing practices.

FutureLearn courses are divided into weeks. The MOOC contain various activities that participants should aim to complete within the week, each one built from a sequence of straightforward steps, to help them learn. Each week is given a descriptive name, so participants always know what's expected, and can even navigate between them, to see what's coming up, or catch up from the beginning if they missed out on the respective lesson. Participants can learn by watching videos, listening to audio and reading articles. Many of these steps are followed by short quizzes to help them to check that they have understood. Every article, video or piece of audio has a space to allow learners to comment and ask questions. This appears in the margin on large screens or is revealed below on small screens. Participants can discuss topics with each other and educators will offer guidance and answer questions. There is a switch at the end of each step that allow them to mark it as complete. This updates their 'To do' list, but leaving the switch off does not prevent them from moving on to the next step. And if they are not sure if they properly understood something, they can leave it and come back to it later.

### **What participants achieve from the *EFA: DDI MOOC*?**

Over a period of six weeks, participants learn from a range of people with experience of disability, discovering practical ways to create a more inclusive learning environment that they can apply in their own context. By the end of the course, participants will be able to

- Describe the principles and approaches of inclusive education

- Identify environmental and social barriers to inclusion
- Discuss the role of the family and the community in supporting inclusive education
- Explore how to create an inclusive school environment
- Apply ideas for inclusive education practices in the classroom
- Explore the impact of attitudes on one's ability to implement inclusive education



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