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WESTERN CAPE

**EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DISTANCE LEARNING AS  
AN ALTERNATIVE TO MAINSTREAM EDUCATION FOR DISABLED  
CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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**MASTER OF ARTS**

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## DECLARATION

I, *Yumnah Jones*, hereby declare that this dissertation submitted for the degree, Master of Arts in Sociology, at the University of the Western Cape is my own independent work and has not been submitted by me to any other department or institution for another degree course. Furthermore, in the usage of secondary source material, the information or data has been sensibly acknowledged and referenced as per university requirements.



**YUMNAH JONES**

**Date: 23 June 2022**



## DISCLAIMER

The usage of the term “disabled” in the title of the thesis is intended for easier referencing and to shorten the already lengthy title of the thesis. Throughout the thesis, “disabled children” are mainly referred to as children living with disabilities, learners with disabilities or students with disabilities. The purpose of this thesis is not to discuss the politically correct terminology but to delve deeper into a system that has for decades vastly neglected people living with disabilities by focusing on the accessibility of education for children with impairment. The more focus is given to the most crucial part of an individual’s life, accessibility to education, the better we can increase the life chances of people living with disabilities.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**God** – to have reached this stage would not have been possible without your Grace and Guidance over my life. I am forever grateful for the opportunities that You have bestowed upon me throughout the years of growing up to everything that I have accomplished thus far. If it were not for You, I honestly do not know where I would be today. I am truly humbled and honoured by Your Grace and it is through You that I have overcome so many trials and tribulations that I know today were only there to preserve me, strengthen me and prepare me.

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*Thank you!*

## DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to children living with disabilities. I understand what it means to deal with ableism; your struggles, your tears, your pain and your sweet triumphs as you navigate through a world that is not designed for you but to which you have to acclimatize. I know because I am you. Growing up with a disability is never easy and being diagnosed with a disability, and knowing a life before that disability, is even worse. I know, because I have multiple disabilities and live with a condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa: Usher Syndrome Type II. It is a condition characterised by hearing loss since birth and gradual vision loss. “Exploring the effectiveness of distance learning as an alternative to mainstream education for disabled children in South Africa” is a thesis I embarked on because I want more representation of people living with disabilities in our society, in our job markets and in our universities; not because of our disabilities but because we are capable and empowered. However, to reach that level of capability and empowerment, we need to find a solution or conduit in which we can make education accessible to children who are often left on the backburner.



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## SYNOPSIS

The educational outcomes of learners with disabilities are low among the South African population. The aim of this study was to investigate whether there is an alternative to mainstream education for children living with disabilities. Within the context of low educational outcomes for learners with disabilities, the study explores the option of distance learning in the traditional home-schooling sense with elements of online schooling to determine whether distance learning could potentially improve the educational outcomes of learners with disabilities.



## ABSTRACT

The implementation of inclusive education by the South African government has been inspired and mandated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. While South Africa was among the first United Nations members to ratify this human rights treaty, the challenges associated with the implementation of an inclusive education are so dire that there are 600,000 children living with disabilities that are out of school, with an increasing need to identify an alternative solution to include learners living with disabilities in the education system. This study explores the extent to which distance learning bridges the learning and development gap for disabled learners who are unable to get into mainstream schools. Specifically, the research examines the extent and degree to which distance learning is inclusive for learners with disabilities. It does this by investigating the success rate, curriculum content, affordability, logistical arrangements, and other broader factors that affect and influence the educational attainment of learners living with disabilities. Within this context, affordability, acceptability, accessibility, availability, and logistical support as measures of the efficiency of distance learning were investigated using in-depth qualitative interviews. The findings indicate that affordability is a relative concept and based on this concept, distance learning can work for children with disabilities, with the correct logistical support by the Government of South Africa. The author is of the view that it could serve as a better and safer alternative to special schools in South Africa.



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## KEY TERMS

Distance learning, capacity-building, learners with disabilities, disability-friendly support materials

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

4IR:	Fourth Industrial Revolution
ADHD:	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CAPS:	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE:	Department of Basic Education
DHET:	Department of Higher Education and Training
DLI:	Distance Learning Institution
DoE:	Department of Education
FMS:	Facilities Management System
ICT:	Information and Communications Technology
IEB:	Independent Examination Board
IGCSE:	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
LMS:	Learning Management Systems
NSFAS:	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
SEN:	Special Educational Needs
SNP:	Sip-and-Puff
TTS:	Text-to-Speech
TVET:	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNISA:	University of South Africa



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Rationale of the Research Study

The rationale of the study is that inclusive education has neglected the needs of learners with disabilities, as evidenced by the state of special schools and the lack of qualified special needs educators in South Africa. Furthermore, socio-economic challenges, the state of school violence, inadequate infrastructure, and the misappropriation of funds by state officials of the Government of South Africa have motivated this research study, to explore the effectiveness of distance learning as an alternative to mainstream education for disabled children in South Africa.

### 1.2 Background of the Research Study

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa has identified the need for accessibility and social inclusivity for individuals living with disability (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2017). The Labour Relations Act, 66 of 1995, the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998, the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 4 of 2000 are some of the many laws that were implemented to create an equal and non-discriminatory society for the differently abled, hereafter known as people living with disabilities (Engelbrecht, 2006). Emerging evidence suggests that these policy imperatives are not fully implemented. These well-thought-out laws, policies, and initiatives have not had the intended far-reaching impacts, as the disabled are still enduring discrimination, social stigmatisation, marginalisation and non-accessibility (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2017).

While the Constitution's legal and policy framework has been promulgated and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been ratified without any reservations in 2007, Chiwandire and Vincent (2017) note that progress has been slow in creating a conducive and dignified society for the 2.8 million South Africans living with disabilities. The authors explain that inadequate access to basic welfare and social services has impeded the day-to-day living and lifestyle of people living with disabilities across all ages, ethnicities/race, gender, and place. In this regard, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2014) notes that people with disabilities – ranging from 5 to 85+ years, from urban to rural, from regional to national and from gender to race – share similar barriers. In order to address these barriers,

the national government has made efforts to provide incentives and palliatives. In 2017, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) earmarked R76.6 million for students with disabilities in universities for that academic year. Furthermore, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) allocated 80% of programme costs for students with disabilities who attend Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges (Engelbrecht, 2006). However, reports from Statistics South Africa (2014), indicate that despite these incentives, school enrolment and attendance rates by children living with disabilities, at basic education levels, remain abysmal. They note that on average, nearly 40% of the people living with disabilities in South Africa, are aged 5 to 24 (818,074). Furthermore, of the 818,074 children and young people living with disabilities who were not attending schools, 45.2% are Coloured, 35% are Black African, 24.6% are Indians and 29.1% are whites.

These statistics are an indication that nearly half of the population of children living with disabilities attend school and that only half of those attending school complete their education. As indicated by Statistics South Africa (2014), people living with disabilities have the worst educational outcomes with 5.3% attaining higher education, 23.8% with no formal education and 24.6% completing primary school. Human Rights Watch (2020) notes that globally, 32 million learners with disabilities are out of school, for example 57% in Cambodia, 15% in Maldives, 23% in Uganda, 24% in Colombia and 42% in Gambia.

The reasons for non-attendance, at both primary and secondary school in South Africa, were determined to be limited access to resources, inaccessible transport, lack of access to early childhood development and early intervention, discriminatory attitudes, inaccessibility of curriculum, lack of support staff in mainstream schools, limited spaces in institutions for providing high levels of support, and limited access to assistive devices such as Braille material, spectacles and special needs school (Stats SA, 2014).

Subsequently, this raises a crucial question: what initiatives or practical solutions are being considered to redress low school attendance by children living with disabilities? For context, low educational outcomes among persons with disabilities results in a low market absorption of persons with disabilities, which means that non-attendance of school perpetuates the cycle of marginalisation, discrimination, social stigmatisation and non-accessibility to and within mainstream society (Engelbrecht, 2006). Thus, while the broader government, with NSFAS



and the DHET are committed to social transformation and social inclusivity for persons living with disabilities, there appears to be a “missing link” in their focus (Engelbrecht, 2006).

The underlying assumption here suggests that national policy imperatives could centre funding towards making basic education accessible to children and students with disabilities. According to Human Rights Watch (2019), the education system is currently not sufficiently skilling children living with disabilities for the open labour market or as owners of economically viable small enterprises due to poor access to basic education, among other factors. Furthermore, the inaccessibility of learning materials during early stages of education already impacts negatively on appropriate skills acquisition. Equal access to and enjoyment of a quality education are essential to realise the full potential of persons with disabilities, to equip them with adequate skills to successfully participate in the economy (Engelbrecht, 2006). While it has been argued that the distance learning mode is excluding disabled children from mainstream education, the fact remains that inclusive education has simply marginalised the disabled even more in the educational sector.

### **1.3 Preliminary Literature Review**

#### ***1.3.1 Inclusive education and distance learning in South Africa***

According to the Department of Basic Education’s 2015 *Report on the Implementation of Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education* (DBE, 2015), there has been progress in terms of higher enrolments in special schools and an increase in the number of special schools in South Africa. However, in 2014 the number of learners with disabilities who were out of school, was standing at 597,953 (Statistics SA, 2014). In 2015 there were 5,552 learners with disabilities on the special schools waiting list, which were more than the 2001 statistics when the South African disabled population had about 400,000 learners with disabilities, of which 280,000 learners with disabilities were unaccounted for and not in school (DBE, 2015). With the exacerbated state of education for learners with disabilities in South Africa (SACE, 2017) and the increasing number of dropouts among learners with disabilities (Stats SA, 2014), distance learning seems to be a prime solution to bridge the gap to education for learners with disabilities within the education system.

Researchers have noted that the main purpose of distance learning is to overcome the physical barriers to education, and it enables any learner living in isolated, less populated and non-urban,

rural areas the opportunity to receive an education (Keles & Ozel, 2016). Pouget and Pym (2000) found that education received in isolation through distance learning was not the main cause of concern experienced by students, but that there was recurrent distress surrounding the use of computer technology, the uncertainty of what was expected of them and communication breakdowns. Balle, Notvig and Petersen (2017) identified attitudes which support, were neutral towards and against distance learning. However, of note is the fact that studies from Burdette and Greer (2014), Bjekic, Obradovic, Vucetic and Bojovic (2014) and Pouget and Pym (2000) were more focused on the effectiveness of distance learning for university students.

In South Africa, most studies conducted on distance learning focused on the evaluation of e-learning usage in South African universities (Bagrukayo and Kalema, 2015); learner support in the open and distance learning context at the University of South Africa (Baloyi, 2012); the provision and challenges of e-learning in South Africa with specific focus on the University of South Africa (Letseka, Letseka & Pitsoe, 2018) as well as the effectiveness of information and communication technologies in teaching and learning in high schools in the Eastern Cape Province (Adu & Ojo, 2018). While most of these studies have been conducted on distance learning in the South African context, the main focus of their studies is to ascertain the challenges associated with distance learning in their specific contexts. There is no objective to determine if distance learning could work as an alternative option to special schools, for learners with disabilities in South Africa, particularly at the early childhood, primary and secondary school levels.

### ***1.3.2 Multiple barriers to inclusive education in South Africa***

Although South Africa has implemented various education policies, including the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy, and promulgated appropriate legislative frameworks, there is a dissonance between inclusive education policies and legislation and the realities at school level, which impacts its implementation (Conway, 2017). Enrolment figures may be equivalent to international trends, but inclusive education is still lacking due to the segregation between social classes and the rural/urban divide that still exist even after the demise of apartheid (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit & Van Deventer, 2016).

With the attempted implementation of inclusive education, it became apparent that the legislative achievement of democracy was not a sufficient condition to eliminate structural and

historical inequalities in education. According to Conway (2017), pre-existing inequalities within post-apartheid society needed to be redressed and the full commitment of sufficient resources to implement the ideals of the White Paper 6 is required for inclusive education to be successful since the onset. However, Engelbrecht et al. (2016) note that the implementation of inclusive education has failed, largely due to a lack of resources and funding, negative attitudes, lack of clarity regarding the implementation of the White Paper 6 and the lack of teachers' capacity and inclusive training.

Robson (2003) asserts that the social climate in South Africa gravely and negatively impacts the learning and educational attainment of learners living with disabilities since they have to contend with systemic, physical, social and economic challenges, including poor quality of special schools, and the mistreatment of special schools. Furthermore, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW), these barriers, particularly in special schools, leave the disabled learners graduating or dropping out of school when they turn eighteen, without knowing how to read and write adequately or with the basic skills needed for the employment sector (HRW, 2019).

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory**

Critical Theory emerged out of the Marxist tradition and was developed by a group of sociologists at the University of Frankfurt in Germany and is referred to as the Frankfurt School of Thought. It focuses on reflective assessment and critique of society in order to reveal and challenge power structures (Crossman, 2019). Critical Theory is a social theory and multidisciplinary approach drawn from various perspectives, including politics, philosophy, sociology, history and anthropology and thus, overcomes the fragmentation prevalent among established academic disciplines to address issues of broader interest (Kellner, 2008).

Critical Theory in Education is about questioning the education system to ascertain how it can best offer education to all people and it also offers opportunities and understanding of the different perspectives of disadvantaged members of society. Critical Theory recognises that learners enter the education system with differing advantages and disadvantages and focuses on how to help every learner to achieve their potential (Boyd, 2014). The current study is situated within the Critical Theory framework. The aim is to examine the variables of distance learning, as an option, to determine if it is viable for learners with disabilities and if it could serve as a replacement of the special schools' system in South Africa – an inclusionary measure

that was embarked on by the Government of South Africa but which dismally failed learners with disabilities.

## **1.5 Problem Statement and Research Objectives**

### ***1.5.1 Problem Statement and Research Questions***

The study of the relationship between parental involvement in education and distance learning, in the education of their own children, is an under-researched area, but it would potentially be important to our understanding of the inclusion of learners living with disabilities.

Hence, this study sourced parents who are already pursuing distance learning as an alternative for their children, to gain insights into their experience. Through their experiences, it was ascertained if it can be applied to learners with disabilities. The study was guided by the following questions:

- To what degree and extent can distance learning be an alternative and practical solution?
- In what ways do affordability, logistics, accessibility, availability and acceptability determine the effectiveness of distance learning?

**Affordability** focuses on whether parents or guardians of children can afford tuition for distance learning. **Logistics** focuses on whether parents are able to make logistical arrangements for their children to write exams and are able to attend tutor classes or open days. **Availability** ascertains whether parents are available to supervise their children in their distance learning and if distance-learning institutions are available to assist parents in the event of any challenges. **Accessibility** determines if distance-learning institutions are able to accommodate parents with special needs, for example, transport arrangements, courier services, disability-friendly support materials, etc. **Acceptability** focuses on whether parents are satisfied with the services of distance-learning institutions that their children are currently enrolled in and if not, what improvements do they think the institution should consider?

### ***1.5.2 Research objectives***

The overarching aim of this study was to determine whether distance learning is a practical solution to bridging the gaps experienced by learners with disabilities in the mainstream

schooling system by studying participants who have already embarked on this educational route. In addition, the study sought to understand the peculiar logistical challenges or constraints that parents or guardians experience with regards to their interaction with the education sector or mainstream schools. Through studying the logistics of the distance learning mode of education, the goal was to determine if distance learning can be inclusive, affordable and sustainable.

### ***1.5.3 Research design and methodology***

**A qualitative research approach** was used as it provided deeper insights into the subjective and personal experiences of the parents who have made the decision to use distance learning as a conduit to educate their children. Data collection methods included purposive sampling and in-depth interviews.

#### *Purposive sampling*

The research study focused on parents who use accredited distance-learning institutions to educate their children at home. Thus, the purposive sampling research method was used as the researcher selected and needed research participants with certain population characteristics. These characteristics included: parents using distance learning to educate their minor children, through the expertise of accredited distance-learning institutions that offer structured learning courses for Grades 1 to 12.

#### *In-depth interviews*

In-depth interviews were conducted online and face-to-face to enable research participants to speak freely and provide insight into factors or situations that the researcher was not aware of nor considered when initiating the research. The researcher approached three distance-learning institutions: *Impaq*, *Syllabis* and *Clonard* and three sets of parents per institution who use the respective distance-learning institutions to educate their children. The in-depth interviews were planned to last for approximately one hour each, of which the audio interviews were recorded, and comparative notes were made between the different sets of interviews. That amounted to three interviews with the different distance-learning institutions and a total of nine interviews with three sets of parents per institution. In total, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted, including both institutions and parents.

### **1.5.4 Ethical considerations**

This study was conducted in accordance with the general ethical guidelines as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy of the University of the Western Cape. Ethical issues anticipated and planned for this study were concerned with protecting the rights of the people who participated in the study. All related matters, such as the right to self-determination, right to privacy, right to autonomy and confidentiality, the right to fair treatment and the right to protection from discomfort and harm, were considered and were an integral part of this study (Mouton, 2001).

### **1.6 Time Frame**

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>DEADLINE</b>
1. Submit proposal for review	February 2021
2. Submit proposal for ethics clearance	February 2021
3. Submit request for extension to complete	March 2021
4. Data collection	March 2021
5. Completion of Chapters 2 and 3	May 2021
6. Completion of Chapter 4	September 2021
7. Completion of Chapters 1 and 5	November 2021

### **1.7 Chapter Outline**

This study consists of five chapters:

#### ***Chapter 1: Introduction to the research study***

This chapter focuses on the contextual background of the study, provides the rationale for the study and discusses the research problem and study objectives.

#### ***Chapter 2: Literature review***

This chapter focuses on the existing literature on distance learning for learners with disabilities and on the literature focused on the home dynamics and the significance of parent involvement in their children's educational attainment.

### ***Chapter 3: Theoretical framework***

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that underpins the study.

### ***Chapter 4: Research methodology***

This chapter documents the design and methodology that underpin the fieldwork. This includes an explanation of the sample design, the sampling techniques that were used and the criteria used in the choice of sample size.

### ***Chapter 5: Data analysis and findings***

This chapter offers a presentation of the research findings by discussing the main findings and insights that were obtained in the research study.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the growing need for distance learning considering the COVID-19 pandemic which led to the need for the digitization of education in South Africa. It further discusses the importance of parental involvement in the education of the child, particularly the maternal presence, and how the development of technology and technological tools has enabled or facilitated the process of distance learning.

### 2.2 The Changing Face of Inclusive Education: Distance learning

With technological development, the lack of an effective traditional inclusive education system, and school safety concerns, there is an increasing prospect for parents to pursue the distance learning route for their children. Technological developments have facilitated this growing need, making it a viable option for learners with disabilities. The disability-conscious tuning of tools, technologies and systems makes distance learning a viable option for learners with disabilities (Branstetter, 2020). However, what is distance learning? Distance learning is an alternative educational conduit that does not require the physical presence of learners within traditional classroom settings. It enables learners to be educated remotely, from home, while the teacher assigns work and assists digitally, with no face-to-face interaction between student and teacher (Neese, 2015).

There are various modes of distance learning: it can be strictly home-schooling, in which the parent becomes the teacher; and online or hybrid learning, in which both parents and teacher supervise and educate the child. Nevertheless, throughout all these options of distance learning, similar forms of digital communication are used. These range from webinars, voice-over presentations, and discussion boards, to learning management systems (LMS) (Mansingh, Reddy & Souls, 2020). Mansingh et al. (2020) note that these tools are crucial in assisting learners living with or without disabilities. The dual nature of distance learning is that it is all-encompassing and has the capacity to accommodate learners from all walks of life, if and when given the necessary support structure.

As human societies change with the advent of technology, learning is being produced and reproduced. Within this context, learning as a concept is socially constructed. Traditional forms



of learning are becoming obsolete and no longer needed in most contexts and spaces, as online and virtual learning takes over. As a social activity, learning – in particular distance e-learning – should be designed to promote participation and enable students to partake in all subjects and activities to promote cooperative learning.

Within the inclusivity discourse, particularly, in relation to including learners with disabilities in mainstream schooling, the concept of inclusivity has changed with technological developments. In this regard, inclusive education is considered a socially constructed concept that can be amended in the face of technological changes in contemporary society. The integration of e-learning and e-teaching, as supported by Web 2.0 technologies and assistive devices, has been useful in teaching learners with disabilities. Hence, the development of technologies has added to the concept and dimensions of distance learning in terms of inclusivity with the new communication and interaction opportunities (Bjekic et al., 2014). Developing technologies have changed inclusivity from meaning “inside the classroom” to meaning virtual connections “outside the classroom” (Bjekic et al., 2014; Branstetter, 2020). Due to rapid advances in assistive technology tools, learners, parents, and teachers have unlimited tools at their disposal which can be leveraged within the distance learning environment to aid learners with disabilities in their academic and personal growth without learning in isolation (Neese, 2015).

To include learners with disabilities in the educational sector is to recognise that inclusive education is a social construction that acknowledges, accommodates and meets the learning needs of all learners, including those with physical, cognitive and neurological impairments. This acknowledgement and accommodation is also cognizant of the changing times and new technologies. Thus, inclusive education means to acknowledge that learners with disabilities have a range of diverse individual learning needs, and that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) could be an important element in the realization of their educational goals (Branstetter, 2020).

However, in order to utilise these tools successfully it is critical to develop a special needs education plan, worldwide and in South Africa, for their usage, since assistive technologies are not commonly used in the special education needs arena. Furthermore, although the advancement of technology in special education is promising, the same increase is needed for the number of special education instructors (Neese, 2015).

## 2.3 Technological Tools in Distance Learning

### 2.3.1 Web-based education

According to Bjekic et al. (2014), educational technologies with their e-learning components can promote the inclusion of students with various disabilities through distance learning because it offers a variety of ways in which students with special educational needs (SEN) can learn. In a traditional setting, learners with disabilities are part of the disadvantaged group with certain SEN subgroups receiving more attention than other subgroups, resulting in the neglect and stagnation of learners with disabilities in traditional settings (Branstetter, 2020). Therefore, distance learning can offer positive behavioural, academic and social outcomes that will guide learners with disabilities to their eventual and full integration into mainstream society, especially considering that in contemporary times, with its technological advancements, most individuals interact and communicate in a virtual world.

While technical support may be expanded through the medium of distance learning, current integration of the support with learning procedures and adaptation to the educational needs of learners with disabilities are not directed to all subgroups. One of the reasons is a lack of teamwork in creating e-learning technology-supported processes and feeding for learners with disabilities. However, e-learning technology can promote the inclusion of learners with various disabilities (Branstetter, 2020).

### 2.3.2 E-learning environment and Web 2.0 technologies

Gugulielman (2010) emphasises the necessity to develop an e-learning environment for learners with disabilities, including e-inclusion, e-learning models, and participatory design and learning theories. The major benefits of developing e-learning courses for learners with disabilities are peer support through computer mediated communication tools and possibilities for peer-to-peer collaboration and to avoid social isolation. Social isolation tends to be experienced more by learners with disabilities in the traditional educational setting since they are treated as disadvantaged due to the misunderstanding of their varying conditions. Thus, web-based education allows learners with disabilities to be proactive and self-reliant especially considering that most young children are digital natives compared to former learners with disability graduates, viz., digital immigrants, who had to contend with an isolating system of traditional learning.

Further, the benefits of distance learning include controllability of learning and flexibility in time and space. Distance learning can enable learners with disabilities to pace their learning through multimodal communications that are suitable for their specific disabilities. Additionally, it will enable them to learn from home and arrange their physical environment, hardware devices and software systems to their preferences. Likewise, distance learning would facilitate easier and efficient student and teacher communications. Therefore, Web 2.0 technology tools can be used to create learning environments which open up spaces to develop creativity and collaboration and it would be appealing to learners with disabilities experiencing problems in traditional learning/teaching environments (Bjekic et al., 2014).

### ***2.3.3 Assistive technologies: Hardware devices and software packages***

Assistive technologies include any hardware or software device that is used to improve or maintain capabilities of learners or persons with disabilities that will enable them to integrate and be on par with the rest of society (Bjekic et al., 2014). Assistive technologies alleviate the burdens associated with living with a disability and aid learners in executing tasks that are challenging and borderline difficult. These technologies simultaneously aid in their scholastic and professional pursuits and help them with social inclusion (Bjekic et al., 2014). The mainframe computer is only one component of the many assistive devices available on the market to aid in learning besides the Web 2.0 tools, that enables users to not only receive information from the internet but also allows them to interact with others, thereby increasing social inclusion.

Web 2.0 tools include web applications such as Google docs, hosted services (Google Maps), video sharing sites (YouTube), podcasting (Podcast Alley), blogging (WordPress), social networking (Facebook and Instagram) and microblogging (Twitter) (Branstetter, 2020). Aside from the assistive technologies, Web 2.0 tools facilitate authentic interactions with the content of learning and with other students in their classroom and on global platforms, thereby creating a much wider audience and diminishing the sense of social exclusion. Furthermore, these tools enable learners with disabilities the opportunity to solve real-life problems and to create meaningful online collaborations with others. It also affords them the freedom to customise their responses according to their own interpretations and conceptual understandings, as opposed to the one-sense learning in traditional classrooms, and these online interactions improve learning opportunities (Gulley and Thomas, 2018).

While Web 2.0 tools are available for all users of the internet and/or online platforms, assistive devices are the extension of Web 2.0 tools that are specifically designed to facilitate learning for students with disabilities. Assistive technologies also include but are not limited to text-to-speech (TTS) software, graphic organisers, facilities management systems (FMS), and Sip-and-Puff (SNP) systems. Text-to-speech software, such as Kurzweil 3000, are designed to assist learners suffering from dyslexia, visual impairment or an intellectual disability, experiencing difficulties with reading standard print. Some of the features of Kurzweil 3000 include talking spell-checker, text magnification, and tools for taking tests, including essay writing.

Graphic organisers, such as Draft:Builder, a software programme that is effective in helping learners with disabilities to organise their thoughts and is a good choice for learners suffering from dysgraphia or disorders of written expressions by helping them map out a course of action. An FM system is a sensory-neural system that helps students with sensorineural hearing loss in which the inner ear (cochlea) or nerve pathways in the inner ear are damaged. Sip-and-puff systems are used by learners with mobility challenges, suffering from paraplegia and impaired motor skills, through the use of a mobile device or other technological application that enables the learner to manoeuvre the device with their mouth, for example Jouse 3. Assistive technologies are available to assist learners with disabilities in learning remotely, without social exclusion, and are supported by Windows, Macintosh, Linux and Unix-based computers, in addition to Android and iOS mobile devices. Furthermore, these learning electronic devices and software are available in various languages and can be customised specifically as per learner needs (Neese, 2015).

#### ***2.3.4 Digitisation of education in South Africa***

Teaching spaces were becoming digitised even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) trained 44,000 teachers in computer skills and, in partnership with the University of South Africa (UNISA), utilised 20 ICT laboratories nationwide to upskill teachers in digital skills. While most private schools in South Africa have been digitised, digital initiatives, such as coding, were being piloted at several public schools, to help prepare learners with the inevitable disruptions to learning. The DBE is focusing on four key areas to promote a quality digital education for South African scholars, in keeping with global best practices.

The four key areas are: (a) implementing a curriculum with skills and competencies for a changing world in all public schools; (b) completing an Integrated Infrastructure Development Plan, informed by infrastructure delivery, regular maintenance and resourcing; (c) continuing to improve and strengthen education provisions of learners with special education needs and equipping all students with the skills they need to survive and thrive in the fourth industrial revolution; and (d) providing end-to-end ICT solutions for schools by developing and distributing digital content for online and offline learning.

In June 2021, it was announced that R206 million had been set aside by the provincial government to provide matric learners in Mpumalanga with tablets to help improve their learning experiences. While progress has been made, not all learners of South Africa will be able to fully participate in the digital revolution as global citizens if the cost of data, reliability, availability of internet connections and mobile networks in South Africa are not fully addressed. The digital infrastructure is vital in ensuring a successful transition to distance learning and the prioritisation of digital literacy and digital skills to enable learners to participate in the workplace of the future. Unstable internet access and a lack of electricity, in both rural and urban areas, still act as a barrier for learners in both traditional education systems and in online learning environments. If the education system does not adapt to the changing world, it finds itself in, South Africa risks having a large youth population that is unemployed, and largely unemployable (*Mail & Guardian*, 2021a).

#### **2.4 Parental Involvement in Education and Distance Learning**

The educational attainment of children is largely influenced by their household dynamics and the educational status of their parents (Hofmeyr, 2018). Although there is no unilateral method to achieving an education, there are variables that can impact the educational outcomes of children. Household dynamics include family composition, size, the occupation and material resources of parents, their investment and commitment towards child-rearing and their child-rearing styles. With the patterns of poverty and inequality that are still felt across South Africa, there is no uniformity between household dynamics which brings about the differential educational outcomes per household. The long-lasting adverse effects of apartheid, industrialisation, urbanisation, and work migration have impacted the ways the family unit operates (Sooryamoorthy & Makhoba, 2016) and the cultural capital that is accessible to each child (Hofmeyr, 2018).

In a study conducted by Hofmeyr (2018) on the home background and schooling outcomes in South Africa, differential educational outcomes of children across different strata of society were identified as important factors that perpetuate patterns of poverty and inequality in South Africa. Most of these differences were attributed to inequities across social classes in the quality of education received by children; thus, indicating a strong causation between the home background and educational outcomes of children. In particular, the co-residence of biological parents in the household (i.e., dual-headed households) and the education attained by parents were positively associated with the educational outcomes of their children. However, the study indicated that while there are clear associations between home background and schooling outcomes, the analysis does not extend to establishing whether these associations were causal.

In their study, Chuong and Operario (2012) also noted the importance of family structure in education within the South African context, when they investigated the family dynamics of orphaned children in relation to their education. Using three key objective variables, they assessed educational delays in relation to orphanhood: finding the association between orphanhood and educational delay; finding the relationship between educational delay and family characteristics (i.e. presence of parents); the relations to the head and age of the head of the household; the number of children in the household and demographic factors; and identifying key household characteristics that are linked to educational delay of orphaned children. They found that HIV/AIDs had a grave impact on the educational attainment of orphans who experienced educational delays due to the absence of a mother. The authors observed some educational delay for orphans in terms of their grades versus their ages as they were not reaching the appropriate educational milestones for their respective ages.

The relationship between parental involvement in education and distance learning is an under-researched area, potentially important to our understanding of the inclusion of learners living with disability. Studies have shown that distance learning requires the significant participation of parents in both logistic activities (providing appropriate equipment, printing materials, supervising the schedule of activities, etc.) and direct involvement in the learning process (task preparation and implementation and finding sources, etc. Parents and families of learners living with disability may employ different strategies, including modern technology, to maximise the benefits of distance learning.

Distance learning is developing dynamically due to the availability and expansion of modern technologies and e-learning seems to be easier and more accessible than traditional learning due to its flexibility (Diehl, 2019). However, it requires access to the necessary technologies, the need to develop specific curricula and materials adapted to this form of learning and the motivation and digital competences of parents. In addition, teachers and students are also of key importance (Zawacki-Richter & Anderson, 2013).

At kindergarten and early childhood schooling levels, the implementation of distance learning requires the assistance of parents since children have not yet reached that level of independence. Hence, early childhood requires the direct involvement of parents as companions and guides to participate in a series of distance learning, from online to hybrid to strictly home-schooling( reference this). Parents are expected to be able to guide children to learn from home and replace the role of teachers at school with the aid of e-learning facilities in the form of internet-based digital media, tools, and systems. Therefore, the importance of the role and guidance of parents in achieving distance learning goals is integral to inclusion and other broader learning outcomes.

While the availability of technological devices is important, parental involvement is equally of significance and value to achieving impact in distance learning. The absence of parents in distance learning renders the process ineffective, particularly at early childhood level. Some studies report that the level of parental education affects the continuity of children's education. In this regard, the mind-set, mental models, socialisation and educational orientation given to their children are mostly influenced by the level of education of the parents. The higher the education level of parents, the more open parents think about education and how to educate their children (Sari & Maningtyas, 2020); hence, the integral role of parents' involvement in education, irrespective of the method of education.

A meta-analytic review of the literature on parental support and in distance learning and inclusion suggests that, overall, parents' involvement in distance learning shows the importance of taking time to accompany children. Having knowledge of e-learning tools to assist children in distance learning and the influence of the role of parents on the application of distance learning particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic is very high (Sari & Maningtyas 2020). These studies conclude that the influence of parents as a motivator to foster children's motivation and interest in learning is the most visible. Thus, the involvement of

parents in distance learning cannot be separated from the level of parental understanding of learning materials.

The understanding of material and broad thoughts that parents have are very useful to help the learning process at home. However, it is important that parents must understand the learning material from schools, so that the implementation of education at home can be successful (Sari & Maningtyas, 2020). As Branstetter (2020) emphasises, nothing drives engagement in distance learning more than a positive relationship with the supervising parent, or teacher, as connection fuels engagement. Social-emotional learning is a lever for academic learning and while there are available technologies, the positive relationship is the connector between technologies and academic learning.

## **2.5 COVID-19 Pandemic and Distance Learning**

The outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in over 1.2 billion children being out of classrooms with the shutdown of all schools across the world (Li, 2020). This increased the need for alternative approaches to learning, compelling parents to work remotely while making them available for distance learning (Knopik, Błaszczak, Maksymiuk & Oszwa, 2021). With this sudden shift away from the traditional classroom, there have been questions as to whether the adoption of distance learning will continue to persist post-pandemic, and how such a shift would impact the worldwide education market (Li, 2020).

While blended learning has existed globally, the preference has been traditional face-to-face learning in the South African context. In particular, with the historic gaps in education and language, the traditional, face-to-face learning has proven beneficial to individuals from previously marginalised communities. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the increasing need for a transition to distance learning for schools in South Africa and globally (*Mail & Guardian*, 2021b). This has provided an alternative avenue for learners with disabilities to be included in mainstream educational processes.

While most social networking websites and other Web 2.0 tools, including WhatsApp and Facebook are being used by the general South African population, it is not officially incorporated into the educational curriculum of public schools (Mpungose, 2020). However, since education has dramatically changed with the distinctive rise of e-learning, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, learning has become remote and digitised (Li, 2020). This has



revolutionised the way education will be provided in the near future (Mpungose, 2020). It is difficult, however, to benchmark South Africa globally with regard to education. The relationship between the education of learners with disabilities in South Africa and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is one of polarisation. As with all other sectors and marginalised populations, education for learners with disability has continuously been defined by structural discrimination and exclusion, , given its history of apartheid and discrimination.

While the world has continued to prepare for a 4IR classroom in 2030, South Africa is trying to equalise systems in the aftermath of the apartheid era. The struggle for educational equality continues as the numbers of under-resourced rural schools have not decreased almost three decades into democracy and the current challenge to improve the educational curriculum continues to beg the question: Is the future of education in South Africa still digital, and to what extent? (Mansingh et al., 2020). The exclusion of learners with disability from mainstream schools due to bodily or sensory impairments, coupled with the historical trajectories and dictates of the political economy of South Africa, are important aspects of the context in which parents across South Africa are enabled or constrained in the quest to support their wards or get them included in mainstream schools.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a literary review of research studies and articles on distance learning, the availability of technological tools, the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing need for a change in learning. It discussed the importance of household dynamics, the maternal presence and impact on the child or children's educational outcomes. The following chapter presents the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – CRITICAL THEORY

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning this study, namely the Critical Theory. It discusses the origin, emergence, and understanding of this theory. Furthermore, the chapter strives to explain the relevance of critical theory in the consideration of distance learning particularly for learners with disabilities.

### 3.2 Origin of Critical Theory

Left-wing and Right-wing theorists have attacked the abstract vocabulary of Critical Theory and its marginal status within sociology but the abstractions within Critical Theory are deliberate since its discourses are shaped by intellectual traditions that are foreign to conventional sociology (Crossman, 2019). Critical Theory is unlike other theories in that it is not uniform and dependent on philosophical concepts. Many theorists point towards its heterogeneity and lack of set core techniques which reveal a wide range of methods, theories and substantive analyses (Dell'Angelo, Seaton & Smith, 2014). Critical Theory is not immune to a summary and requires effort to familiarise with even basic information. It is not a fixed body of conceptual knowledge but should be understood in connection to changing historical contexts, from the period of Marxism and its criticisms (Tyson, 2006).

In the works of Karl Marx, against a backdrop of changing socio-political circumstances and the failed predictions of Marx, a distinction was made by critics between two sections of Marxism: scientific Marxism and critical Marxism. These two sections were called “the two Marxisms” to differentiate between science and humanism. Scientific Marxism constitutes a fundamental rejection of his earlier Hegelian idealism, as shown in *Capital*, towards a materialistic analysis of the modes of production (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014). Critical Marxism claims that Hegelian dialectic and critique of alienation is a persistent thread, as shown in Marx's early writings, especially “*The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*” and commodity fetishism is evidence of this thematic coherence. Scientific Marxism and critical Marxism both express a commitment to socialist political transformation, but each section approaches transformation differently.

Scientific Marxism emphasises the need for party organisation to guide a proletarian revolution unfolding from a social formation's materialistic law of motion. Contrarily, critical Marxism abandons the notion of bureaucratic party organisation and historical inevitability for emancipatory consciousness, mass action and revolutionary spontaneity (Crossman, 2019). The divisive relation between critical Marxism and scientific Marxism should be understood against the historical background (Tyson, 2006). During the twentieth century, scientific Marxists – the likes of Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky – argued that the interface between market and corporate capitalism will collapse and result in the demise of capitalism and the rise of socialism due to the rapid shift in property relations.

However, during World War I, their hopes were diminished, and doubts were further intensified by the survival of capitalism, the failure of workers' councils and the Bolshevisation of the international communist movement (Thompson, 2017). Hence, by 1923, the guarantees of a scientific socialism were destroyed by the lack of a hoped-for revolution and subsequently, this reformulated a revolutionary theory in the works of critical Marxism (later known as Critical Theory) – the theoretical and foundational works of Karl Korsch, George Lukacs and Antonio Gramsci who challenged the scientism of scientific or orthodox Marxism. These theorists retained the goal of social transformation but took into consideration the active agency of the subject within a voluntaristic framework by stressing collectivist subjectivity and cultural factors (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014).

### **3.3 Understanding Critical Theory**

Critical Theory was adopted as a code word for Marxism during the American exiled Frankfurt School of Thought (Crossman, 2019) and the goal of this theory was to refashion the tenets of Marxism, while still being rooted in it, to be able to take into consideration the historical changes that transpired since the period of Marxism. At the point of conception, the theory did not have a clear set of main characteristics but was expanded by various theorists, from Horkheimer to Habermas, in accordance with the different historical contexts and experiences of their time (Antonio, 1983). Similar to Marxism, Critical Theory is critical of the system that causes power imbalances and oppression; but while Marxism was focused on the economic imbalances, Critical Theory is an all-encompassing theory.

Critical Theory focuses on reflective assessment and critique of society in order to reveal, challenge and transform power structures (Crossman, 2019). Critical Theory is a social theory and multidisciplinary approach drawn from various perspectives including politics, philosophy, sociology, history, and anthropology and thus, overcomes the fragmentation prevalent among established academic disciplines to address issues of broader interest (Kellner, 2008). To understand the purpose of Critical Theory is to understand the definition of *critique*. Critique is a distinctive structural analysis rooted in Marxist tradition that is opposed to empirical and positivistic models of knowledge (Thompson, 2017). Critique is not similar to “be critical of” which often wrongfully leads to the categorisation of theories such as feminist theories, post-structural theories and deconstruction theories are “critical theories” (Tyson, 2006). To critique means to strive to understand, without judgement or resistance, the workings of the world in the way a subject relates to an object, because critique seeks to rationalise and perceive the deeper workings of everyday life (Thompson, 2017).

The centrality of Critical Theory is its ability to see the inherent relation between thought and action and in this process of critical or rational thinking, the emancipatory transformation of perception, thought and subsequent action will occur (Dell’Angelo et al., 2014). Critical Theory is the process of understanding the world, its defects and potentialities from within, and seeks to unravel the contradictions that already exist within it by making evident this emancipatory insight within the social fabric that we exist rather than imposing priori values and ideals onto the social world (Antonio, 1983). Hence, a Critical Theory of society is aimed with the task of uncovering the social conditions under which knowledge about itself is articulated, since the way a subject comprehends the object or objective world is related to the ways the subject visualises its own self (Thompson, 2017).

### **3.4 Emergence of Critical Theory**

Marx’s theory of social change predicted the mechanistic reaction of society that would see the overthrow of capitalism and the emergence of communism through class struggle. According to Marx’s prediction, the emergence of class consciousness and the evolution of class society was an automatic process which would naturally stir a revolution through class conflict and create a classless society, but the reality was that later socialist movements saw the failure of communism. The failure of socialist movements created a dilemma in the World of Theory and raised questions as to the validity and accuracy of Marx’s theory of social change (Kellner,

2008). As a result of the political failure of socialist movements, the need to reformulate orthodox Marxism emerged through the works of four prominent theorists: Karl Korsch, George Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci and Wilhelm Reich, who sought to provide a more nuanced theory of society and human action and provide a theory based on the practical-political aspect of working-class movements (Thompson, 2017). According to these theorists, class consciousness and uprising was not an automatic process of individual agency but required a critical, reflective thought process by the working class about their role within the social fabric of society and the recognition of the political power they possess to maintain or overthrow the very system that oppresses them. The respective theorists expanded on the blockage within the mindset of the working-class people – the inability to critique and recognise and position themselves as objects in relation to the subject (Dell’Angelo et al., 2014).

In his book *Marxism and Philosophy*, Korsch opposed the determinism of orthodox Marxism and stated that an essential subjective moment is required by the object, viz. the working class, to activate radical political activity to bring about a truly effective political movement and subsequent social change (Kellner, 2008). This subjective moment is the remaking of the social-psychological conditions of the working class in which they critique and fully comprehend the system of which they are a part and to “include from the point of view of the *object* an empirical investigation ... of all its relations and development, and from the point of view of the *subject*, an account of how the impotent wishes, intuitions and demands of individual subjects develop into an historically effective class power leading to ‘revolutionary practice’ *Praxis*” (Thompson, 2017: 5).

According to Lukacs, in his book on *History and Class Consciousness*, a critical engagement with the social world and a morally correct perception of the historic-philosophical situation was determined by the capacity of the working-class people to be able to dialectically grasp the essential structure of the world, as praxiologically and relationally constructed, and that the lack of radical critique and revolutionary activity was due to the blockage of the rational comprehension by the working class due to the concept of reification (Dell’Angelo et al., 2014). Reification is a pathology of consciousness which commodified humans as objects and perceived them as controllable, lifeless instruments which led to the dehumanised reality of the mass production of goods and services and a dissection between the lived capitalistic reality and an ideal moral consciousness among the working class.

Lukacs reasoned that the working-class level of moral consciousness was stunted to the critical assessment of their lived capitalistic reality and because of this, the ability to emancipatory practices was stalled (Thompson, 2017). Gramsci's contributions were also concerned with the question as to why the working-class population was not resisting the exploitation of the capitalist system (Thompson, 2017: 4). His analysis led him to confront the culture in which dominant ideas were interwoven in the social fabric of family life, the education system and the larger civil society. The outcome of his work resulted in the formulation of the *Theory of Hegemony* – the theory in which the ideas of those with power and authority, viz. the bourgeoisie, become the dominating forces that shaped and influenced the institutions of society and everyday life (Crossman, 2019).

According to Gramsci, the dominant powers of any class-based society would naturalise a set of cultural norms and values against which the rest of society had to abide by and in this process of dictation, would deaden and inhibit the critical consciousness and radical activity of the working-class people (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014). Hence, culture became an important element of critique in Gramsci's work since it was in this element that power and domination became woven into the consciousness of the everyday lives of people (Tyson, 2006). William Reich critiqued the materialism of Marxism stating that it did not take into consideration the personality structure of the masses. Reich posed the question, "why the majority of those who are hungry *don't* steal and why the majority of those who are exploited *don't* strike?" (Reich, 1970: 19).

Reich stated that personality structure plays a pivotal role in how ideology is processed and how the relation of individuals to the world was structured. Hence, he rejected the notion that the economic factors of social life spurred an uprising or the appeal of fascism. Thus, Reich focused on unifying the theoretical efforts of Freud and Marx to understand the nature of domination in modern society. He concluded that in order to understand domination in society requires looking at the ways in which primitive drives are repressed through the various institutions of society, from the workplace to the household. Reich stated that various institutions often possess authoritarian structures that inhibit the will to freedom and instead instil a "fear of freedom". Hence, the working class's embrace of fascism in Europe came as no surprise to Reich (Thompson, 2017).

The critique of the materialism of Marx's theory of social change through the works of Korsch, Lukacs, Gramsci and Reich led to the incorporation of the subjective factors and experiences of the working-class people (Tyson, 2006). The study of social change within the consciousness of such agents of transformation, by these four thinkers, rather than the automatic reaction of positivistic laws external to such agents as posited by Marx, established the basis of Critical Theory. Korsch, Lukacs, Gramsci and Reich's emphasis on the psychological and subjective elements of the individual, the focus on the culture and institutions that shape consciousness and the insistence that a new form of consciousness is required to break away from the shackles of everyday life, were crucial building blocks to what would later become known as Critical Theory (Thompson, 2017).

### **3.5 Theories of the Frankfurt School**

In 1924, the Frankfurt School at the *Institut für Sozialforschung* was established as a centre for Marxist research under the leadership of Carl Grünberg, with research being characterised by orthodox, scientific Marxism (Antonio, 1983). However, when Max Horkheimer was appointed the leading figure at the *Institute of Social Research* at the Frankfurt School in Germany, critical Marxism became the forerunner with the above questions raised by Korsch, Lukacs, Gramsci and Reich. Their respective research were becoming the foundation for a new form of social inquiry into structures and the dynamics of modern society, which would later be termed Critical Theory. For Horkheimer, Critical Theory was the juxtaposition of traditional Marxian theory in that the latter was concerned with descriptive analysis of the problem while Critical Theory was concerned with the normative evaluation of society and the cause of the problem under investigation (Thompson, 2017).

With the philosophical underpinnings of Critical Theory, Horkheimer was able to establish the new critical framework for social research and examine social problems with explanatory methods and the practical-transformative activity required for its resolution (Tyson, 2006). Furthermore, many theorists, including Adorno and Marcuse, began reworking the basic concepts of the social sciences and sought out new fundamental questions about the structure of late industrial societies, personality structure of the members of mass society, popular culture and the nature of modern social power. For the Frankfurt School of Thought, critical philosophy, psychoanalysis and social theory became the synthesis to analyse the totality of modernity (Thompson, 2017).

Critical theorists, including Adorno and Marcuse, identified Marx's critique of the political economy and used this critique as the basis or structural and material foundations of modernity and further understood Marx's critique of capital, exploitation, commodity fetishism and alienation and the predominance of exchange value over use value as critical tools to understand the dehumanisation of culture (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014). However, Marx's insights were blended with the critiques and works of Freud and Weber. Freud's psychoanalytical model of the ego was essential to understand the irrational forces that plagued political and critical consciousness. Weber's concern was the expansion of the rationality of society and the rise in administrative and bureaucratic forms of institutional power, which resulted in the justification of legitimate forms of authority and domination of mass society (Thompson, 2017).

Critical theorists viewed the legitimisation of structural imperatives as essential to a capitalist society, the commoditization of culture and the dehumanisation of life and that capitalism, the structural imperative, was becoming a system of production and a normative force, securing forms of legitimacy and acceptance among the broader public. Legitimation was in effect, the silencing of the masses and the erosion of emancipatory thought processes resulting in the pathologies of ideologies. The pathology of ideology then produced a false sense of knowledge or conception of reality within mass society, as differentiated by German Idealism between understanding (*Verstand*) and rationality (*Vernunft*). *Verstand* represented the superficial, defective level of thinking and insufficient forms of reasoning that could only give the subject an empirical, thin conception of the object while *Vernunft* represented a deeper, comprehensive conceptualisation of the object of knowledge that was able to grasp the totality of the object, its dynamics and its processes. Ideological underpinnings became the primary and essential methodological implications for Critical Theory of society (Thompson, 2017).

According to critical theorists, the shattering of ideological thinking meant overcoming the reificatory aspects of consciousness (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014) brought on by administrative rationality and penetrating commodity forms and exchanging value into all aspects of mass society. In his book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Herbert Marcuse studied the various ways that a new form of consciousness and reasoning was colonising mass society, called one-dimensionality. He coined the term "one-dimensionality" to demonstrate that capitalist production caused the spread of technologized thinking and that through this capitalist production, new and more effective, and "pleasant" forms of social control and social cohesion



were able to be instituted (Thompson, 2017). Thus, the critique of consciousness was to be understood as critical of the social formations that shaped it, viz., consciousness, since the self-understanding of individuals was being affected and distorted by defective social relations and structures (Tyson, 2006).

While social relations and structures may be efficient in terms of mass production and social stability, they caused human pathologies, stunted true expressions of human development and freedom, and were in contradiction with any conception of a genuinely rational society (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014). The key element of critique was therefore to be found in the ways that the normative concepts such as freedom were being collapsed into the very ideological structures of the techno-industrial system. Genuine critique, an authentic grasp of human freedom, was only possible once the narrow forms of self-reflection and self-constitution of technically efficient administrative, capitalist society were conquered (Thompson, 2017). The rise of Stalinism, Nazism and anti-Semitism caused the establishment of a research programme that strove to unearth the dynamics of authority in the personality of the modern man.

In his book *Authority and Family*, Horkheimer ascertained the dynamics of the modern bourgeois family and the ways in which they acted as a mechanism to habituate authority into the developing ego. Furthermore, Eric Fromm's research reflected on the class consciousness of the working-class people during the Weimar period and highlighted the dissected thinking between their subjective ideas and objective interests. Instead of retaliating to the oppressive norms of their society, they accepted it as a legitimate form of control due to the lack of a critical stance. In his later works, Fromm demonstrated in his book *Escape from Freedom* how forms of authority, conformity and acquiescence to the status quo were expressions of a weakened ego; an ego weakened by the processes structured by a modern capitalist society and the subsequent proliferation of social relations (Tyson, 2006).

Social forces shaped social relations, the self towards these social relations that the ego moved away from the impulse of freedom and found comfort, attraction and submission towards authority and state control (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014). Through their research study which was documented in *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno and his colleagues' provided insight into the structure and dynamics of authoritarianism. According to Adorno and colleagues, the repressive nature of authoritarian parenting with high levels of intolerance towards disobedience was caused by the emergence of authoritarian values and attitudes. Thus,

individuals were shaped by authority and replicated it through their own children, perpetuating the cycle of authoritarianism.

The basic hypothesis is that the roots of anti-Semitism and other forms of authority were rooted in a dialectical interplay between social and psychological factors was confirmed by Fromm and his colleagues. Thus, the study of personality and authoritarian attitudes and their rootedness in the social conditions of the personality and its development became a central area of Critical Theory (Thompson, 2017). However, the rise of fascism and the rationalisation of a capitalist society was not the only cause of pathologies in modern thinking. According to some members of the Frankfurt School of Thought, modern thinking was irreversibly affected by the reality of the Holocaust, the power spread of administrative rationality and the increasingly destructive impact of technology.

Adorno and Horkheimer reasoned that the pathologies of modern thinking had to be investigated but also that the search for the cultivation of critical rationality had to be ascertained. The collapse of the working-class movements, the social nature of individual pathologies and the subsequent acquiescence into a capitalist society created a dilemma for critical theorists in that many sought to understand how to activate a critical mentality in an age of conformity and reification (Tyson, 2006). In Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* he states that the human subject has to determine that the social reality and modernity represent a negative reality that reconciles it to a rationality that destroys differences and forces identity onto the human subject and that this kind of one-dimensionality – as termed by Marcuse – or conformity, was a negative dialectic that would negate instead of affirm the subject's relation with the prevailing social reality (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014).

However, Adorno regressed back to the subject and the need for the subject to resist the reificatory forms of rationalisation that have permeated modern society. Thus, Critical Theory morphed from the practical-political intent, which left the theoretical framework as inadequate reasoning, to a research programme that was driven by the need to focus on the philosophical defence of the subject against the reification of an administrative, capitalist society. As a result, Critical Theory then focused on the re-conceptualisation of reasoning from a subject-centred paradigm and philosophy of consciousness to an inter-subjective paradigm (Thompson, 2017).

### **3.6 Communicative-Pragmatic Turn**

Jürgen Habermas rejected Adorno and Horkheimer's cynical view on rationality and stated in his book *Knowledge and Human Interest* that the respective theorists merely collapsed reason with instrumental rationality. Habermas then proposed a different path for Critical Theory and proposed that reason had to be reconceptualised from an intersubjective paradigm rather than a paradigm of subject-centred reasoning and philosophy of consciousness, if the critical and emancipatory impulses were to be realised. Habermas indicated that inter-subjective and communicative practices were a framework for a renewal of Critical Theory and sought to save rationality from the grasp of instrumental reason. He summarised the difference between the two by stating that empirical sciences are subjected to transcendental conditions of instrumental actions while hermeneutics sciences proceed on the level of communicative action (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014).

While adhering to rationality, Habermas amended instrumental reasoning to communicative reasoning, thereby opening a new pathway in Critical Theory by positing communication as a new form of social action. Communicative reasoning was then turned into a category of social action in opposition to the Frankfurt School of Thought's view that instrumental rationality was the major cause of modern pathologies. With communicative action, Habermas's theory became complementary to the categories laid out by Weber's and moved away from a Marxian approach to a Kantian-pragmatist model of reason and social action that retained its critical stance. The ideas of Habermas transformed Critical Theory from its roots in the twenty-first century Marxian problems towards the Idealist principles and philosophical concepts of the Enlightenment period. In his defence of reason as a critical and emancipatory force, Habermas was able to defend the Enlightenment project against its detractors and link Critical Theory to concrete political questions, particularly theories pertaining to the legality of the state, and succeeded in putting the Enlightenment project back in line with Critical Theory (Thompson, 2017).

### **3.7 Framework: Critical Theory**

Critical Theory, unlike the existence of other theories, is not characterised by a set of methodological techniques but in spite of this is still considered a coherent approach in its analysis of the social world compared to the rigidity of Marxism and other types of sociology.

The power of Critical Theory lies in its diversity, practicality and emancipatory assessment. However, it is a theory that has been loosely applied by many sociologists brandishing theories as critical without due consideration for the historical development of Critical Theory from its Hegelian-Marxism roots to the research studies of the Frankfurt School of Thought to recent critical theorists (Tyson, 2006). The ability to apply Critical Theory lies in truly understanding the networks of methodological assumptions and a concern for certain substantive problems that are distinctive to Hegelian-Marxism (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014).

Critical Theory is rooted in Hegelian dialectics, modified by Marx's materialist criticism, and is thus based on meta-assumptions. Hegel's pragmatic philosophy contrasts Kantian's static philosophy in that it stresses the immanent principles of contradiction, change and movement (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014). Furthermore, another defining aspect of Critical Theory is that it is located within the critical dialogue of Marxian theory. It differs and rejects orthodox Marxism and official Marxism of state socialist regimes because it believes that emancipatory theory must be re-evaluated in reaction to (a) the absence of an emancipatory proletariat in capitalist nations; and (b) the development of a totalitarian bureaucracy in state socialist societies.

According to Critical Theory, a Marxist theory that ignores these two empirical realities and maintains the guarantee of a Western proletarian revolution and an Eastern democratic socialism constitutes a new metaphysics in materialist garb (Tyson, 2006). The essence of Critical Theory is to use Marxian theory and make it responsive to current social issues and social development. This entails the elaboration of social and material conditions that block the development of a democratic and emancipatory society and also necessitates the analysis of other theories, ideologies and culture that contributes to the shaping of such an emancipated society. Hence, the critical analysis by critical theorists of Marxism is an epistemological and cultural critique (Thompson, 2017).

While Critical Theory has been successful in unearthing the weaknesses of Marxism, it in itself needs to be strengthened by complementary enquiries that focus on the empirical conditions of social and material life (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014). The formulation of theoretical problems by Critical Theory reflects its central, emancipatory value orientation and its substantive focus on possible forms of social organisation and possible types of social relations. While the purpose of sociology as a discipline is to provide theoretical explanations and empirical descriptions of social life, Critical Theory is characterised by elaborative descriptions of possible

emancipation. Furthermore, while Critical Theory is based on a common value orientation, sociology is characterised by a plurality of value orientations.

However, Critical Theory cannot be distinguished from sociology in spite of emancipation serving as its evaluative compass because of the sociological basis of value bias and value freedoms (Tyson, 2006). As Weber explained, all social research is rooted in and guided by value orientations. The correct application of Critical Theory requires a phase of analysis, aiming at empirical understanding, similar to that of sociology but the difference between these two approaches is on the level of value orientations that define research problems (Thompson, 2017). Sociology provides the researchers with a choice characterising the study with a conflation of underlying value orientations to the degree that some sociologists treat the research problem neutrally without due consideration of the value orientations of their research study. Consequently, this could result in research being conducted in an uncritical manner. However, with Critical Theory this is to err as it is imperative that research be driven by a conscious commitment to emancipation – a value orientation that determines the scope of research and the identification of a common set of problems.

Domination has pervaded capitalistic society and has created a grave dissonance and need for emancipation. Thus, the substantive limits set by the common value orientation are broad and permit a variety of empirical foci, theoretical concepts and analytical techniques (Crossman, 2019). Critical Theory does not reject Marxist theory but is different from scientific Marxism since the latter does not admit a crisis within Marxism which reflects their bourgeois thinking without consideration of the proletariat. Instead of focusing on issues relating to the integration of the proletariat, state socialist domination and other problems relating to the missing transition to democratic socialism (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014).

Consequently, the application of scientific Marxism results in a crudely materialistic version of Marxism and in a socialist state, Marxism is treated as a pure theory that transforms and serves the administrative structure in which criticisms of the political bureaucracy are stunted. Although the impact of Critical Theory has been primarily theoretical, the approach includes a rich research tradition that involves research subjects in the study to enable a free public sphere of discussion and debate that intensifies a community's consciousness of its problems and galvanise them into a state of self-mobilisation to find possible solutions to the problems.

Hence, Critical Theory is not simply the production of information but a theoretical and participatory catalyst for change.

### **3.8 Critical Theory in Education and Disability Studies**

Critical Theory in education recognises that the education system is a powerful mechanism and is complicit in the oppression of learners and the entrenchment of social inequality through the varying provision of its services to different sectors of society. In addition, it recognises that there needs to be a corresponding plan to emancipate the oppressed, ignored, marginalised or side-lined through education. Furthermore, the mechanism for oppression and opportunity co-exists within the spectrum of education. Thus, within the context of education, Critical Theory explores the dialectic between (a) consciousness and self-reflection; and (b) the external social reality. The implication is that within this context, Critical Theory rejects the ideal notion that a singular solution exists to fix oppression or marginalisation within the education system. Specifically, when applied to education, Critical Theory provides alternative solutions to problems pertaining to a particular social structure or socio-historical context of certain sectors of individuals within the education system (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Critical Theory in education is about questioning the education system to ascertain how it can best offer access to education to all people. In addition, it also offers opportunities and understanding of the different perspectives of disadvantaged members of society. Critical Theory in education recognises that learners enter the education system with differing advantages and disadvantages and focuses on how to help every learner to achieve their potential (Boyd, 2014). Through a critical assessment and literary review of the current provision of inclusive education in South Africa, it was ascertained that the marginalisation of learners with disabilities were worsened by barriers such as limited access to resources, inaccessible transport, lack of access to early childhood development and early intervention, discriminatory attitudes, inaccessibility of curriculum, lack of support staff in ordinary schools, limited spaces in institutions for providing high levels of support and limited access to assistive devices for special needs children (Engelbrecht et al., 2016).

Through its regard of the dominant, the capitalist society of South Africa has produced educational discourses within the education system that have neglected and continue to neglect the needs of learners with disabilities despite its pursuits in the inclusive education spectrum. While efforts have been made with the increased implementation of special schools and

integration of certain learners with disabilities into mainstream schools, the needs of learners with disabilities are not prioritised in the same manner in which the needs of learners without disabilities are. This is evident in that student teachers are generally not trained to deal with learners with disabilities to courses offered in schools that do not teach learners on the importance of inclusivity. The general discriminatory attitude of disabilities tends to view disability as a medical or personal issue as opposed to a systemic issue of integration. With the common opposition to and rhetoric of disabilities, this attitude has often shaped and perpetuated dominant educational discourses.

Thus, while learners with disabilities are constitutionally perceived as having the same rights as learners without disabilities, the practical implementation of inclusive education has left many learners with disabilities even further marginalised (Engelbrecht, 2006). Due to the emphasis by Critical Theory on the relationship between power and culture and the marginalising discourses of mainstream schools within South Africa, a critical assessment may mobilise the development of an educational framework that may be considered separatist but will be effective in the provision of educational services to learners with disabilities that have little to do with their physical pathologies (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014).

As Giroux (2003: 13, as cited by as cited by Thompson, 2017) stated, interrogating how power works through dominant discourses and social relations, particularly as they affect young people who are marginalised economically, racially, and politically, provides opportunities for progressives to challenge dominant ideologies and regressive social policies that undermine the opportunities for connecting the struggles over education to the broader crisis of radical democracy and social and economic justice. The aim of current schooling is to educate learners about the demands of the global economy that necessitates the increased need for effectiveness, value for money and competitiveness of which learners with disabilities are automatically sidelined, in comparison to the "ideal students" who are regarded as "human resources" in alignment with the universal expectations.

Thus, the expectations of the "ideal students", viz., learners without disabilities, engender the "non-ideal students", viz., learners with disabilities, in dominant discourses of which the non-ideal students have been subordinated to a deficient position within the system. According to Francis (2006: 197, as cited by Thompson, 2017), "a critical analysis and deconstruction in order to make visible the discursive 'sharp blades' of delineation and pathologization (and

to) identify and illuminate the ways in which neo-liberal (education) policy demonises vulnerable groups”.

In this regard, the current schooling system simply reproduces social hierarchies and legitimises existing power relations that are attuned to the needs of the corporate world and in accordance with corporate modes of production. The essence of capitalism and modes of production is evident in educational institutions. It is similar to the production of goods in which a manufacturing company would distribute the ideal goods to a sales company and discard the deficit goods or sell them at a lower or marginal cost. Such a construction of the learner is hugely problematic for learners with disabilities who require the support of others (Boyd, 2014). Due to the capitalistic thinking in the production of students for the workforce, inclusion is part of neoliberal concerns over effectiveness, productivity, and entrepreneurial capacity. Thus, inclusivity is not about accommodating that which is different but to mould the misfit into a learning process that is a standardised measure of excellence for all.

While inclusive education may enable schools to redistribute and focus resources on learners with disabilities, the essence that guides inclusivity is capitalistic in nature with the issue of adjusting to, versus accommodating the needs of the educationally disadvantaged. Through the critical assessment of inclusivity and inclusive education, it is crucial to research new possibilities of mobilising cultural and symbolic changes in the provision of education in such a manner that truly accommodates the needs of the disadvantaged, as opposed to merely adjusting a system that by its nature is concerned with reproduction and maintaining the status quo (Crossman, 2019). Critical forms of thinking and acting with regard to the disadvantaged individuals can facilitate transformative change both at the ideological and institutional level (Dell’Angelo et al., 2014).

As stated above, the purpose of Critical Theory in education is to recognise that the education system can be both an emancipator and an oppressor based on the varying degree of services to different sectors of society but in the case of providing inclusive education to learners with disabilities in South Africa, the provision of services has been dismal to exclusionary. Thus, this means that there is a need to examine the nature, quality, affordability, and other related logistics of education provided for learners with disabilities who are unable to attend mainstream schools, yet are enrolled in distance learning, which is partly or fully regulated by the education system. The critical perspective argument forms the basis of this study by



exploring the effectiveness of distance learning as an alternative plan to emancipate the oppressed, viz., learners with disabilities, and provide them with an education and an overall increased educational outcome through distance learning (Engelbrecht, 2006).

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the theoretical framework that underpins the study. It discussed the historical development of critical theory and from a critical perspective, has shown that distance learning should be considered as an alternative method to the mainstream as the mainstream method of learning that does not necessarily work for all learners. The following chapter presents an exposition of the research methodology that guided this study.



## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights and explains the research methodology of the dissertation, focusing on the processes by which data was collected to answer research questions, and how data was analysed and presented. In more detail, it outlines and discusses the research strategy, research design, research approach, methods of data collection, sampling unit, selection of the sample, the research process, the type of data analysis, the ethical considerations and the research limitations of the project.

### 4.2 Research Design

The main aim of this thesis is to answer two key questions: “to what degree and extent can distance learning be an alternative and practical solution?” and “in what ways do affordability, logistics, accessibility, availability and acceptability determine the effectiveness of distance learning?” In order to explore these, it became necessary to understudy a social group involved in distance learning and general decision making for learners living with or without disabilities. Parents who are involved in home-schooling and other forms of distance learning were identified for this study as they were best placed to obtain relevant data for the research questions. Previous studies have documented the correlation between parent involvement, familiarity with learning tools, socio-economic status and learner’s learning outcomes. As the aim here was to explore the experiences of parents remotely teaching or supervising the learning experiences of their children, who are living with or without disabilities, it became important to utilise an exploratory research design.

Exploratory research design is a qualitative method of data collection involving discussions between the researcher and the research participant being studied. While the researcher may guide the discussion around a specific problem or research topic, the questions are generally casual and the data generated is textual times, revolving around specific themes. Hence, the method of analysis is not statistical or mathematical. The purpose of exploratory research is to function as a source for developing ideas which can be expanded on by further research. When the researcher has a minimal level of understanding or experience of a research issue, exploratory research is a good preliminary step. It helps to ensure future research studies on the research topic will be thorough and definitive and will not start with insufficient knowledge

of the nature of the problem. Hence, exploratory research designs offer qualitative data and provide a better idea of a concept or crystallise a problem without offering a precise measurement or quantification of the problem under study (Grochowski, 2013).

In order to satisfy the objectives of the dissertation, the study adopted a qualitative research approach. The main characteristic of qualitative research is that it is mostly appropriate for small samples, while its outcomes are not measurable and quantifiable. Its basic advantage, which also constitutes its basic difference with quantitative research, is that it offers a complete description and analysis of a research subject, without limiting the scope of the research and the nature of participants' responses (Collis & Hussey, 2003). However, the effectiveness of qualitative research is heavily based on the skills and abilities of researchers, while the outcomes may not be perceived as reliable, because they mostly come from researchers' personal judgements and interpretations. Because it is more appropriate for small samples, it is also risky for the results of qualitative research to be perceived as reflecting the opinions of a wider population (Bell, 2005).

As with any research, the qualitative approach has its own strengths and shortcomings. While a qualitative approach enables one to gather and analyze in-depth data that are varied and grounded in reality, a major limitation is the subjective nature of the data. In addition, findings from qualitative data are often subject to differing interpretations, a process that could result in oversimplification or taking information out of context.

#### **4.3 Research Method – Narrative Inquiry Approach**

The narrative inquiry approach is a relational form of inquiry that is sensitive to subtle textures of thoughts and feelings in an account of a lived experience and enables participants to bring forth the events of most significance in the stories they share. Narrative inquiry focuses on individual experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional contexts of those individual experiences and how these individual experiences are shaped, expressed and enacted through these contextual factors. The researcher chose narrative inquiry to provide the flexibility for participants to share stories about their experiences with distance learning without undue influences from the researcher (Creswell, 2007).

#### **4.4 Research Approach and Rationale**

The research approach followed for the purposes of this research was the inductive one. According to this approach, researchers begin with specific observations, which are used to produce generalised theories and conclusions drawn from the research. The reason for occupying the inductive approach was that it considers the context where research effort is active, while it is also most appropriate for small samples that produce qualitative data. However, the main weakness of the inductive approach is that it produces generalised theories and conclusions based only on a small number of observations; the reliability of research results are therefore under question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

#### **4.5 Site and Population Selection**

The researcher used purposive sampling to develop the sample of the research under discussion. According to this method, which belongs to the category of non-probability sampling techniques, sample members are selected based on their knowledge and relationships with the research subject (Freedman, Pisani & Purves, 2007). In the current study, the sample members who were selected had a special relationship with the phenomenon under investigation, viz. their own children. They also had sufficient and relevant experience with distance learning and active networks with the distance learning fraternity. Other members within the distance learning fraternity were approached to partake in this study but opted not to. Within this context, the participants of this study were parents of children with learning disabilities and others were parents of children without learning disabilities. Thirteen participants participated and of this sample, two parents divulged that one of their children has learning disabilities and one parent alluded to her child having a learning disability, but no official diagnosis had been made.

##### ***4.5.1 Demographic profile of research participants***

All thirteen research participants who participated in the in-depth interviews were based in various provinces of South Africa – from Gauteng, Kwazulu-Natal and Western Cape.

***Research Participant 1*** is based in Gauteng and started home-schooling her child from Term 2 of Grade 2 due her child, a very bright learner, being bullied at school and the COVID-19 pandemic strengthened their decision as parents.

**Research Participant 2** is based in Gauteng and started home-schooling her child from Term 3 of Grade 3 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Research Participant 3** is based in Kwazulu-Natal and started home-schooling all her children (4 in total) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They are in Grades 4, 8, 10 and 11 respectively.

**Research Participant 4** is originally from Cape Town, South Africa but is currently based in Tennessee, United States of America. She home-schooled her child both before and after emigrating. Her child is on the autism spectrum.

**Research Participant 5** is based in the Western Cape and started home-schooling her child in elementary school since her child was not being treated fairly by teachers, with the expectation that her child needed to keep up with their classmates. As a result, her child suffered from school anxiety and was removed from this environment to be home-schooled. Her child is autistic and suffers from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

**Research Participant 6** is based in the Western Cape and started home-schooling her children as a natural progression from interactive play. Hence, none of her children went to mainstream school and they are in Grades 2, 3, 8 and 12 respectively. One of her four children has a learning disability, termed a “slow learner”.

**Research Participant 7** is based in the Western Cape and pursued the online schooling option due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Research Participant 8** was a former remedial teacher who has first-hand experience of the quality of the South African education system. She made a personal choice to home-school her children in 1996. Her first child was born 3 years later, and she home-schooled all 3 of her children from pre-primary school until Grade 12. They are all currently university students, with one having been awarded a scholarship to study in the United Kingdom. She is based in Gauteng, South Africa.

**Research Participant 9** is based in the Western Cape. She was also a former teacher who decided to independently home-school her 2 daughters. She started home-schooling them from the ages of 8 and 9 years respectively as she was not happy with the South African education system. Both of her daughters have completed home-schooling and are now students at the University of the Western Cape.

**Research Participant 10** is based in the remote areas of the Western Cape, the Garden Route. She started home-schooling her son in Grade 3 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Research Participant 11** is based in Gauteng and has been home-schooling her children for the past 5 years now. They are currently aged 14 and 17, respectively and are close to finalizing their secondary education with the American system of schooling.

**Research Participant 12** is based in Gauteng and her second child, a son, started distance learning in his first year of high school. He is of independent age and as a working mother, this option has been working for her and the entire family, who will in the near future be moving to the Western Cape region.

**Research Participant 13** is based in the remote areas of the Western Cape, the West Coast and started home-schooling her daughter who suffers from depression and anxiety as a result of bullying in mainstream school.

#### **4.6 Data Collection Methods and Tools**

For the purposes of this qualitative research, in-depth interviews were used as the primary data collection tool. In-depth interviews are an open-ended, discovery-oriented method to obtain detailed information from participants about a particular topic. The purpose of in-depth interviews is to explore in depth the viewpoint, experiences, feelings, and perspectives of participants in relation to the research topic (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The main advantage of in-depth interviews is that at the core, lies a two-way communication between the researcher and participant that fosters discussions on one or several topics. Through such discussions, the researcher can learn more about the participant's true knowledge and experience on a particular topic (Talimonchuk, 2021). In-depth interviews offer flexibility in terms of the flow of the interview, thereby leaving room for the generation of conclusions that were not initially meant to be derived regarding a research subject. However, there is the risk that the interview may deviate from the pre-specified research aims and objectives (Gill & Johnson, 2002). As far as data collection tools were concerned, conducting the research involved the use of a set of categories and lines of inquiry. The lines of inquiry contained broad categories. The researcher employed an open-ended, unstructured approach, and the main categories were affordability, logistics, availability, accessibility, and acceptability.

**Affordability:** Can parents afford to pay tuition for distance learning?

**Logistics:** Are parents able to make logistical arrangements for their children to write examinations and attend tutor classes or open days?

**Availability:** Are parents available to supervise their children in their distance learning and are distance-learning institutions available to assist parents in the event of any challenges?

**Accessibility:** Are distance-learning institutions able to accommodate parents with special needs, for example, with transport arrangements, courier services, disability-friendly support materials, etc.?

**Acceptability:** Are parents satisfied with the services of distance-learning institutions or curriculum providers?

The reason for choosing and including broad categories in the lines of inquiry was to ensure that all intersecting themes were covered in any order that flowed in a particular interview and for validity.

*(A detailed form of the interview guide is presented in Appendix C).*

#### **4.7 Research Process**

The researcher approached distance-learning institutions during July and August 2021. The research objectives were explained in the request for permission letter but due to the protection of clients' confidential information, in respect of the newly promulgated Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), the researcher's request was declined. The researcher subsequently approached distance-learning networks through contacts and social media and requested them to participate in the research after explaining the nature and the scope of the study. With more than 52,000 potential participants, twenty candidates responded in the affirmative and provided their contact details. The questionnaires were emailed to all twenty participants but only seven candidates made a concerted effort to participate in the in-depth interviews. The remaining candidates refused to proceed further as they stipulated that their children were not learners with disabilities. Of the 7 participants, those whose children did not have disabilities, understood the significance of this study and how their insights and experiences could shed light on and assist in working towards a distant learning system that could work for learners

with disabilities. The in-depth interviews were conducted virtually and telephonically due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meetings and follow-up discussions were conducted during August 2021 and September 2021. After the initial seven interviews were undertaken, the researcher realized that there was insufficient data to meet the research objectives as the sample selected for the study had not reached saturation point nor did it address all the research objectives. To ensure that the research objectives could be met within the timeframe, the sample had to be expanded to 13 participants. Hence, to increase the sample size, the researcher approached social media and personal networks to find more participants for the study, during the period of February 2022 to June 2022. The researcher found six more participants to meet the targeted sample size of 13 participants. To meet the research objectives, 6 more in-depth interviews were conducted over WhatsApp and via email correspondence as the research study still occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and especially considering that participants were geographically dispersed. It was also a cost-effective method to obtain the data with consideration that this is an exploratory study. During all thirteen in-depth interviews that were conducted, participants were free to express their views, even on topics which were not included in the discussed areas, as mentioned in paragraph 4.6.

#### **4.8. Data Analysis**

The researcher used narrative analysis to analyse the data gathered from the in-depth interviews. According to Moore and McCabe (2005), narrative analysis refers to a cluster of various analytic methods of interpreting texts that have a storied form. A common assumption of narrative methods is that people share stories to help organise and make sense of their lives and their storied accounts which serves as being both functional, and purposeful. The advantages of narrative analysis are that it gains in-depth data, participants are willing to share their stories and reveal self-reflection, and it enables the provision of a voice for participants (Creswell, 2007).

There are many forms of narrative data collections from autobiographies, diaries, and other written accounts of a particular experience. However, the most popular form of narrative data collection and analysis are interviews, which can be conducted in face-to-face encounters or through online methods. The interview method was the prime method of data collection in this narrative methodological research in which participants were asked questions along themes of affordability, acceptability, accessibility, logistical support, and availability, that guided their



responses on their experiences of distance learning. The researcher opted for in-depth interviews to encourage deeper insights into the experience of participants with distance learning and to sift through participant responses to ascertain the similarities and differences in their experiences of distance learning. The benefit of doing the interviews online, in written form response, was that it enabled participants to share insights uninterruptedly and freely yet guided by the themes. The benefit of doing it online was that there was no potential interruption or suppression by the researcher on participant responses which would have possibly hindered the responses by participants and lessened the insights acquired by the researcher. This enabled the researcher the space to peruse responses and liaise with participants for clarification in a much deeper and more thoughtful manner (Murray, 2018).

#### **4.9 Ethical Considerations**

There are usually ethical issues regarding acceptable behaviours when embarking on qualitative data collection. These ethics are often dictated by social norms and acceptable moral or societal codes (Zikmund, 2000). With any research endeavour, it is important to ensure that the enquiry is carried out in an ethically sound manner and style. With the research study focusing on a confidential nature, the feedback of parents on the learning experiences of their children, the ethical considerations had to be considered rather intensively to ensure that the parents of these children, viz. The participants were protected and safeguarded. This study was conducted in accordance with the general ethical guidelines as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy of the University of the Western Cape (HS21/4/11). Ethical issues anticipated and planned for this study were concerned with protecting the rights of people who participated in the study. All related matters, such as the right to self-determination, the right to privacy, the right to autonomy and confidentiality, the right to fair treatment and the right to protection from discomfort and harm, were considered and were an integral part of this study (Mouton, 2001).

To ensure that the reputation of the University of the Western Cape was protected and that the research protocol was of academically sufficient standards, the initial research proposal, topic, objectives, and outcomes went through a rigorous process of approvals, adjustments, and revisions. The research proposal went through the approval and considerations of the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) of the University of the Western Cape. After continuous feedback, comments, and recommendations from the committee, the proposal was adjusted and rectified accordingly. A formal letter of ethics

approval (Appendix B) was received in June 2021 from the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) with the granting of ethical clearance and approval to commence the research.

The researcher sourced participants and conducted interviews with participants via email and WhatsApp, due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. In this research study, all participants submitted their written acceptance, via email, regarding their participation in the research, through a signed consent letter. The aim of the letter was to reassure participants that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from it at any point and for any reason. Furthermore, participants were fully informed regarding the objectives of the study, while they were reassured that their answers were treated as confidential and used only for academic purposes and only for the purposes of this research. Participants were not harmed or abused, both physically and psychologically, during the conduct of the research. The researcher attempted to create and maintain a climate of comfort and the interviews were amicable, respectful, and treated with the utmost care. The researcher also did not come across as the expert on distance learning but indicated to participants that as parents involved in distance learning, their insights, inputs, and opinions were integral to the research study and that their voices and contribution would not be manipulated or coerced to fit a certain agenda but that their inputs would be published, in polished form, of their experiences with distance learning.

#### **4.10 Research Limitations**

Preliminary reading had indicated some of the challenges and limitations inherent in qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Some of these challenges vary from interpretation of data to bias from participants and the researcher. While these factors were considered during the course of data collection, there were limitations worth noting. Thus, as with most qualitative studies, this dissertation had a number of limitations. First, the size of the sample was relatively small, necessitating a modification of the methodology and further data collection to achieve saturation, which resulted in a total number of 13 participants. While the minimum required

data size was reached, a bigger sample would probably have enhanced the reliability and generalisability of the research.

Other challenges experienced include difficulty in recruiting parents of learners with disabilities who are doing distance learning, the measurement of the variables given the modification of the methodology. In this regard, modifying the study from quantitative to qualitative research did allow for in-depth analysis of the issues and engagement with participants, it does not allow the measurement of the examined indicators that were outlined. In addition, the analysis of distance learning as a potential solution for learners with disabilities may be influenced by factors which were not considered in this project and in some cases, participants may not have fully disclosed the health conditions of their children.

The most difficult challenge was finding research participants who are parents of learners with disabilities. Of the 52,000 participants who were invited to participate in the study, only thirteen participants showed interest in participating and of the thirteen participants, only two participants who had children with disabilities were South African and one was American. It leaves a lot to be desired in making distance learning an accessible option to learners with disabilities and it also raises the following questions: How many learners with disabilities are actually involved in distance learning in South Africa? What considerable efforts have been made – particularly during this pandemic – by the Government of South Africa to include learners with disabilities in the alternative option of distance learning?

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the research steps that were taken in the entire research process. It discussed the research methodology, the research design and the sample selection process including the challenges experienced within the research process. Furthermore, it provided a short introduction to the research participants and the research ethics that were considered. The following chapter presents the research findings, data analysis and discussion of data collected.



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## CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings, data analysis and discussion of data collected by the researcher. The tabulation of findings presents the pattern of responses by research participants, the demographic profile of research participants and the organisation of responses in accordance with the research themes on affordability, logistics, availability, accessibility, and acceptability.

### 5.2 Quality and Trustworthiness of Data

Trustworthiness of data refers to the interpretation, methods and level of confidence that were applied for the research study to be considered a worthy research endeavour. This research study aimed to ensure that all the research steps were taken in a trustworthy manner so that readers could accept, relate, critique, and follow what the intention and findings of the research were (Polit & Beck, 2014). Gunawan (2015) highlights that a study can only be considered trustworthy if the reader of the research report finds it to be reliable. To ensure a degree of trustworthiness throughout the research endeavour, this study used Shenton's (2004) strategies to uphold a trustworthy research study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. All these research strategies were used within and throughout this research process to establish a degree of trustworthiness.

#### 5.2.1 Credibility

According to Polit and Beck (2014), credibility is the most important aspect of a research study, resembling the confidence in the truth of the research study and its findings. Credibility is the balance between reflexivity and subjectivity, the balance between the meaning of participants and the researcher's interpretation thereof. Within the strategy of credibility, various elements were identified and utilised, which allow readers to see the experiences of the explored study through the participants' interpretations. It was extremely important in this research study to establish a sound balance between the researcher's own interpretations of the findings and the actual lived experiences of participants, as told in their stories. The researcher was able to sufficiently link and understand the findings to incorporate and integrate them with reality (Shenton, 2004).

Various techniques are available to ensure that credibility is prone to be more relevant within a research study: “Techniques used to establish credibility include prolonged engagement with participants, persistent observation if appropriate to the study, peer-debriefing, member-checking, and reflective journaling. Evidence also should be presented of iterative questioning of the data, returning to examine it several times. Negative case analysis or alternate explanations should be explored as well” Connelly (2016: 435). The researcher established a connection with the participants on social media, through distance learning groups, and sourced participants through personal contacts. Discussions with participants and clarification of their narratives were checked by the researcher and verified with participants via email or WhatsApp conversations to ensure that the researcher had interpreted their narratives correctly.

Physical observations were not necessary for the study as this is a narrative analysis of their experience of distance learning and the narratives provided the researcher with adequate insights into the participants’ lived experiences. The researcher scheduled peer-debriefing sessions with her supervisor to enhance the credibility of the research. The researcher also kept a reflective journal to keep track of the work progress throughout the analysis process. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to reflect on learning experiences (personal and professional) and the means to consider and understand the lived experiences of the thirteen participants interviewed.

### **5.2.2 Transferability**

Transferability is the ability to reveal the research study’s findings in such a manner that it can be applied to other contexts. Polit and Beck (2014) observe that transferability is different from other strategies identified to ensure the trustworthiness of data because readers ultimately determine how applicable the findings of the study are, according to their own lived experiences and situations. Transferability refers to how useful the findings of the study might be in the contexts of others. Although it is difficult to establish a set of techniques which might be applicable for ensuring transferability, Connelly (2016) states that qualitative researchers support the study’s transferability with a rich, detailed description of the context, location, and people studied, and by being transparent about analysis and trustworthiness. Researchers need to provide a vivid picture that will inform and resonate with readers. The researcher aimed to get a deeper insight into the social and economic settings of participants to enable readers to determine if distance learning was facilitated by enabling social and economic factors. With

these contexts in mind, the reader can ascertain whether distance learning could be an effective alternative means for other interested households.

### **5.2.3 Dependability**

With any research endeavour, consistency is key. Consistency allows other researchers to use methods of data collection, interpretation, and analysis similar to those used in this specific research study. According to Connelly (2016), dependability is a strategy to ensure the trustworthiness of data that can help the researcher to illuminate deeper meanings of phenomena to ensure the reader can understand the explored topic more thoroughly. Thus, dependability is the stability of findings over time where the findings of the study should be consistent, and the results must be able to be replicated (Polit & Beck, 2014). Shenton (2004) states that all the research study processes should be reported in detail for future studies to be able to repeat the work. Thus, detail should be invested in the research design and its implementation, the operational detail of data gathering, and a reflective appraisal of the project. To ensure that dependability was used as a strategy to enhance the trustworthiness and quality of data in this research study, the researcher addressed these three components, as identified by Shenton (2004), by describing and explaining what was executed and planned regarding the research design and the implementation thereof.

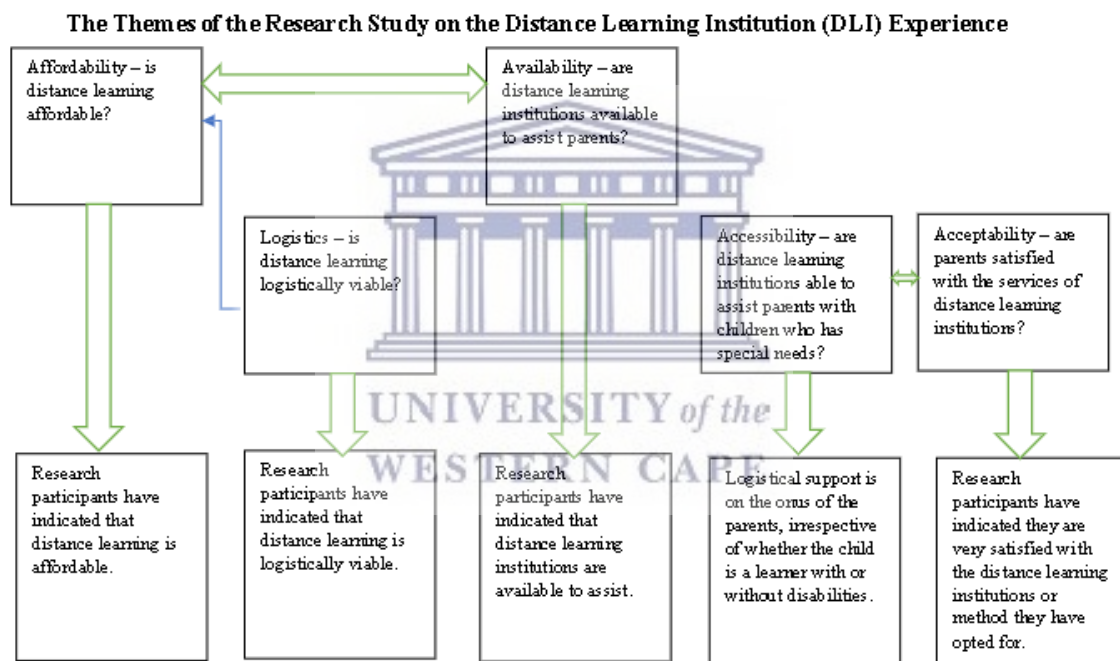
### **5.2.4 Conformability**

The strategy of conformability will naturally occur when the findings of the study are consistent and could be repeated. Shenton (2004) believes that the concept of conformity is the qualitative researcher's comparable concern to objectivity and that steps should be taken to ensure that the study's findings are the result of the participants' experiences and ideas rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. The importance of conformability operates on the basis that all the results in the research study should correlate with the participants' experiences and not the researcher's experiences; the researcher should strive to remain objective throughout the entire process. Thus, conformability refers to how the results can be corroborated by that of other researchers. Hence, the interpretations and data found within the research study should be based on the data and not the subjective understandings of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). According to Connelly (2016: 435), when addressing the strategy of conformability, qualitative researchers should "... keep detailed notes of all their decisions and their analysis as it progresses. In some studies, these notes are reviewed by a colleague; in

other studies, they may be discussed in peer-debriefing sessions with a respected qualitative researcher. These discussions prevent biases from only one person’s perspective on the research.” With this specific research study, the researcher made sure to keep track of all the notes recorded, which was relevant in the analysis process as this facilitated the process of comparing narratives of the participants and to ensure that conformability was used as a strategy to enable the trustworthiness and quality of the research study’s data. Once the study had achieved dependability, credibility, conformability, and transferability, the study was deemed valid.

### 5.3 Thematic Analysis of Narratives

**Figure 1: Map of emerging themes**



Source: Data gathered by researcher

Preliminary findings from the study indicated that the cornerstone of embarking on distance learning are two elements: affordability and availability. Between a set of parents, one is required to work to enable the other to focus on distance learning and being available for the child or children. The decision to embark on distance learning impacts the household dynamics



and the education of the child. Most of the research participants are stay-at-home mothers, which pinpoints that a source of income is available but not necessarily through their pockets, as a sustainable income is required to fund distance learning. It may be argued that the mothers may have savings, inheritance, or investments to sustain themselves, but it does not dispute the fact that a sustainable income is required to fund distance learning, as distance learning is not a government-funded programme in South Africa. Affordability will enable participants to have logistical support.

When analyzing the responses of participants, it can be ascertained that distance learning institutions do not cover the cost of technological devices such as tablets, laptops, cellular phones and other required learning gadgets that are needed to facilitate distance learning. Hence, affordability is closely linked with accessibility and raises questions such as, can the parents afford the additional costs of gadgets that may not necessarily be required in mainstream schools as technology is crucial in facilitating distance learning? Without access to technological devices, there would be no distance learning. Hence, affordability facilitates access to distance learning that financial freedom or financial independence affords, and lacking affordability deprives many learners with or without disabilities the privilege of distance learning .

To be able to have access to the networks provided by the distance-learning institutions and enable them to be available for their children when open days are required, or social gatherings are hosted. It allows parents to provide access for their children to examinations electronically (through the purchasing of data or devices) and physically (through the dropping off of children and waiting for them while they complete their exams, if required). Most parents in distance-learning institutions need to ensure that the children have access to the devices, gadgets, and networks to facilitate their learning. Tuition fees, paid to distance-learning institutions, often exclude these additional costs.

The availability of a parent is crucial to the success of distance learning as it would require the supervision and assistance of a parent to ensure the success of the distance-learning approach to education. Most of the research participants' children are in their formative years, which means that they cannot operate independently. It is only when the child is independent and can navigate the distance-learning environment, that it does not necessitate the presence of a parent. Parental involvement is crucial to the success of distance learning of the child as most often

children have developed a sense of trust with their parents that facilitates learning. It cannot always be assumed that distance learning would be successful under the supervision of parents, but participants noted that what is most crucial is the bond between parent and child which drives the learning of the child.

Human connection emerged as a core determinant of educational progress. Most of the research participants indicated that their children's academic performance has tremendously improved under their supervision. Parents with and without disabilities mentioned a similar experience of improved academic experience and overall well-being of their children and this is due to the knowledge the parent has of the child. The parent's knowledge of the child is intimate. The parents seemed aware of their children's strengths, weaknesses, mannerisms and characteristics and this knowledge guided them in deciding which learning style will suit their child, by asking questions such as: Does the child have a short attention span? Is the child better with numbers or with words? Is the child more creative and less academic? Intimate knowledge of the child will facilitate the academic progress of the child. By the time children are enrolled in mainstream school, they are typically aged seven years and are placed in an environment that does not possess the intimate knowledge of the learner that parents are aware of; this lack of knowledge can potentially disrupt the learning of the child.

As three research participants noted, their children did not perform well in a mainstream school due to teachers not being equipped to deal with their children or due to the fact that the child was bullied. The latter raises another factor, namely that the distance learning approach is conducted within a safe learning environment, subject to the availability of a nurturing parent. While all the other factors may facilitate learning, the human connection of trust, love and support is crucial. Accessibility and acceptability relate to the services of distance-learning institutions, of which eight research participants indicated they were satisfied with the services provided. However, the key feature of distance learning in this respect boils down to the availability of the parent and the facilitator between the child and the distance-learning institution.

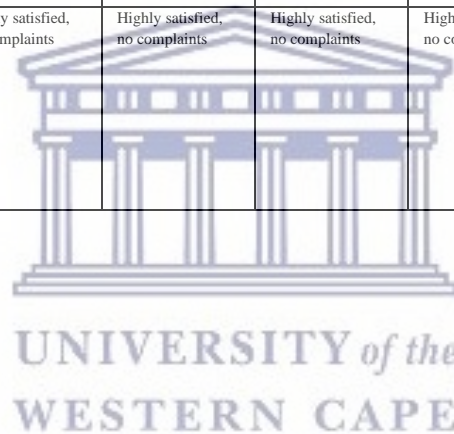
The two main themes of distance learning are affordability and availability. If these two aspects are sound, the rest of the themes will be facilitated and easier to manage. Irrespective of whether the participant is resident- in the Western Cape or Gauteng, this research study has proven that distance learning will be a success with an available parent and a sustainable income.

**Table 1: Overview of findings**

	RP 1	RP 2	RP 3	RP 4	RP 5	RP 6	RP 7	RP 8	RP 9	RP 10	RP 11	RP 12	RP 13
<i>Section A: Demographic Profile of Research Participants (RP)</i>													
Location	Gauteng, South Africa	Gauteng, South Africa	Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa	Western Cape, South Africa (originally)	Western Cape	Western Cape, South Africa	Western Cape, South Africa	Gauteng, South Africa	Western Cape, South Africa	Western Cape, South Africa	Gauteng, South Africa	Gauteng, South Africa	Western Cape, South Africa
Gender of supervising parent	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother
Occupation of supervising parent	Housewife	Housewife	Housewife	Working	Working	Housewife	Housewife	Housewife (former remedial teacher)	Housewife (former schoolteacher)	Working (Remotely)	Housewife	Working	Housewife
Educational level of supervising parent	Grade 12	University Student (correspondence)	Bachelor's Degree	Grade 12	Grade 12	BCom Degree	Grade 12	Higher Education Diploma in Remedial Teaching	B.A Degree, Higher Education Diploma	Postgraduate Diploma in Marketing Management	Grade 12	BCom Degree	Grade 12
Grade of child(ren) at transition to distance learning	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grades 4, 8, 10 and 11	Grade R	Grade 3	Grade R	Grade 8	Birth/Pre-primary school	Grades 4 and 5	Grade 3	Grades 4 and 7	Grade 8	Grade 6
Social life of child(ren)	Actively social	Actively social	Actively social	Preferred loner	Actively social	Actively social	Actively social	Actively social	Actively social	Actively social	Actively social	Actively social	Limited Social Activities
Health status of child(ren)	No disabilities	No disabilities	No disabilities	Autism spectrum	Autism and ADHD	3 children – no disabilities 1 child – learning disabilities (slow learner)	No disabilities	No disabilities	No disabilities	No disabilities	No disabilities	No disabilities	Depression and Anxiety
Reason for distance schooling	Bullying and COVID-19 pandemic	COVID-19 pandemic	COVID-19 pandemic	School anxiety levels of child	School anxiety levels of child	Religious reasons	COVID-19 pandemic	Dissatisfaction with the South African education system	Dissatisfaction with the South African education system	COVID-19 pandemic	Dissatisfaction with the South African education system	Personal Choice	Bullying
<i>Section B: Research Variables</i>													
Affordability – is distance learning affordable?	Yes, cheaper than mainstream school	Yes, there are different packages	Yes, cheaper than mainstream school	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, cheaper than mainstream school	Yes	No, but made it work.	Affordable package but limited content	Yes, cheaper than mainstream school	Yes	Yes

	RP 1	RP 2	RP 3	RP 4	RP 5	RP 6	RP 7	RP 8	RP 9	RP 10	RP 11	RP 12	RP 13
Logistics – is distance learning logistically viable?	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, with the right support system.	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, support networks in place	Yes, support networks in place
Availability – are distance-learning institutions available to assist parents?	Yes, always available	Yes, they are	Yes, always available	Yes, always available	Yes, always available	Yes, always available	Yes, always available	Yes, always available	Yes, always available	Yes, always available	Yes, always available	Yes, always available	Yes, always available
Accessibility – are distance-learning institutions able to assist parents with children who have special needs?	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable	Parents, as the mediator, provide the necessary support and tools to the child(ren) where applicable
Acceptability – are parents satisfied with the services of distance-learning institutions?	Highly satisfied, no complaints	Satisfied, but indicated a preference for more support	Highly satisfied, no complaints	Highly satisfied, no complaints	Highly satisfied, no complaints	Highly satisfied, no complaints	Highly satisfied, no complaints	Highly satisfied, no complaints	Highly satisfied with choice but great dissatisfaction with the Western Cape Education Department (WCED)	Highly satisfied, no complaints	Highly satisfied, no complaints	Highly satisfied, no complaints	Highly satisfied, no complaints

Source: Data gathered by researcher



## 5.4 Thematic Categorisation of Participant Responses

### 5.4.1 Affordability

*Question: Can parents afford to pay tuition for distance learning?*

The range of responses from participants differ on the aspect of affordability as each participant has tailored a distance-learning method that works for their child's individual learning need, irrespective if the child is a learner with a disability or a learner without a disability. However, none of the participants in this research study has outrightly said that distance learning is not affordable. Some mentioned that distance learning is much more affordable than mainstream schooling with others specifically stating that some curriculums are expensive and that getting a tutor would be expensive. However, the participants have found tailored packages, curriculum providers and networks that work for them and in other cases, they have designed a learning experience that works for the family. Hence, while parents can afford the tuition for distance learning, each package varies according to households.

#### **Research Participant 1:**

“We paid the year in full, and it was R6,500 but the robotics was a separate amount. We invested in a proper printer with tons of paper. You have the option to buy the Cambridge books or get them online for free and print them. We opted to print the online version as it worked out cheaper. I also no longer have a massive monthly bill to buy Vanish to maintain the whiteness of his white school shirts, buying of bread tins (which he lost every week) and stationery that keeps on getting lost or stolen. I also saved a lot on school bags and school clothes (jerseys, winter gloves, etc.) because the clothes and items would just go missing or be misplaced. So, no uniforms, no extra stationery, no buying of lunch tins, juice bottles or Pritt!”

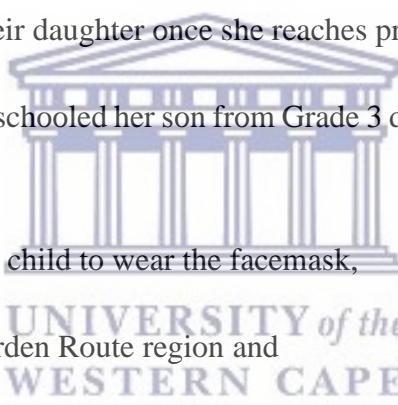
**Research Participant 1** stated that she receives the necessary support from *Think Digital Academy* with the institution having a WhatsApp group and a parent support WhatsApp group, among parents, who help each other out when needed. The Tutor Chat App Portal is also available to aid parents and children who are stuck with the learning process.

In terms of the average day of learning in the household of Participant 1, there is a learning schedule that they try to abide by, but on certain days her child would decide to cover more learning materials to be able to take the Friday off or he will opt to do his computer work in

the morning and do his manual “paperwork” in the afternoons. Hence, while there is a schedule, Participant 1 allowed the liberty of learning that may not necessarily be present in a mainstream class of 40+ children. In addition, Participant 1 did not enlist the help of any private tutors as with the support received from the institution, this is not necessary. Participant 1 stated that in terms of service delivery by *Think Digital Academy*, there are no complaints; she is very happy with their services and stated that the choice of transitioning from mainstream school to home-schooling has been the best decision they ever took as a family.

She concluded by saying that the quality of education is higher, that they are working at their own pace and that her son is a happier child. She said the pace at which they are learning is faster compared to if he was still at a government school; with the current pandemic, it would have led to him being behind in his learning. During early 2021, it was estimated that he would be complete with Grade 3 by October 2021 and may start Grade 4 during that same year (if he so wishes). She also stated that even though her son is being home-schooled, he does have a social life and socialises with his school friends, who are also being home-schooled. She said they will opt to home-school their daughter once she reaches primary school level.

**Research Participant 10** home-schooled her son from Grade 3 due to the COVID-19 pandemic because

- 
- (a) she did not want to force her child to wear the facemask,
- (b) they live remotely in the Garden Route region and
- (c) since she works from home, home-schooling was a suitable family option.

Participant 10 has registered with the Department of Education for the CAPS curriculum and is enrolled with a distance learning portal called IXL (I Excel). IXL offers free content in English and Mathematics subjects only. She stipulates that she pays R 550.00 per month (R 6 600.00 per annum) but that she wishes the portal could provide more free content. She states that it was a struggle finding a system that works for her but that the internet has a vast array of material and that parents simply need to create a safe space for learning. However, she encourages that a free distance learning curriculum be made available on the internet for parents such as herself who may not be able to afford the exorbitant costs of distance learning institutions or set curriculum packages as with the Cambridge Curriculum.

She has not yet enlisted the help of private tutors and might do so in future. Her son is currently in Grade 5, and she states that she will continue with the home-schooling route as she is quite pleased with her choice as her son is happier being home-schooled.

#### **5.4.2 Logistics**

*Question: Are parents able to make logistical arrangements for their children to write exams and attend tutor classes or open days?*

Research participants are able to make logistical arrangements for their children, with most participants being stay-at-home mothers. In the event of working mothers, participants indicated that they are able to make logistical arrangements for their children. However, **Research Participant 2** would like to receive more logistical support. She is a stay-at-home mother and is based in Gauteng, South Africa. She started home-schooling her children from Term 3 of Grade 3 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She holds several university certificates and is doing her Bachelor's degree through the University of South Africa (UNISA). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, they were doing the traditional mainstream schooling but since her husband has co-morbidities, that was the main reason they made the switch to home-schooling. Her children (gender and ages were not stipulated and they have no disabilities) are enrolled with *Brainline* and are using the IEB (Independent Examination Board) curriculum. She indicated that the registration process with *Brainline* was less intimidating than she anticipated, and they opted for the full package at *Brainline* which amounts to R9,500 per annum, for Grade 4 learning, but this excludes the costs of textbooks and other materials. The full package, however, incorporates one online class per week, per subject, and also includes grading reports and assessments. She states that there are various home-schooling options at *Brainline*. Hence, in terms of affordability, there are different options.

With regards to the logistical support received from *Brainline*, she would like to receive more support but is happy with their services since they do respond promptly to her emails. She mentioned that as a family who is home-schooling, they are not used to being able to have “free-roam” when educating their children and stated that there needs to be an improvement in service delivery, and suggested, for example, the circulation of newsletters to assist parents with the teaching aspect since not all parents are natural born teachers. Her children's average day of learning is from 08h30 until 12h30 on weekdays and the home-schooling lessons are structured around the online classes per subject per day with a break time reserved before

12h30. As the supervising parent, Participant 2 dedicates her mornings to home-schooling her children. She has not enlisted the help of a private tutor but might consider it at a later stage.

She concluded by saying that she would never have home-schooled her children and was actually against it, but that they have been home-schooling for more than a year and she does not regret the decision. She stated that she is studying through UNISA and is a distance learner herself, and in her own words:

“If my children can adapt to this method of schooling from a young age, they will have a whole lot of discipline once they get to high school and varsity”.

**Research Participant 7** is also very satisfied with the logistical support received as she had no issues with registration of her child. In fact, the distance-learning institution has facilitated everything. Research Participant 7 completed Grade 12 and is a stay-at-home mother who decided to enrol her child in distance learning with the *Future's Academy* in Cape Town, South Africa. She stated that her son, who has no disabilities, attended mainstream school from Grades 1-9 but then the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and her child was then transitioned to distance learning in order to not fall behind. She stated that she receives logistical support from the distance-learning institution and the cost of fees, inclusive of materials, is R15,350 annually. She indicated that her son has a structured learning method, day to day and week to week.

She is always available to supervise her son and stated that she has not enlisted the help of independent tutors and neither does the institution provide tutors. She stated that she did not have to register with the Department of Education (DoE) but instead went directly to the institution that takes care of all the logistics regarding registration with the department. She stated that she is satisfied with the distance learning method, as her child's focus on schoolwork is much better as there are no class distractions with distance learning. She also indicated that children who are doing the distance learning method have time for both schoolwork and also participating in their hobbies during the course of the day. She stated that her son is socially active, both with friends and family. In terms of distance learning, she had the following to say:

Mainstream schools should opt for the option of distance learning for kids who would like to be a part of a certain school but do it from home.



**Research Participant 11** is a stay-at-home mother that is available to home-school her children. She started home-schooling her children five years ago, at the ages of 9 and 12. She is very satisfied with the transition from private school to home-schooling. She states that for most of the years spent home-schooling, the family opted to not use a curriculum service provider (also known as a distance learning institution). They used an eclectic and child-led method of home-schooling. However, with both of her children in their final phase of home-schooling, namely high school, they have chosen the American High School Diploma and not CAPS/SA Matric as their exit certificate. The participant's children are going through an online curriculum service provider this year as well as an umbrella school as they can choose resources to create a custom learning curriculum within certain guidelines. Participant 11 states that they did not operate nor register via the Department of Education and stated that many parents choose Cambridge above CAPS. In terms of costs, Participant 11 states it costs them approximately 100 dollars (R 1 600.00) per month for the online curriculum and this includes all materials required for the learning process. She also stated that it is much cheaper than private schools in South Africa. In terms of logistics, Participant 11 has this to say:

“We have made connections with home-schooling networks on social media and have received the necessary support from fellow home-schooling parents and the current online curriculum service provider we enlisted with. Going forward, we will use an umbrella school and based on experiences of other home-schooling parents, they do receive the necessary support from umbrella schools”.

She concludes by saying that she is very happy with her method of education for her children and feels that home-schooling should become the norm in South Africa especially with the situation of crime in the country. It is truly a better and safer option for children. Furthermore, with the overcrowding of classrooms especially in public schools, home-schooling would really enable parents to provide their children with individual attention and a better learning experience.

#### **5.4.3 Availability**

*Question: Are parents available to supervise their children in their distance learning and are distance-learning institutions available to assist parents in the event of any challenges?*

All participants indicated that the distance-learning institutions are available to assist them in facilitating the distance-learning experiences. Some of the participants also mentioned that they

have other networks to consult with if they need additional assistance. Participants who opted for the home-schooling route stated that they also have home-schooling support networks to assist them. All parents – particularly mothers in this case – are available to supervise their children. The working participants’ children are more independent and have been groomed to do distance learning since their kindergarten days and are more adept at working independently while still being supervised by their parents.

**Research Participant 13** completed Grade 12 and is a housewife that is available to home-school her daughter. She initially opted for distance learning but instead, decided to home-school her daughter as it is cheaper than the online curriculum providers. Participant 13 is based in the West Coast, another remote region in the Western Cape. She started with the distance learning route when her daughter was Grade 6 but eventually switched to home-schooling due to affordability. She has chosen the Cambridge Curriculum and stated that it costs R 20 000 all inclusive. Her daughter is currently in Grade 8, age 13 years, and was moved out of mainstream school because she experienced trauma because of bullying at school.

The participants daughter was diagnosed with depression and anxiety and although Participant 13 did not classify this as a disability, it is considered as a disability by certain disability-advocate groups. Participant 13 states that she is always available and does have support networks in place to assist her, but that there is limited social networking but that this is an aspect that she is working on. Her daughter’s learning is structured yet goal-driven but most importantly, it is at her daughter’s own pace. Participant 13 states that her daughter has become more confident and is much happier being home-schooled by her mother and she is in an environment of love and understanding. However, Participant 13 states that she wishes there were more information available to the public regarding home-schooling. In her own words:

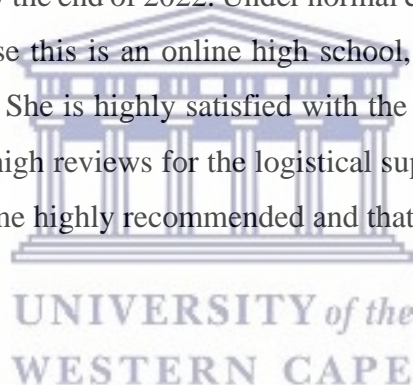
“There should be more information provided to the public regarding home-schooling as many parents spend a fortune before getting it right”.

One of the working mothers, **Research Participant 12**, chose distance learning for her son in Grade 8 only, the start of secondary school, which means that he has never been home-schooled or attempted online schooling before, but because he is of independent age, Participant 12 chose to start distance learning at age 13, with her son. She chose the *University of Cape Town Online High School (UCTOHS)* because she stated that her son is not street-smart and would not fight back if he is bullied. She is speaking from experience of her first child, her daughter,

who she refers to as a fighter, that had to contend with an enormous amount of bullying in mainstream school. Hence, because of her son's soft nature, she decided the distance learning route for him.

Participant 12 is a marketing consultant and single mother with 2 independent children and is based in Gauteng, South Africa. She states that when her son attended mainstream school, she had to do school runs every morning and evening and had to monitor and check up on him constantly but since he is now with the online high school, there are no more school runs and that amazingly, her son's personality has become more confident and responsible. She in fact states that she spends less money now that her son attends online high school, with it costing R 2 095.00 per month (R 25 140.00 per annum), and that socially, he is very active. He belongs to the UCTOHS networking groups, like VC Gaming Group, and that the UCTOHS also hosts social events for their high school students.

Although this participant and her family are based currently in Gauteng, they will be moving to Cape Town, Western Cape by the end of 2022. Under normal circumstances, it would require a change of schools but because this is an online high school, it is one less aspect to worry about when moving provinces. She is highly satisfied with the choice of enrolling her son in an online high school and has high reviews for the logistical support of the UCT Online High School. She states that they come highly recommended and that most importantly, her child is very happy and well-adjusted.



#### **5.4.4 Accessibility**

*Question: Are distance-learning institutions able to accommodate parents with special needs, for example transport arrangements, courier services, disability-friendly support materials, etc.?*

Most participants have children who are not learners with disabilities, but some indicated that the distance-learning institutions their children are at, provide for learners with disabilities. However, parents are responsible for ensuring that the participants have the necessary tools, gadgets, and devices to facilitate learning as most distance learning materials are electronic and amenable to suit the needs of learners. For example, gadgets have accessibility options and there are gadgets on the market specifically designed for certain disabilities. In terms of transport arrangements, courier services and other support materials, this ties in with the availability of participants in which most said they are available; but in terms of services of

distance-learning institutions, the participants indicated that the institutions have made networks available to the parents.

Furthermore, in terms of accessibility, as shown by **Research Participant 4**, distance learning knows no borders. It is available to parents even regardless of their location, affording them the freedom to initiate learning as or when they choose. It also affords them the liberty to choose curriculum providers or institutions as per their preferences without uprooting their families or disrupting their children's education. Research Participant 4 is a working mother. She started home-schooling her child, who is on the autism spectrum, but was never officially diagnosed as such, since pre-school because her daughter experienced high anxiety levels in the short period that she attended public school. When she started home-schooling her child, she was a stay-at-home mother but now that her daughter, aged 13, is in Grade 9 and more independent, she is able to work but still supervises her child and does the curriculum planning per term. As the supervising parent, Participant 4 has completed her Grade 12. Participant 4 also indicated that her child does not have an active social life, by choice.

Since they opted for independent home-schooling, Participant 4 combined the online curriculum from *Times4Learning* paired with the *Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books*, *Glencoe Books* and *Classroom Complete Press* for a balanced online and offline learning experience. In terms of tuition costs, the annual registration fee is R1,926.13 which includes attendance tracking, grade reporting and transcripts. Online access to *Times4Learning* costs R592.66 per month for four core subjects and access to worksheets. Physical curriculum pricing varies per course. Participant 4 structured school weeks from Mondays to Fridays with each day starting off with online work before it proceeds to books and laboratory studies. Participant 4 stated that most of her child's work is independent but that she is always available if her daughter needs assistance. She also stated that she has never enlisted a private tutor for all the years of home-schooling.

Participant 4 stated that she is very happy with the method of independent home-schooling because they have tried other methods and switched back to public school, for a very brief period. She found that this method is the best way that her daughter learns since she progresses at her own pace and is more relaxed and happier. Participant 4 stated that her only concern with home-schooling is the perception that it is associated with mostly religious families and stated that it would be helpful if the secular curriculum was more accessible. With regards to the future of home-schooling, Participant 4 had the following to say:

“It is very important that families are given the option to choose home-schooling. Not all children learn in the same way, and it is easier to tailor a learning plan to your child’s needs because you know your child”.

Furthermore, as can be shown by *Research Participant 5*, it does not matter in which part of the world parents are, distance learning is always a viable option. It also shows that distance-learning institutions provide support for parents of learners with disabilities, not necessarily in the provision of gadgets but in enlightening parents with the available gadgets on the market or in providing parental guidance for learners with disabilities. Research Participant 5 is a working mother and started home-schooling her child shortly after he started elementary school (i.e., Grades 3 to 6). He was not being treated fairly by teachers, whose expectation was that her child needed to keep up with his classmates, and he could not. He also experienced severe anxiety while attending mainstream school. As a result of the pressure, her child suffered from school anxiety and was removed from that environment to be home-schooled. They transitioned from elementary school to being home-schooled when her son was aged 8 in Grade 3 and when she learned that her son suffers from autism and ADHD. As the supervising parent, Participant 5 completed her secondary education.

Her son is registered with an umbrella school called *HomeLife Academy* which helps them with logistical support and resources. However, she has not enlisted the help of a private tutor, as tutors are very expensive. Participant 5 uses the online curriculum of *Times4Learning*, which costs approximately \$50 (R737.10) per month and includes the cost of supplies. On an average day of learning, her son does two hours of learning and two hours of worksheets or some kind of structured activity. In total, schooling is about four hours each day. Participant 5 stated that she is satisfied with the transition, as her son is so much happier being home-schooled and he is quite smart. The transition has really helped him in his learning. Besides being home-schooled, her son has an active social life but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this aspect has been disrupted.

#### **5.4.5 Acceptability**

*Question: Are parents satisfied with the services of distance-learning institutions or curriculum providers?*

All participants are very satisfied with their chosen method of distance learning. Many indicated that they have not registered with the DoE as this is done via the distance-learning

institution. However, three participants voiced their dissatisfaction with the DoE. They instead opted for independent home-schooling. However, this required registration with the DoE. One of the participants (RP6) refused to register, due to the costs of registration and assessment fees as mandated by the Department. RP8, RP9 and RP11 also did not register with the DoE and instead all went the independent home-schooling route. All of them are satisfied with their choice of independent home-schooling.

**Research Participant 3** seemed very satisfied with the services of the chosen distance-learning institution, focusing on the rhythm of education in terms of time and lack of repetition, compared to a mainstream school. Research Participant 3 is a housewife and is based in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, she started home-schooling all her children (two sons and two daughters), none of whom have disabilities. They are in Grades 4, 8, 10 and 11 and they are aged 9, 13, 15 and 18 years respectively. As the supervising parent, she holds a BCom degree and a certification in estate agency. Participant 3 stated that the main reason they transitioned from mainstream schooling to home-schooling is because her husband has co-morbidities and their fear was that because of his co-morbidities, that he may contract COVID-19. Hence, because of this, extra caution was taken by removing potential hazards to his health through not exposing their children to potentially dangerous elements as this may have adverse effects on her husband's health.

She stated that her children's confidence has grown tremendously since being home-schooled and learning has been adjusted according to their strengths, with two of her children having strong academic abilities and the other two being technically inclined. She asserted that home-schooling has brought them closer, as a family, and that being home-schooled has taught her children many things that mainstream school could not. She also commented that there is so much time being wasted in the learning process at mainstream school, with so much repetition and what usually takes a whole day being learned at school is being earned in a quarter of that time, at home.

Her children are all enrolled at *Seats SA Academy*, which uses the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) curriculum. While she contends that it has worked out much cheaper being home-schooled than being schooled traditionally, she has not provided any cost comparisons. In her view, *Seats SA Academy* has a good support structure, which does not require her to be too hands-on with her children and their learning. She tries to leave them to do their own work and only steps in when they do not understand certain aspects of the work.

Their average learning day consists of two hours of online structured teaching time, that are split into four 30-minute slots.

***Example of a daily schedule:***

09h00 – 09h30:	Online lecture
09h30 – 10h00:	Supervised schoolwork
10h00 – 10h30:	Online lecture
10h30 – 11h00:	Supervised schoolwork
11h00 – 11h30:	Online lecture
11h30 – 12h00:	Supervised schoolwork
12h00 – 12h30:	Online lecture
12h30 – 13h00:	Supervised schoolwork

Participant 3 chose not to use private tutors, since the classes are online, under her supervision. She expressed her family's happiness with the transition to home-schooling because her children are learning real-life skills in addition to online learning, such as learning how to cook, shop and buy groceries, change a lightbulb, use a credit card, paint, and learn arts and crafts.

***Research Participant 6*** indicated her dissatisfaction with registering with the DoE as she has chosen independent home-schooling, which requires registration with the department. This is unlike other participants who are not doing it independently but via a distance-learning institution – which does not require them to register with the Department, as tuition fees are inclusive of registration fees, which means that the onus is on the distance-learning institution to register their children with the Department. Research Participant 6 is a stay-at-home mother and is based in the Western Cape, South Africa. She started home-schooling her children as a natural progression from interactive play. Hence, none of her children went to mainstream schools. She has four children (three daughters and one son), aged 7, 9, 14 and 17 and they are in Grades 2, 3, 8 and 12 respectively. As the supervising parent, Participant 6 holds a Bachelor's degree. She stated that as a stay-at-home mother, she has always interacted and played with her children, providing an environment in which they learned through play. At 18 months, the play became more directed using *Practica* (a kit of toys developed by an occupational therapist). She also used the Montessori and Waldorf philosophies in her home-education style and placed a strong emphasis on reading to her children.

Her eldest daughter was then enrolled in Grade R but was removed 6 months later as they, as parents, detected her amazing memory and decided to enrol their daughter at a *madrassa* (Islamic school) for *Hifdh* (Qur'anic memorisation classes). While her daughter was at *madrassa*, Participant 6 continued teaching her daughter academic subjects, mainly mathematics and reading. Since she had all the resources at hand, it just made sense to continue the same route with her younger children. Hence, they never attended mainstream schools. She also opted to not register with the DoE for home-schooling because of the department's dogmatic approach to learning and its subsequent assessment requirements with a stricter view on compliance reports than on the actual process of education and learning.

Her experience with home-schooling became more fine-tuned when it was detected that her son had some learning challenges, with his learning being slower than her daughters. Hence, through this, she learned more about the different learning styles and adapted them to suit the individual needs of her children. In terms of her son, his learning style was kinaesthetic. She therefore had to adapt her teaching approach and taught mathematics to him in a very hands-on and physical style. Science involved many activities and experiments, whereas History and Geography were immersive, and they would dress up or bake as per the country or era they were learning about. When the children were younger, learning was very interactive but as they approached higher grades, Participant 6 took a more formal approach to learning and started using the Cambridge Curriculum. Since her children are doing *Hifdh*, she incorporates the Cambridge Curriculum learning around the *hidfth* classes.

In terms of tuition, cost varies as they buy second-hand textbooks and resources or use shared resources, as the Cambridge Curriculum textbooks are very expensive. As a Muslim home educator, with a big focus on *hidfth* learning, Participant 6 has joined and established networks with other Muslim home educators to support each other and socialise by organising outings and clubs for their children to ensure they also have an active social life.

The average day of learning in Participant 6's home starts after *fajr* (around sunrise) or at 08h00 with Quranic lessons, house chores and an allocated time per topic or subject per day to ensure that the secular textbooks are covered. Since the older ones are more independent, she spends time mainly with the youngest two as they are currently in the early stages of learning. Participant 6 expressed her happiness with having chosen the home-schooling route:



I am satisfied with the way I have educated my children, as I know them. I know how they learn. I know their interests and can tailor their learning to suit them and their strengths. More importantly, we can prioritise what we deem more important, namely our *Deen* and bring it into all our learning as well as extra subjects like *Fiqh*, Arabic and *Hadith*.

Participant 6 stated that a group of home educators are currently in consultation with the DoE to help the department understand home education better, as home-schooling is not just “school at home”, but goes beyond compliance with the departmental requirements such as attendance registers, assessment reports, evaluations, etc. This group emphasises that home-schooling is about making learning a part of living. She also stated that as a Muslim, she would appreciate *Hifdh* being recognised as a legitimate option for learning, as *hifdh* learning helps with the academic programme; it should not be perceived as “being three-quarters of the time absent from school”. She explained that even though her daughter has not received mainstream academic education, as per the departmental requirement, she is registered for a two-year IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) programme and recently wrote her first IGCSE examinations in Biology and English and scored 75% in each subject. Participant 6 maintains that although their route may not seem traditional, it is working for them as a family and as her daughter’s scores indicate, it is not to her children’s detriment.

Furthermore, Participant 6 maintains that the DoE and other schools (online or physical) do not accommodate children who learn different subjects at different paces and thus, refuses to multi-grade them. Instead, they would prefer to pass a child in all subjects, even if it is on a lower grade, than to enable parents who would prefer to pass their child(ren) on their strengths and pace and work with them on their weaker subjects. For example, her son who has struggled academically, is at different grade levels in different subjects but she would prefer him to go slower and grasp better, than to “pass” with a lower grade. She has enquired about this at schools, but they do not and will not accommodate a child with varying aptitudes.

She further indicated that if a home-schooling family is registered with the DoE, the onus is on the family to provide evaluations for the department’s perusal. However, these evaluations need to be done by a private evaluator, which means that this cost is not covered by the department and that private evaluations can be very costly. She maintains that if the DoE requires those kinds of records, they should provide facilities free-of-charge that can evaluate home-educated children. She concluded by saying that her networks are currently rallying

against the new proposed laws on home education which stipulate that parents who fail to register for home-schooling with the DoE or any home curriculum provider, will either be fined or sentenced to jail.

**Research Participant 8** was a remedial teacher and based on her experiences with the South African education system, she made the decision to home-school her own children before they were even born. She stated that does not regret her choice at all as all her children has received the best education through her chosen curriculum which was the Cambridge Curriculum. All her children are now university students, with one of them that is studying in the United Kingdom on a full scholarship. With regards to the South African education system, she stated:

I was a teacher and I saw everything and thought I would like to have a better schooling or education for my kids. This was in 1996. Child number 1 was born in 1999 and the twins were born in 2002. They went all the way through and are all studying now.

Participant 8 also indicated that she never registered her children with the Department of Education; they initially started with the Pestalozzi Trust and finished off with Cambridge (A Levels), as private students. She was always available for her children, but they only enlisted private tutors when it was needed. She said it was the best choice she made for her children and that they have excellent and close relationships as a family too. She concluded by saying that home-schooling can work for learners with and without disabilities in South Africa.

**Research Participant 9** was a former schoolteacher that resigned to home-school her 2 daughters as she was not satisfied with the mainstream schooling system and felt that she could do a much better job of teaching her children than the system itself. She wanted more control over the quality of education her children were receiving and removed her 2 daughters from primary school after they completed Grades 1 to Grade 3 and Grade 4, respectively. She used the independent schooling method and used second-hand textbooks and borrowed textbooks from school, to home-school her children until they completed Grade 12. They completed their Matric (Grade 12) through the Amended National Senior Certificate route. She states that when she wanted to register her children for home-schooling with the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), she received a lot of grief. She had this to say:

I tried to register as a homeschooler with the WCED and was unsuccessful. They did home visits and rejected my relaxed home set up, even though I used a R10 000 curriculum by *Love to Learn*, at the time. I was extremely disappointed by their

insensitivity and complete lack of understanding about what home-schooling is about. In other words, it is a different set up for each unique family built around the needs of the child or children. They demanded that I re-enrol my kids as soon as possible. I ignored them and they never contacted me again or showed any further interest. I continued home-schooling my way; guided and encouraged by internet blogs, overseas home schoolers, as well as local home-school associations.

Participant 9 is very happy with having made her choice to home-school as both her children are now university students and throughout the years of home-schooling them, she was always available and only used private tutors in their Grade 12 years, for subjects such as Mathematics and Science. She stated that they are very close as a family and that home-schooling has developed her daughters into well-rounded individuals. She feels that the Western Cape Education Department needs to improve their service delivery and concluded the interview by stating the following:

The WCED is not very clued up on the difference between home-schooling and public schooling. They also do not respect parents choosing to home-school their children. Instead, they are criminalizing the parents going this more challenging route while so many kids in public schools receive little to no parental support and these parents are not being dealt with by the WCED. Home-schooling parents take responsibility for their own children. The WCED can do so much more by focusing on providing guidance, books, inclusion in sports and cultural activities and not dividing and judging between home-schooling and public schooling parents. They should respect parents choosing to home-school their children from a place of love. Home-schooling is an act of love and in our own way, we 'help' overworked teachers faced with overcrowded classrooms by removing our own children and fulfilling their individual needs, at home, at our own cost and with our love.

### **5.5 Political Economy of South Africa – Historical Trajectories, and Exclusion of Learners with Disabilities in Education**

The research participants who participated in the study were a small sample. All research participants may have opted for a different distance-learning institution or for independent home-schooling, but the theme that runs through all of them is the case of affordability. While they may have considered it more affordable with some saying that distance learning is cheaper

than mainstream schooling, if this sample should be used comparatively against a larger sample in South Africa, the question of the affordability of distance learning for a larger group in South Africa, may be disputable. The political economy of South Africa is divisive with the great socio-economic divide between those who can afford certain educational options, and those who cannot. For example, the cost of R6,500 per annum for distance learning would be the total monthly salary of another South African living in the ‘Cape Flats’, while a monthly salary of R15,350 would be considered sufficient to ensure a good standard of living.

The trajectory between the buying power of individual South Africans varies. This calls to attention a need for the Government of South Africa to step up and devise an effective plan to make distance learning accessible for learners with disabilities because if the parents and caregivers of learners with disabilities could afford distance learning as an option, there would have been many more participants who would have participated in this study. However, it can be assumed that there is a minimal portion of the larger distance-learning networks that have learners with disabilities. The political economy of South Africa with its historical trajectories has made it increasingly difficult for the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. While the Constitution of South Africa has identified the need for accessibility and social inclusivity, studies conducted by Chiwandire and Vincent (2017), Human Rights Watch (2019), and Statistics South Africa (2014) have shown that better solutions need to be sought for learners with disabilities to improve their educational outcomes.

Through this study and other studies on distance learning (see for example, Bjekic et al., 2014; Branstetter, 2020; Neese, 2015) and on the importance of household dynamics (see for example, Sooryamoorthy & Makhoba, 2016; Hofmeyr, 2018), it shows that distance learning should seriously be considered as an option despite the potential challenges this may present in the infrastructure of South Africa with its huge rural/urban divide. With the fourth industrial revolution and the technological advancement across the globe, it is vital that South Africa keeps pace, to avoid the continuous situation of learners with disabilities being at the lowest end of the rung of unemployment and unemployability in this country.

## **5.6 Gaps in the System: Oppression or Ignorance?**

The Constitution of South Africa has made considerable efforts at guiding policy initiatives and their implementation to ensure that learners with disabilities are not left behind. However, the implementation of these policies has seen resources being provided for learners with

disabilities at university level (HRC, 2017) without making these resources available at grassroots-level (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2017; Engelbrecht, 2006; Robson, 2003). Considering these funding initiatives and the study conducted by Human Rights Watch (2019), it gives an indication that more can be done for learners with disabilities. The problem is not a lack of funds, but the distribution of such funds, as evidenced by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), with its allocation of R76.6 million for students with disabilities at university-level. Is this really a gap in the system caused by ignorance, oppression or sheer non-committance? More effort needs to be made with making provision for learners with disabilities, in whichever capacity, to increase the educational outcomes of learners with disabilities and to ensure that they receive a good, quality education.

While participants in this study are by the means to afford this mode of education, it indicates that the Constitution can provide the means to ensure that each child – especially learners with disabilities – can receive a quality education through distance learning. In light of participants stating that distance learning is cheaper for them than mainstream schooling, if it is rolled out to all provinces in South Africa, less effort will be put into building schools and maintaining school infrastructure and more effort will be put into building the technological infrastructure of South Africa with the nationalisation of network providers to cheapen the cost of data and other technological devices. One of the study’s participants have used a “free content” distance learning portal, although it is not entirely free, but it shows that the Government of South Africa should consider this route and can avail free and full online curriculum to the public of South Africa if more effort, commitment, and discipline is put into this venture.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the research findings in which all participants are of the view that distance learning is an effective method of learning considering the individual needs of their children. It discussed the findings categorized according to the themes that guided the study. However, it also brought to attention that while this would be an effective tool for learners, both with and without disabilities, the greater South African population may find distance learning a challenge due to the great socioeconomic divide within the country. Furthermore, the chapter states that distance learning is a conduit which the Government of South Africa should consider improving the learning outcomes of learners with disabilities. The following chapter presents the summary and conclusion of the research study.



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## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the general overview of research findings, the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning and the categories guiding the study's line of enquiry.

### 6.2 General Overview: Discussion of Research Findings

Parental involvement plays an integral role in the facilitation of distance learning (Sari & Maningtyas, 2020) as the findings indicate, with most parents being available to supervise their children's learning or who made the personal choice of leaving their teaching careers to supervise their children's education. Interestingly, most of the supervising parents are mothers, which points to the importance of a maternal presence in the education of a child (Chuong and Operario, 2012). In the cases of Research Participants 4 and 5, they home-schooled their children in their early childhood development stage to a point of independence before returning to the workforce, which pinpoints the importance of the knowledgeable implementation of distance learning before the child can operate in the distance-learning environment, independently of the parents (Sari & Maningtyas, 2020) or as indicated by Participant 12, that the child is independent before transitioning to distance learning from mainstream schooling. As indicated by the studies of Sooryamoorthy and Makhoba (2016), Hofmeyr (2018), and Chuong and Operario (2012), the household dynamics, maternal presence, and cultural capital indeed influence the educational outcome of children. Furthermore, the educational level of the parent(s) is positively associated with the educational outcomes of their children. All participants of this study completed secondary school, with some mothers having completed their tertiary education, and this enabled the supervising parents to assist their children in navigating the world of distance learning (Sari & Maningtyas, 2020).

All the research participants indicated that their children made great progress when they opted for the distance learning route. Their children became more relaxed, were happier, and more focused and because they were in a happier learning space, they could focus more on their academic performance. According to Branstetter (2020), a happier child emotionally, becomes a better student, and connection is protection, which refers to the importance of personal relationships in learning. Research Participants 1, 4, 5 and 13 indicated that they removed their children from mainstream schooling because of bullying and school anxiety levels, and since they transferred their children into healthy learning spaces, their academic performances

naturally improved. It is because of this reason that the author of this dissertation strongly believes that distance learning will work for children with disabilities. As can be seen in the cases of Research Participants 4, 5, 6 and 13, whose children suffer from autism, autism and ADHD, being a slow learner, and depression and anxiety, respectively, these children received individualised attention and special care from the supervising parents. In the case of Research Participants 4 and 5, and 13, whose children attended public schools in their formative years, opting for distance learning turned their learning experience from an unpleasant experience in public schools to a pleasant experience in their own private spaces.

Social-emotional health is integral to distance learning and any type of learning experience (Branstetter, 2020). Furthermore, it is especially difficult for learners with disabilities to adjust to the traditional classroom settings that are not built or designed to meet their learning needs (Branstetter, 2020). However, with distance learning, technological developments are flexible and expansive (Diehl, 2019) and with the presence of supervising parents who adapt learning to the needs of their children (Zawacki-Richter & Anderson, 2013) as evidenced by Research Participant 6, who adopted the kinaesthetic style of learning for one of her children who suffers from learning disabilities, while using a more mainstream schooling style for the rest of her children. All research participants – with or without children with disabilities – use technological devices (Bjekic et al., 2014; Branstetter, 2020; Li, 2020) to accommodate the learning needs of their children (Gugulielman, 2010). This led to an improvement in the overall academic performance to the point that some research participants indicated that their children are learning at a much faster pace in distance learning than they would have in mainstream schools.

Five of the thirteen research participants stipulated that the COVID-19 pandemic was the reason they opted for distance learning (RP1, RP7 and RP10) or were forced to consider the distance learning route (RP2 and RP3). These participants have no desire for their children to return to mainstream schooling, as distance learning has brought their families closer, enabled their children to learn useful skills outside of the traditional classroom, and enabled their learning to be fast-tracked within a short pace of time, with many doing distance learning half days compared to an eight-hour mainstream school class, with the added benefit of overall academic performances. RP8, RP9 and RP11 opted for the distance learning route because of their dissatisfaction with the education system in South Africa; two of the three that stipulated this were former schoolteachers and it indicates that if qualified schoolteachers could say this



about the education system that there are many more that would be sharing the same viewpoint of the South African schooling system. The general view of all three (RP8, RP9 and RP11) is that the school system's quality of education was wanting, that schools were crime-ridden and that classrooms were overcrowded, and teachers are overworked, not allowing their children to receive the individual attention required in the learning process.

Furthermore, as in the case of Research Participant 6, distance learning was chosen due to religious reasons which enabled them, as a family, to raise and educate their children according to Islamic values and upbringing. Research Participant 6's household was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as distance learning was the norm, compared to many households around the world that were forced to opt for distance learning, causing disruptions to the traditional way of learning (Knopik et al., 2021).

Research Participant 4 has been home-schooling her child for years across borders and countries and that has been an added benefit to her in that her child's schooling has not been disrupted, despite the family's emigration from South Africa to the United States of America. Research Participant 12 will be moving shortly from Gauteng to the Western Cape and shares the same experience as RP4 in that she does not have to stress about finding a new school for her son and in the process disrupt his learning through moving as it is online and readily available irrespective of a change in his physical learning space.

The social lives of most of the children of the participants – both with and without disabilities – are active. Distance learning has not isolated their children, who are well-adjusted. The general argument of inclusivity activists is that to remove learners with disabilities from mainstream and special schools is to exclude or isolate them. On the contrary, as indicated by Gugulielman (2010), Neese (2015), and Bjekic et al. (2014) developing technologies enable learners, with and without disabilities, to connect virtually with all the available Web 2.0 technologies. Thus, inclusive education in the traditional sense is slowly but surely being replaced by inclusive education in a virtual sense (Neese, 2015). This is augmented by social networks too, which have been built by the parents who participated in this study. Their children are not isolated; there are distance-learning networks and through these networks, their children meet other distance-learning children through planned social events and during school holidays.

The circumstances that spurred this research study was a general dissatisfaction with the South African education system and the issue of inclusivity of learners with disabilities which were confirmed by previous studies conducted by Engelbrecht (2006), Chiwandire and Vincent (2017), Robson (2003) and Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit & Van Deventer (2016). This dissatisfaction with the South African education system was further confirmed by the experiences of research participants 8, 9 and 11. Of the three participants that transitioned to distance learning because of their dissatisfaction, two of these participants were former teachers that has first-hand experience of the South African educational system that were and still is marred by “overworked teachers” and “overcrowded classrooms” that inadvertently impacts the deliverance of an education to learners.

Teachers are stressed out; overworked and underpaid, with little to minimal support while having to contend with overcrowded classrooms. With low morale and limited state resources at their disposal, they are not always in the right frame of mind to be teaching learners, never mind learners with disabilities that require special attention and care. Hence, Participant 9 argues that the attitude of the Department of Education towards parents who choose to home-school their children should change and become more accommodating as these parents have removed their children from the mainstream school environment and in the process, lessened the burden that are currently on teachers, dealing with overcrowded classrooms.

Participant 11’s dissatisfaction was concerning the safety of her children considering the “level of crime” in this country has spread to school grounds and this has been highlighted by the experiences of Participants 12 and 13 whose children experienced bullying. Interestingly, most of the children of these participants are learners without disabilities, except for Participant 13 whose child now suffers from depression and anxiety as a result of bullying. Participant 13 stipulated that she removed her daughter's emotional health from suffering because of the bullying. Since they have transitioned to distance learning, all have expressed a high satisfaction with their choice of transitioning to distance learning and indicated they would not return to mainstream schooling. As mothers, their children’s happiness and emotional well-being are tantamount to their own happiness and emotional well-being. Hence, all research participants have stated that as a result of this change in education, their families have become closer, and they have better relationships. Distance learning has strengthened the familial structure and improved their children’s academic performance because of individualized attention and customized learning.

The former teachers, Participants 8 and 9, indicated that their children are now university students with Participant 8's child being granted a full scholarship to study in the United Kingdom and Participant 9, whose daughters are studying at the University of the Western Cape. Participants 8 and 9 resigned from their teaching careers and expressed zero regret at exercising more control over their children's education and Participant 11 indicates that it can work for learners with disabilities. The experiences of these participants indicate a strong need for the South African education system to transition to distance learning because if the dynamics of school grounds are hard on learners without disabilities, how much harder would it be on learners with disabilities?

Hence, this is an opportunity for the Government of South Africa to make a set distance learning curriculum available to all South Africans, at an affordable cost, as encouraged by Research Participant 10. However, as Research Participant 9 explains there is a lot of bureaucracy surrounding those that chooses to do distance learning and that the Department of Education should really re-assess and upskill themselves within this sector. Hence, the attitude towards and surrounding distance learning and parents choosing distance learning should really change as this is a key to a better education for all South Africans if given the proper structure and support.

### **6.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Distance Learning**

There are advantages and disadvantages to distance learning, which have been identified based on the responses of research participants. Interestingly, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

The advantages of distance learning include:

- Safer learning environment
- Emotional well-being and increased academic performance
- Closer family ties and relationships
- Customised learning styles (individualised attention and special care for the learner).
- Flexibility of distance learning (easier to relocate, shorter productive school days and liberty to determine curriculum).
- Geographically friendly

The disadvantages of distance learning include:

- Sustainable income is required to enable affordability
- Challenge for single-headed households
- Lack of a free online curriculum set
- Government bureaucracy regarding distance learning

## **6.4 Categories Guiding the Study's Line of Enquiry**

### ***6.4.1 Affordability***

Distance learning is an affordable option for the research participants with some of them expressing the views that it had been cheaper than mainstream schools and that there are different affordability packages. However, it does require a sustainable income to enable supervising parents to be present for their children's learning.

### ***6.4.2 Logistics***

Distance learning is logistically viable as there are support networks in place for the supervising parents and child from support groups, both online and offline, that serve as a social network and helpline. The research participants are not left unaided but are guided through the process of distance learning with many acknowledging their satisfaction with the support they receive.

### ***6.4.3 Availability***

Research participants indicated that the distance-learning institutions of their choice have assisted them with transitioning to distance learning from mainstream schooling and that with the assistance of distance-learning institutions, the transition has been seamless.

### ***6.4.4 Accessibility***

Research participants are responsible for ensuring that the correct devices and equipment are purchased to facilitate the learning of their children – with or without disabilities – while most technological tools have in-built software that accommodates the learning of learners with disabilities (Gulley and Thomas, 2018).

### ***6.4.5 Acceptability***

The research participants expressed their satisfaction with the service of distance-learning institutions, except for one research participant who indicated that more support would be preferable, as not all parents are natural-born teachers.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This research study sought to address the following question: To what degree and extent can distance learning be an alternative and practical solution and in what ways do affordability, logistics, accessibility, availability and acceptability determine the effectiveness of distance learning? The researcher has determined that distance learning is an effective educational route for learners with disabilities, with the correct support structure, that would enable them to learn more effectively and efficiently. Distance learning will improve the educational outcomes of learners with disabilities and will be a much better option and replacement of special schools in South Africa, considering the state of special schools, the rate of school violence, the neglect of learners with disabilities, the lack of special needs educators and the quality of education at mainstream schools (Engelbrecht, 2006). However, affordability of distance learning – which is mainly a private schooling option in South Africa – is a precursor to accessibility, logistical support, availability, and acceptability for distance learning to be effective. However, should the Government of South Africa mandate distance learning as a replacement for special schools in South Africa, it could become an affordable option and more accessible to a larger group of South Africans. In fact, if the Government of South Africa can be invested in designing a free and full online CAPS curriculum distance learning system, and minimize their restrictive rules on distance learning, to enable parents to pursue it without any administrative bureaucracy, the more it can work for a larger sector of the South African society. The era for transition to distance learning has fully arrived and it is truly a time for considerable thought to be put into place for all sectors of society so that no one is left behind.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter will address the research questions and aims of this research study by discussing the key findings and main contributions and make recommendations for future research in the hopes that a more affordable distance learning system can be implemented for learners with and without disabilities so that all learners and their families, irrespective of varying backgrounds, are able to have access to the benefits of distance learning without financial constraints.

### 7.2 Key Finding

The key findings of this study have highlighted the following:

- The importance of parental involvement and household dynamics in distance learning
- Distance learning is an effective alternative to mainstream education for learners with and without disabilities
- There is a need to design an affordable distance learning programme for all sectors of society
- The importance of collaboration to determine an effective way forward for all parts of society to have access to the benefits of distance learning

### 7.3 Research Aims and Inferences

The aim of this research study was to determine whether distance learning is an alternative and practical solution for learners with disabilities and to ascertain its affordability, accessibility, availability and acceptability through assessing the experiences of participants who have embarked on this mode of learning.

After the conclusion of this study, it has been determined that:

Distance learning is a better educational alternative to mainstream education and special schools in South Africa for learners with disabilities. It can be a practical solution with the right support structures, in place, from parental involvement to access to resources.

Participants' positive feedback on distance learning and the educational achievements and outcomes of their children indicates that distance learning is not only an alternative but also an effective alternative as their children are or became well-adjusted, happier and more successful when they embarked on distance learning as they learnt in a safer and secure environment, under the love and supervision of their parents, without the negative external influences often associated with South African schools; poor infrastructure, school violence, lack of skilled teachers and a deteriorating educational system, amongst other factors.

However, for distance learning to really be a practical solution for all learners, including learners with disabilities, distance learning needs to be made affordable to enable most, if not all, South African learners to have access to the benefits of distance learning.

Practicality is closely linked with the affordability aspect. If the issue of funds or finance is resolved, progress towards distance learning becomes much easier. With the affordability factor, parents of learners will be able to afford technological devices, software packages, private tutors, tuition fees and a world-class education that would facilitate distance learning.

In terms of the affordability, logistics, accessibility, availability and acceptability of distance learning, participants have responded positively on their experiences of distance learning with many indicating that they receive the necessary support from distance learning institutions from 24/7 online support and supervision, access to distance learning parental and social networks and a quality education that is much better than the mainstream educational system of South Africa. Many participants have stated that distance learning is cheaper than private schools in South Africa with other participants indicating that it can be expensive and that some of them had to resort to second-hand textbooks and materials to ensure the success of distance learning. Hence, with the varying socioeconomic backgrounds of participants, the means to afford distance learning differs but it is also dependent on the distance learning package that was selected as there are different options with different costing brackets. However, as stated before, being able to afford distance learning is a precursor to having access to resources that would facilitate the distance learning experience.

#### **7.4 Main Contributions of the study**

While this research study had challenges in sourcing (a) parents who has children with disabilities (b) that are actively pursuing distance learning, four participants who have children with disabilities that have participated in this study has proven that distance learning is an effective alternative to mainstream education particularly for learners with disabilities. Their experiences have shown that their children's well-being has improved while learning in a safe and secure environment under the love and care of their parents.

The main contribution of this research study is that it has provided insight that there is a better alternative to the mainstream education provided in public schools across South Africa and that learners with disabilities learn much better in safer spaces without the added pressure of having to adjust to a society that is not fitted to their special needs.

A shift in thinking is required to realize that inclusion does not necessarily require the physical presence of an individual, for example a learner with disability in a mainstream class setting but that with the digitization of society, the notion of inclusion should evolve to mean the participation of learners with disabilities in the digitization of society.

#### **7.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

This qualitative research study was an explorative study unearthing the experiences of participants and their children that have embarked on distance learning. Through this research study it was determined that there are endless opportunities for researchers, consultants, current distance learning institutions, parents and the government sector to collaborate on means and methods to design and implement an affordable system of distance learning for the masses. Currently it appears that each sector, particularly distance learning institutions and the government sector are working in silos, with the government sector making it challenging for parents who wish to opt for the current non-traditional method, in the South African context, of distance learning.

With the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) upon us and the digitization of society, it is imperative that more research is conducted in this specific area but with the aim of making distance learning available to all sectors of our society and it is highly recommended that resources, due commitment, respect and focus is given to expand distance learning to all by



finding common ground among the various sectors of the distance learning arena on the way forward. Collaboration is integral.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

The explorative nature of this research study has attempted to ascertain if distance learning can be effective alternative for learners with disabilities in South Africa considering the poor educational outcomes of learners with disabilities in South Africa and the rest of the World, due to a lack of inclusivity, social stigmatization and discrimination, with minimal to zero support for individuals with disabilities and the education system reflects this discriminatory attitude. In conclusion, there are currently 32 million learners with disabilities, Worldwide, that are not attending school and, in many countries, from Third World countries to developed nations, individuals with disabilities have been left, for the most part, on the backburner (Human Rights Watch, 2020). At the heart of this research study was and still is the hope that solutions are found to bridge the gaps and promote access for learners and individuals with disabilities so that they can also become an active part of society, starting with their education. We cannot afford to lose the benefit of having individuals with disabilities as part of our society if we continue to leave their talents and abilities untapped. With the right support, they can also flourish, succeed and contribute to making the World a better place.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Letter: Ethical clearance from the HSSREC Ethics Committee



UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE



22 June 2021

Ms Y Jones  
Sociology  
Faculty of Arts and Humanities

**HSSREC Reference Number:** HS21/4/11

**Project Title:** Exploring the effectiveness of distance learning as an alternative to mainstream education for disabled children in South Africa.

**Approval Period:** 17 June 2021 – 17 June 2024

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

**Please remember to submit a progress report by 30 November each year for the duration of the project.**

*The permission to conduct the study must be submitted to HSSREC for record keeping purposes.*

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse events and/or termination of the study.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Josias'.

Ms Patricia Josias  
Research Ethics Committee Officer  
University of the Western Cape

NHREC Registration Number: HSSREC-130416-049

Director: Research Development  
University of the Western Cape  
Private Bag X17  
Bellville 7535  
Republic of South Africa  
Tel: +27 21 959 4111  
Email: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

## APPENDIX B: Letter: Permission to conduct research



Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, South Africa  
HSSREC, Research Development, (t) 021 959 4111 (e) [research-ethics@uwc.ac.za](mailto:research-ethics@uwc.ac.za)

Date  
Title and Name of Head  
Head of Distance Learning Institution  
Address

### RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution. I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Sociology programme at the University of the Western Cape and am in the process of writing my Master's Thesis. The study is entitled "Exploring the effectiveness of distance learning as an alternative to mainstream education for disabled children in South Africa".

I hope that your respected Institution's Administration will allow me access to anonymously interview 3 sets of parents (single or couple) of children at the institution (copy enclosed of interview schedule) which means that I only require 3 set interviews. Due to the nature of the study, I hope to recruit parents of students, with physical disabilities, but if not able to, then to please provide me parents of students with no disabilities. Interested parents, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed and returned to the primary researcher, prior to the interview process (copy enclosed of consent form).

If approval is granted, parents will be communicated with via email correspondence (or WhatsApp, should they prefer). The interview process should take no longer than 2 hours of their time. The interview results will be pooled for the thesis project and individual results of this study will remain strictly confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your institution or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with an email or telephone call and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have. You may contact me at my email addresses [y11172@myuwc.ac.za](mailto:y11172@myuwc.ac.za) or preferably [yumnah007@gmail.com](mailto:yumnah007@gmail.com).

If my request has been granted, please submit a signed permission with the institution's letterhead acknowledging consent and permission for me to conduct my study at your respected institution.

Yours in service,

Sincerely,

Yumnah Jones  
MA Sociology Student  
Department of Sociology  
University of the Western Cape  
Email: [y11172@myuwc.ac.za](mailto:y11172@myuwc.ac.za)  
Signature:

Dr. Chinwe Igwe  
Supervisor & Research Advisor  
Department of Sociology  
University of the Western Cape  
Email: [obuaku@uwc.ac.za](mailto:obuaku@uwc.ac.za)



## APPENDIX C: Interview schedule



Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, South Africa  
HSSREC, Research Development, (t) 021 959 4111 (e) [research-ethics@uwc.ac.za](mailto:research-ethics@uwc.ac.za)

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARTICIPANTS

**Project Title:** Exploring the Effectiveness of Distance Learning as An Alternative To Mainstream Education For Disabled Children In South Africa

#### INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for participating in this interview. As a student researcher, I am interested in getting an understanding amongst participants, in the study, by exploring distance learning as a method of education for children with disabilities in South Africa. Whether you have chosen home-schooling for your child or enrolled him or her in a distance learning institution, your insights and reasons for choosing your child's method of education will aid us in helping children with disabilities that tend to experience major challenges in the mainstream schooling system.

#### Demographic information

Please indicate your child's gender:

OptionButton1 Female

OptionButton2 Male

Which category below includes your child's age?

OptionButton3 1- 6yrs

OptionButton4 7-12yrs

OptionButton5 13-17yrs

OptionButton9 18-21yrs

OptionButton6 > 21yrs

Which grade is your child?





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- OptionButton7 Grade 1-7
- OptionButton8 Grade 8-12
- OptionButton10 Non-graded learning

**Disability (if applicable)**- What kind of disability does your child have?

**Location** - Where in South Africa are you located?

**Age** - At what age/grade did you enroll your child in distance learning?

**Highest Level of Education** - As the supervising parent, what is your highest level of education?

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:** *(Please feel free to answer as much as you prefer)*

1. What was the reason you chose distance learning?
2. Did you opt to go straight into distance learning or was it a process of going mainstream schooling to a distance learning institution?
3. Which institution is your child currently registered with or enrolled at?
4. What was the experience of getting your child registered, whether it was directly via the Department of Education or through a registered educational institution?
5. Which curriculum is being used?



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6. In terms of affordability, what is the tuition per annum or per month and does this cost includes all materials or equipment required for the learning process?
7. Do you as a duo (parent and child) receive the necessary and logistical support from the institution you are working in conjunction with? For example, does the institution have support networks in place (e.g. administrative, disability or tutor support) to assist you as a parent, should you not be available the day your child needs to write an exam or attend an extra-mural activity or if you require disability-friendly support materials?
8. What does the average day of learning entails? Is it a structured day to day/week to week method of learning or as per the achievement of learning goals?
9. How often are you available, as a parent, to supervise your child in his or her learning?
10. Have you employed the help of independent/private tutors or are they provided via the institution you enrolled your child with?
11. Are you satisfied with having chosen the method of learning for your child? Kindly elaborate.
12. What do you feel needs to be improved in terms of service delivery for your chosen method, if you have opted to go via a distance learning institution?
13. Are there any further comments or concerns, opinions or suggestions you would like to mention regarding the future of distance learning in South Africa?





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**Thanking you for your participation!**



## APPENDIX D: Consent form



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### **Letter of Consent – PARENT**

This letter serves as consent that Ms. Yumnah Jones has permission to conduct her research study as explained in the documentation given to myself. I fully understand that my participation in the research is entirely voluntary and that I can, at any time extract myself from the research study. Ms. Jones has explained that if I should have any questions relating to my participation in the study, that I can contact her Supervisor, Dr. Chinwe Obuaku-Igwe on the number listed below.

Full Name & Surname:.....

Date:.....

Signed:.....

This research is being conducted by Yumnah Jones, a student at the University of the Western Cape. Her contact number is +[REDACTED]. Student Number: [REDACTED]

If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Chinwe Obuaku-Igwe at the Department of Sociology, University of the Western Cape, her telephone number, +27 (021) [REDACTED].

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Dr. Chinwe Igwe  
Department of Sociology  
University of the Western Cape  
Private Bag X17  
Bellville 7535

***This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's HSSREC.***