

**Teaching in the time of massification: Exploring Education  
academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African  
higher education**



**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES**

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**January 2021**

## Declaration

I, **Thabang Mokoena**, declare that:

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As the student's supervisors we, **Dr. Mlamuli N. Hlatshwayo** and **Ms Thabile Zondi**, hereby approve the submission of the thesis for examination.

Supervisor's Signature: 

Date 13/04/2021

Co-supervisor's Signature: 

Date: 13/04/2021

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## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this fine work to my late mother. Shine your angelic light for eternity.*

## **Abstract**

This interpretive research study sought to explore education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education. An extensive reading of the topic under study was conducted and the literature reviewed revealed that large classes were problematic to a conducive learning environment for both academics and students. This study sought to explore academics' lived experiences and used phenomenology as the theoretical framework. As a qualitative research study, the researcher had initially hoped to generate data using face to face semi-structured interviews. However, this approach proved challenging due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher, therefore, generated data using semi-structured interviews through Zoom meetings. Eight education academics from one South African university in Kwa-Zulu Natal were selected using purposive sampling, hence; this study does not claim to be representative of all South African higher education academics. The focus of the study was on exploring and interpreting academics experiences' of teaching large classes. These interviews were recorded and the recordings were then transcribed to make meaning of the academics' experiences. Generated data was analysed using thematic analysis. Findings of this study revealed that the academics that participated in this study were mostly frustrated by teaching large classes due to many factors including inadequate infrastructure and lack of material support which compromised their engagement with individual students. The study concluded that large classes were here to stay and need to be managed better with reduced class sizes to improve educational outcomes.

**Keywords:** Massification, Large Classes, South African Higher Education, Phenomenological Analysis

## **List of Acronyms**

CHE:	Council on Higher Education
DBE:	Department of Basic Education
DHE:	Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation
HEIs:	Higher Education Institutions
ICT:	Information Communication Technology
MCQs:	Multiple Choice Questions
NSFAS:	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NDP:	National Development Plan
ODeL:	Open Distance e-Learning
TVET:	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UKZN:	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNESCO:	United Nations Education Scientific Cultural Organisation

## List of Figures

<b>Figures</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
2.1 2018/2019 Consolidated Budget	29
4.1 Sampling Techniques	74

## List of Tables

<b>Tables</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
3.1. Differences between types of phenomenological analysis	56
4.1. Comparisons of Qualitative Paradigms	70
4.2. Profile of Study Participants	76
5.2. Key Themes	85

## List of Annexures

<b>Annexure Type</b>	<b>Page Number</b>
Appendix A: Ethical Clearance	144
Appendix B: Informed Consent	145
Appendix C: Interview Schedule	148
Appendix D: Turnitin Report	150

# Table of Contents

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page No</b>
Declaration .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Dedication .....	iv
Abstract .....	v
List of Acronyms .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
List of Tables .....	viii
<b>Tables of Conent</b> .....	viii
Chapter One .....	15
Overview, context and objectives .....	15
1.1 Introduction .....	15
1.2. Title .....	16
1.3. Purpose and focus of study .....	16
1.4. Location of the study .....	16
1.5. Background and Rationale of the study .....	16
1.6. Literature Review .....	17
1.7. Theoretical Framework .....	18
1.8. Research Objectives .....	19
1.9. Research Questions .....	20
1.10. Research Design and Methodology of the Study .....	20
1.11. Chapter Outline .....	21
1.11.1 Chapter One .....	21
1.11.2 Chapter Two .....	21
1.11.3 Chapter Three .....	21
1.11.4 Chapter Four .....	21
1.11.5. Chapter Five .....	22
1.11.6. Chapter Six .....	22

1.11.7. Chapter Seven.....	22
1.12. Chapter Summary.....	22
Chapter Two.....	23
Literature Review.....	23
2.1. Introduction .....	23
2.2. What is massification? .....	23
2.3. International perspectives on massification .....	24
2.4. Local perspective on massification (South Africa) .....	28
2.5. How large is a large class? .....	31
2.6. International perspective on teaching large classes.....	32
2.7. Local perspective on teaching large classes (South Africa).....	35
2.8. Academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African Higher Education....	38
2.9. Decolonisation and Transformation .....	43
2.10. Chapter Summary.....	48
Chapter Three.....	49
Theoretical Framework.....	49
3.1. Introduction .....	49
3.2. Theory in Research.....	49
3.3. What is Phenomenology?.....	50
2.4. History of Phenomenology .....	51
3.5. Types of Phenomenology.....	52
3.5.1. Descriptive Transcendental Phenomenology .....	53
3.5.2. Interpretive Hermeneutic phenomenology .....	55
3.6. Phenomenological Concepts .....	58
3.6.1. Epoche/Bracketing.....	58
3.6.2. Life-world.....	60
3.6.3. Focusing on lived experience .....	60
3.6.4. Internationality.....	61
3.6.5. Noema and Noesis .....	61
3.7. Phenomenological studies in context .....	61

3.7.1. International Phenomenological Studies .....	62
3.7.2. Local Phenomenological Studies.....	63
3.8. Rationale for Phenomenology theory in this Study .....	64
3.9. Chapter Summary.....	65
Chapter Four .....	66
Research Methodology .....	66
4.1. Introduction .....	66
4.2. Research Design and Methodological Approach .....	66
5.3. Case Study Design .....	73
4.4. Sample and Sampling Methods.....	74
4.5. Case study and Sampling of participants .....	77
4.6. Data Generation Methods and Process.....	78
4.7. Semi-Structured Interviews.....	78
4.8. Pilot Study .....	79
4.9. Data Analysis .....	80
4.10. Trustworthiness of the study .....	81
4.10.1. Credibility .....	82
4.10.2. Transferability .....	82
4.10.3. Dependability.....	83
4.10.4. Confirmability .....	83
4.11. Ethical Considerations.....	83
4.11.1 Gaining access .....	85
4.11.2. Recruiting participants and consent.....	85
4.11.3. Confidentiality and Anonymity .....	85
4.11.4. Data Protection .....	86
4.12. Limitations .....	86
4.13. Chapter Summary.....	86
Chapter Five.....	88
Data Presentation and Findings .....	88
5.1 Introduction .....	88

5.2. Findings and Discussions .....	88
5.3. Key Themes.....	88
Theme One .....	89
5.3.1. Large classes as a recent phenomenon .....	89
Theme Two.....	92
5.3.2. Class Attendance .....	92
5.3.3. Limited Infrastructure.....	95
Theme Four.....	97
5.3.4. Assessments.....	97
Theme Five .....	101
5.3.5. Negative impact on social life .....	101
Theme Six.....	103
5.3.6. Other experiences of teaching large classes worth noting.....	103
Theme Seven .....	106
5.3.7 Challenges with remote or online learning.....	106
Theme Eight .....	109
5.3.8. Positive experiences of teaching large classes .....	109
5.4. Chapter Summary.....	112
Chapter Six.....	113
Theorising the Findings .....	113
6.1. Introduction .....	113
6.2. Phenomenology theory.....	113
6.3. Life-World of Participants .....	114
6.4. Intentionality of Participants .....	118
6.5. Noema and Noesis of the Participants.....	122
6.6. Epoche or Bracketing .....	123
6.7. Chapter Summary.....	126
Chapter Seven .....	127
Major Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions .....	127
7.1. Introduction .....	127

7.2. Summary of Chapters .....	127
7.2.1. Chapter One .....	127
7.2.2. Chapter Two .....	128
7.2.3. Chapter Three .....	128
7.2.4. Chapter Four .....	128
7.2.5. Chapter Five .....	129
7.2.6. Chapter Six .....	129
7.3 Major Findings .....	129
7.3.1 Large classes a recent phenomenon.....	130
7.3.2 Class Attendance .....	130
7.3.3 Shortage of Resources .....	130
7.3.4. Major challenges with large class assessments .....	131
7.3.5. Negative impact on social life .....	131
7.3.6. Challenges with remote learning .....	131
7.3.7. Other experiences of teaching large classes worth noting.....	132
7.3.8. Minimal positive experiences of teaching large classes .....	132
7.4. Suggestions for further research.....	132
7.5. Recommendations .....	133
7.5.1. Need for assistant lecturers.....	133
7.5.2. Better training for remote learning .....	133
7.5.3. Allocate greater budgets for resources .....	133
7.5.4 Continue with remote learning .....	133
7.6. Conclusion.....	134
References .....	135

# **Chapter One**

## **Overview, context and objectives**

### **1.1 Introduction**

According to Trow (1973) massification is a massive enrolment increase in higher education. It is argued that the last few decades have seen a rapid expansion of students' enrolment at higher education institutions worldwide due to massive democratisation of higher education and an increased demand for post-secondary education (Allais, 2016). In South Africa, the demand for higher education was/is greater than the state's preparedness. As a result, this has had negative consequences on almost all of the public higher education institutions in South Africa in terms of physical infrastructure, staffing, educational quality and graduate employment (Allais, 2016). Recently, the aspiring student population has been much more diverse than in the past, and the new cohort of students enter higher education with wide ranging objectives occasioned by their different backgrounds and different cultural orientations. The effect of this is felt beyond mere increase in student numbers and well beyond the classroom.

The pressure of massification and its attendant problems means that academics now have increasingly demanding roles to improve student learning, particularly in a system ravaged by shortage of resources (Mohamedbhai, 2011). It is incumbent upon the higher education sector, both at national and institutional levels, to come up with innovative solutions to cope with the challenges posed by large classes, as they are said to be here to stay. This study sought to explore education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education as a result of massification. This chapter begins by discussing the focus and purpose of the study, followed by a brief description of the location of the study and a discussion of the background and rationale for the study. A brief review of literature is presented, followed by the objectives, research questions, and a summary of the research methodology. Finally, a chapter overview of the study is provided.

## **1.2. Title**

The title of this study is:

- Teaching in the time of massification: Exploring education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education.

## **1.3. Purpose and focus of study**

The main purpose of the study was to explore education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education. The focus of this study was on education academics in a higher education institution in KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa; particularly those who are currently teaching a class of 150 or more students in one seating.

## **1.4. Location of the study**

The study was conducted in the 2020 academic year in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province, South Africa. The campus was selected for the study due to its convenience to the researcher and its proximity to education academics. This campus presented a magnificent site of exploring education academics' experiences of teaching large classes as it has a Faculty of Education.

## **1.5. Background and Rationale of the study**

According to Marrais (2015) there is an inverse relationship between the class size and student achievement rates. The higher the number in a class, the poorer the students perform and vice versa. However, Jennifer (2014) believes that class size in of itself is not a distinguishing feature of student performance. Rather, class size matters in relation to education goals and quality of the educational experience.

During my undergraduate studies, academics were using more and more of surface learning methods of teaching; not necessarily because they were effective, but to some extent because of contextual factors and limitations of resources. There was more content knowledge to memorise than to engage with, to promote student engagement and higher order cognitive functions. The pressure to quickly complete the modules led to academics encouraging students to memorise large chunks of content knowledge taught in class, as part of the drilling routine. Mastering large

amounts of information was the daily practice, as part of the tests and examination preparation. There was minimal or no opportunities given to students to construct knowledge on their own. This study, therefore, focuses on academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education. The motivation for conducting this study was based on personal experience as a university student as well as insights from literature I have read thus far.

I recall my past experiences while I was still an undergraduate student in one of the historically white universities. On average, first year academics were teaching a class of 500 students or more in one seating. I did not know how the academics managed to effectively teach these large classes, but what I still remember vividly is that, I found attending tutorials more helpful compared to attending classes. It is this experience and reflection that made me explore how education academics grappled with large class teaching. I took it upon myself to engage with relevant literature on large classes and explore how academics experienced teaching these classes. The journey I took allowed me to multiple insider and outsider perspectives regarding what large classes and their attendant problems meant for the higher education as a whole.

## **1.6. Literature Review**

There is a long-standing belief that the number of students in a class affects the quality of the learning environment (Hornsby et al. 2014). Large classes are believed to correlate with low student performance. As massification of higher education continues to increase, academics have to grapple with complex issues of large class sizes. Many scholars argue that, "class size has an effect on the quality of educational outcomes and it is considered as one of those important determinants of academic performance which academics may have little or no control over" (Hornsby et al. 2014; p. 13). In order to tackle the problem of large classes, higher education institutions around the world have to be transformed and be innovative in their use of resources available to them.

Within the body of literature reviewed, there is little agreement as to what constitute large class. Some scholars define "a large class not in terms of numbers, but rather as an environment where the quality of student learning may be negatively impacted by the number of students in the class" (Jennifer, 2014, p. 23), whereas others define large classes based on numerical numbers,

meaning any class with over 80 students is large class (Archer, 2015). When looking at large classes, other scholars' discount the issue of numbers and focus more on contextual factors e.g. size of the lecture room, nature of the course, resources available and pedagogical needs of the learning environment (Marginson, 2016a). However, "regardless of discipline and/or the pedagogical needs of the learning environment or contextual factors, what is clear from above about large classes is that, a class is considered large when proper management of the class and effective teaching and learning is nearly impossible" (Chikoko, 2015, p. 4). The debate about large classes has continued amongst educational stakeholders between academics, policy makers, parents and students over the educational consequences of class size. The idea of smaller class size is strongly supported by academics, students and the general public at large. The support is in relation to the goal of promoting quality education. However, as Chikoko (2015; p. 2) puts it, "realising and maintaining quality education will only be possible when, among others, there is knowledge about how academics experience their large class teaching." Whilst there is more literature on large classes and their negative effects on higher education resources (Trow, 1973; Mohamedbhai 2008 & 2011; Hornsby 2013; Hornsby et al., 2014; Jennifer, 2014; Archer, 2015; Chikoko, 2015; Allais, 2016 & 2017; Marginson, 2016a; Marginson, 2016b; Matoti, 2018 and others), there is however a scant research on how this phenomenon has affected academics in South Africa higher education. It was therefore, the intention of this study to fill in this knowledge gap by contributing to this body of knowledge within the higher education landscape. This study sought to give meaningful interpretations to those complex lived realities of academics as they taught large classes.

## **1.7. Theoretical Framework**

The present study is framed within the phenomenological theoretical framework and uses the works of Husserl (1913), Heidegger (1964) and other recent phenomenological scholars. While the original concepts of phenomenology can be traced back to the works of great German thinkers like Kant and Hegel, most scholars regard Husserl as the founder of phenomenology with Heidegger following as a major influence on its development (Smith et al., 2018). Phenomenology is defined as "an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a

phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it” (Sloan et al., 2014, p. 3). The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of experience; both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced. It studies structures of conscious experience as experienced from a subjective point of view, along with its intentionality (the way experience is directed towards a certain object) (Neubauer et al., 2019). The aim of this study was to explore, understand and interpret the phenomenon of teaching large classes, using phenomenological approach.

Finlay further defines phenomenology as “the study of an individual’s lived experience of the world as it is subjectively lived” (Finlay, 2012, p. 2). Since the participants of this study were different from each other, and had different lived experiences, this approach was best placed to explore and give meaning to those diverse experiences. In a phenomenological sense, experience does not only include relatively passive experiences of perception and observations, but also the individual’s desires, imaginations, emotions and actions (Finlay, 2009). In this sense, experience includes everything that we live through; consciously or subconsciously. Finlay (2012) argues that what makes an experience conscious is a certain awareness one has of that experience while living through or performing it. However, Heidegger (as cited in Neubauer et al., 2019) pointed out that, we are often not explicitly conscious of our habitual patterns of action, and the domain of phenomenology may spread out into semi-conscious and even unconscious mental activity. Therefore, the purpose of phenomenological research is to describe experiences as they are lived in phenomenological terms and in this context, to capture the lived experience of academics of teaching large classes.

## **1.8. Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study were:

- to explore what are education academics’ experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education
- to understand how education academics experienced teaching large classes in South Africa higher education

- to understand why education academics experienced teaching large classes in South Africa higher education in the way that they did

## **1.9. Research Questions**

To achieve the set objectives, this study was guided by the following key research questions:

- What are education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education?
- How do education academics experience teaching large classes in South African higher education?
- Why do education academics experience teaching large classes in South African higher education the way they do?

## **1.10. Research Design and Methodology of the Study**

This study was an interpretive research that sought to explore education academics' experience of teaching large classes. The research methodology describes all the techniques and methods that the researcher used to generate data in order to answer the research questions. Creswell et al. (2017 p. 4) further explains that, "this section of methodology clearly describes the research approach, design, and justifying their choice". As a qualitative research study, data was generated using semi-structured interviews to help with an in-depth exploration of the topic under study. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews offers the qualitative researcher the advantage of being able to modify their line of inquiry, to follow up on interesting responses and to investigate underlying motives, thereby allowing more in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2014). Data was generated from a sample of eight academics from one South African University in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The focus was on exploring their experiences of teaching large classes, using semi-structured interviews through zoom meetings. These participants were selected using non-probability purposive sampling, and all data generation zoom meetings were recorded and the recordings were then transcribed for easy reading. Data was decoded and analysed using

thematic analysis. This chapter ends with a brief discussion of the limitations of the study as a result of Covid-19 pandemic.

## **1.11. Chapter Outline**

### **1.11.1 Chapter One**

Chapter one of this study provided an introduction to the research study by giving a summary of the rationale for the study and a description of the context in which the research took place. The chapter ended with an overview of the research questions that were used as a guide to achieve the research objectives.

### **1.11.2 Chapter Two**

This chapter gave a broad summary of contemporary literature on teaching large class and how this phenomenon is experienced by education academics teaching in South African higher education. The chapter reviewed the literature about massification and on large classes internationally and locally, to get different perspectives about the topic under study. The chapter concluded by briefly discussing the relationship between massification and decolonisation to get a holistic view of South African higher education transformation.

### **1.11.3 Chapter Three**

This chapter focused on the philosophical underpinnings of the study by describing qualitative research and the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm focuses on meanings and attempts to understand the research context and totality of each situation by employing a variety of qualitative methods. The chapter further discussed the data generation process followed in this study and concluded by detailing how ethical issues were addressed.

### **1.11.4 Chapter Four**

The chapter discussed phenomenology as a theoretical framework framing this study. In this chapter, the researcher gave a detailed explanation of the concepts that make up phenomenology as a theoretical framework. The chapter differentiated between Husserl's descriptive phenomenology that emphasises a process of bracketing off one's prior knowledge; and Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology which emphasises interpreting life-world of participants affected by the phenomenon. The different phenomenological concepts discussed were life-world, intentionality, noema-noesis and bracketing off. The chapter concluded by

giving different research examples where interpretive phenomenology has been used by international and national researchers to explore and interpret lived experiences.

#### **1.11.5. Chapter Five**

Chapter five dealt with presentation of the findings through coding of themes. This chapter provided a thematic analysis of data to allow “data to speak for itself” through verbatim quotes from participants. The chapter also presented themes that emerged through the semi-structured interviews where transcripts were read several times to highlight experiences and challenges of the participants.

#### **1.11.6. Chapter Six**

In this chapter, findings were theorised in an attempt to make theoretical sense of them. The findings were theorised in relation to phenomenology as a theoretical framework of the study and the literature on large classes infused to make the arguments more compelling. The chapter concluded that, the life-world of participants teaching large classes is full of frustrations and also bracketing off one’s prior knowledge is a challenging process during research.

#### **1.11.7. Chapter Seven**

This chapter provided the reader with the general overview of the study; outlines the research objectives and research questions. A brief summary of the chapter was presented and the chapter ended by offering suggestions; recommendations and conclusions for the study.

### **1.12. Chapter Summary**

This provided the reader with the general background of the study. It also outlined the title, the focus, research objectives and research questions of the study, as well as the location of the study. This chapter also gave the rationale of the study, outlined reasons for conducting the study; explained what literature says about the phenomenon under study (large classes), and study focus (experiences of education academics teaching large classes in South African higher education). The chapter also provided a brief overview of the theoretical framework and highlighted the research design and methodology of the study. The following chapter reviewed literature about massification and large classes.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter briefly discussed the summary and framework of the study. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a broad overview of the burgeoning literature around massification and large classes in higher education institutions. This chapter began by firstly, providing a conceptual definition and explanation of massification, followed by broad overview of massification both internationally and locally. A broad outline of literature around large class teaching in higher education institutions, both internationally and locally, was offered before the chapter ended with an outline of the relationship that exists between the large classes with broader calls for South African higher education transformation and decolonisation.

This study focuses on exploring education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education. The South African higher education landscape consists of public universities, Technical, and Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET), and all private institution that offer post-secondary schooling (Council on Higher Education, 2016). This literature review seeks to explore the relevant topics, the synthesis of scholarly articles, and hypotheses of the scholarly works related to this research topic, with the aim of developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under exploration, both internationally and locally. The chapter concludes by mapping the gaps in the field to which this study seeks to make a contribution.

#### **2.2. What is massification?**

In the last few decades, we have witnessed a rapid expansion of enrolment at higher education institutions worldwide, resulting in the massification of higher education (Allais, 2016). According to Allais (2016, p. 2), “this mass expansion has been due massive democratisation of higher education, increase in demand for postsecondary education, and the rise of the knowledge economy which put pressure in higher education.” Trow (1973) argued that massification

describes massive enrolment increase in higher education. Trow (1973) further observes that massification in higher education went through three stages depending on the level of participation, and it “began from elite to mass to universal phases signifying qualitative changes in the nature and role of higher education within the society” (Mohamedbhai, 2008, p. 13). Trow (2000) further provided a typology to the term massification and coined the terms elite, mass and universal higher education, with elite representing a national enrolment ratio of up to 15% of secondary school leavers; mass enrolments represented a national enrolment ratio of up to 50% of secondary school leavers, and universal enrolments representing a national enrolment ratio in excess of 50% of secondary school leavers.

This increase in analogy as reflected above is consistent with Allais’s assertion that the major drivers of massification have been rising social expectations, democratisation of higher education, and the demand to acquire social and cultural capital that is connected with the demand for graduate level jobs (Allais, 2017). Whilst some countries seemed ready for the mass demand of higher education, others appeared not to have planned for this phenomenon as seen with South Africa’s higher education demand being greater than the state’s preparedness to deal with it (Hornsby et al., 2014). This has had negative consequences on almost all of the public higher education institutions, in terms of physical infrastructure, staffing, and educational quality (Allais, 2017). I now turn to the international discussion of massification to traverse the international landscape in relation to massification.

### **2.3. International perspectives on massification**

According to Marginson (2016a) international higher educational landscape has significantly changed in the last few decades. It is argued that, despite the fact that the world’s population almost doubled in 40 years between 1970 and 2010, worldwide enrolment in higher education increased more than six times during the same period (Marginson, 2016a). This has resulted in a dramatic change in the composition and the outlook of higher education landscape globally. This shows that access to higher education was expanded to more students during those forty years that at any point in history of mankind. Higher education was once the privilege of an elite social class. However, current national enrolments in postsecondary education have increased to more than 50% in many countries (Marginson, 2016b). University enrolments have increased all the

way from moderately elite phases in parts of the Middle East to mass enrolment in Africa, Latin American and Asia; all the way to universal enrolment in Western Europe and North America (Huang, 2016). While the use of national enrolment ratios or participation rates may be appropriate to define massification of higher education in industrialised countries, this may not be the case in developing countries; particularly in Africa or Middle East. In many Western countries, massification happened many decades ago with the developing world in the Global South only experiencing it within the last two to three decades. Most African countries have a very low higher education enrolment ratio but have experienced a rapid increase in actual numbers of students enrolled in higher education in recent years (Mohamedbhai, 2011; Hornsby et al., 2015). This is why this rapid increase in actual numbers has been considered massification as well, despite the national enrolment ratio possible being less than 50% of secondary school leavers in terms of Trow's typological classification of massification.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, higher education in Western industrialised countries was mainly reserved for social elites, mostly males; and accessible to only a small proportion of the population (Albertyn et al., 2017). However, this trend changed during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where there was an increase in democratisation of higher education (increased education access) and a shift from elitist to mass higher education. The demand for higher education is still rapidly increasing in Africa, Latin America and Asia; while Western Europe and North American have reached a saturation point (Mok et al., 2016). It is argued by Allais (2016), that massification in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and more significantly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has been caused by factors such as population growth, increased urbanisation, globalisation, democratisation of education, and an individual's need for upward mobility.

As a result of the abovementioned factors, "higher education participation and enrolment rate is predicted over the next 20 years from 2010 to 2030 to be higher than that experienced in 20 years between 1990 to 2010" (Calderon, 2018, p. 2). The worldwide number of students enrolled in higher education by 2030 is forecast to rise from 100 million in 2010 to 500 million in 2030 (Calderon, 2018). If an extra five years is added to this projection, the number of students pursuing higher education by 2035 is likely to exceed 600 million; an increase of more than 500% in 25 years (Calderon, 2018). Up to 2000 more students were enrolled in higher education

in North America and Western Europe than in any other part of the world, but since early 2000s, we have seen an increase of students pursuing higher education in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe (Mok et al., 2016). According to Mok et al. (2016), the 21<sup>st</sup> century growth is mainly fuelled by massification taking place in the developing countries of the world, and it is a growth that will only accelerate in coming decades. It is projected that Asia is likely to remain the region with the largest volume of enrolment globally. This is partly explained by population growth in this region, and the economic growth the region has experienced in the last few decades (Mok et al., 2016). It is argued that North America and Western Europe traditionally, had the greatest share of global enrolment. However, their share of enrolment is likely to gradually fall and by 2035, the Asian region is expected to exceed enrolment of 200 million between 2025 and 2035. Calderon further argues that by 2035:

42% of global enrolment will be from Asia, with China as the country in the world with the highest number of students enrolled in higher education (anywhere between 20% and 30% of the world's total). India is projected to remain in second place in terms of enrolment numbers, and other countries projected to have large numbers of enrolments by 2035 are Indonesia (world's top 10), and Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines (all three in the world's top 20) (Calderon, 2018, p. 8).

Similar to the Asian region, the number of students from Latin American as a proportion of global enrolments has increased exponentially over the last few decades (Marginson, 2016a). This rise is projected to continue well into the future given the levels of inequality prevailing in this region. This is because of the importance of higher education has on promoting social mobility for people, particularly for those from disadvantaged social-economic and indigenous backgrounds” (Marginson, 2016a). Brazil is expected to become one of the world's top five countries in terms of the number of enrolments whilst Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela are forecast to be in the world's top 20 countries by 2035 (Marginson, 2016a). Africa also experienced massification as exemplified by the enrolment growth in actual student numbers. However, because of the nature and structural landscape of the African higher education system, it is likely to remain the region with the lowest enrolment numbers well into the future (Mohamedbhai, 2011). In terms of higher education enrolments worldwide, only South Africa,

Egypt, Ethiopia and Nigeria are projected to be in the world's top 30 by 2035 (Calderon, 2018). Given the strategic geopolitical position of Eastern Europe, this region is also projected to rapidly increase its volume of enrolment in higher education (Smolentseva, 2016). Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and Romania are projected to be in the world's top 20 countries in terms of the enrolments (Smolentseva, 2016). According to European statistics of 2015, "population growth is projected fall in Europe by 2040 due declining birth rates... however, even if the Western European population stabilises through immigration, higher education will be hit because of the decline in young people" (Smolentseva, 2016, p. 10). However, populations are expected to explode in most of the developing countries. It can therefore, be concluded that by 2035, the industrialised Western countries are expected to remain within their current enrolment numbers and participation rates; with Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America rising up the ranks

Looking at the above trends and statistics, it can be further concluded that the higher education landscape is on the verge of profound transformation. Regardless of the relative growth that materialises up to 2035, it is clear that increased rates of access and participation in higher education will add pressure to higher education's funding models and teaching and learning strategies (Albertyn et al., 2017). In addition, it is also likely to have an impact on how institutions operate and compete for resources, as well as their ability to attract and retain academics and students alike. To help mitigate the negative impact caused by massification, the higher education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be global and transcend national borders to take advantage of the availability of technological tools. The need for healthy partnership with international educational bodies is crucial. The global trend of increasing student mobility is expected to grow, and this will shape the landscape of universities as they gear themselves to attract students who are an important source of income in a sector faced with dealing with limited government funding and shrinking income from subsidies (Marginson, 2016b). We are living in a globalised world but under territorialised rules. That is why the very structure of higher education must be transformed and opened up beyond its current environment to a global community, not limited to a single geographic nation. The world is changing hence, the need to rethink and redefine our 21<sup>st</sup> century educational frameworks and any strategy for higher education needs to be applicable to current realities. There are profound social and political economic changes taking place all over the world. Higher education locally and globally is

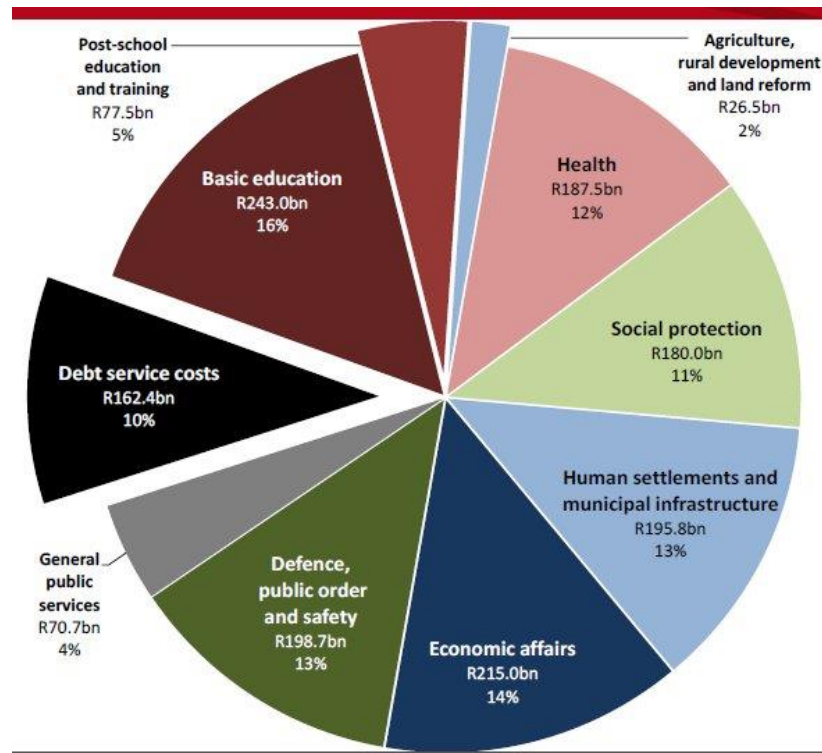
ideally placed to play a critical role in addressing these challenges, and to develop young people as global local citizens. Huang (2015) concludes that, the successful education of the future will not teach isolated specific content around the singular career direction, rather successful education of the future will facilitate collaboration in real-world activities, critical thinking, lateral thinking, adaptability and seamless, confident communication to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands.

## **2.4. Local perspective on massification (South Africa)**

Whilst some regions and countries seemed ready for the increased demand for higher education, others appeared not to have planned for this phenomenon (Hornsby et al., 2014). In South Africa, the demand higher education was greater than the state's preparedness to deal with it and as a result, "this had negative consequences on almost all of the public higher education institutions, including physical infrastructure, funding, staffing, educational quality and graduate employment" (Mohamedbhai, 2008, p. 4). Like in South Africa, it can be argued that for many African countries, massification of higher education was as a conscious decision largely meant to redress historical injustices by making the job market easily accessible to the black masses (Albertyn et al., 2014, Allais, 2016). In South Africa, this agenda is captured in, amongst other things, the country's constitution and education policies that have articulated the need to redress historically inequalities and improve the quality of life of all citizens through education (RSA Constitution, 1996; National Development Plan, 2012; Higher Education White Paper, 2012; Council on Higher Education, 2016). The Higher Education White Paper of 2012 states that, "universities in South Africa have to increase their intake from 900 000 to 1.5 million by 2030" (White Paper, 2012 as cited on Council on Higher Education 2016 report).

The current South African higher education landscape has changed dramatically in terms of broadening access to learning from previously only serving the elite class to being accessible to the masses (Albertyn et al., 2014; Allais, 2016). According to Council on Higher Education (2016, p. 9), "higher education plays a very important role in social-economic development and it is also essential for the facilitation of nation building in terms of promoting greater social cohesion as well as encouraging democratic participation through open debate." Higher education brings about an appreciation of diversity in gender, ethnicity, religion, and race. This

partly explains why the South African government spends more of public funds on education 21% (basic and higher) than on any other sector and also more than any other country in Africa. This public expenditure is shown in the 2018/19 South African Consolidated Budget as indicated below.



**Figure 2.1** 2018/2019 South African Consolidated Budget: adapted form National Treasury

According to Allais (2016), South Africa is characterised by a huge demand for education as the previously disadvantaged majority seek to emancipate itself, through education which is seen as a major avenue for social mobility and a carte blanche for moving up the upper echelons of society. Given the country's greater economic strength compared to its neighbouring countries, the country has become the most attractive destination for foreign university students from the region (Chikoko, 2015). These factors have resulted in huge student enrolments in South African universities. Globalisation and the evolution of knowledge based economies have led to dramatic changes in the characteristics and functions of education in the country (Allais, 2016). The growing impact of globalisation has made the South African government believe that higher education matters more especially if the country wants to achieve global competitiveness. This

has led to government making big efforts in expanding higher education to nurture professionals with higher levels of innovation and creativity to meet the increasing demand for skilled labourers domestically (NDP, 2012). It is therefore, not surprising to hear the former South African President Mr J.G. Zuma arguing that one of the reasons accounting for the state's promotion of higher education and increased funding was to intentionally meet the increasing demand for university education workforce in order to sustain the country's economic growth (Mthembu, 2018). However, the government has been unable to successfully fund public higher education because of budget constraints.

Since 1994 and the advent of democracy, the South African government and universities pursued increased enrolments in higher education within the context of limited public finances, leading to uncomfortable choices. In fact, the government's flirt with a welfarist and neo-socialist funding model for higher where the government behaves like 'Father Christmas' to all was always going to be unsustainable for a developing country like South Africa. Paradoxically, this policy and government magnanimity encouraged more demands from students in the form of fee-free higher education. The government responded to "the need to improve access and funding for needy students through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which grew by nearly 200% between 2010 and 2016" (Mthembu, 2018, p. 10). After the students' protest in 2015, the government responded by injecting an additional R1.5 billion to NSFAS, but that was not enough to satisfy students' demand for fee-free higher education. It is therefore, incumbent upon the higher education sector, both at national and institutional level, to come up with innovative solution to cope with these challenges posted by increased enrolments in higher education.

The need for increased access to higher education and the government's inability to fund all qualifying students, resulted in widespread reaction and student protests in 2015/2016; with students demanding, amongst many things free-fee decolonised higher education (Mbembe, 2016). Students also demanded many institutional reforms, changes in governance structures and funding mechanisms (as is the case with #feesmustfall protests), greater accountability, and above all, the demand for education relevant to societal needs (see decolonisation protests) (Mbembe, 2016). The pressures of massification and its associated problems meant that academics now had increasingly demanding roles to improve student learning, particularly so in

a system ravaged by shortage of resources (Mohamedbhai, 2011; Chikoko, 2015). It can be argued that increased enrolment in higher education addressed issues of access and equity; but equally important was the issue of ensuring access with success. Increased access coupled with shortage of resources to support students in need, which led to broader calls for fee free decolonised education has shown the underlying fault lines of South African higher education in a dramatic way.

## **2.5. How large is a large class?**

The increase in higher education enrolments has led to increased student numbers in classes. Many scholars believe that the number of students in a class affects the quality of learning environment resulting in low student performance (Jawits, 2013; Hornsby, 2013; Hornsby et al., 2014; Jennifer, 2015; Chikoko, 2015; Leibowitz, 2016; Allais, 2016; Matoti, 2018). As massification of higher education continues to increase, the struggle for academics to grapple with complex large classes continues as well. Class size is considered as one of the important determinants of academic performance which academics have little or no control over (Jawits, 2013). With so much literature around large classes, there is still no consensus as to what actually constitutes a large class. Some scholars define a large class based on numerical terms while other scholars define a large class based on environmental factors like classroom size or pedagogical needs. Jennifer (2014) defines a large class as a class with 80 or more students in one seating. However, Chikoko (2015, p. 4) defines a large class not in terms of numbers, but rather as “an environment where the quality of student learning may be negatively impacted by the number of students in the class.” Other scholars discount the issues of numbers and rather focus more on contextual factors e.g. size of the lecture hall, nature of the course, resources available and pedagogical needs of the learning environment.

Regardless of discipline and/or the pedagogical needs of the learning environment or the contextual factors, what is clear is that a class is considered large when proper management of the class and effective teaching and learning is nearly impossible. The debate about large class teaching has continued for years amongst academics, policy makers, parents and students alike with all in strong support of a small manageable class size (Maroun et al., 2018). This is all done because class size has a bearing on the promotion of quality education. However, as Chikoko

(2015) puts it, realising and maintaining quality education will only be possible when, among others, there is knowledge about how academics experience their large class teaching. In this study, a large class is defined as any class that has 150 or more students in one seating. This threshold was taken from an average number of students that the participants indicated that they taught. In fact, some of the participating academics had classes as big as 600 – 1000 students per seating.

## **2.6. International perspective on teaching large classes**

At many colleges and universities, large class sizes have become a norm, as institutions grapple with increasing student enrolments. These large class environments are a reality for many who teach at higher education institutions around the world. Such environments are commonly believed to pose real challenges for academics and students alike. They pose complex challenges to academics because “academics seek to deliver a meaningful learning experience; and they also pose complex challenges to students because students not only seek to gain knowledge, but also to develop critical thinking skills” (Maroun et al., 2018, p. 4).

There is a close relationship between a country’s economic development and the proportion of its skilled workforce. This is because socio-economic development in many countries is closely linked to its educated workforce. Most indicators show that many developing countries suffer from lack of skills development or lack of technical trained workforce, a factor that slows their economic and social development. Countries that have invested in their scientific and technological capability (usually developed at universities) have been known to reap great results in industrial growth (Mthembu, 2018). Allais (2016) argues that the expansion of higher education promotes faster technological catch up for countries, and also improves those countries’ ability to maximise their economic output. This is why many countries see a trade-off between large classes and educational quality as worthwhile as they seek to up-skill their workforce.

It is argued that there is an inverse relationship between class size and quality learning. As class size increased, student learning through constructive engagement dropped. Marrais (2015) argued that a class size of 62 students per academic was the threshold beyond which effective

learning stopped or learning became so compromised that it ceased to make significant impact on students. Woods (2015) further argued that large classes negatively influenced two important and interrelated factors of academic practice, namely, teaching time and the management of the classroom. Large classes negatively affect the academic's management of time in that, more time may be spent on giving instructions to students than the actual teaching (Woods, 2015). According to Nyamupangedengu (2017), the focus in modern day education is on the needs, interests and comfort of the students, which allows them to learn effectively without disturbing one another. Therefore, "deep learning is achieved through student's active involvement and robust application of what they are learning; thereby enabling them to be socially and academically engaged" (Maroun, 2018, p. 12). However, this is often very difficult to achieve with large classes, because the more students an academic is responsible for, the harder it is to effectively teach and assess.

While a number of studies posit a correlation between class size and student achievement, others strongly disprove this claim, concluding that class size has little or no impact on student outcomes (Marais, 2016). Traditional wisdom among parents, academics and policy makers is that, smaller class size translates to improved student learning and outcomes. However, this wisdom has not been universally supported by realistic evidence, as it is sometimes argued that there is usually high energy and excitement in large classes as students tend to learn to work well in groups since group work is a necessity in large class sizes (Marais, 2016). It has been argued that increasing the intake of students in large classes has many benefits for higher education institutions and the country as a whole as it helps reduce the cost of building additional classrooms of which few institutions have the resources for. To support this view, Woods (2015) argues that pedagogies designed for teaching smaller classes sometimes overlap with pedagogies employed when teaching larger classes, which makes, the arguments on both sides debatable.

As already alluded to, there is an inverse relationship between the size of a class and the quality of learning therein. This view is consistent with Stephens et al.'s (2015) study on learning outcomes, which demonstrated that an inverse relationship existed between class sizes and learning outcomes. Student learning decreased as class size increased. This meant that the higher the total number of students in a class, the lower the level of concentration which led to poor

performance of students (Stephens et al., 2015). Nyamupangedengu (2017) notes that students' engagement, behaviour, and retention are affected in many ways by the size of the class. Chikoko (2015, p. 4) concluded that, "student engagement took place in two forms, namely social engagement (how a student interacts socially with other students and lecturers in either pro-social or anti-social ways) and academic engagement (students' attitude towards schooling and the learning process)." It can be argued that when the students are placed in smaller classes, they become more engaged, both academically and socially; and with strong social academic engagement, academic results improve. Small class pedagogies can include activities where students are individually monitored and provided with continuous feedback on tasks designed to develop higher order thinking skills (Jennifer, 2015). All the cited studies suggest that higher education institutions should promote fewer students in a class, to provide learning experiences that facilitate increased collaboration and communication among students, to develop students' holistic academic skills.

According to Mthembu (2018), quality teaching and learning requires not only adequate human resource, but also sufficient and functional physical facilities. He further argues that, because of widespread shortages of public funds for expansion, the physical infrastructure at higher education institutions is not always increased proportionally with increased enrolment. As a result, lecture theatres are not large enough to accommodate the large number of students. Furthermore, "the available academic staff and administrative offices, and even sanitary facilities are inadequate to meet the needs of the enlarged student and staff population and in some cases, residences must now accommodate three or four times the number of students they were designed for" (Mohamedbhai, 2011, p. 15). In some instances, the situation has been compounded by lack of maintenance, resulting in a general degradation of the institutional physical infrastructure. Most institutions have been unable to recruit additional academic staff to cope with the increased enrolment; either because of shortage of funds or unavailability of qualified candidates (Mohamedbhai, 2011). The result has been that academic staff to student ratios has increased and institutions have had to resort to part-time staff that are not always adequately qualified or experienced to teach at the higher education level (Maroun et al., 2018). In addition to teaching, academics have to supervise practical assessments and tutorials, set examination papers, mark large numbers of scripts, and deal with administrative duties.

Examinations have to be held more frequently and academics often repeat the same exam paper to different groups of students (Mohamedbhai, 2008). The pressure on academics to mark large amounts of scripts in limited time also increases the risk of human error. The nature of examination questions has also changed as most academics prefer structured and multiple-choice questions (MCQs) which are easier to mark (Jennifer, 2015). Such MCQ assessments mostly test knowledge acquisition rather than knowledge application. All these challenges that come with teaching large classes are experienced by higher education institutions in many countries worldwide. It is difficult to argue otherwise about the South African experience.

All this proves that indeed large classes are detrimental to quality teaching and learning at higher education institutions worldwide. Also exacerbating the problem in many developing countries is that “the proportion of staff with PhD is relatively low as compared to developed countries, which means that these staff members are not in a position to promote postgraduate programmes or supervise research, both vital for socio-economic development” (Jennifer, 2014, p. 13). For example, it is argued that research output from higher education institutions in developing countries is very low, and because of low research output, young staff members find it very difficult to get promoted as most institutions use research output as an important criterion for promotion (Marrais, 2015). The observation above clearly shows why every attempt must be made by higher education institutions to limit the teaching load of their academic staff to a reasonable level, and to recruit more permanent academic staff from other countries if needs be. At the same time, higher education institutions should ensure that conditions in universities are adequate, and that the campus environment is peaceful and conducive to teaching and learning (see the frequency and effects of violent student protests in South African higher institutions).

## **2.7. Local perspective on teaching large classes (South Africa)**

Like in many countries worldwide, large classes have increasingly become a norm in many South Africa higher education institutions. The mass expansion of higher education has played a significant role in broadening learning access from previously only serving the elites to mass enrolment. According to Badat (2017), access to higher education is not only open to those with the classic definition of student e.g., a person of 18 to 24 years who has entered higher education directly from secondary school but is also available to older students who wish to further their

education in this era of lifelong learning. Currently, there are more students of all ages, social class and calibre in higher education than at any time before, proving that the democratisation of access and is no longer elitist (Badat, 2017). Lifelong learning has become a global trend as people now change careers several times during the course of their lives. Many people are continuously improving their skills and knowledge to keep pace with a rapidly evolving economy, and to remain competitive in the job market (Jawits, 2013). Some higher learning institutions have resorted to permanent online learning for delivering curricula to large numbers of students, and this mode of delivery is likely to grow exponentially in the immediate future (Albertyn et al., 2017). The growth of online and remote learning has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Proponents of online learning argue that this mode is an important instrument of social integration, as it creates the space in which people from all walks of life can access education at their convenience (Badat, 2017); and at the same time, this method can be used to address lack of university admission spaces, university residences, and funding challenges faced by many students.

Higher education institutions may permanently resort to online or remote learning to mitigate the challenges brought on by massification. However, regardless of face to face teaching and learning or remote teaching and learning, large class environment will continue to pose real challenges for academics and students alike. Despite these challenges posed by large classes, (see Hornsby et al., 2014; Jennifer, 2015; Chikoko, 2015; Leibowitz, 2016; Allais, 2017; Maroun et al., 2018, Matoti, 2018 and others) there has not been an agreement on what constitutes a large class. Many education stakeholders differ greatly when it comes to optimal class size. Over and above the other given definitions of a large class, Hornsby (2014) defines a large class as one in which students are too many to be effectively managed and taught. Jennifer (2014) defines a large class as one with 80 students or more. Although Leibowitz (2016) admits that this definition is rather arbitrary, they argue that 80 students is the threshold beyond which traditional teaching methods no longer work, and new ones would have to be found. Chikoko (2015, p. 7) succinctly puts it when he argues that, “a large class is considered large when, getting to know your students by name is near impossible, eye contact with each student would take more time than the allocated lesson time, grading weekly written assignments with care would leave you with no life.” However, due to massification of higher education, a large class nowadays can

range from 80 students to 1500 students in one cohort (Matoti, 2018). Matoti (2018, p. 7) identifies three key factors to consider when defining a large class, namely, “how many students there are in a class, the teaching and learning activities taking place, and the available facilities”. The interaction between these factors influences both lecturers’ and students’ perceptions of whether or not a class is large. Matoti (2018) further argues that, if an academic sought to deliver a didactic lesson, whether students are 25, 100, or 1000 in a classroom will not change the academic’s and student’s activity. If an academic was to deliver a traditional type of a lesson in a lecture theatre with capacity to seat 500 students, and number of students is 300, then this situation may not constitute a large class (Hornsby, 2013; 2015). This is because the lecturer and student perform the same activity regardless of the number of students in the class (Hornsby, 2013; 2015). When any of these features change [i.e., classroom size, student number or pedagogic need], the picture of class size also changes. Regardless of discipline and/or the pedagogical needs of the learning environment or contextual factors, what is clear from above about large classes is that a class is considered large when proper management of the class and effective teaching, learning and assessment is nearly impossible.

The increased democratisation of higher education has been celebrated as it is viewed as advancing the social justice agenda. However, this social justice agenda is hampered by the growth of large classes in universities. Large classes are detrimental to student learning in many ways such as the compromised quality of education and low student performance (Hornsby et al., 2014; Chikoko, 2015; Leibowitz, 2016). It is argued that the South African economy needs graduates with commonly identifiable 21<sup>st</sup> century characteristics such as being creative, ethical and well versed in the practical application of theory (Albertyn et al., 2014). However, the expansion of higher education through increasing class sizes is self-defeating. This is because constructive collaboration between academics and students’ is necessary for acquisition of university disciplinary knowledge and it is difficult to achieve such disciplinary knowledge in large class environments (Allais, 2016). It can also be argued that the current discourse on large class teaching which suggest that academics must accept ever increasing class sizes in the name of access is unrealistic (Leibowitz, 2016). Class size in and of itself is not a distinguishing feature of student performance, rather; class size matters in relation to education goals and the quality of the educational experience (Leibowitz, 2016). In higher education, “goals move

beyond simple knowledge acquisition (surface learning) to promoting student engagement and higher order cognitive functions (deep learning)” (Leibowitz, 2016, p. 16) which are necessary for South Africa’s socio-economic development.

In South Africa, the issue of class size is significant, because in most cases, most students enter higher education from secondary school environment with learning strategies constructed around the memorisation of facts and the simple reproduction of knowledge (Hornsby et al., 2014). These students need to be shown how to adopt the problem solving and critical thinking skills crucial for an innovation economy and a knowledge society. Unfortunately, large class learning environments are counterproductive to this need. Akoojee et al. (2007, p. 11) argues that, “while there is clearly a need to enable access by improving student access (access with success), as opposed to simply ensuring their participation (access as participation), the adequacy of the initiative needs to be evaluated in the context of institutional transformation.” Increasing enrolment in higher education should not be the only imperative, but rather achieving educational quality. This understanding has led to broader calls from students and academics for decolonisation and transformation of higher education. For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017), decolonisation is about epistemic justice as an essential prerequisite for social justice, a process of learning to unlearn in order to relearn.

If the South African government and its higher education institutions are to make headway and meet the challenges posed by large classes, higher education institutions must be prepared to plan, to innovate and to embrace change. It is also important to learn from the experiences of others, but at the same time the higher education institutions should not be mere imitators of solutions that may not always be appropriate to their local context (Mamdani, 2016). This explains the broader calls for decolonisation and transformation in higher education to better improve both the academics’ and students’ experiences in a South African university.

## **2.8. Academics’ experiences of teaching large classes in South African Higher Education**

The increase in numbers of students entering South African universities resulted in the challenges of effectively managing large groups of students in classrooms (Albertyn et al., 2014). Despite the shift from “open access” to “access with academic success”, graduation

outputs in South African higher education remain low (Maringe et al. 2014). The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, (DoE 2001) made provision for the massification of higher education in South Africa. This resulted in large numbers of students entering universities, which created the challenge to effectively manage hundreds of students together in large lecture halls or classrooms (Albertyn et al., 2014). To make provision for responsible massification of higher education that does not affect the quality of student learning negatively, it is necessary to explore the experiences of academics teaching large classes. Matoti et al., (2018) argues that several challenges related to the large class phenomenon are known and accepted by many academics as the reality of contemporary higher education systems worldwide. These challenges include inadequacy of resources, poor student engagement and difficulties in marking assessments amongst others challenges. Hornsby et al. (2014, p. 146) locates the problems associated with large class teaching and learning “as real, with *raison d’être* that large classes in HE are a threat to the skills integral to the advancement of the economic growth of developing countries”. Large class size is thus not just an issue of numbers but is an issue of the complexities and challenges associated with delivering both equality and quality learning opportunities for all students.

As already argued in the preceding paragraphs, there is no agreement as to the optimum class size effective for teaching and learning; however there seems to be consensus with regard to diminishing returns in terms of opportunities to learn as class sizes increase (see Biggs, 1999; Cuseo, 2004, Hornsby, 2014; Chikoko, 2015). CHE (2010; 2019) maintains that the dilemma many academics face is how to cope with the need to teach more students in their classes. On one level, they are faced with insufficient teaching and learning support material and resources in addition to poor infrastructure (limited room for movement or group work). On a second level, lecturers find that the students themselves are underprepared to meet the demands of university study (CHE, 2010; 2019). Maringe et al., (2014) argue that, in their formative years, students learn what it means to be a student, what is required to get by. If students are taught to be passive seekers and transcribers of information, that is what they become. Furthermore, they set their sights accordingly in subsequent courses, often actively resisting attempts in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or post-graduate year courses to get beyond the memorisation of information given to them (Mulryan-

Kyne, 2010). On the other hand, Woods et al. (12, p. 1) also caution against the negative implications of impersonal, anonymous, 'en masse' education for first year students. They note:

These large class settings have historically been lecture-centred, requiring minimal student engagement, and expecting little more than memorisation of terms and concepts as evidence of student learning. The sheer size and anonymity of large classes seem to militate against the very elements that promote student involvement and intellectual development, learning and success. Inattention or absence from class and mediocre student performance seem to be tolerated simply as unfortunate realities.

The above conceptual arguments against large classes show how detrimental large classes are to quality learning. In a small class with active learning, students' misunderstandings are revealed and given attention; whereas in a large class, it is difficult for the academic to know how much of the content and concepts was understood by students (Christopher, 2012; 2017). This is because in a large class setting, learning is lecture-centred with minimal student engagement. The poor engagement and performance of students is exacerbated by the fact that in many large class settings, students are usually heterogeneous in terms of language and aptitude, making more difficult for those who did not understand to express their opinions and to raise their concerns in class (Biggs, 1999; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). This argument is further supported by the study conducted by Matoti et al (2018), who found that 60 % of the students reported that the presence of a large number of people in class deterred them from asking questions.

In large classes where students feel anonymous and disengaged, there are more distracting behaviours such as students coming in late, leaving early, side conversations, texting, and students doing other activities on their laptops (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010, Maringe et al., 2014; Matoti et al, 2018). The unfortunate reality is that, academics cannot control all of these aspects. This talks to the difficulty of effective classroom management in a large class. This is especially true as in a large class, learning everyone's name is difficult and hard to remember, limiting the academic's effort of creating interpersonal relationships. Matoti et al. (2018) argue that academics often complain that they do not get an opportunity to get to know all their students and even those they know, remembering their names is a big challenge. These challenges can be overcome by encouraging participation and attention from all students, which is in itself a huge

problem since in a large class there are students of different cognitive levels, opinionated and shy students, and first, second or elementary level language speakers of the language of teaching and learning (Maringe et al., 2014). These challenges tend to make some students feel anonymous and isolated in large classes which make them less likely to attend regularly. Attendance can also be logistically difficult to record when there are many students to account for.

Bovilla et al., (2011) argues that in a large class, it is more likely that what makes one student happy might make another student unhappy. Therefore, when academics pose questions the less shy students are likely to answer. Too often, interaction is restricted to students in the front rows. Sometimes it becomes difficult for an academic to pay equal attention to all students, hence the material used or taught becomes too easy for some students, but too difficult for others (Moodley, 2015). It is argued that seats at the back are usually for those who seek less attention and engagement in class. As a result, some students' opportunities to learn are lessened and only a few good students improve their learning, while many make little progress and may even fall further behind.

In terms of assessments, Moodley (2015) argues that it is difficult for academics to effectively assess students' work for a large number of students. Grading becomes more complicated and giving written feedback take much more time. Hence, Msiza, Zondi and Couch (2020) argue for the usage of peer assessment in the time of massification as it promotes student engagement. With regards to limited student engagement, it may be difficult to know who is succeeding in a large class because it may be hard to know what mistakes are being made by whom (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). In large classes, the chances that many students can complete a whole semester of study without experiencing a single episode of interaction with the academic are very high. The work of Maringa et al., (2014), demonstrates that interaction between academic and individual students through verbal or written comments is closely associated with higher students' gains due to increased retention, higher academic achievement, development of critical thinking and having higher aspirations. For many students, the absence of such personalised feedback reduces their chances of attaining meaningful outcomes, and can lead to them dropping out, poor performance, non-completion, and reducing their motivation to learn. Therefore, it can be concluded from the above arguments that large classes teaching and learning also leads to many

challenges for academics and students alike. In a weird paradoxical way, if education students are poorly prepared in the universities where they were supposed to have obtained the best of training, because of large classes, then it means when they complete their training and are required to teach in the secondary school or basic school level, academics at universities should not expect magic (CHE, 2019). The situation becomes a ‘chicken and egg’ situation as to who is responsible for poor education at basic education. In South Africa, most students enter higher education from secondary school environment with learning strategies constructed around the memorisation of facts and the simple reproduction of knowledge (Hornsby et al., 2014). Thus, the quality of teaching provided in basic education becomes circumspect and the whole education sector becomes compromised.

To summarise the academics’ experiences of teaching large classes, literature reveals that their experiences are largely negative coupled with many challenges. Teaching large classes has many challenges because of contributions in class are mostly done by few students with the rest of students either uninterested or distracted by other things (Bovilla et al, 2011; Rowe, 2011; Moodley, 2015). Furthermore it is difficult for academics to effectively engage and interact with students to know their challenges and offer assistance and also the use of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) becomes a problem, since lecturers cannot have many TLMs for individual students (Bovilla et al, 2011). In addition, effective assessment is a challenge as it is difficult to mark students’ scripts and provide feedback on time; and those academics who are able to mark scripts and provide timely feedback are left with no social life (Chikoko; 2015). The other challenge limiting student engagement is the issue of language proficiency with other students being shy to voice their opinions in class. All these challenges lead to non-attendance of class by students, which in turn makes the student to fall behind in learning leading to the student dropping out.

The above challenges offer compelling evidence against the use of large class size teaching in higher education; yet large class teaching seems to be increasing rather than lessening. Wood et al., (2012) argues that the financial advantage large classes bring to institutions including the political imperatives of democratising educational provision to all seem to compel institutions to throw caution to the wind. Large classes are unlikely to go away anytime soon and we must learn to live with them. However, given the negative academics’ experiences expressed above, it

seems there is need to invest in research, which seeks to mitigate the challenges associated with large class teaching.

## **2.9. Decolonisation and Transformation**

In order to make sense of the current events taking place in South African higher education institutions, we ought to reflect the historical events that contributed to the challenges facing the higher education system. These various calls for decolonisation and transformation in higher education did not come without merit. According to Heleta (2016), colonisation and apartheid in South Africa were systems designed to exclude, marginalise and subordinate black people, and maintain the dominance of white people. Fanon (1952 [translated by Philcox, 2008, p 3]) argues that:

Colonialism was a system of power and a radical decivilising, dehumanising, and thingfying process. It was a social movement of epochal dimensions whose enduring significance lived beyond the life-span of the colonial situation. This colonial process worked on the history of the oppressed people, and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it. What Africa knew about itself, what different parts of Africa knew about each other, was profoundly influenced by the colonial masters.

Mkandawire (2005) further argues that the negative impact of colonialism on the African people was as cultural and economic as it was academic. wa Thiong'o, one of the most renowned African scholars, maintains that, "the physical violence of the battlefield during colonial dispossession was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom through the sword and the bullet of the chalk and the blackboard" (wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 23). wa Thiong'o (1981) argues that colonisation operated within the coercive element of mental force that led to a distorted consciousness of the reality of their actual relationship (between the body and the mind). Colonial educational literature took African people further from themselves to other selves, and from their world to other worlds. The effect of colonial culture was to annihilate people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, and ultimately; in themselves (Mkandawire, 2005). This process dislocated the people's minds from the place they already knew to a foreign starting point. African people ended up identifying with

the foreign base as their starting point towards themselves, which is from another self (Philcox, 2008). Professor Ramogale, the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Mangosuthu University of Technology (2019, p. 3) succinctly captures similar arguments by stating that:

Didactics, also known as the science of teaching, recognises that if teaching and learning is to be successful, certain universal conditions must be met. These universal requirements are known as didactic principles. By sanctifying the values and beliefs of the colonial master as the golden standard to strive for, colonial education alienated the colonised from their own culture, and turned them into foreigners in their own land. Through its prioritisation of things European at the expense of things African, colonial education undermined, from an educational point of view, the didactic principle that urges that all teaching must proceed from the known to the unknown. By violating this principle, colonial education ultimately rendered its own teaching ineffectual while also weakening the learning potential of the colonised.

These were the effects of colonialism on the cultural consciousness of the black African people. This is why the #FeesMustFall student movement that began as a protest against the fee increase in universities ended up demanding more than just fee freeze but decolonisation of the curriculum. This is because, in higher education, a curriculum is not just seen as the content, but as a multifaceted, encompassing element of power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Students called for decolonised curriculum because they felt that the curriculum was alienating and made them fail to recognise who they were/are. In other words, they could not locate themselves in the curriculum, and this was particularly true for many black students.

In South Africa, until 1994, the apartheid state excluded the majority of citizens from genuine and equal participation and used education to socialise young people into the existing status quo of inequalities through conformity to authoritarian structures (Badat, 2017). The function of these universities was to deliberately retain black students in the position of subordination and marginalisation. These universities, deeply rooted in colonial and apartheid agendas, posed a challenge to the transformation of South African higher education in post-apartheid South Africa. Hlatshwayo et al. (2019, p. 5) argue that, "...the separation of students into different

higher education systems resulted in the unintended consequences of creating the conditions of possibility that led to the emergence of student movements that acted as a force of resistance calling for the decolonisation of the university.”

I wanted to first and foremost, make the reader to understand what colonisation was, and how colonisation affected the cultural consciousness of the black African peoples, and why the need to decolonise higher education. From this perspective, we can see the role the state and higher education institutions have to play in redressing past injustices and also in terms of achieving national goals of quality, equity and transformation. One of the ways state and higher education institutions sought to transform higher education landscape was through massification by increasing access. This meant that higher education was now broadly accessible to more and more previously disadvantaged students. Badat (2010) argues that the South African Constitution of 1996, as well as the Education White Paper 3 of 1997, directed the state and higher education institutions to prioritise higher education and development. These legislative instruments served as guidelines to redress the injustices of colonialism and apartheid in society, and in higher education institutions through massification. This speaks to the belief that higher education institutions are key players in the broader society’s transformation agenda, tasked with an ethical obligation to redress the injustices of the past through progressive transformation (Badat, 2010). Hlatshwayo et al. (2019) argues that the #FeesMustFall was caused by the need for access to opportunities that improved the lives of majority black students. This is because it is believed that gaining access in higher education leads to a better life; and a good education is the key to success. Hlatshwayo et al. (2019, p. 1) further argues that:

Subsequent calls for decolonisation transformation have shed a spotlight on a range of issues which include but are not limited to the funding crisis facing higher education institutions; academic staff diversity; the marginalised experiences of black female academic staff in higher education; the plight of workers and outsourcing; the role of language as a symbolic representation of hegemonic cultures of epistemic racism and cultural alienation; the deeply contested notions of higher education curricula as an institution, one that embodies Eurocentric and alienating values, and beliefs.

We need to appreciate why there was/is a need to increase student enrolment in higher education which ultimately led to large classes. This study precisely locates large classes within the broader framework of transformation, to realise epistemic justice for many. The 2015/16 student protests re-defined decolonisation as a process of expanding imaginations and drawing on a meta-analysis of lecturer and education curricula at large. Mbembe (2015) tells us that the decolonisation conversation currently happening within South Africa's higher education teaches us that decolonisation as a project will always follow different parts because of different institutional contexts, different historical periods and mostly, different role players. It is therefore, important for South Africans to cultivate the capacity to theorise their own conditions. This implies a concomitant responsibility to pay careful empirical attention to lived realities and the multiple histories underlying their conditions and experiences (Akoojee, 2007). Mamdani (2016, p. 13) argues that:

Higher education is where teachers are trained and curricula developed. Without research in higher education to develop curricula for the entire system of education, all curricula will be as an off the shelf imported facility, with little relevance to the lived circumstances of both student and society. If our object is to transform general education, we need to begin with higher education. Higher education is the strategic heart and indeed head of education.

The meaning of decolonisation cannot be taken for granted, but must instead, be a subject of public deliberation and reflection process of expanding one's imaginations which, among other things, involves rethinking what counts as relevant and rigorous scholarship. In fact, democratising access to education resulting in massification was the first step to decolonisation. Therefore, in keeping up with the principles of didactic theory by Ramogale (2019), it is very important to show that one of the ways to improve learning outcomes *vis a vis* quality education, new knowledge must form a link with the knowledge and experiences the student already possesses. If the new knowledge relates to the learner's experiences, then the student will find the new knowledge meaningful and will acquire it with ease and enjoyment. If new knowledge production is not connected to the students' existing knowledge; the result is likely to be boredom, alienation and poor motivation. This probably explains why in the campaign to

decolonise our education, young people have routinely complained about how alienating and foreign some institutional cultures in South Africa are. The need to retain the learner's interest and teach in a meaningful way is the reason why academics are urged to start with the familiar and then gradually proceed to the unfamiliar.

It can be concluded that the primary purpose of higher education in any society is to solve social problems, not necessarily to maximise commercial profits. The purpose of higher education is to generate knowledge that liberates humankind from epistemic colonisation, spiritual enslavement and social marginalisation. Our higher education system must produce graduates who can serve as public intellectuals, thought leaders, be forces for social change, and agents of transformation in all spheres of socioeconomic, religious and cultural aspects of life. Radical departures from the status quo are never easy; but taking up the new opportunities always opens up new possibilities for questioning what was once unquestioned and unquestionable. This is exactly what the South African higher education system needs today; a radical departure from the status quo and a questioning of the colonial and apartheid knowledge systems that, until now, have not been sufficiently questioned, if at all. The movement to transform and decolonise higher education, a coalition of students, progressive academics, university staff and concerned public must find ways to hold the institutions accountable and maintain the non-violent, intellectual, evidence-based, popular struggle until Eurocentrism and epistemic violence at universities is dismantled.

In contributing to the clarion call, this study sought to explore and understand education academics' experiences of teaching large classes. Through understanding education academics' experiences of teaching large classes, their ways and means of designing and delivering curricular, we will be certain that we are moving to the right direction. Whilst there is more literature on decolonisation, massification and large class phenomenon, there is scant research on how these events have affected education academics in South Africa higher education. This is why, based on my experience as a university student, as well as literature reviewed, I decided to undertake this study to fill in a knowledge gap on lived experiences of education academics' teaching large classes. Findings from this study will not only contribute to the educational

literature, but also educational planning and policy towards the university's infrastructure and course allocation, as well as coping with teaching large class teaching.

## **2.10. Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a broad summary of contemporary literature on large class teaching in higher education. The chapter reviewed the literature on massification internationally and locally to get different perspectives on the topic. The chapter also reviewed literature on large classes internationally and locally to get different perspectives on the topic under study. The chapter concluded by briefly discussing the relationship between massification and decolonisation to get a holistic view on higher education transformation. The following chapter focused on the theoretical framework for the study.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed in detail, the burgeoning literature around massification and large classes in higher education institutions. The chapter ended with discussing the link between massification, and broader calls for transforming higher education. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a broad overview of the theoretical framework chosen for this study. This chapter began by discussing the importance of theory and theoretical framework, followed by the selected theory; phenomenology. The chapter further discussed the history of phenomenology, and then moved on to discuss the types and key concepts of phenomenology. The chapter ended with a brief review of phenomenological studies both, internationally and locally.

#### **3.2. Theory in Research**

In academic discourse, theory is an explanatory proposition, an idea or set of ideas that in some way, seeks to impose order or meaning upon a phenomenon. As such, all enquiry proceeds through the construction of theories, sometimes thought of as hypotheses, that is; an explanatory proposition waiting to be tested (Killam, 2018). As a result, theories are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomenon and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions (Walden, 2014). According to Walden (2014, p. 3), “theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study, and it introduces and explains why the research problem under study exists”. The selection of a theory depends on its appropriateness, ease of application, and its explanatory power. Guided by relevant theory, a researcher is given a basis for his/her hypotheses and choices of research methods. Killam (2018) asserts that, by virtue of its applicative nature, a good theory in social sciences strengthens the study by explaining the meaning, nature, and challenges associated with a phenomenon, which are often experienced but unexplained. This is why we use certain theoretical knowledge to act in more informed ways.

### **3.3. What is Phenomenology?**

Phenomenology is an umbrella term encompassing both a philosophy and a range of research approaches (Giorgi, 2012). The central concern of phenomenological research is “a return to embodied, experiential meaning; to seek fresh, complex, vivid description of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (Sloan et al., 2014, p. 4). In common with other qualitative approaches, doing a phenomenological research can be likened to going on a voyage of discovery because, in phenomenological research, a researcher sets out on an adventure; not knowing where s/he will end up, which opens up the possibility of discovering a new world (Finlay, 2010). Finlay (2010) further argues that, the goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of experience in terms of both, what was experienced and how it was experienced; exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it. Phenomenological research studies structures of conscious experience as experienced from a subjective point of view, along with its intentionality (the way an experience is directed towards a certain object) (Finlay, 2012). The aim of this study was to explore and understand the phenomenon of teaching large classes in South African higher education.

According to Finlay (2012), a phenomenological approach is a powerful research framework that is well suited for exploring experiences from individuals’ point of view as it offers a flexible and versatile approach to understanding people’s lived experiences. Simply stated, phenomenology studies individuals’ lived experiences of the world. By examining an experience as it is subjectively lived, new meaning and appreciation can be developed to inform the understanding of that experience (Mohamed, 2017). This study sought to create, neither new identities nor new realities, but merely to give a voice to academics’ experiences of teaching large classes regardless of the positivity or negativity of those experiences. Phenomenology notes that individuals are unique in their being; hence their experiences are different, even though these individuals co-exist in the same context and are affected by the same contextual factors (Sloan et al., 2012). Based on the same contextual setting and lived realities, individual A will likely always experience the same phenomenon differently from individual B. This means that there is no single objective reality or truth out there waiting to be discovered. Rather, there is a multitude of contested realities, and truth is constantly being created and re-created as societies evolve.

This is the core ontological assumption of phenomenology; that there are multiple mental constructions of realities influenced by experiences, social interactions, with each reality considered correct (Sloan et al., 2014). Truths or realities may change over time and multiple truths may conflict but they are nevertheless, still truths. Therefore, the choice of phenomenology as a theory underpinning this study is ideal because it gives space to academics to tell their diverse experiences emanating from the same phenomena.

## **2.4. History of Phenomenology**

The present study is located within the phenomenological theoretical framework and uses the works of Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976), and other recent phenomenological scholars like Max van Manen (1990s), Linda Finlay (2000s) and others. While the original concepts of phenomenology can be traced back to the works of German thinkers like Emanuel Kant (1724 -1804) and Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1837), as well as French philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1753 – 1778) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908 - 1961), most scholars regard Husserl as the founder of phenomenology, with Heidegger following as a major influence on its development (Mohamed, 2017). It is argued that Husserl attempted to:

Resolve some of the key intellectual debates of his era like the one put out by Kant who argued that, “noumena” (fundamentally unknowable things-in-themselves) must be distinguished from “phenomena” (the world as it appears to the mind). Therefore, he established his phenomenological approach as a philosophy to challenge the Cartesian philosophy that sought to be objective and positivist in nature. The Cartesian philosophy by Rene Descartes (1596 - 1650) argued that knowledge can be derived from innate ideas through deductive reasoning. Cartesian duality (mind and body), of [*cogito ergo sum*], I think, therefore, I am. (Killam, 2018, p. 7)

For Descartes, the outer reality was a separate and distinct entity that could be understood in rational terms through the cognitive process of deduction (Killam, 2018). Therefore, from a philosophical perspective, “Husserl saw phenomenology as a way of moving away from this highly deductive positivist approach, to an approach that makes it possible to penetrate deeper into people’s mental consciousness and understand their lived experiences” (Staiti, 2012, p. 12).

Phenomenology was seen as a break from the Cartesian dualism of reality being something “out there” waiting to be discovered (Mohamed, 2017). Phenomenological approach sought to understand the outside world as interpreted by, and through human consciousness with an emphasis on “back to things themselves” (Mohamed, 2017). As a method of research, Husserl proposed epoche, a Greek word which refers to the suspension of judgements and positioning of the researcher with regard to the experiences of the studied phenomenon (Sloan et al. 2014). It is argued that this suspension of judgment is a mechanism which ensures objectivity during the process of data collection and analysis. According to Sheehan (2014, p. 11),

Husserl was the professor at Freiberg University in Germany for years and had a student, later an academic assistant called Martin Heidegger. Heidegger developed his own strand of the phenomenological approach that became known as hermeneutic phenomenology as a follow up from Husserl transcendental phenomenology.

To compare the two versions of phenomenology; Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology was called transcendental because he believed the researcher could transcend the phenomena and meanings being explored to take a global view of the essences discovered (Sheehan, 2014). This meant that there was an objectivisation of the meanings of human experiences. However, “Heidegger was of the view that the researcher could not remove him or herself from the process of essence identification because the researcher existed with the phenomena and the essences” (Sheehan, 2014, p. 13). Heidegger suggested that a philosopher cannot investigate the phenomenon while remaining neutral or detached from the said phenomenon because it may be impossible to bracket off the way one identifies the essence of a phenomenon (Sheehan, 2014). After Husserl and Heidegger had established their two phenomenological approaches, other philosophers and scholars have developed and/or further refined these phenomenological approaches. These scholars included Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ademeo Giorgi, Hans-George Gadamer and Max van Manen amongst others.

### **3.5. Types of Phenomenology**

As already explained above, phenomenology is an approach started by Edmund Husserl and later developed by Martin Heidegger, which sought to study the lived human experiences. According

to Finlay (2010), this approach has evolved into a mature qualitative research methodology during the last decades of the twentieth century, largely due to a big shift from mainly deductive quantitative research to inductive qualitative research. There may be many types of phenomenological approaches but the most common can be identified as descriptive transcendental and interpretive hermeneutic. The two phenomenological approaches follow the broad philosophical traditions of Husserl and Heidegger respectively as explained in the above paragraphs. Descriptive phenomenology was developed Edmund Husserl and interpretive phenomenology was developed by Martin Heidegger (Mohamed, 2017). In order to accurately describe phenomenology, it is appropriate to begin with a brief overview of these two types.

- Descriptive Transcendental Phenomenology
- Interpretive Hermeneutical Phenomenology

### **3.5.1. Descriptive Transcendental Phenomenology**

The focus of this approach is to examine the essence of experiences in the way they occur to our conscious. Therefore, descriptions of the experiences are anchored rigorously on the data without the influence of any external theory (Lavery, 2004). According to Lopez et al. (2004, p. 4), “this approach is based on the philosophy of Husserl’s phenomenology which involves the principle of epoche, the intentional analysis and eidetic reduction.” Put simply, the researcher is required to adopt a phenomenological attitude to bracket or put aside past knowledge. It is argued that Husserl’s approach to philosophy “sought to value objective experiences, with his body of work culminating in his interest in pure phenomenology or working to find a universal foundation of philosophy and science” (Lopez et al., 2004, p. 4). He rejected positivism’s absolute focus on objective observation of external reality, and instead, argued that phenomenon as perceived by the individual’s consciousness, should be the object of scientific theory, and no assumptions should inform phenomenology’s inquiry (Lopez et al., 2004). Instead, the focus should be on what is given directly to an individual’s intuition. Sloan et al. (2014) argues that this attitude towards phenomenology is akin to that of a natural scientist who has just discovered a previously unknown aspect of reality. This shift in focus requires the researcher to describe what is given to us in experience, without obscuring preconceptions or hypothetical speculation *vis a vis* back to the things themselves (Mohamed, 2017). Husserl asserted, “ultimately, all genuine and, in

particular, all scientific knowledge, rests on inner evidence, inner evidence that is what appears in consciousness is where a phenomenon is to be studied” (Mohamed, 2017, p. 5). What this means is that subjective and objective knowledge are intimately intertwined. To understand the reality of a phenomenon is to understand the phenomenon as it is lived by a person.

However, according to Neubauer et al. (2019), the challenge facing the researcher engaging in transcendental phenomenology is to describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection. This means that the challenge facing the researcher is to deeply engage in the study of a person’s lived experience without any preconceived biases. This requires the researcher to suspend his/her own attitudes, beliefs, and suppositions in order to focus on the participant’s experience of the phenomenon and identify the essences of phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). This framework enables researchers to suspend the natural attitude as well the naive understanding of human mind and to disclose the realm of transcendental subjectivity as a new field of inquiry (Sloan et al., 2014). In Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, the researcher’s goal is to achieve transcendental subjectivity, a state wherein the impact of the researcher on the inquiry is constantly assessed and biases and preconceptions neutralised, so that they do not influence the object of the study (Neubauer et al., 2019). The researcher is to stand apart, and not allow his/her subjectivity to inform the description offered by the participants.

The transcendental researcher brings no definitions, expectations, assumptions or hypotheses to the study. Instead, the researcher assumes the position of a ‘tabula rasa’, a blank slate that uses participants’ experiences to develop an understanding of the essence under-study. Smith et al. (2018) further argues that this “tabula rasa state” is achieved through a series of reductions. The first reduction is referred to as the transcendental stage, which requires the researcher to transcend from the natural attitude of everyday life through epoche, also called the process of bracketing off. This is the process through which the researcher is required to set aside or bracket off his/her past knowledge and assumptions about the phenomenon. The previous understandings of the researcher that must be set aside include a wide range of sources like scientific theories, explanations, truths or personal views, and experiences (Smith et al., 2018). For many researchers, reaching the transcendental state remains a big challenge. However, proponents of

this approach strongly argue that epoche and bracketing off remains the only way to explore and find the true transcendental experience.

### **3.5.2. Interpretive Hermeneutic phenomenology**

Descriptive transcendental phenomenology has been criticised by many scholars for being too philosophically and conceptually difficult to work with (see Ashworth, 2003; Lopez et al., 2004; Finlay, 2009, 2010 & 2012; Sheehan, 2014; Sloan et al., 2014; Mohamed, 2017; Killam, 2018; Neubauer, 2019). Moreover, the idea that the ultimate human experience can only be examined by setting aside pre-conceived knowledge has been dismissed as too simplistic and unattainable. Finlay (2012; p. 09) argues that, “the challenges and inaccessibility of pure experience as advocated by transcendental phenomenologists saw sharp departure from Husserl’s pure phenomenological ideas because some scholars saw it as too deductive.” As a result, some scholars reject the idea of suspending personal opinions in favour of interpretation of experiences.

At the fore-front of this departure from transcendental phenomenology to interpretation of experiences, was Martin Heidegger. Heidegger was of the view that a researcher could not remove himself or herself from the process of essence identification because the researcher existed within the studied phenomena (Lopez et al., 2004). The researcher would be required to bear that in mind during the phenomenological study. Heidegger suggested that a researcher cannot investigate “things in their appearing” to identify their essences while remaining neutral or detached from those things. This criticism of transcendental phenomenology led to the emergence of another type of phenomenology called interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology from the works of Martin Heidegger.

Interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology “is a blended approach that aims to provide detailed examination of the lived experience of a phenomenon through participant’s personal experiences and personal perception of events” (Lopez et al., 2004, p. 4). While Husserl saw human beings as being constituted by states of consciousness, Heidegger argued that consciousness was peripheral to the primacy of one’s existence (i.e., the mode of being of dasein), which cannot be reduced to one’s consciousness of it (Killam, 2018). From this angle,

One's state of mind is an effect rather than a determinant of existence, including those aspects of existence of which one is not conscious about. By shifting the centre of gravity (consciousness) to existence (ontology), Heidegger altered the subsequent direction of phenomenology. It is argued that while Husserl was interested in the nature of knowledge (i.e. an epistemological focus), Heidegger was interested in the nature of being (i.e. an ontological focus) (Killam, 2018, p. 8).

As a consequence of Heidegger's modification of Husserl's conception, phenomenology became increasingly relevant to contemporary analysis (Finlay, 2010). With this focus on human experience and how it is lived, hermeneutic phenomenology moves away from transcendental phenomenology's focus on acts of seeing, perceiving, recalling and thinking about the world, and to human beings as knowers of phenomenon.

Finlay (2012, p. 8) further argues that, "hermeneutic phenomenology is interested in human beings as actors in the world and it focuses on the relationship between an individual and his/her life-world." In hermeneutic phenomenology, the term life-world refers to the idea that individuals' realities are invariably influenced by the world in which they live (Ashworth, 2003). Given this orientation, individuals are understood as always having an understanding of themselves within the world, even if they are not constantly, explicitly and/or consciously aware of that understanding (Ashworth, 2003). Within this framework, an individual's conscious experience of a phenomenon is neither separate from the world nor from the individual's personal history (Ashworth, 2003). Consciousness is a formation of historically lived experiences that include a person's individual history and the culture in which he/she was raised (Sloan et al., 2014). Langdrige (2007) argues that an individual cannot step out of his/her life-world, s/he cannot experience a phenomenon without referring back to his/her background understandings. Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to "understand the deeper layers of human experience that lay obscured beneath surface awareness and how the individual's life-world, or the world as s/he pre-reflectively experiences it" (Finlay, 2010, p. 8). Hermeneutic phenomenology studies individuals' narratives to understand what the individuals experience in their daily lives, what their life-worlds are. Instead of undergoing the process of epoche and bracketing off, hermeneutic phenomenology recognises that the researcher, like the research

participant cannot separate himself or herself from his/her life-world. Alternatively, the researcher's past experiences and knowledge are valuable guides to the inquiry. In fact, it is the researcher's education and knowledge base that leads him/her to consider a phenomenon or experience worthy of investigation.

It must be understood that Husserl was a natural scientist by profession hence his positivist ontological assumptions, while Heidegger was a social scientist which explains his relativist outlook. However, it is important to point out that, although Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology followed Husserl's descriptive phenomenology in time, it did not diminish the value of descriptive phenomenology as a means of identifying essences of human experience (Sloan et al., 2014). It is a matter of judgement as to which of these approaches is appropriate to a particular study. Whichever phenomenological approach is chosen, the phenomenological focus on experience is central, and the resulting outcomes are likely to be the same or similar at best. The following table shows concisely lays out the comparison between the two phenomenological approaches.

	<b>Transcendental (Descriptive) Phenomenology</b>	<b>Hermeneutic (Interpretive) Phenomenology</b>
<b>Key philosophical figures</b>	Husserl	Heidegger
<b>Major philosophical origins</b>	Cartesian duality: mind and body	Dasein: oneself in situation
<b>Ontological assumptions</b>	Reality is internal to the knower; what appears in their consciousness	Lived experiences is an interpretive process situated in an individual's life-world
<b>Epistemological assumptions</b>	Observer must separate himself/herself from the world including his/her own physical	Observer is part of the world and not bias free; understands phenomenon by interpretive means

	being to reach the state of bias-free to understands the phenomena by descriptive means	
<b>Researcher's role in data collection</b>	Bracket researcher subjectivity during data generation and analysis	Reflects on essential themes of participant experience with the phenomenon while simultaneously reflecting on own experience
<b>Researcher's role in data analysis/writing</b>	Consider phenomena from different perspectives, identify units of meaning and cluster into themes to form textual description (what of the phenomenon). Use imaginative variation to create structural (the how) description.	Iterative cycles of capturing and writing reflections towards a robust and nuanced analysis; s/he considers how the data (or parts) contributed to evolving understanding of the phenomena (whole)

**Table 3:1.** A brief comparison of transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology and hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology as adopted from Neubauer et al. (2019, p. 89)

### 3.6. Phenomenological Concepts

For a clear understanding of phenomenological ideas, it is important to identify the key concepts underpinning phenomenology as a theoretical framework. In the next section, some of the key phenomenological concepts of are explained including life-world, internationally, noema-noesis and epoche/bracketing off. However, most of these concepts have already been briefly spoken about in the preceding paragraphs.

#### 3.6.1. Epoche/Bracketing

The process of epoche or bracketing off is a cornerstone of transcendental phenomenological theory. It argues that, when a researcher adopts the phenomenological attitude, s/he must suspend his/her biases (Sloan et al., 2014). For transcendental phenomenology, the process of reduction or epoche is a process whereby the researcher brackets off (puts aside) the natural, taken-for-granted everyday world and any interpretations in order to let the phenomenon show itself in its essence (Lopez et al., 2004). According to Smith et al. (2018), transcendental phenomenologists

believe that people have a natural attitude towards things. This attitude towards things suggests that people conduct their lives with a common natural belief that the reality that they inhabit is fundamentally separable from their subjective experience of it (Sloan et al., 2014). In other words, because of this natural attitude, it is possible for people to adopt a phenomenological attitude whereby they can suspend or bracket off their worldviews and beliefs. This act of bracketing off is also known as epoche. According to Sloan et al. (2014, p. 5)

Epoche means to stay away or abstain from presupposition or judgement about the phenomenon under investigation. The aim of epoche is to enable the researcher to describe the things themselves and attempt to set aside his/her natural attitude or all those assumptions the researcher may have about the world around.

The process of epoche or bracket gives the researcher a non-biased way to describe reality from an objective perspective. Given that the basis of pure phenomenology is the examination of the thing itself, thoughtful focus and the careful examination of experience in the way it occurs to participants is an essential process (Langdrige, 2007). However, for the researcher to completely take out his/her bias in undertaking any research is nearly impossible as s/he is part of the world and not bias free. Instead of epoche or bracketing off prior knowledge as suggested by Husserl, Heidegger suggested *dasein* to represent the unique existence of human beings literally being there in the world to express the inter-relationship and inter-connectedness of human experience (Sloan et al., 2014). Heidegger argued that, “consciousness is a product of the historical context from which it arises and in turn, one can never approach the study in a presuppositionless form” (Langdrige, 2007, p. 13). Reality and consciousness are co-creations and because of this, human understanding always arises between the two [reality and consciousness] acting upon each other. Therefore, any successful phenomenological study will have to acknowledge that human experiences are filled with complexities that require the individual’s life, biographical history, and the socio-economic situation to be taken into consideration in order to fully grasp and interpret the lived experience.

### **3.6.2. Life-world**

Life-world is an empirical approach that explores how daily experiences manifest in individuals' everyday lives (Finlay, 2012). With this focus on human experience and how it is lived, hermeneutic phenomenology moves away from Husserl's focus on acts of attending, perceiving, recalling and thinking about the world and on human beings as knowers of phenomenon (Giorgi, 2012). Hermeneutic phenomenology is interested in human beings as actors in the world, and so it focuses on the relationship between an individual and his/her life-world. Life-world then is a term used to describe our everyday experiences with the world around us. One could call it the background or horizon of all experience, and it is that on which each object stands out as itself and with the meaning it can only hold for us (Willis et al., 2004). For participants in this study, this would relate to their experiences of teaching large classes in higher education. This approach also believes in different life-worlds *vis a vis* multiple truth because of different contextual factors, social interactions, hence; each reality is considered correct and valuable. This is why it is important for the researcher to explore and interpret the individuals' life-world experiences as they are, conflicting as they may be.

### **3.6.3. Focusing on lived experience**

Phenomenological study aims to capture subjective lived experiences. More specifically, phenomenologists explore the life-world of individuals, the world as directly and subjectively experienced in everyday life, as distinguished from the objective physical world of the sciences (Ashworth, 2003). This concept of life-world directs our attention to people's lived experiences to engage explicitly with its different dimensions. According to Van Manen (2014), the four aspects of lived experience that are of interest to phenomenologists are:

- lived space (spatiality)
- lived body (corporeality)
- lived time (temporality)
- lived human relation (relationality)

According to Van Manen (2014, p. 17), "these aspects are very important in understanding people's lived experiences especially: their meaning of health/stress, their coping mechanisms with challenges and their quality of life within the phenomena". A researcher can therefore,

recognise the participants' intentions, emotions and expressions caused by large class teaching. The awareness of these aspects is fundamental in any phenomenological study, as it allows the researcher to enter into and interpret one's life-world.

#### **3.6.4. Intentionality**

According to Giorgi (2012, p. 14), "intentionality in phenomenology does not signify an action such as something we intend to do, but rather it applies to the mental relationship we have with the world around us." The word, in this context refers to the consciousness stretching out towards its object (in tension), and it is not just a mental act of doing something for no purpose (Ashworth, 2003). For example, the researcher chose to conduct this study with a purpose [intention] in mind, i.e., intentionally directing one's focus to describe realities. This means that the object of consciousness does not have to be a physical object apprehended in perception; it can just as well be a fantasy or a memory. These structures of consciousness like perception, memory, and fantasy are called intentionality. Intentionality incorporates the concepts of noema and noesis which are explained below.

#### **3.6.5. Noema and Noesis**

In phenomenological approach, noema represents the objective experience of the object, while noesis represents the subjective experience (Willis et al., 2004). Noesis is the part of the act that gives it a particular sense or character (as in judging or perceiving something, loving or hating it, accepting or rejecting), and all this takes place in the consciousness (Giorgi, 2012). The noesis is always correlated with a noema. Noema, in this sense, is the noun (mind) and noesis is the verb (an act of thinking).

### **3.7. Phenomenological studies in context**

According to Finlay (2010), the aim of a phenomenological study is to capture lived experiences in all their ambiguity, urgency and immediacy. She argues that, in recent decades, phenomenology has been increasingly used in qualitative research to explore what it is like to experience a certain phenomenon. Her 2010 informal review of research in studies that explore lived experiences over the last ten years revealed that more than half of the qualitative studies used phenomenologically inspired approaches, suggesting that phenomenology was the qualitative research method of choice in those fields. While some of these articles reveal

confusions or misunderstandings about the nature of phenomenological studies, the desire to explore lived experience and the relevance of research with such a focus is evident (Finlay, 2010).

### **3.7.1. International Phenomenological Studies**

In a phenomenological study conducted by Penner et al., (2008) in Canada on the family caregivers' experience caring for tube feeding dependent patients with advanced head and neck cancer, the researchers explain that they used phenomenological study aimed at understanding the family caregivers' experiences. The researchers further explain that phenomenological research allowed them to understand the caregivers lived experiences. It is the lived experience that gives meaning to each individual's perception of a particular phenomenon, and therefore, presents to the individual what is true or real in his or her life (Penner et al., 2008). The researchers selected the participants using a non-probability convenience sampling technique and their findings did not claim to represent wider population. The researchers made use of semi-structured interviews which allowed them to ask more questions about the phenomenon and focused on important characteristics of the phenomenon. They analysed their data using thematic analysis.

In addition, in an interpretive phenomenological study conducted by Giles (2012), that sought to understand the lecturer-students lived and experiential relationship in Australian higher education, the researcher explained explored how lecturers and students gave meaning to their relationships. Research participants' lived experiences were hermeneutically interpreted. The researcher focused on the lecturer-students relationship as experienced by lecturers and students, as opposed to how it might be theorised. The researcher tried to achieve a balance by listening to participants' experiences and asking critical questions to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. The researcher made use of semi-structured interviews, where themes were identified and explained. The raw data which included the audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews and field notes was thematically analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. Interview transcripts, interview guidelines, list of participants, participant profiles and field notes, were audited. The attitude between lecturers and students of represented age groups towards each other seemed to vary from favourable to neutral to unfavourable.

In a descriptive phenomenological study conducted by Hall et al., (2016) on obesity amongst minors in the United States, the researchers observed that, “as the prevalence of childhood obesity has increased in the United States, so have nutrition education delivered by classroom teachers has become a popular intervention designed to combat childhood obesity” (Hall et al., 2016, p. 2). The purpose of the study was to explore how elementary teachers described their experience with nutrition education. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten teachers who delivered nutrition education in their classrooms, as well as observations and document analysis. Inductive coding was used to determine invariant constituents, reduce constituents to categories, and cluster categories into themes. Reliability and validity were accomplished through audio recording, triangulation, and member checking. The researchers concluded that health educators should work with classroom teachers at the program design, implementation and evaluation stages of curriculum development, to better address children’s needs and facilitate the delivery of high-quality nutrition education for students.

### **3.7.2. Local Phenomenological Studies**

Closer to home, phenomenological studies conducted in South Africa indicate that phenomenology, as a theoretical approach, is preferred across a variety of disciplines. In a study conducted by Matoti (2018), on students’ experiences of attending large classes in a South African higher education, the researchers explained that phenomenological research design was used as it enabled them to examine the students’ experience attending large classes. Phenomenological approach was chosen as it enabled the researcher to probe into what students liked or disliked about attending large classes in a South African university. Data was generated using questionnaires asking undergraduate students to provide information related to their experiences on various aspects related to attending large classes. Some of the aspects were the physical environmental, teaching methods/activities, and assessment techniques. Data was analysed using document analysis.

In a qualitative study conducted by Isabirye et al. (2018) on the lived experiences of academics who participated in a professional development programme at an Open Distance Learning (ODL) University in South Africa, the researchers found that phenomenological research design was selected because it allowed them to examine the lived experiences of academics. Giorgi’s

phenomenological psychological method was used to analyse and retrospectively examine the learning experiences of the participating academics in order to establish how they lived, behaved and experienced the training programme. Data was generated using semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The researcher concluded that the academics' experiences and concerns should provide insight into their skills development needs and the adequacy of the programme provided in addressing the needs and equipping academics for online teaching. They argued that perspectives identified during data analysis should be used to guide the development and promotion of professional development programmes for online teaching and learning.

Another phenomenological study was conducted by Lesch et al. (2018) on South African single women. Situated in a feminist-phenomenological perspective, this study explored the experiences of tertiary educated, child-free, never-married, White South African women between the ages of 30 and 40. The researchers explained that they chose a phenomenological approach because it allowed them to explore participants' subjective lived experiences. Data was generated using structured interviews; and Giorgi's descriptive-phenomenological method was used to analyse the individual interview data. The researchers highlighted how the notion of a committed sexual relationship, as the ultimate relationship that provides effortless connectedness and companionship, underpinned all of these themes. They recommended that alternative discourses and mechanisms of connection that accommodate people who live as single adults, be fostered

### **3.8. Rationale for Phenomenology theory in this Study**

The purpose of a phenomenology approach in research is to study lived experiences. From the preceding discussion and selected phenomenological studies, it is clear that a phenomenology theory was well suited for exploring academics' experiences of teaching large classes. This is because this theory offers a flexible and versatile attitude to understanding people's experiences. The phenomenology theory places an emphasis on "convergence and divergence of experiences, as well as its mission in examining detailed and nuanced analysis of the lived experience of small number participants" (Finlay, 2012, p. 6). The phenomenology theory seeks to shed light on meanings that are less perceptible and help bring them to the forefront. Furthermore, an

interpretive qualitative research is designed to study people's life experiences and deliberately shuns quantitative preoccupation with measuring, counting and prediction in favour of describing, exploring, and interpreting the phenomenon (Finlay, 2012). The uniqueness of phenomenological theory was necessary to understand the complex interrelationships among participants' experiences of teaching large classes.

The phenomenology theory was chosen for this study because the interpretive nature of this theory enabled the researcher to get insights from the participants by employing semi-structured interviews with much open-mindedness and flexibility to listen to people narrating their stories, to identify the factors that shaped their experiences of teaching large class sizes. Interpretative phenomenological analysis appreciates that; there is not a single reality, rather; reality is based on perceptions that are different for each person and reality changes over time. What we know has meaning only within a given situation or context. From this understanding, meanings and reality are produced from lived experiences. This theory and its analytical framework was therefore suitable for this study as it sought at exploring academics' experiences of teaching large class sizes.

### **3.9. Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with a definition of phenomenology and the history of phenomenology. The key characteristics of phenomenology were identified and also explained according to literature reviewed. The advantages and disadvantages of using different phenomenological approaches were identified and explained in detail. Some international and local studies where phenomenological approach was selected were identified and briefly summarised. The chapter ended by explaining the rationale for selecting the phenomenology theory in this study. The next chapter focused on the methodology of the study.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter was dedicated on the study's guiding theoretical framework. This chapter introduced the research design and methodology of the study. This was a qualitative study underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm, exploring education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education. The first part of this chapter looked at research paradigm of the study, while the second part focused on types of research case studies. Also covered in the chapter were sections on methods of data regeneration and data analysis. The chapter further discussed types of samples and sampling of participants in order to give the reader a preview of the methods techniques used in the study. This chapter also emphasised the issues of rigor and validity, before the chapter ended with an extensive discussion research ethics and ethical consideration adhered to in this study.

#### **4.2. Research Design and Methodological Approach**

Research design and data generation methods are integral parts of any dissertation. According to Maxwell (2013, p. 13), "research design is the foundation of any study and it helps find answers to proposed research questions." This section of the study explains the research methodological approach that was used to generate data, as well as how data was analysed. Creswell et al. (2017) explains that, this section of methodology describes the research approach, and design by justifying their selection. Creswell (2014) defines methodology as a theory of getting knowledge through the use of best techniques and procedures. Choy (2014) further explains that research methodology describes all the techniques and methods that the research uses to generate data in order to answer the research questions. Research methodology guides the researcher on a systematic process of generating, and analysing information and finding a methodical way to explore and explain the phenomena understudy. As a result, the main function of a design becomes that of allowing the researcher to easily go about exploring and explaining the phenomena understudy, and answering the research questions using multiple data generation

methods. In simple terms, a research philosophy is a belief about how data about a topic under study is generated and analysed. There are many schools of thought about science of knowledge production. There are qualitative research and quantitative research methods for generating and analyzing data. Quantitative research methods deal with numbers and statistics, while qualitative research deals with the interpretation of certain phenomenon meanings. Both of these philosophies are important for gaining different kinds of knowledge.

Quantitative research is usually expressed in numbers and graphs to establish generalizable facts about a topic by testing or confirming theories and assumptions (Creswell et al., 2017). Qualitative research is expressed in words, and it is used to understand concepts, thoughts or experiences. Creswell et al. (2017) argues that, this type of research enables a researcher to gather in-depth insights on topics that are not well understood. This was a qualitative research study that used interpretivist methods. According to Choy (2014), a qualitative research is a process of enquiry that draws data from the context in which the events occur, in an attempt to describe these occurrences, as a means of determining the process in which events are embedded. It is a systematic scientific inquiry which seeks to build a holistic, largely narrative, description to inform the researcher's understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon (Choy, 2014). Creswell et al. (2017, p. 15) further elaborates that,

A qualitative research is an inductive process of organising data into categories by identifying patterns, and relationships among categories to get a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, this is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions on inquiry that explore a social or human problem. In qualitative research, the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports details of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

Creswell et al. (2017) further highlights seven important features of qualitative research which are “the study of participants in natural settings, focus on perspectives, interpretation and understandings of individuals, emphasis on the process, generation of voluminous unstructured data, usage of inductive analysis, and emphasis on the need for flexibility” (p. 16). Therefore, a qualitative research is concerned with life as it is lived, and experiences are explored in real-life situations. This is seen in how qualitative research methodology pre-assumes that individuals

play a significant role in the construction of their own social reality, and the role of the researcher is interpret the ways in which individuals make sense of that social reality (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative research approach was considered appropriate for this study because the study sought to explore lived experiences, and interpret how people make meaning of their lived experiences. The qualitative research approach was best suited because it allowed for exploration of human behaviour and habits in their natural contexts. Qualitative research design also seeks to provide reflective description of how people think or feel about certain situations, generating qualitative data that is better suited for addressing personal opinions and judgements. It is argued by Choy (2014) that, the strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual description of how people experience certain phenomenon. Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion; whose role in the research focus may not be readily obvious.

Having given the advantages of qualitative research, research as a concept or as a systemic inquiry of knowledge production has been, and in some cases, still is problematic. More recently, decolonial scholars have begun to critique the notion of “research” as a colonial anthropological exercise, and where one needs to be critical aware of as s/he do his/her work (see Smith, 2013, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Hlatshwayo et al., 2019). The word research here is put in inverted commas to signify my discomfort in how it came into being. Smith argues that:

from the vantage point of the colonised, a position from which she writes, and choose to privilege, the term “research” is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, “research” is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. The ways in which scientific “research” is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonised peoples and it is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity (Smith, 2013, p. 1).

The Palestinian renowned scholar, Edward Said (1935 - 2003) was also an influential critic of how “research” was conducted by the Westerners on colonised states. His book presented his influential ideas on Orientalism, the Western study of Eastern cultures (Said, 1978). Said

contended that Orientalist scholarship was, and continues to be, inextricably tied to the imperialist societies that produced it, making much of the work inherently politicised, servile to power, and therefore, suspect. He grounded much of his propositions on his intimate knowledge of colonised literature such as the fiction of Conrad's "heart of darkness", that described the savagery on Congolese people, and on the post-structuralist theory of Foucault, Derrida and others. He argued that much of western scholarship was marked by "subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arab-Islamic peoples and their culture" (Said, 1978, p. 204). He argued that, a long tradition of false and romanticised images of Asia and the Middle East in Western culture, served as an implicit justification of European and American colonial and imperial ambitions. Smith further argues that:

it appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations (Smith, 2013, p. 1).

It can be argued that colonisation of much of the world was made possible and /or justified by many unethical results of "research". From this understanding, we may break the mythical cycle of unethical oppression of others in the name of "research". Decolonial scholars argue for the re-examination of these subtle power relations between the knower [the researcher] and the subjects [research participants]. Furthermore, naturalist scholars within qualitative research propose and promote the use of postcolonial indigenous research paradigms as analytical tools between human relations. Chilisa et al. (2013) has discussed postcolonial indigenous research paradigm as a world view that focuses on the shared aspects of ontology, epistemology, axiology and research methodologies of disempowered or historically oppressed social groups. Postcolonial indigenous researchers describe this research paradigm as a paradigm informed by "relational ontologies, relational epistemologies and relation accountability" (Smith, 2013, p. 18). This postcolonial indigenous approach has grown in recent years, as a means for hearing non-Western voices and emancipating the voices of formerly oppressed generations from silence imposed by colonisation, to provide the means of emancipation and valuing indigenous knowledge systems.

This approach is in sync with what non-Western voices are calling for, a transformed and decolonised educational landscape.

Having said that, at the end of the day every study is context bound and dependent on the researcher's interest. Researchers are always at liberty to choose any research paradigm to answer their research questions or solve research problems. According to Chilisa et al. (2013), research paradigms inherently reflect our beliefs about the world we live in and want to live in. Those beliefs guide how the researcher seeks to solve the research problem. Chilisa et al. (2013) distinguish between critical theory, interpretivism, feminism, positivism, amongst many paradigms. However, it is important to note that paradigms do not exist per se, rather; they are social constructions for locating and making visible the researcher's worldview (Chilisa et al., 2013). Without getting into much detail about each and every paradigm, I illustrate their similarities and differences using table below.

	<b>Interpretivism</b>	<b>Positivism</b>	<b>Feminism</b>	<b>Critical Theory</b>	<b>Post Structuralism</b>
<b>Reason for research</b>	Discover natural laws so people can predict and control events	To understand and describe meaningful social action	To empower and radically change women socially, personally and politically	To smash myths and empower people to change society radically	To demonstrate the ways language obfuscates meaning
<b>Nature of social reality</b>	Reality is subjective and constructed	Reality is socially constructed on the basis of issues of power	Reality is subjective oppressions to regulate women	Reality is subjective and constructed on the basis of issues of power	Reality is ultimately unknowable
<b>Nature of truth</b>	There is one truth that can be discovered	There are many truths and all are social constructed	Truth is many and can be found in a women's	Truth is many and constitutes a system of socio-economic	Truths are socially constructed systems of

			experience	power	signs which contain the seeds of their own destruction
<b>Nature of discourse</b>	Discourse is structured	Discourse is dialogue	Discourse is gendered	Discourse is embedded in rhetorical and political purpose	Discourse is inseparable from its subject and is radically contingent and vulnerable
<b>Epistemology</b>	What is true? What can we know?	What can we understand?	What works against women? What must we do?	What is just? What can we do?	Is there a truth? What constitutes truth?
<b>Validity and rigor</b>	Credibility Transferability Dependability Conformability	Internal validity External validity Reliability Objectivity	Authenticity Trustworthiness Credibility Consciousness s-raising reflexivity catalytic generatively	Authenticity Trustworthiness Reflexivity Reciprocity Generatively Transgressive Voluptuous Rhizomatic	Ironic Validity Exemplarity Generatively Contextuality

**Table 4:1.** Differences within qualitative paradigms as adopted from Chilisa et al. (2013, p, 5)

Using the above comparison of different qualitative paradigms, this research study is located within the interpretivist paradigm. Under this paradigm, individuals understand that every person has his or her own interpretation of everything that happens around them, and that is their subjective reality. Therefore, knowledge has the trait of being culturally driven and historically situated (Chilisa et al.; 2013). The interpretive paradigm does not question ideologies; it accepts

them as they are. The ontological position of interpretivism is relativism. Relativism is the view that reality is subjective and differs from person to person because of contextual and cultural differences. According to Smith (2018);

The world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it, and reality is individually constructed. There are as many realities as individuals out there. Our realities are mediated by our senses and without consciousness the world we live in is meaningless. The interpretive epistemology is one of subjectivism which is based on real world phenomena. It focuses on the relative nature of knowledge and understands that knowledge is created, interpreted and understood from a social as well as an individual perspective. Regarding the same phenomenon, different people may construct different meanings in different ways but truth is a consensus formed by co-constructors (Smith et al., p. 23).

This is why this study used an interpretivist paradigm to understand human behaviour as humanly lived. As such, this paradigm sought to explain the participants' behaviour from their individual viewpoint, as opposed to viewing them as passive actors who are completely determined by the situation in which they are located. The participants in an interpretive paradigm are seen as active agents who are autonomous and able to create their social reality. In essence, this paradigm is of the notion that the way in which people respond in a given situation depends on their experiences and circumstances, and therefore, their context is important. Maxwell (2013) argues that, a research framed in the interpretive paradigm can be used to justify how and why something is happening, and it can also address what is happening from a particular viewpoint. The decision to use this type of paradigm was based on its flexibility, as it allows for more freedom during data generation. Although, researchers may use many different data generation techniques, at the heart of interpretive paradigm is the desire to expose the human part of a story, hence the choice of this approach that allows for personal and participants' expression of a lived experiences. This study examined and interpreted the experiences of eight education academics currently teaching large classes at a higher education institution in South Africa. The use of interpretive paradigm provided the necessary insight into

the experiences academics in teaching those large classes, and how they negotiated their challenges.

### **5.3. Case Study Design**

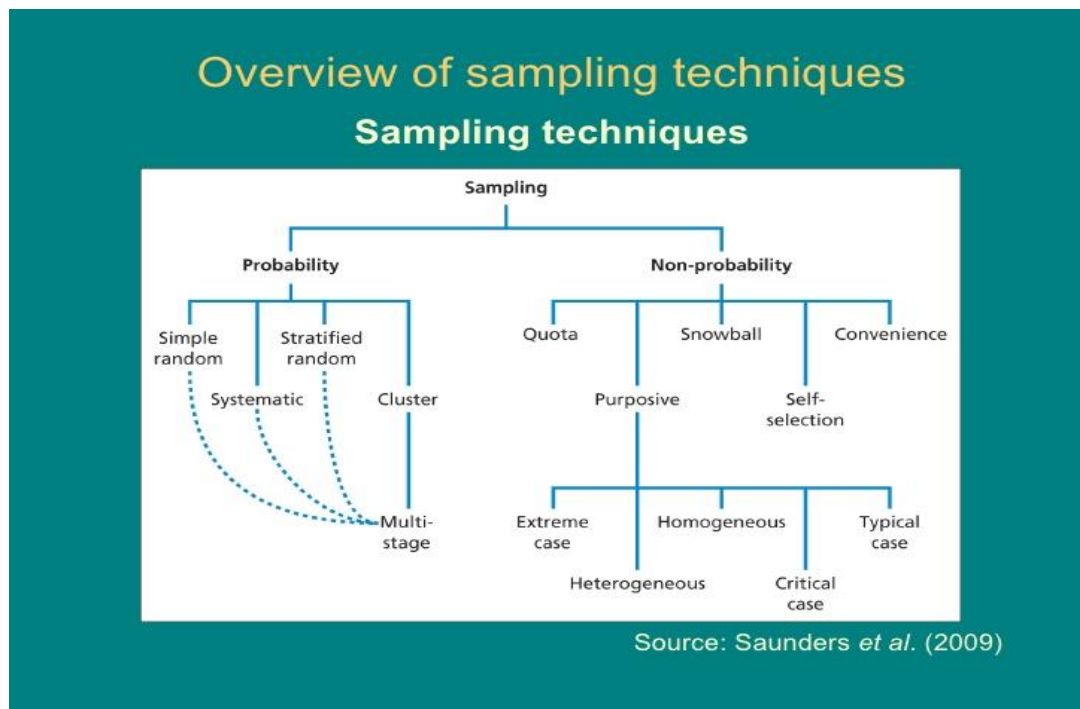
Yin (1994) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context. A case study is useful, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. According to Baxter et al. (2008, p. 16), “a case study is a general term for the exploration of an individual, group or phenomenon”. Along these lines, Miles et al. (2014), asserts that case studies explore and investigate real-life phenomena through detailed analysis of situations and their relationships, to shed light on that particular phenomenon. Yin (1994) and Stake (1995) identify different terms to explain different types of case studies. Yin (1994) categorises case studies as explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive, whereas Stake (1995) sees case studies as instrumental, collective or intrinsic.

According to Baxter et al. (2008), an explanatory case study is the type of case study that would be used if a researcher is seeking to answer a question that sought to explain the presumed casual links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies. An exploratory case study is the type of case study that is used to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes. Furthermore, there is also a descriptive case study that is used to describe a phenomenon under the real-life context in which it occurred (Stake, 1995). However, as different as these types of case studies may be, all of these designs similarly afford the researcher an opportunity to explore or describe a phenomenon in context using a variety of data generation sources. According to Yin (2003), a researcher should use a case study design if the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions, or if the researcher cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study. Furthermore a case study can be used if the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions because s/he believes they are relevant to the phenomenon under study, or if the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses, which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood.

Informed by the interpretivist paradigm and the qualitative research approach, this study utilised a descriptive exploratory case study design as suggested by Baxter et al. (2008). As already explained above, a descriptive exploratory case study approach aims to explore the un-explored, and interpret the un-interpreted phenomenon to better understand it. Furthermore, Creswell et al. (2017) stresses this view by stating that, a descriptive exploratory study provides in-depth, rich data, and is useful when examining an existing phenomenon that exists in a real situation. This case study design enabled the researcher to work in a bounded context, and in the case of this study, large classes were phenomenon explored and the context was University Kwa-Zulu Natal, Edgewood Campus in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province of South Africa.

#### **4.4. Sample and Sampling Methods**

According to Creswell (2014, p. 143), “a sample is a group of people, objects, or items that are a representative of the population taken for measurement or examination.” Etikan et al. (2016) further defines a sample as a smaller part of the entire population, chosen to represent the larger population. A sample is selected for research purposes if it is not possible to study the entire population. In all forms of research, it would be ideal to test the entire population, but in most cases, the population is too large to include every individual representative. This then necessitates an allowable conscious or unconscious bias for the researcher in selecting his/her sample (Emory and Cooper, 2016). However, this bias should be done within the confined realms of research sampling methods. The researcher has to use a specific sampling method to select the participants in the study. There are many sampling techniques that can be used as shown in the figure below



**Figure 4.1:** Sampling Techniques as adopted from Emory and Cooper (2016; p. 276.)

According to Emory et al. (2016, p. 275), “there are two common types of sampling methods which are probability sampling and non-probability sampling”. Within these two types of sampling methods, there are many sampling techniques one can employ within each. Probability sampling is a sampling technique in which the researcher chooses samples from a large population using a method based on probability (Etikan et al., 2016). The cornerstone of probability sampling is the use of random selection to help the researcher select units from the sampling population. The purpose of random selection is the creation of a sample whose units are representative of, or have very similar characteristics to, the population they represent (Emory et al., 2016). With random selection, each unit has an equal chance of being selected. The use of random selection, not only improves the chance of creating a representative sample, but also provides the researcher with methods to estimate how likely representative the sample will be.

On the other hand, there are non-probability sampling techniques. Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique in which the researcher selects samples based on his/her subjective judgement rather than random selection (Emory et al., 2016). This sampling technique depends

heavily on the expertise of the researcher. Unlike probability sampling, where each member of the population has an equal chance of participating in the study, whereas in non-probability sampling, not all members of the population have an equal chance of participating in the study. In non-probability sampling, participants are chosen by the researcher with the complete knowledge that they do not represent the entire population (Etikan et al., 2016). In this case, not all members of the population selected will represent the entire population. Non-probability sampling method is the most suitable for exploratory studies.

Other probability sampling techniques include, but are not limited to simple random sampling, systematic random sampling, cluster random sampling, and stratified random sampling, whereas non-probability sampling techniques includes convenience sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling and purposive sampling amongst others as shown in the figure above (Emory et al., 2016). This is by no means an exhaustive list, but a researcher can select either one or a combination of these sampling techniques. Etikan et al. (2016) defines a convenience sample as a non-probability sampling technique where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included in the study. In convenience sampling, samples are selected from the population only because they are conveniently available to the researcher. Snowball sampling is a cumulative sample that is generated by starting with a few participants and asking them to recommend more people (Etikan et al., 2016). Snowball sampling helps the researcher to find a sample when the sample size is small and not easily available, and difficult to locate. This sampling technique works like a referral program. Another common nonprobability sampling technique is purposive sampling, where the researcher selects the samples based purely on the researcher's knowledge (Emory et al., 2016). The researcher chooses only those people who are deemed to fit for the objectives of the researcher study.

For this study, I made use of a non-probability sampling technique and employed a purposive sampling method. The purposive sampling technique was preferred because the researcher wanted to explore academics' experiences of teaching large class sizes. The purposive sample is very useful for situations where the researcher needs to reach a targeted sample quickly, and where sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern (Etikan et al., 2016). It is a non-

random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. Therefore, in purposive sampling, the researcher samples with a purpose in mind.

#### 4.5. Case study and Sampling of participants

Purposive sampling was adopted for this study to select both the university and the participants. The participants in this research were education academics from an institution of Kwa-Zulu Natal. In addition to choosing the institution as a case study, eight education academics were chosen using purposive sampling. As explained above, purposive sampling is a sampling method where participants are chosen specifically by the researcher for the purpose the researcher has interest on. The researcher made this decision on the basis of research participants' expert knowledge on the topic under study, and also the participants' willingness to participate. The researcher chose a smaller and more manageable sample to do the research in greater depth, and to keep up with the principles of qualitative research design. The chosen sample size was based on the researcher's willingness to participate on the study. The profile of the selected participants is represented in the table below. The participants are from different disciplines as a result they had different perspectives.

<b>Name<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Highest Qualification</b>
Anathi	Black	Female	Geography Education	Masters
Bekzin	Black	Male	Curriculum Studies	PhD
Duduzile	Black	Female	English Education	PhD
Jameson	Black	Male	Curriculum Studies	Masters
Mindlo	Black	Male	Geography Education	PhD
Mapula	Black	Female	Curriculum Studies	PhD
Rose	Black	Female	Curriculum Studies	PhD
Zanele	Black	Female	History Education	PhD

**Table 4:2.** Profile of Study Participants

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<sup>1</sup> In adherence to research ethics, these are not the participants' real names but pseudonyms to protect their identity.

## **4.6. Data Generation Methods and Process**

Qualitative research involves using a variety of data generation methods. Creswell (2014) explains that the qualitative study uses data generation methods such as interviews, observation, focus groups, and documents analysis, amongst others. He defines observation as a method of data generation in which the researcher watches or walks through the actual system/event/incident to observe whatever that may be happening (Creswell, 2014). This form of data generation records the original data at the time it occurs. It also obtains information that participants would ignore because it is so common and that the participants think of it as not relevant. Sometimes, this form of data generation may be the only method available to record certain types of data. As good as it may be as a form of data generation, observation is limited in the sense that, results are restricted to information that can be learned by observation. It cannot observe rationale for actions nor explain why other actions happen the way they do. Therefore, it is not a very effective data generation on its own but, a very helpful method when used in combination with other data generation methods like interviews, which allow participants the chance to explain why things are the way they are.

There are three types of interviews that can be used in data generation such as structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews (Creswell, 2014). Regardless of type of interview employed in data generation, all interviews seek to get answers about a specific topic. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Maxwell, 2013). Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences, and they also allow the researcher to pursue in-depth information around the topic. Working under the interpretivist paradigm, this study used semi-structured interviews to get into the professional spaces of these participating academics, to capture their experiences, and make sense of the meaning they gave to these experiences.

## **4.7. Semi-Structured Interviews**

In keeping with the interpretive paradigm underpinning this study, the main data generating method employed were semi-structured interviews. According to Creswell (2014, p. 11) "semi-

structured interview is the interview structure where by the same open-ended questions are asked to all interviewees.” Semi-structured interviews are those interviews where the interviewer has prepared a list of topics to be explored, and questions to be asked, and follows that list during the interview but also ensures that the questions elicit open responses by the participants that enable lines of conversation to be developed in ways that would not have been anticipated when the interview schedule was being planned (Maxwell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are positioned between structured interviews, where the interviewer does not deviate from the prepared interview schedule and unstructured interviews that are free flowing, and the interviewer can explore and interrogate emergent topic that were not anticipated. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews offers the qualitative researcher the advantage of being able to modify their line of inquiry, to follow up interesting responses and to investigate underlying motives by allowing an in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews were seen as an appropriate data generation method in this study because of the existence of a small sample. The semi- structured interviews allowed the researcher to remain in control of the topic, but also allowed the participants to freely give subjective responses. Because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, face to face interactions were impossible, hence; all semi-structured interviews were done through Zoom meetings and each session lasted for about an hour. All semi-structured interviews were recorded and later transcribed to provide a more accurate capture of the interview responses.

#### **4.8. Pilot Study**

A pilot study can be defined as a “small study to test research protocols, data collection instruments, sample recruitment strategies, and other research techniques in preparation for a larger study” (Peter et al., 2018, p. 1). A pilot study is one of the important stages in a research project, and is conducted to identify potential problem areas and deficiencies in the research instruments and protocols, prior to implementation during the full study (Peter et al., 2018). A pilot study is important in a study because it is used to help the researcher to become familiar with the research procedures and protocols. To determine the feasibility of the study, a pilot study was conducted with two participants for constructive feedback. This was done to familiarise the researcher with the research content and methods, and to take pro-active actions

to remedy potential challenges. It was during the pilot study where the researcher became aware of the challenges of in-person semi-structured interviews and to mitigate this challenge, the researcher chose to generate data through Zoom meetings.

#### **4.9. Data Analysis**

After the researcher has generated data, that data needs to be analysed so that findings are derived. According to Nowell et al. (2017, p. 11), “data analysis means a close or systematic study or the separation of a whole into its parts for the purpose of the study.” Rahman (2017) adds that data analysis as a body of methods helps to describe facts, detect patterns, develop explanations and test hypothesis. In analysing the data generated, thematic analysis was used. In this study, thematic analysis was chosen as the researcher sought to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within data. Nowell et al (2017, p. 15) argues that, “thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences and generating unanticipated insight.” A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Rahman, 2017). This provided the basis from which data from interviews was analysed. Another purpose for the use of thematic analysis was that it organises and describes data sets in detail. Creswell et al. (2015) further argues that, thematic analysis is very useful in analysing data generated from a qualitative phenomenological inquiry as it goes beyond simply counting phrases or words in a text and moves on to identifying implicit and explicit ideas within the data.

Semi-structured interviews were played and replayed on tape to ensure clarity. Data generated was coded according to themes and perceptions, and those themes were all analysed to create an understanding of what is it like to experience teaching large classes. After data was coded and put into themes, it was interpreted using interpretive phenomenological analysis. Interpretive phenomenological analysis is an analytical approach within the phenomenology theory. According to Laverly (2003, p. 17), “‘interpretative phenomenological analysis’ aim is to look in detail at how someone makes sense of life experience and to give detailed interpretation of that account to understand the experience”. This analytical approach enables the researcher to get insights from the participants by employing semi-structured interviews with much open-

mindfulness and flexibility to listen to people narrating their stories, to identify the factors that shaped their experiences. Interpretative phenomenological analysis appreciates that; there is not a single reality, rather; reality is based on perceptions that are different for each person and reality changes over time. Thus it can be argued that this study used an interpretive phenomenological thematic analysis to analyse data and interpretation of participants' experiences.

#### **4.10. Trustworthiness of the study**

According to Guba et al. (1985), trustworthiness refers to the level at which the study can be trusted. In many traditional and scientific researchers, credibility of the study is maintained through objective methods since they, arguably could be assessed in a relatively straight forward manner. In contrast, Shenton (2003) argues that, qualitative studies are usually not based upon standardised instruments, and they often utilise smaller, non-random samples. Therefore, these evaluation criteria cannot be strictly applied to the qualitative studies, particularly when the researcher is more interested in understanding the meaning and interpretation of phenomena.

It is argued that, although assessing the accuracy of qualitative studies is not easy, however, there are several possible strategies that can be used to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Trustworthiness is the corresponding term used in qualitative research as a measure of the quality of research. Guba et al. (1985, p. 210) suggest that, "the trustworthiness of a qualitative research can be established by using four strategies: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability." These trustworthiness strategies and especially these terms have been used by qualitative researchers so that they distance themselves from quantitative positivist paradigms (Shenton, 2003). Guba et al (1985, p. 212) differentiated trustworthiness strategies used by qualitative and quantitative studies as follows:

- Credibility (in preference to internal validity)
- Transferability (in preference to external validity/ generalisability)
- Dependability (in preference to reliability)
- Confirmability (in preference to objectivity)

#### **4.10.1. Credibility**

Guba et al. (1985) argue that the credibility of a study is determined when co-researchers or readers are confronted with the experience, and they can recognise it. Credibility addresses the accuracy of respondents' views and the researcher's representation of them. Credibility answers the question of how believable or authentic the data is, as a representation of the actual views of the participants (Shenton, 2003). Guba et al. (1985) suggested a number of techniques to address credibility including activities such as, prolonged engagement between the researcher and the participants and doing peer debriefing to provide an external check on the research process, and examining referential adequacy as a means to check preliminary findings and interpretations against the raw data. To facilitate credibility in this study, the researcher made sure that there were as many debriefing sessions between the researcher, participants and the supervisor.

#### **4.10.2. Transferability**

Transferability is how the researcher demonstrates that the study's findings are applicable to other contexts. In this case, other contexts meant similar situations, similar populations, and similar phenomenon. According to Guba et al. (1985, p. 214), "qualitative researchers use thick description to show that the research study's findings can be applicable to other context, circumstances and situation." Transferability refers to the generalisability of inquiry. The researcher cannot know the co-researcher who may wish to transfer the findings; however, the researcher is responsible for providing thick descriptions, so that those who seek to transfer the findings to their contexts can judge transferability. The researcher can enhance transferability by detailing the research methods, contexts, and assumptions underlying the study. Shenton (2003) argues that, transferability is achieved by providing a detailed, rich description of the settings studied, to provide the reader with sufficient information to be able to judge the applicability of the findings to other settings. Thick descriptions relates to providing broad details on the procedures of data generation and include the geographical area where data was generated in the research report, which gives the person who reads the ability to critique and review the suitability of the research outcomes for another study (Shenton, 2003). This means that thick descriptions involve the researcher describing explaining the location of the study. However, transferability is

considered to be a major challenge in qualitative studies due to their subjective and relative nature. In qualitative studies, truth is multiple, relative and different but nonetheless remains truth. Therefore, time and contextual changes may result in different findings regardless of using similar sample, similar methodology and similar context.

#### **4.10.3. Dependability**

Dependability is also another trustworthiness criterion involving the explicit revelation of the steps taken in generating data and data analysis, thereby making sure that it remains unchanged (Guba et al., 1985). This is the extent that the study could be repeated by other researcher and that the findings would be consistent. In other words, if a person wanted to replicate the present study, they should have enough information from the research report to do so, and obtain similar findings as this study. A qualitative researcher can use inquiry audit in order to establish dependability, which requires an outside person to review and examine the research process, and the data analysis in order to ensure that the findings are consistent and can be repeated (Shenton, 2003). To facilitate an audit trail, I kept my raw data, generated from semi-structured interviews, so that my study is clearly documented and traceable to my auditors and/or co-researchers for future references.

#### **4.10.4. Confirmability**

One of the trustworthiness concerns in qualitative research is confirmability. Confirmability means that the findings are a true reflection of the participants' responses to the questions asked, and not the interpretations of the researcher (Shenton, 2003). To keep up with the principles of confirmability, I took back the transcribed recordings as transcribed to the research participants so that they would check and verify that the responses were a true reflection of what they said. I then provided an audit trail which highlighted every step of data analysis that was made, to provide a rationale for the decisions made. This process helped establish the accuracy of research findings as portrayed by participants' responses.

### **4.11. Ethical Considerations**

Researchers are bound by certain ethics when carrying out studies. Ethics offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most appropriate conduct towards the research participants (Resnik, 2013). There are many ethical principles that every researcher should consider when

conducting his/her research. At the core of these ethical considerations, is the need to do good and do no harm. In practice, these ethical principles mean that, as a researcher, one needs to at least do the following; obtain informed consent from potential research participants, protect participants' identity and confidentiality, and give the research participants the right of withdrawal from the research any time (Makau, 2016). It can be argued these ethics principles came about as a result of the excesses of research as partly explained on page 65-66. The abuse of human research participants in the Western world played a significant role in shaping present-day research protection norms, standards requirements (Resnik, 2013). The unethical experiments that were conducted by Nazi scientists during the Second World War led to the formulation of the Nuremberg Code of research ethics in 1946 (Resnik, 2013). This led and influenced the international research ethics environment in many ways. Many countries have now established human research oversight systems in response to the demands of research and the most significant one was the Helsinki declaration of 1964 which states "the need for non-therapeutic research emphasizing the protection of subjects by nothing that the well-being of individuals is of paramount" (Kruger et al., 2014, p. 7). Africa has not been immune to human research abuses, with numerous reports having documented unethical experimentation and unethical clinical trials in the continent.

Educational research must therefore, be held beyond ethical reproach. It can be argued that, for example, recording or observing a research participant while s/he is not aware, is definitely an ethical violation. Generating data from the research site or the participant without the necessary consent is an ethical violation. Every interaction with research participant must always be at the participant's convenience in terms of time and space. The following is a general summary of some ethical principles that various codes try to address e.g. honesty, integrity, objectivity, human dignity, confidentiality, social responsibility and non-discrimination amongst others (Makau, 2016). Honesty tries to report data, results, methods and procedures as they are; without fabrication, falsification or misrepresentation of any sort. This also has to do with plagiarism, where the researcher has to give proper acknowledgement or credit for all works used. Integrity has to do with the researcher keeping his/her promises and agreements, at the same time acting with sincerity and consistence. Every researcher has to strive to promote social responsibility, and avoid discriminatory behaviour against colleagues, or students on the basis of sex, race,

ethnicity, or other factors not related to research competence and integrity (Kruger et al., 2014). Failure to meet one or all of these ethical principles may render any research unethical. Even in criminal proceedings, evidence gathered unethically is usually deemed inadmissible in any court of law. This shows how important ethical principles are in any human interactions. The following ethical aspects were taken into consideration in the process of conducting this study.

#### **4.11.1 Gaining access**

In conducting the study, the researcher began by applying and obtaining gatekeeper permission from the University's register to grant access to the research site that is the university. The researcher received ethical clearance from the research project to make sure that the study aligned with the demands of ethics and respect of the institution as shown in Annexure One page 138.

#### **4.11.2. Recruiting participants and consent**

After getting the gatekeeper permission and ethical clearance, the researcher then engaged all potential research participants and explained to them what the study was about and how they could participate in it. The researcher engaged potential participants through emails and all avenues the researcher could to reach out. Unfortunately, of the potential research participants engaged, not all were available to participate in the study due to various reasons. On other occasions, emails were not responded to, meaning the researcher had to work with whoever was available. This was also made difficult by the Covid-19 pandemic, as the researcher could not consult potential participants in person to. However, at the end of the day, the process went very well as the researcher was able to get the eight participants the researcher had initially projected using. Once participants agreed, the researcher then gave them the consent forms; an agreement between the researcher and the participant, which they signed. This ensured that participants gave consent to partake in the study and they were also fully informed about the purpose of the study as well as the procedure and risks involved in the study. Participants confirmed their availability and also the consent form specified that they were allowed to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time, should they wish to do so.

#### **4.11.3. Confidentiality and Anonymity**

One of the principles of ethics in research is that the research participants must have anonymity during the generation of and analysing of data. To ensure anonymity, the researcher made use of

the pseudonyms instead of their real names. For confidentiality, the participants were allowed to have access to the finished report from generated data, records as well as transcribed notes. The anonymity of the participants is shown in Table 4:2 in page 74.

#### **4.11.4. Data Protection**

Data protection is designed to protect personal data stored on computers or in an organised paper filing system. Individuals have legal rights to control information about themselves. To ensure that data generated was safe, I was guided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's ethics office in terms of sharing the information. The data from this research will be held by the university in terms of the copy rights, accessed through permission and destroyed after five years.

#### **4.12. Limitations**

This study was limited in that it was carried out in only one of many higher education institutions as a representative sample for the South African higher education. The data generated cannot, therefore, be transferred nor generalised. Another limitation of this study was the fact that the participating academics were from one university, meaning that their experiences cannot necessarily be generalised as a reflection of all education academics within the South African higher education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using zoom meetings. Furthermore, because of Covid-19 pandemic, there were challenges with logistics, and unforeseen technological problems that made it difficult generate data timeously. To mitigate the challenges brought up by the on-going health pandemic and avoid unexpected time delays, I gave notice to my research participants in due time and scheduled suitable times that accommodated everyone..

#### **4.13. Chapter Summary**

The aim of this study was to critically explore education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South Africa higher education. From the above paragraphs; it was clear that the best way to approach and explore such a study was through using qualitative research design with its interpretive methods of data generation and analysis. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. Measures were taken to ensure

trustworthiness, and all ethical concerns were sufficiently dealt with. The following chapter was the subject of data presentation and findings.

## Chapter Five

### Data Presentation and Findings

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed methodology for the study and how data was generated and analysed. It described the principles of a qualitative research design and explained why this design was suitable for this study. This chapter presented the findings and discussion of the study. The focus was on the presentation of data from transcribed recordings of semi-structured interviews. Findings were presented as themes, and verbatim quotations were used to allow data to “speak for itself”. The findings were discussed in accordance with the questions used in the semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. A systematic reading and analysis of the transcripts gave rise to major themes. Themes that emerged from transcripts were supported by the literature reviewed to lend credence to the study. The next section focused on the findings and discussions of themes that emerged.

#### 5.2. Findings and Discussions

According to Nowell et al. (2017) presenting data in more detail by using direct quotations from the participants’ responses ensures the credibility of the study. Findings are presented in themes, and the following table details the themes and sub-themes that emerged from data analysis.

#### 5.3. Key Themes

	Core themes		Sub-themes
5.3.1.	Large classes as a recent phenomenon	5.2.1	Began from 2016 onwards
		5.2.2	Caused by increased access
5.3.2.	Large classes Attendance	5.2.1	Poor attendance because students are uninterested
		5.2.2	Good attendance because students are interested
		5.2.3	Forced to attend classes as they are part of exams
		5.3.1	Lack of support structures for academics

<b>5.3.3.</b>	<b>Limited Infrastructure</b>	5.3.2	Lack of IT knowledge and Data for students
<b>5.3.4.</b>	<b>Large classes Assessments</b>	5.4.1	Rational for MCQs, Essays and Group assignment
		5.4.2	Challenges with adequate feedback
		5.4.3	Challenges with marking assessments
<b>5.3.5.</b>	<b>Impact on Social Life</b>	5.5.1	Loss of family time and/or social life
<b>5.3.6.</b>	<b>Other experiences of teaching large classes worth noting</b>	5.6.1	Disrespect and disruption from students
		5.6.2	Surface learning instead of deep learning
		5.6.3	Limited engagement due to language barrier
<b>5.3.7.</b>	<b>Challenges with remote learning</b>	5.7.1	Lack of attendance and classroom environment
		5.7.2	Students enjoy the freedom to learn from comfort
<b>5.3.8.</b>	<b>Positive experiences of teaching large classes</b>	5.8.1	Love engaging with differing opinions (diversity)
		5.8.2	Enjoy making a difference to many lives
		5.8.3	Grown and became a better academic

**Table 5:2.** Key themes emergent from data analysis.

It should be highlighted that, although these themes are broken down and written as separate analytical categories, they intersect and are related to each other. The discussion of these themes was as follows.

### **Theme One**

#### **5.3.1. Large classes as a recent phenomenon**

Most participants in the study said large classes were fairly a recent phenomenon. They began seeing and experience teaching large classes from 2017 onwards, especially after the #feesmustfall and fee-free education protests by higher education students. Duduzile said “*I started getting large classes I think in 2017. In 2014, I had 20 to 30 students per module and it was nice because when the class is smaller you get to interact with the students and have that interpersonal relationship, be able to attend issues individually because there is that bond. So in 2014, it was not that hectic; only 2017 when I started teaching large classes of 150 students or more, everything changed*” (Duduzile).

To further emphasise this point of large classes being a recent phenomenon, Mindlo said *“I started teaching a large class in 2018. I wanted to have a feel of another University, so I took a class of 190 students at University of [university named]. The teaching of large classes at University of [university named] was slightly different from this institution. So before 2018, I have been teaching- small sized classes”* (Mindlo).

Early career academics and other more experienced academics who have been in higher education for a long time seemed to have consensus as to when and why large classes began. Here is what Duduzile said about her class, *“my first large class was when I joined [university named] in 2017. I was given a first-year module in [module named]. We used Margaret Martin lecture venue for lessons because it is one of the few venues that accommodate all first years in module [module named], and that class was over 600 first year students and I was so overwhelmed because that was my largest class ever”* (Duduzile).

One can conclude that large classes did not come from a vacuum, rather; they are a symptom of South African higher education landscape. South African Higher Education Institutions have been experiencing growth of large classes due to many reasons as alluded to in the literature review in chapter two. The increase of students’ enrolment was partly caused by government policy decisions to redress the past injustices and the need from Higher Education Institutions to drive transformation of the South African higher education landscape. To support this, Rose said that *“large classes in higher education were caused by democratisation of higher education that opened access to previously disadvantaged groups. This increase has also been exacerbated by the fees must fall student protests that started in 2015 that led to free education”* (Rose).

Another participant explained this phenomenon by saying *“large class go hand in hand with what is happening in the country. Imagine the people that have been disadvantaged by the system and now you want to open doors for them. Many black students have historically been excluded from higher education s. However, since the dawn of democracy access has been extended to all, especially the previously disadvantaged groups with the goal of transformation in mind. So it is not strange that also we had black students struggling to access the university, but now are the majority in many universities with the government through NSFAS and other sources of funding”* (Jameson).

It can be seen from the above findings that massification in higher education leading to large classes was inevitable in South Africa because of historical context. Higher education plays a very important role in socio-economic development, and this may partly explain why the South African higher education institutions are seeing increased demand for higher education as the previously disadvantaged groups seek to emancipate themselves through education, which is seen as a major avenue for social mobility, and a *carte blanche* for moving up the upper echelons of society. However, excerpts data from participants may be in contrast to what many studies and literature around the topic show (Biggs, 1999; Jawits, 2013; Hornsby, 2013; Maringe et al., 2014; Hornsby et al., 2014; Jennifer, 2015; Chikoko, 2015; Leibowitz, 2016; Allais, 2016; Matoti, 2018). This is because large classes in South African higher education can be traced as far in the late 1990s, immediately after the dawn of democracy as the government tried to massify and transform higher education. In the Western World, large classes began from as early as 1960s and 1970s (Mohamedbhai, 2008). It is believed that since the 1970's, class sizes in universities across the world have been increasing (Biggs, 1999). Jennifer (2015) notes that, "large classes are very prevalent in many universities and failure rates in large class courses contribute heavily to overall institutional drop-out rates between the first and second years" (p.24). This shows that as much as data from participants reveal that large classes are recent phenomenon, this trend has been with us for a long time and likely to continue growing.

The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, made provision for the massification of higher education which resulted in large numbers of students entering universities (CHE, 2010). Given the high demand of higher education and the worldwide phenomenon of educational expansion, large class sizes became a part of a teaching setup at the university especially at undergraduate level. Mulryan-Kyne (2010), found out that large classes at the undergraduate level were common at many institutions of higher learning. These large classes, according to various studies, pose challenges to both experienced and inexperienced academics alike (Hornsby, 2013; 2015). As pointed out in the responses of participants and literature reviewed, the issue of large classes is not unique to the South African higher education but is found at other higher institutions all over the world. Thus it can be concluded that the reason participants argued that large classes are a recent phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that most the study's participating academics can

classified as early career academics, meaning they began lecturing in higher education within the last seven years.

The following is the discussion of theme two, focusing on student attendance and factors that affect class attendance.

## **Theme Two**

### **5.3.2. Class Attendance**

Study participants mostly agreed that teaching large classes can be a daunting task. They noted that students attend classes for various reasons. Some students attend classes because the class is interesting, and the academic in charge creates a positive learning environment, while other students may dislike attending the class but attend just because it is compulsory to do so. It can be argued that at university level, the assumption is that every student is a grown up and matured enough to be responsible with her education. The other challenge with large class teaching was the student's disrespect. Here, Mapula said *"sometimes how a student presents himself or herself is also a challenge. Think of a student who comes to class late with a small handbag. She only brings to class a cell phone, and then uses the cell phone to record my voice until I am done teaching. During such time as I'm teaching, that student would be talking with friends in class, disrupting those who want to be proactive in class. That bleeds my heart"* (Mapula).

In some instances, students attended classes for different reasons. Here is what one participant said about large class attendance. *"The most difficult part with large class teaching is that, students don't understand what is being taught because they usually sit at the back of the class, and they play with their phones. Some of the students even play music in class or come to class to sign the register and leave. They just attend to sign the register for DP (Duly Performed) purposes"* (Anathi).

On the same note, Mapula observed that sometimes students came to class just for the sake of coming to class because in most cases, they were not be interested in it all. *"The calibre of our students has deteriorated of late. Sometime students come to class willingly on time and they occupy the front seats. But students who are interested in attending the class will come early*

*while others who are not interested will come late without any valid reason and sit sit at the back,, and many of them will not even bring their books” (Mapula).*

Expanding on the “don’t care” attitude from students, Zanele observed that *“The most difficult part is that, students don’t understand the material taught because they don’t own up their education. Finding out whether these students understood what was taught in class is just something else. How do I know that these students understood nothing? I know that because when I mark their assessments, I realise that students don’t take their learning seriously and don’t even grasp the module concepts; and for me, it goes back to the number of students that are in the classroom” (Zanele).*

The other participant noted that, when students did not attend her classes, she came up with a better way of making sure that students attend her class by making sure that she does not put too much information on Moodle<sup>2</sup> or on the slides. She explains it by saying that, *“I usually give out less information on the slides to get more students in class, and obviously I also try to make my class as interesting as possible. This motivates students to come back to class the next time around, because when you look at that it, the slide does not give out a lot but all the engagement is happening in the lecture venue” (Anathi).*

Jameson said his students attended his classes in numbers as they were always filled with interesting engagements. He explained that *“my attendance register is signed before the class start so that if a student wants to leave can leave. But fortunate enough, only few will leave, maybe 10 out of over 300 or over 500 students will leave, but some will leave and tell you ‘Sir I am leaving because I have got a clash but next class I will be there.’ The conclusion I have for this is that, these students enjoy my class and the way I teach” (Jameson).*

To further highlight the importance of ensuring that students attend class, one participant observed that the most effective way was to make the class interesting as possible. She noted that an academic’s teaching strategies should always create positive learning environment by ensuring that students debate and engage with issues. She explained that, *“for me when I joined higher education, I quickly realised that students sometimes just attend to tick the registers, but*

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<sup>2</sup> Moodle is a learning software that is used by academics and students to upload and download teaching and learning materials at University KwaZulu-Natal.

*to discourage that, you have create and maintain their interest. So if you don't maintain interest in your lectures, students start in large numbers in the early days but eventually, you lose most of them. So I ensure that my teaching strategies are mostly interesting, relevant, and stimulate their interest" (Duduzile).*

In the other discipline, one participant reported that in his class, students had to attend the class because his classes were somewhat compulsory as attendance counted towards the final mark. In his case, he did not have to mark the attendance register because *"the only advantage that I have in my class is that the module that I teach is a continuous module. So we don't have any exams at the end of the semester. What we do during the lectures counts in students' final mark. So if I assign group work and I expect feedback, those feedbacks contribute to the students' final mark. So if a student goes on social media during lesson, s/he somehow remembers that whatever we are doing in class contribute to his/her final mark. So this makes students to be hands on in class, and it works perfectly fine for me" (Bekzin).*

The theme showed that there were many factors that affected how and why students attended classes. Class attendance depended on many factors, some of which were beyond the control of the academic. Sometimes students disliked attending the class because there were just too many students in one seating, compromising the students' ability to effectively engage and learn, sometimes they disliked attending as a result of failure to take responsibility for their own education. This is consistent with studies done by (Biggs, 1999; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Jawits, 2013; Hornsby, 2013; Maringe et al., 2014; Hornsby et al., 2014; Jennifer, 2015; Chikoko, 2015; Leibowitz, 2016; Allais, 2016; Matoti, 2018 and others) that concluded that large classes demotivated and discouraged class attendance. Students tend to feel anonymous and isolated in large classes which make them less likely to attend regularly, especially if they feel the class does not directly relate to them. In large classes where students feel anonymous and disengaged, there are more distracting behaviours such as students coming in late, leaving early, side conversations, texting, and students doing other activities on their laptops (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). It can be argued that attendance is the responsibility of both the academic and the student. Academics will need to implement strategies to encourage students to come to class by conducting vibrant engaging lessons and teach the curricula that talks to students' lives and

context, while on the other hand, students need to take learning into their own hands. Learning is effective through engagement with others in class, and non-attendance is counterproductive to this fact. Based on the above excerpts, this is why it was important for participants to come up with policies, strategies and incentives to encourage class attendance in promotion of quality learning.

Having established the many factors that affected students' class attendance and student engagement, it is also important to discuss how lack of adequate infrastructure facilities and sufficient support which is the subject of theme three affected teaching and learning for academics and students alike.

### **Theme Three**

#### **5.3.3. Limited Infrastructure**

As literature suggests, in South African higher education institutions, increase in student numbers was not met with increased infrastructure to meet the demand and this led to poor educational outcomes, and affected the quality of education in many ways. Many participants reported resource shortage as a constraint to positive learning environment. Here, the term infrastructure is used to refer to support facilities like classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services, and availability of data to students for effective remote learning. Availability of adequate support facilities is meant to capacitate and empower academics to meet the challenges of teaching large class. Here is what Bekzin said with regards to shortage of infrastructure. *“The nature of many of our classrooms is that they are small. Only recent is the university trying to build or renovate lecture halls to meet the current challenges. When I’m talking about size of our halls, I’m referring to physical size of it e.g. I’m referring to Lt2 and Ll3<sup>3</sup> as some of the smallest lecture halls and using these venues to teach 100 or more students is not conducive at all” (Bekzin).*

In support of limited resources as having a negative teaching impact for academics when teaching large classes, one participant noted how she had to leave one university after 2 years of teaching, as the environment was not very favourable at all. She noted that *“the*

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<sup>3</sup> These are lecture venues in one university in the KwaZulu-Natal province

*infrastructure...was a little bit limited compared to [university named]. There was a shortage of resources, and also the university was not well funded. We did not get professional support as young lecturers. So there were so many challenges, that after two years of teaching, I decided to move” (Duduzile).*

The lack of infrastructure led to a sense of inadequacy on the part of participants. One participant’s experience of teaching large classes was further negatively affected by the fact that she was not permanently employed, rather a contract lecturer, hence lacked adequate and conducive working space. She noted that “[university named] should do things like how preeminent universities do, and generate more income to improve the university’s infrastructure. For example, we need more IT experts and offices every floor on the [campus named] campus. ICT team can be distributed on every floor to support the lecturers in terms of every ICT problem. Compounding this problem is the inadequate working space for the contract lecturers, and it is very challenging to do consultation with your students without an office” (Mapula).

Also noted was the issue of shortage of learning materials for students. One participant observed that many students were left behind as a result. She said, “*there are so many gaps that have not been filled. For example, many students have not been provided with laptops, or with enough data for proper learning. I cannot reach majority of my students that I want” (Duduzile).*

The lack of proper infrastructure demonstrates the extent to which higher education institutions need to invest in improving the quality of educational outcomes. This is because, without adequate infrastructure, support provisions and qualified academics; the goal of empowering students and building social cohesion will remain elusive. These extracts are consistent with studies done by (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Hornsby, 2013; Maringe et al., 2014; Hornsby et al., 2014; Jennifer, 2015; Chikoko, 2015; Matoti, 2018 and others) who concluded that the dilemma many academics face is how to cope with the need to teach more students in their classes with insufficient teaching and learning support material and resources in addition to poor infrastructure (limited room for movement or group work). The other resource limitation faced by academics include specialised lecturing skills and sufficient and appropriate facilities that allow a variety of teaching methods, a flexible approach to seating and improved technological resources (Biggs, 1999; Mohamedbhai; 2011). As a result, participants argued that there is an

urgent need to heavily invest in maintaining old and acquiring new resource materials to successfully meet the challenges posed by large class teaching. However, in developing countries like South Africa, issues of affordability, access and maintenance of technological software and resources can act as barriers to using technology as a resource to promote quality education.

Furthermore, research done by Maringe et al. (2014), highlights that student engagement with the lecturer is of crucial importance to ensure the academic success of students (Biggs 1999; Carbone & Greenberg 1998). The increase of class size often results in limited exchanges occurring between students and lecturers with the consequence that students remain anonymous and become passive (Christopher, 2012). Without appropriate engagement with lecturers, students often experience difficulty when making meaning of the subject field that they have not been previously exposed to (Rowe, 2011; Moodley, 2015). The large class has implications for teaching and learning related to student and lecturer interaction, student learning and responsibility, teaching and feedback. A large classroom setting is not conducive to the development of interpersonal dialogue as a significant mode of dialogue that ensures teaching and learning (Rowe, 2011). Structural resources, like seating arrangements and the physical environment of the classroom, might hamper the scope for interpersonal dialogue between a lecturer and a student, as well as among students.

The next theme presents a subject that was prominently expressed by participants, mainly the confusions, ambiguities and concerns they have when it comes to large class assessments.

## **Theme Four**

### **5.3.4. Assessments**

The findings did reveal that large classes posed a huge challenge to participants when it came to assessments. The participants indicated having to resort to many strategies to successfully administer assessments in the face of these challenges. The participants reported that they preferred tests, group tasks, exams and essays as forms of assessment, or a combination of all these strategies for holistic assessment. Here is what Jameson said about his rationale for using essays to assess students. *“I usually give students essays as a way of assessment to teach them how to write academically, because some of them may want to pursue their postgraduate studies.*

*So, when they write their essays, it gives them an opportunity for them to write in an academics way.” His rationale for not preferring tests was that “a student can pass a test without necessarily giving out an effort, as they can just memorise whatever from the scope, because they usually demand a scope before any test. As a lecturer, it is difficult to ascertain whether the students understood what was taught from marking a test. This is why I prefer essays as a way of assessments” (Jameson).*

However, other participants said they preferred a combination of both essays and tests so that no students are discriminated by the form of assessment. One participant argued that, *“the essence of these assessments should vary because students differ. Some are good in essay writing, some are good in multiple choice questions (MCQs) and others are good in group works. So, to use the concept of assessment inclusiveness, I try to ensure that all my students do well because they are all catered for. If we use essay writing, we may favour some students and leave out others; likewise if we only use MCQ, meaning other students may benefit, while others are disadvantaged. So, I try to bring in the concept of assessment inclusiveness by using different kinds of assessment strategies to assess my students” (Mapula).*

Some participants preferred (MCQs) as they were easy to mark, whereas other participants disliked them for the same reason of testing surface knowledge. One participant said, *“personally, I am not a fan of MCQ’s, but now with the remote learning, most of the things have to be done online, and there is no way of running away from MCQ’s” (Rose).* However, when it comes to marking essay assessments, which was her preferred method of assessment, the participant stated that *“we obviously need to employ other people to help with marking. If I were to mark 1300 scripts, it would take months to do that, so I employ other students from the Masters and PhD programmes to help me with the marking” (Rose).*

In other disciplines, exams are written in essay format, and marking all those essay scripts becomes a huge challenge. The participants explained that it was a huge challenge marking +- 100 scripts of 5 or more pages, and that was cumbersome and it increased human error. Marking professionally and giving out constructive feedback was highly challenging. Therefore, other participants preferred to assess students using multiple choice questions (MCQs) as they were easy to mark or because of the availability of computer software used to mark them. Allais

(2016) argues that the purpose of higher education is to produce students who are able to communicate effectively, have a strong interpersonal and social awareness, and students who are problem solvers, who display well developed leadership skills. In support of this argument, some participants preferred using group work as that allowed for a collaborative culture amongst students. Rose says she used group work because *“group work teaches students to be able to learn together collaboratively and also taking leadership because they will need to have someone to organise and motivate the group members”* (Rose).

In support of group work, Bekzin said, *“group work is also a good way of assessment as it teaches students tolerance amongst one another, and to respect different opinions. Students should be taught how important tolerance and respect in academia is and also understand the value of teamwork for collective good”* (Bekzin).

One participant concluded that large class assessment was ineffective and unfair in many instances. Many strategies that academics came up with, with good intentions, ended up not working the way they were meant to. Participants employed Masters and PhD candidates to help them with marking. However, that strategy did not always work properly with Masters and PhD candidates who did not teach the module, and may not be familiar with the content. While that was a challenge with large class assessment marking, one individual could not be reasonably expected to mark over a 1000 scripts. One participant summarised her frustration with large class assessment as follows: *“large class assessment is a tedious work because, how do you effectively asses a class of 1200 students like I had last year. First of all, you need to deal with the issue of marking and hiring of markers. The issue becomes discrepancies in the marking of those assignments as each marker will have to mark 100 scripts or so. You find students who were not supposed to pass, passing with higher marks and others who were supposed to pass, failing. This happens because even these markers put more pressure on themselves whereby they are sometimes marking more than 2 modules at a time, and also have deadlines. They then have to push for marks in as quickly as possible for a quick buck. I can prevent this by moderating the scripts but this impossible as I would have to do a double job of moderating all 1200 essays. All these challenges also affect the quality of marking and the progression of students as there are students who pass without meeting the actual minimum requirements hence progression to the*

*next level or students are supposed to pass but end up failing hence repeating the module. All this is something that I can't correct because it's impossible to moderate all 1200 scripts. Therefore, large class marking becomes flawed and full of inconsistencies with students getting marks they didn't deserve and/or inflated marks (Zanele).*

The above theme on challenges with assessments and assessment marking illustrates that large classes are detrimental to quality teaching and learning at higher education institutions. In addition, participants argued that finding time for planning, administering and marking the assessment left the academics with no 'life'. They further contend that academics see this as a direct threat to the quality of teaching. Essay type of questions that are designed to encourage critical thinking and synthesis of content were discouraged as these type of assignments took more time to be marked. Thus all in all, quality teaching and assessment actually suffers in large classes, and this is an indictment on the quality of higher education in South Africa. These observation and arguments are supported by studies conducted by (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Jawits, 2013; Hornsby, 2013; Maringe et al., 2014; CHE, 2010; CHE, 2019; Mahabeer, 2019) who concluded that assessment is undoubtedly important in realising the goals of teaching and learning and in improving student performance, and it cannot be removed from the process of education.

The purpose of assessment in higher education is to measure the level of student knowledge for quality; assess the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved; and to judge the quality of higher education institutions and programmes in the upkeep of standards (accreditation) (CHE, 2019; Mahabeer, 2019). With the ever-changing curriculum, Mahabeer, (2019) argues that higher education institutions worldwide are increasingly moving towards online learning management systems to offer effective and efficient assessment solutions to large class teaching and to cope with the demands of the 21st century. Also, Msiza, Zondi and Couch (2020) argue that given the current era of massification in higher education, students be given should more opportunities to engage in peer assessment as it is engaging for students. Assessment activities that do not engage students in active participation and those assessments that remain unchanged year after year are not stimulating original thinking, and this influences acts of cheating and plagiarism (Mahabeer, 2019). Thus the quality of teaching, learning and

assessment is compromised by the growing problem of academic dishonesty, especially in large classes as it is difficult to keep track on each and every student. In South Africa and around the world, student plagiarism and cheating has become a matter of concern, especially when it comes to teaching large classes, and this concern has received much attention as it impacts negatively on the maintenance of academic standards and integrity at many universities (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). Participants spoke of their concerns with regards determining the individuality and the authenticity of the students' work especially since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition to teaching, academics have to supervise practical assessments, set examination papers, mark large numbers of scripts, and deal with administrative duties. Examinations have to be held more frequently and academics often repeat the same exam paper to different groups of students (Mohamedbhai, 2008). The pressure on academics to mark large amounts of scripts in limited time also increases the risk of human error. The nature of examination questions has also changed as most academics prefer structured and multiple-choice questions (MCQs) which are easier to mark (Jennifer, 2015). Such MCQ assessments mostly test knowledge acquisition rather than knowledge application. All these challenges that come with teaching large classes are experienced by higher education institutions in many countries worldwide. Thus large class assessment is detrimental to quality teaching, learning and assessment as well as maintenance of academic standards and integrity.

I now begin the discussion of theme five about the impact of large class teaching has on participants' social lives

## **Theme Five**

### **5.3.5. Negative impact on social life**

It can be argued that, in order for one to be productive and effective at work, one has to work in a conducive environment to perform at optimal levels, and most of all, have enough rest. Large class teaching usually deprives academics this requirement. One participant noted that large class teaching *"takes away your social life because you always end up thinking about what is next. Even when you are with your friends, and in your mind, you already thinking about the students, I should be sitting down and marking, chasing deadlines. If you force to have a social life, you*

*end up not sleeping because, after you have met with your friends, then at night - reality kicks in. The marks are waiting. They need to be submitted on Monday or on deadline” (Jameson).*

Anathi argued that *“on the negative side of teaching large classes is that they affect your social life in the sense that you end up taking large chunk of work home. The time that you supposed to be spending with your family or doing other social activities; you will end up devoting it on your academic work” (Anathi).*

In the same vein, another participant said large class teaching really “messed-up” his social life. He explained that *“personally, as I am a sport person, I really can’t compromise my sport. I got to sport and after, I do my work. During the day I usually mark at least 5 scripts. Now imagine, let’s say you are in a soccer game, immediately after the game you think I would have marked 5 scripts in the 90 minutes I spent here. You cannot even enjoy that victory; so it really compromises your social life” (Mindlo).*

To improve lives of all involved in large class teaching and learning under such environments, there should be a system put in place by the relevant authorities to help lecturers and students alike to better deal with these challenges. One participant complained that academics were very overworked. She complained that it was all about work for her, with little time to socialise. She said, *“We are overworked like there is no tomorrow...you will be spending time with your family and loved ones while your mind is constantly somewhere, because you have to meet the deadlines all the time. You see, as I’m speaking to you now, I only slept for three hours last night. Earlier, I was busy with the marking and quickly remembered that I have a meeting with you. The lines are now blurry. I do not have family time and work time. It is like my time is almost work, so sometimes I almost feel guilty and it is very depressing because you need to have time with your family to reflect and re-energise” (Rose).*

She further detailed the health toll large class teaching has had on her life. She noted that *“I’m constantly thinking of the next thing to do, and that has really contributed negatively in my well-being. I have suffered in terms of my eyes. My eyes are very sore and I had to consult medical doctors. I am now wearing glasses because I spend so much time using the laptop. So now I have to spend money on the spectacles. I am now suffering from headaches and lot of it because I*

*mostly have meetings and deadlines to be met. So personally, the aspect of family time and social life has gone because of the environment I work under” (Rose).*

The findings above about the impact of large class teachings on academics’ health show that this phenomenon requires engagement with relevant stakeholders with the goal of availing and increasing different kinds of support to academics to improve the quality of education. Other participants commented on how the time they should devote to their personal duties, research and personal development has been taken up with several duties occasioned by large class teaching. This theme is consistent with studies by (Chikoko, 2015; Hornsby, 2014) that concluded that marking and giving effective feedback to a large class leaves academics with no social life. Furthermore, participants noted that their lack social life resulting from large class teaching usually led to health concerns.

The focus now shifts to discussion of the general experience of teaching large classes. This theme talks to what participants have observed when it comes to teaching large classes.

## **Theme Six**

### **5.3.6. Other experiences of teaching large classes worth noting**

Almost all the above themes talk to the negative experiences of teaching large classes. This means that most participants do not enjoy teaching large class because they come with many professional and social challenges to one’s well-being. These negative experiences begin all the way from preparation to actual delivery of the lesson, to modes of assessment. Many participants complained about lack of engagement from students due to English language as a barrier. The increased numbers of students in class and lack of student engagement does not allow academics many strategies in terms of lecture delivery, and consequently promotes surface learning instead of deep learning. Most participants noted that in their teaching, their intention is to promote deep learning. However, the environment is sometimes not favourable to promoting deep learning.

One participant explained his teaching strategy to promote critical thinking through deep learning saying *“I thoroughly plan my questions beforehand, even if the complexity of them will move from general to deep critical questions. The further we go with the discussion, we move*

*from the comfort zone of easier questions and surface thinking, to deeper learning and critical thinking about the issues we are discussing” (Bekzin).*

Jameson explained that every academic strives to promote critical independent thinking skills; otherwise there would be no point of learning if academics strove for regurgitation of information without engaging with it. He said, *“I do not believe that any lecturer will want to teach using surface learning methods. We are all striving for deep learning. Even when I’m teaching a smaller class, I will want to go deeper and deeper by encouraging engagement with the issues at hand, and in a small class, it’s easier to engage that it is in a large class. Even when teaching a large class, I might end up in surface learning [regurgitation and memorisation of information], but my initial goal as lecturers is always to critically engage and debate with my students to promote higher order cognitive functions” (Jameson).*

The other participant said she tried to promote deep learning by grouping her students even though sometimes it was challenging to manage such a class in the direction one wants it to go. She said, *“In a large class, it is quite a challenging. You need to thoroughly prepare before the lecture. You need to know how many students you have, and how many students you will have in a group, and also how you going to divide them because it creates so much noise and disturbances if it is not planned properly” (Duduzile).* The success of group work depended on the calibre of students one had in a class as sometimes *“some students will... sometimes forget about your lesson and talk about their boyfriends and girlfriends in a group, instead of talking about the given topic. Some may utilise that time to be noisy and be disruptive because of many numbers, but thorough preparation helps to minimise... these unwanted behaviours” (Duduzile).*

The challenge that comes with large class teaching is that, the bigger the number, the more diverse the class becomes. As the literature alluded to, the recent student population has been much more diverse than in the past because of different social and cultural backgrounds. The other challenge with this type of diversity is that, most of these students enter higher education from secondary school environment where learning strategies are constructed around the memorization of facts, and reproduction of those facts. The effect of these factors is felt beyond a pure increase in student numbers. Some participants found these differences a challenge, as some students were fast students, others were slow, and others had language problems hence had

difficulty participating in class. In a small class, it is possible to cater for all these individual needs, but is highly challenging to cater for all these individual needs in a large class.

One participant said, in a small class, he could identify and attend to every student individually but in a large class, it was a challenge. He said *“when I was teaching smaller classes, I knew that in terms of diversity, I could handle individual student. But ever since large classes became a norm, I try to come up with examples that are common to all the students. Even when I switch into indigenous languages, I have to avoid language that excludes other student. For example, when I walk into a lecture, and greet students in IsiZulu, the Indian community or the white students or other languages may feel excluded, so these are the challenges that come with diversity”* (Mindlo).

The other factor that came with large class teaching was one’s pace with regards to content coverage. *“Instead of devoting teaching time to teach, I try to accommodate students who are slow deal with their questions because I have realised that in large classes, you have students that fast, and can easily and quickly absorb what is being taught, while others are struggling. So, if devote all the teaching time to teach, I may end up excluding the slow learners. The sooner a lecturer recognises this, the better it becomes for one to ensure that there is balance between teaching time and question time, to accommodate all students as much as possible”* (Rose).

The other participant argued that she tried by all means to deliver content as quickly as possible in times of peace as students were prone to sudden protests which often led to cancellation of classes. She said, *“in most cases, I have to deliver and finish content as quickly as possible, as also we don’t have enough time in [campus named] because of constant protests from our students. Students here in [campus named] are always protesting, hence in that period of calmness, I have to ensure that I cover as much content as possible before another wave of protests ensues”* (Zanele).

However, other participants found diversity to be an asset, and enjoyed engaging and getting different perspectives. Not all diversity is bad in a large class. One participant said that, *“whether it’s a small class or a big class, diversity will always be there because, for example, even if there are 2 students in your class, you are already dealing with diversity because those individuals are*

*not the same. I think we are talking about the diversity as a problem but when it comes to large class, diversity is an advantage. As an academic, you get exposed to students who are coming from different background and different communities, and we should take advantage of that to teach students tolerance and respect of different opinions” (Anathi).*

The above theme spoke to what participants observed, and this is neither negative nor positive but, just a recurring theme that is worth noting. Dealing with large classes was a challenge to many participants: diversity of students, lack of flexibility, class climate management, difficulty of setting and enforcing classroom behaviour (crowd control), minimum attention to students, limited monitoring of students' learning and difficulty in engaging students to activities. These challenges are in line with the conclusion from many studies (see Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Jawits, 2013; Hornsby, 2013; Hornsby et al., 2014; Maringe et al., 2014).

There is overwhelming evidence that class size limits both quantity and quality of curriculum coverage and assessment (Hornsby et al., 2014). Cueso (2004) conducted a study with 200 university professors who taught large classes and found that multiple choice testing was more frequently used in large classes while essays were a preferred strategy in smaller classes. Extended writing promotes student thinking and depth of information processing and its absence in large class limits the extent to which these can be promoted (Rowe, 2011; Hornsby, 2013). In addition, students who are tested through multiple choice questions tend to exhibit surface learning strategies compared to those tested using extended essays who engage more deeply with learning (Wood, 2011). One of the essential aims of promoting student engagement and interest is to promote the acquisition of deep rather than shallow knowledge and skills.

Compounding the challenges of teaching large classes has been the on-going Covid-19 pandemic, which moved most of the teaching and learning from face to face interaction to remote learning. The following theme deals with challenges of remote learning.

## **Theme Seven**

### **5.3.7 Challenges with remote or online learning**

According to Zimmerman (2020; p. 2), “remote learning refers to educational activities that have a variety of formats and methods, most of which take place online.” Remote learning is where

the students and the academics are not physically present in a traditional classroom environment. Online learning, sometimes referred to as e-learning, is a method of instruction that takes place over the internet, just like remote learning where academics and students are physical separate in time and distance (Zimmerman, 2020). According to Stanger (2020), open distance e-learning was created to leverage technology and provide students with the opportunity to earn degrees and/or attend school without having to be in a physical class. For both modes of delivery, information is mostly relayed through technological tools and software such as Zoom and Moodle. Both remote learning and open distance e-learning should be properly designed and well thought out to avoid many challenges associated digital classrooms.

Stanger (2020) further argues that while it may seem like semantics at first, it is crucial to recognise the difference between remote learning and open distance e-learning. open distance e-learning (ODEL) is purposely designed to be online and remote, and it is a long-term solution; with lessons taking place online as the main mode of education (Stanger, 2020). However, remote learning is usually done in response to a crisis or something beyond human control at that time, and it usually meant to be temporary. An example of open distance e-learning would be how University of South Africa (UNISA) offers many of its qualifications, whereas an example of remote learning would be the temporary measure of teaching and learning taken by many universities across the country in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced many academics across the country to conduct their teaching and learning remotely. This pandemic hit the South African shores in March earlier this year and forced everyone to change their ways of living and doing things and adapt to what we now commonly call “the new normal”. Higher Education Institutions had to close their gates and come up with ways of continuing teaching and learning despite the dire conditions presented by the pandemic. Contact classes in a classroom environment were abandoned and institutions began remote teaching and learning.

According to participants, this remote learning came with its own challenges like lack of laptops, insufficient provision of data for students, especially those residing in places without network coverage. All this was compounded by the fact that, not all academics are technological savvy; meaning they may have received not enough training and workshops on participating in remote

learning. Duduzile explained that, *“Online learning came up with its own challenges... there are so many challenges starting from not having data and connectivity. Even if I pre-record and upload my lessons on Moodle, I do not know how many of my students are engaging with the content I send and how many of them are not. Remote learning is frustrating because I cannot engage with my students like I would if I was in classroom environment, asking them those probing questions to see if they are engaging with the readings. I administer online assessments and MCQs, but the difficult I have is to ascertain the authenticity of person behind the written assignments as all of sudden, everyone is doing well”* (Duduzile).

Another participant noted that the whole idea of pre-recording a lesson seems and feels bizarre as you have to pretend as if you are talking to students when recording, when you are actually talking to yourself. She said *“for me I am so bored because I like the engagement in class, so now having to engage through a laptop by myself is really frustrating. With the large numbers we cannot have the synchronous class like we are doing right now because the university licence only allows 300 students. So in my class, I have 450 students; meaning I can’t have a live class or live session with all my students. It is really frustrating for me because I like the engagement in class. I miss those discussions and debates in class”* (Rose).

It is important to note that participants are complaining about lack of classroom environment where lively debates are possible. As creative as one might be with technology, one cannot recreate the classroom environment in a remote class. Another participant said it was easier to do remote learning with second, third, fourth year and post graduate students as they may be familiar with the system unlike doing it with first years. This participant said *“this online learning is easier and beneficiary when you are working with second years, third years and fourth years. But when it comes to first year students who are coming from high school, it is a challenge for many reasons”* (Mindlo).

In support of the above observation, Zanele said *“here at [campus named], we have students from deep rural areas, most... have never seen a laptop, they have never had their personal smart gadgets. Even if these student from rural areas have laptops and smart gadgets, login in a challenging exercise because of no connections, and/or bad the network coverage. These are challenges beyond a lecturer’s control”* (Zanele).

Lack of IT knowledge is not only a problem amongst students, but also a challenge amongst academics that are not used to teaching using complicated technology of remote learning. Here is what Mindlo said, *“We have people who have been teaching for the past two decades and have been using their chalkboard. Now these are expected to teach online. That change or transition can affect the way they deliver their content because not every academic is technologically savvy”* (Mindlo). In the same vein, Rose said *“I find it difficult and challenging to move across various technologies, and to use them efficiently. To navigate myself around posting videos on Moodle is a challenge”* (Rose).

In the main, participants did not enjoy teaching large classes as shown by the emergent themes above. These challenges are compounded by the fact South Africa, like other developing countries lack technological advancement. Participants argued that issues of affordability, access and maintenance of technological software and resources can act as barriers to using technology as a resource to promote quality education. Thus as much as it can be an advantage to use technological tools to deliver teaching, learning and assessments in times of Covid-19, participants felt that this approach left many students behind due to students not having access to technological tools like laptops, data or network coverage in their places of residences. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic is a new phenomenon, a lot of studies still need to be conducted on Covid-19 to access the true impact it has on higher education.

However, there are positives take away about teaching large classes which is the focus of theme eight on positive experiences of teaching large classes.

## **Theme Eight**

### **5.3.8. Positive experiences of teaching large classes**

It should be noted that, although all participants disliked large class teachings, there were some positive experiences that could be taken note of. Most participants had minimal positive experiences from teaching large classes. The most important positive experience of large class teaching identified by almost all participants was that large class teaching made them better academics and prepared them for future challenges associated with teaching large class as large classes are here to stay. Jameson had the following to say *“I like the debates coming from my classes because it shows that people are critically engaging with readings. It is a very*

*encouraging experience knowing that I teach more than 100 people with different ideas, different minds, but they give me 100% attention. They talk and engage with me, and amongst one another. This has developed me to be a better person and also be able to communicate to a crowd of people” (Jameson).*

Mindlo said that large class teaching made him a better professional who is able to work under pressure. *“Teaching large classes makes you be able to work under pressure like, when students submit their work in two weeks’ time, they want their feedback. Students expect their feedback to thorough and constructive; also you push yourself because of the knowledge that an external examiner will go over your work. Therefore, you improve as academic; you learn to work under pressure” (Mindlo).*

To emphasise this point of large class teaching creating a better professional, Bekzin said that *“the positive aspect of teaching large class is that we now master how to teach large classes and becoming better at it. The more you teach large classes, the more skills you acquire, the more you understand the changes that are coming within education. You are also exposed to the latest technology in managing large classes. So, as you teach large classes, you also acquire more 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching skills” (Bekzin).*

The other participant said she gets overjoyed by the fact that she is making positive contribution to many people at once. *“Seeing those individuals eventually graduate to exemplary professionals fulfils my heart. When I left school, I thought I was done with having to hear student’s struggles and problems but it is not done. I’m still dealing with human beings. I get overjoyed with the thought of making a difference to all these individuals and helping them wherever I can” (Rose).*

To emphasise the point of large class teaching helping academics to grow and professionally mature, Duduzile said *“My strategies have changed...always look forward to large numbers. The way I plan my lectures has improved a lot compared to when I first taught a large class. Sometimes academics undermine thorough preparations, but since I began teaching large classes, I have truly appreciated its value. So, I feel that I have improved and developed a lot” (Duduzile).*

The above theme showed that, not all is lost with regards to large class teaching. The participants realised some benefits within the difficult conditions. These are the positives to be celebrated and expanded on. Large numbers of people gathered in one place exude energy, which comes from a collective appreciation and enjoyment of something significant that is either already in progress or about to happen (Rowe, 2011). He further argued that large classes provide us with the dual opportunity to construct our lectures as important, not-to-be-missed events, and to draw on the energy and emotion associated with crowds to achieve the goal of facilitating significant learning. Jameson exciting had this to say about large classes: *“as a football lover, anyone who has been to a soccer match, an orchestral or a concert hopes for the place to be packed. I love large classes [...] because [...] you can get that group dynamic working for you. The excitement is just multiplied exponentially if you have many people involved in it. The trick is to ignite the class with exciting yet challenging lesson (Jameson).*

This view was also articulated by Wolfman’s paper about the ‘bright side’ of teaching large classes, in which he calls on lecturers to “turn this crowd atmosphere to pedagogical use” (2002, p. 2). He further argued that:

Academics need to find ways to draw on the traditions of lecturing, performance, motivational speaking and dramatic production so as to create an experience that enables learning for large numbers of students. By cultivating a sense of belonging in a large community of learners, one is feeding into each student’s need to be part of something significant. Our course can provide the vehicle for a journey of discovery, which might in fact produce a unique path for each student, as well as significant elements of shared experience.

From the above argument, this means that large classes offer the opportunity to exploit a more visible level of diversity among students in terms of gender, race and class than often occurs in small classes (Christopher, 2011). In a large class, there is a greater likelihood of significant clusters of students with a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, learning styles, or problem-solving abilities. These clusters are a valuable resource for the academic (Maringe et al., 2014). However, on the other side the potential of this diversity can only be exploited if the academic has the necessary experience and skill to know how to take advantage of it.

It can be argued that in attempting to uncover the causes, consequences and impact of a diverse student body and the arising challenges for a Higher Education Institutions, a concerted effort is imperative to reduce and hopefully eliminate the well-documented adverse effects of large class teaching in university classrooms. The greater purpose of studying in higher education is to produce students who are able to communicate effectively, have strong interpersonal and social awareness, are creative problem solvers and are able to display well-developed leadership skills (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). Large classes are not the ideal environment to develop these skills. Therefore, the planning of teaching and learning in a large class setting should create opportunities to develop the required skills. To achieve the desired outcomes set by HE institutions, it is necessary to be aware of both academics' and students' experiences of large classes.

## **5.4. Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study. The chapter began with a discussion and analysis of themes. The findings showed that academics teaching large classes had many challenges even though there were also minor positive experiences. The findings identified large classes as a recent phenomenon, large class attendance depended on many factors, challenges associated with assessing large classes, challenges associated with remote learning, shortage of infrastructure, negative impact on social life, and minor positive aspects related to the phenomenon. In the following chapter, I theorised the findings of the study, and extrapolate what they meant for the field more broadly.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Theorising the Findings**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter presented different themes that came out from coding transcripts and from the thematic analysis. This chapter was about theorising the findings. This chapter sought to justify the use of interpretive phenomenological analysis in this study, as already indicated in the theoretical discussion in chapter three, by providing a theoretical analysis of the life-world of participants and their lived experiences. After discussing their life-world, the chapter then moved to discuss their intentionality as they grapple with teaching large classes. Intentionality is related to the dual terms of noema-noesis, where noema represents the objective experience, and noesis represents the subjective experience of the object. The chapter ended with a brief discussion of epoche or bracketing off, where the researcher was expected to bracket off his prior knowledge during data generation and data analysis, in order to arrive at the pure experiences as subjectively lived by the participants as they experienced the teaching of large classes.

#### **6.2. Phenomenology Theory**

According to Sloan et al. (2014), the phenomenology theory seeks to describe the participants' experiences of a phenomenon and gain an insight into their life-world. Using Phenomenology theory, researchers can use multiple approaches to describe and interpret participants' experiences. One way to conduct a phenomenological study is to use a descriptive phenomenological approach, where the researcher is expected to bracket off or put aside his/her prior knowledge during the study (Neubauer, 2019). Lavery (2004) argues that the best way to explore and capture lived experiences is having the researcher achieve a transcendental state and objectively move from the participants' descriptions of facts of the lived experience, to universal essences of the phenomenon. This approach seeks to describe the qualities of an experience as objectively lived.

In order to theorise the findings, this study adopted phenomenology theoretical framework. Within the phenomenology theory, there are two analytical approaches which is interpretive phenomenological analysis that is differentiated from descriptive phenomenological analysis, even though both of these analytical approaches seek to give detail to how one makes sense of life experiences. As already suggested in chapter three, it can be highly challenging for the researcher to put aside his/her prior knowledge about the study at hand. This is why this study adopted an interpretative phenomenological analysis within the phenomenology theory to theorise its findings, as this approach puts emphasis on convergence and divergence of the lived experiences. According to Lavery (2004), interpretative phenomenological analysis aims to look in detail at how someone makes sense of life experiences, and to give detailed interpretation of that account in order to understand the experience. Furthermore, interpretive phenomenological analysis takes account of the researchers' prior knowledge and context to answer specific research questions about the experiences of the participants. Without further regurgitation of interpretative phenomenological analysis, the rationale for this analytical approach in this study has been extensively explained in chapter three on page 55. However, regardless of which analytical approach one uses, they both seek to explore lived experiences, understand what a particular experience is like, and what meanings people give to those experiences.

The following is a theoretical analysis of different phenomenology theoretical concepts beginning with the discussion of participants' life-world as it is the cornerstone of any phenomenological study.

### **6.3. Life-World of Participants**

The aim of a phenomenological research is to explore and interpret lived experiences. In broad terms, this refers to researching how an individual perceives the meaning of an event. This form of research seeks to understand what participants felt during a phenomenon, and perceptions, perspectives, and understandings are analysed and then used to create an understanding of what it is like to experience an event. The idea of exploring "experience" differs as compared to its everyday use. The differences between the two concepts of experience are explained below as follows. Firstly, experience is used to mean "the apprehension of an object, a thought, or an emotion through one's senses; whereas the second meaning of experience refers to active

participation in events or activities, leading to the accumulation of knowledge” (Finlay, 2009; p. 5). The aim here is to capture subjective insider meanings and what lived experiences feel like for individuals. Put differently, this approach seeks to explore the life world of participants, the world of research participants as directly and subjectively experienced in their everyday lives. To further emphasise this point, Merleau-Ponty, (1968) as cited in Finlay (2009, p. 6) argued that “a man [*sic*] is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself.” This intertwining of person and world is illustrated in this study, where all participants indicated that teaching large classes directly and/or indirectly occupied all of their “existence”, beginning from their personal lives to their professional spaces. The participants indicated that they lived in a bubble of large class teachings; meaning their life-world was consumed by the thoughts and frustrations of large class teachings.

From the above discussions of life-world, it can be seen that the life world of participants manifested in how they grappled with large class teaching on a daily basis. From extensive reading and analysis of data, the life-world of participants was filled with frustration, stress, exhaustion, and minimal enjoyment. This is seen in participants’ own words when one of them indicated that; *“with teaching large classes, I will say I’m not comfortable with it. It’s very overwhelming, its stressful, it gives me anxiety because I’m a perfectionist in the sense that when I teach, it gives me pleasure to get each and every learner’s attention and vice versa.... Teaching a large class is tiring and cumbersome, and as an academic, I just go there, teach and leave. The other thing is that, I don’t get to use a variety of teaching methods that are possible if I was in a small class”* (Zanele).

Zanele further argued that large class environment were definitely not conducive to get the best of every student and for the academics to perform at an optimal level. This is because *“in a large class environment, I get tired emotionally and irritated by time wasters like students who make noise in class while I’m teaching, students playing with their phones, chatting to one another and doing all kinds of disturbances. This is upsetting, tiring, and also a time waster because I have to stop teaching and call those students to order. It also takes out of my teaching mood, hence I’m saying, there are number of challenges with teaching large classes. It’s physically and emotionally draining, exhausting, and frustrating”* (Zanele).

The other participant argued that the frustrations of large class teaching had become second nature to her. She said *“I think that, I would say I had anxieties when I started teaching, but those frustrations and anxieties are second now, so I don’t spend a lot of time thinking about it. I know that when I was setting up for the first time and going to class for the first time, seeing so many students, I felt overwhelmed, and I think that is where the anxieties came from, but I have graduated from them, because I have gotten used to the idea and I know what I have signed for”* (Anathi).

Even though Anathi had gotten used to the idea of large class teachings as she claimed, , she had a sense of inadequacy as she believed the authorities could and should do more in order to ensure that early career academics can seamlessly adapt to the large class teaching environment from the beginning. She said *“I think that the university should provide training for young academics teaching large classes, because I just find that one is just hired for the job, but nobody prepares or tells you that you are going to be dealing with a large class. I think that a lot has to be done in terms of capacity building workshops to prepare incoming academics about the environment they are going to face. For me, I was coming from primary school environment where I was used to dealing with 40 or 50 students per class, but now we are talking 300 or more and nobody has prepared you for that, it becomes overwhelming”* (Anathi).

On the same point on feelings of ill-preparedness, Duduzile said *“I had to learn while teaching as there was no extra induction. Nobody prepared me for such a big class. I only found out when I went in the class. Students kept on coming and coming for a moment I thought maybe I was in a wrong venue then I asked ‘are you all here for [discipline named]?’ and they all said ‘yes’. I was so shocked and unprepared. I did not expect that. However, as time went on, I got used to it in the midst of all the challenges we have”* (Duduzile).

One of the participants argued that he was frustrated by the calibre of students that large classes brought with. He noted that *“students that I taught in 2012/2013 are lecturers with us in the same department. This shows that we used to produce quality students; obviously because of small sized classes and the type of students who took their education very seriously. However, the ones that we are teaching now rely on you to feed them everything. They want your slides and they want you to do everything. You send them an email of journal articles for them to*

*read... they try to argue, they try to run away from responsibility. You ask them a question; they start looking at you. As a professional, you question their level of understanding. You question the kind of students we are teaching, compared to yester-year. Something is wrong. There is lack of engagement in classes. Students will not engage.... and none of them are interested. That is the present day experience I have from teaching large classes, and I Bekzin is not enjoying it” (Bekzin).*

To further emphasise Bekzin’s point on students’ lack of responsibility for their education, Duduzile explained this phenomenon as a symptom of regression of the South African Basic Education System, and as the effect of broadening access of higher education to students are not yet ready for responsibilities of higher education. Some students who would otherwise not get to university were now getting accepted for transformation purposes. She observed that *“the types of students we have in this university mostly lack the quality, because most of them are coming from rural, poor under-resourced secondary schools, and then some of them were rejected from other universities. So when they come to this institution, they are already de-motivated because this university was not their first choice and did not want to come to here, hence; it becomes hard to motivate them to learn” (Duduzile).*

Rose expressed that academics were so overworked. She complained that it was all about work for her, with little time for family and to socialise. She said *“even if you socialise you may be physically present at the gathering but emotionally and psychologically absent” (Rose).* She described the health toll large class teaching has had on her life and having to consult and seek external help to cope.

As much as they may be minimal enjoyment to teaching large classes, findings showed that the world of participants teaching large classes was full of frustrations and challenges. One participant noted that large class teaching made her dislike the profession because of its many challenges. She confessed that *“large classes have made me dislike teaching as a profession. I have lost all the passion for teaching I had. The university system is not that kind to its employees. The university system does not cater that much for the psychological and emotional wellbeing of its academics. How large class environment affect academics seem to be a non-priority for the university hence, I am saying I'm exhausted and I don't like teaching anymore.*

*Regardless of the level you are in, large classes are problematic and are very unkind to lecturers, and it compromises educational quality. Large class environments are also not fair to the students themselves because only handful students emerge from this of system” (Zanele).*

From the above interpretation of participants’ experiences of teaching large classes, it can be concluded that, the life-world of participants was full of challenges, frustrations and a sense of hopelessness. Participants felt that their challenges were worse compounded by sense of inadequate support structures, lack of resources, ill-disciplined students, and loss of social life. For some of these participants, they argued that life could be made better with better training, improved infrastructure, and adequate emotional support services with the goal of improving educational outcomes.

Having established that the life-world of participants was full of challenges, it became important to then focus on participants’ intentionality, the characteristic of consciousness whereby someone is conscious about something of his/her contextual reality

#### **6.4. Intentionality of Participants**

Without regurgitating the conceptual discussion of intentionality as already discussed in chapter three but suffice to say that intentionality refers to a conscious act or acting with the intention. Lavery (2004) argues that intentionality connects people to the world around them. It signifies an action such as something we intend to do. Intentionality refers to the consciousness of stretching out towards an object (in tension), an act of doing something with purpose. For example, the researcher chose to conduct this study with a purpose [intention] in mind, thereby intentionally directing one’s focus to describe participants’ experiences of teaching large classes. This means that the object of consciousness does not have to be a physical object apprehended in perception. It can just as well be a fantasy or a memory (Ashworth, 2003). From rigorous analysis of the findings, most of the participants were conscious about their surroundings and they constantly devised strategies in response to teaching large classes.

Sloan et al. (2014) argues that phenomenology studies structures of conscious experience as experienced from a subjective point of view, along with its intentionality. By examining an experience as it is subjectively lived, new meanings and appreciations can be developed to

inform, or even re-orient how we understand that experience (Finlay, 2009). It is argued by Neubauer *et al.* (2019), that experience in a phenomenological sense does not only include the relatively passive experiences of sensory perception, but also includes imagination, thoughts, emotions, desire, choices and actions. In short, it includes everything that we live through or perform. We may observe and engage with other things in the world, but we do not actually experience them in a first person perspective. What makes an experience conscious is a certain awareness one has of that experience, while living through or performing it. These participants are always conscious about their surroundings; hence, they try as much to shape and influence their experiences of teaching large classes as much as teaching large classes shapes and influences their lives. Participants were constantly conscious and engaged in making sense of their surrounding reality, as well as cultural traditions and everyday routines, borne out of large class teaching. To be successful in teaching large classes, participants are always doing things with an intention in mind. This is seen when participants detailed their challenges and conscious struggles to come up with effective ways to improve their experience for the good of everyone involved. Participants were aware of their surrounding and they tried to positively shape that reality of teaching large classes as seen by the constant use of the pronoun “*I, I try that, I do that, I teach that, I ensure that and so on*”. This means that one is conscious, s/he thinks and implements with the intention of achieving a specific outcome.

One participant argued that, in order to manage a large class, the first vital lesson is achieving and instilling discipline amongst students. She said, “*As difficult as it may be to control the class, we do try put measures to control and better manage the class by setting the rules for everyone to abide by. When you set the rules with the students, it tends to minimise trouble or disturbances or time wasters. I’ve found that becoming strict sends a little bit of fear to students and it makes it better to manage your class. However, there will always be those students who will continue doing anything and everything to disrupt the class. However, if there are rules, it’s not as difficult as it would if there weren’t rules. Therefore, I find that for us to navigate large class teaching, we have to be very strict in terms of what happens in the classroom, and what the accepted behaviour is from students when the lecturer is teaching*” (Zanele).

Rose said *“It is easy when, from the beginning, you have set the ground rules. So for me, when I start teaching, I always make my students aware that, a classroom is a safe space for all of us to talk and positively contribute, but we all engage within the boundaries of respect. So I create that safe environment for everyone to engage”* (Rose).

Jameson further stressed that it was difficult to use deep learning strategies in a large class environment. However, because he believed that every academic should aspire to employ deep learning methods to teach students critical and analytical skills, he said, *“I teach students critical and analytical skills through assessments. When I teach content, my assessments are set in way that doesn’t require students to regurgitate what I said in the classroom. My assessments require an application of content knowledge that was learnt in the class. Even when I’m teaching, I make sure that I emphasise those key concepts about similarities and differences, the threshold concepts like compare and contrast because I want my students to elicit that which they find as socio-political, socio-economic or ideological behind any content that may be under discussion. This is how I develop critical thinking to my students, through assessments, through our conversation during class discussions”* (Jameson).

Participants were aware of their environment hence, they prepared their teaching accordingly. Rose argued that teaching a large class was a very tedious and frustrating work but sharing ideas with colleagues and proper planning could prevent poor performance. She said, being a teacher from Basic Education almost prepared her for this kind of environment. *“I started teaching at high schools and this prepared me for being a lecturer. So, when I am preparing lessons, I am thinking of what is it that the students will be doing in class. I can’t be standing there for 90 minutes and just talking. We need to have a dialogue...to further improve our experiences of teaching large classes, we usually have meetings, brainstorming meetings with other lecturers at the department so that we share the positives to improve on and develop strategies to mitigate the negatives. Therefore, thorough preparation and sharing ideas with colleagues helps a lot to survive in this environment”* (Rose).

The other aspect that participants spoke about is the issue of dealing with slow students. These participants were aware of the policy guidelines regarding the support for students. They spoke about the Department of Higher Education Science and Innovation’s guidelines on institutions of

higher learning, to vigorously support students who are at risk of falling behind. Duduzile observed that this approach with noble intentions may have been abused by other students wanting to take advantage of the system. She said, *“No student should be left behind regardless of how disadvantaged a student may be. Some people have been accused of not being supportive of transformation process... I am very passionate about the transformation...It is difficult to help a student who sees university or academic work using service delivery approach. Such students don't take their education serious because they believe it is free education, government will pay my books, and my accommodation and I am entitled. Our students should be told that transformation process should also come from within, they should be ready to work to earn their qualifications as nothing is given”* (Duduzile).

On the same point, Anathi said, *“the challenges of large class teaching are compounded by the need to cater for all students regardless of their learning abilities. You have to communicate to students in ways that ensures that everyone is catered for as Minister of Education said we should not leave any students behind. So, every academic works with that in mind, even though one may be frustrated by students' learning abilities”* (Anathi).

In order not to leave any student behind, Mapula suggested having extra consultation times over and above those mandated by the university policy. She said, *“I try to have consultation times that are set aside. We have consultation times because we cannot run away from the fact that there are students who are shy even to talk in class. I always encourage them to speak in class as soon, they will be professionals and expected to speak in front of other people... But now with remote learning, everything has become more challenging especially consultations on email is difficult”* (Mapula).

All the various interventions and strategies show that the participants were aware of their reality of teaching large classes, hence; they intentionally tried to manage that reality. Their actions were intentionally directed at something with a purpose in mind; the purpose of having positive experience of teaching a large class.

Having established what intentionality entails, it is imperative that the two concepts of noema and noesis that are part of intentionality be discussed next. Noesis gives meaning to intentional

act and noema is a meaning which is given to intentional act. In other words, any intentional act has an “I” as already alluded to in the above section. Therefore, it can be argued that intentionality would not be possible without noema (mind) and noesis (action), as one uses his/her mind to be conscious about her surrounding, and simultaneously thinks of better choices and actions to improve his/her reality.

## **6.5. Noema and Noesis of the Participants**

Intentionality would not be possible without noema and noesis. These pair of terms noema represents the objective experience of the object, while noesis represents the subjective experience (Willis et al, 2004). The noesis is the part of the act that gives it a particular sense or character (as in judging or perceiving something, loving or hating it, accepting or rejecting). These structures of consciousness like perception, memory, and fantasy are called internationalities (Ashworth, 2003). Noema and noesis refer to the participants’ objective experience such as perceptions, thoughts, and memories. This has to do with all the strategies participants came up with, to contend with large class teaching, and all their joys from minimal positive experiences they enjoyed within this environment.

Mindlo noted that one way of making his classes manageable was to know as many students as possible by name and involve most of them in class discussion. He said *“I try as much as possible to know all the students by name. I try to make sure that, every student that talks and engages, I will remember him or her...I try to make sure that everyone feels that they are part of the class, anytime they could be called upon to contribute”* (Mindlo).

One participant argued that she got joy from knowing that she was making a big difference in someone’s life. She said *“I sometimes get joy in knowing that there is a contribution that I’m making in someone’s life”* (Rose).

Another participant indicated that, even though being an academic was not his goal, he was enjoying it. He said *“I never thought that one day I would be standing in front of more than 500 students in class. So it did happen and I am enjoying it even though it was not my initial goal to become a lecturer”* (Jameson).

From a phenomenological perspective, all experience is intentional experience. Consciousness is always consciousness of an object (one cannot be conscious without being conscious of something), and the consciousness of an object requires a subject (Smith et al., 2028). These two terms cannot exist independent of each other, as one has to think before s/he acts. As already explained that noema and noesis are part of intentionality in that, intentionality is a conscious act, and any conscious act begins from the mind (noema) before one acts on it (noesis). It can be concluded that the participants thought about and came up with strategies to deal with teaching large classes, and they were also aware of their surrounding professional environment. The various conscious acts from these participants, as seen from the use of the pronoun “I”, begin from the thought process, all the way to the implementation of the thought, to improve one’s experiences.

To get the pure objective experiences, it is argued a researcher should remove himself or herself from the process of experience identification through the process of epoche. This process requires that the researcher put aside his/her prior knowledge about the phenomenon under study. The following section sought to detail how difficult it was to engage in the process of epoche or bracketing off during generation and data analysis.

## **6.6. Epoche or Bracketing**

It is argued that the process of epoche or bracketing off is a cornerstone of descriptive phenomenological inquiry. When a researcher adopts the phenomenological attitude; s/he must suspend his/her biases. For descriptive phenomenology, the process of epoche or bracketing off is a self-meditative process, whereby the researcher brackets off (puts aside) the usually taken-for-granted everyday knowledge, in order to let the phenomenon, show itself in its essence (Neubauer et al., 2019). As part of this approach, prior knowledge (i.e. theoretical or socio-political understandings), and ontological assumptions need to be held in suspension in order to make an objective analysis of the information participants bring to the study. This means that there must be no leading questions. In this case, the aim of phenomenological research is to seek pure self-expression, with non-interference from the researcher.

However, as explained in chapter three on how difficult it is for the researcher to put aside his/her past knowledge. This is why this study adopted an interpretive phenomenological approach as detailed on page 60-61 or briefly explained in the beginning of this chapter. This study focused on the life world participants, hence chose interpretive phenomenological analysis. Interpretive phenomenological analysis appreciates the challenges associated with bracketing off one's past knowledge. This is because after all, the study was initiated by the researcher in the first place, because of his knowledge about the phenomenon under study. Interpretive phenomenological approach argues that lived experiences are an interpretive process situated in an individual's life-world. Therefore, the researcher's role in data analysis is to reflect on essential themes of participants' experience with the phenomenon, while simultaneously reflecting on his/her own experience (Sloan et al., 2014). Furthermore, because data generation is conducted primarily through in-depth conversations and/or semi-structured interviews, the researcher may find it highly challenging to lead an in-depth conversation and/or semi-structured interview while pretending to be on a blank slate mode; pretending to know nothing about the phenomenon. It can be argued that in order to conduct a phenomenological study of exploring experiences of individuals, both the researcher and the participants should have the requisite knowledge and communication skills to successfully communicate the nuances of the experiences.

Furthermore, Mohamed (2017) argues that an authentic research inquiry seeking to understand the experiences of its participants, will also seek to explore the conditions that triggered the experiences which are located in past events, and social-cultural domains. Therefore, interpretive phenomenological approach is an interpretive process involving the analysis of multiple activities. This process starts with identifying an interesting phenomenon that direct one's attention towards lived experiences, and the researcher then investigates the experience as it is lived, rather than as it is conceptualized, and reflect on the essential themes that characterize the participants' lived experiences. Throughout the analysis, the researcher must maintain a strong orientation to the phenomenon under study and attend to the interactions between the parts and the whole, to understand how data (the parts), contribute to the evolving understanding of the phenomena (the whole), and how each enhances the meaning of the other (Neubauer et al., 2019).

One can conclude that successfully navigating this phenomenological analysis requires a knowledgeable researcher to knit together the individual parts of the themes to arrive at the whole experience of the phenomenon. As much as, I tried letting the participants detail their experiences without me leading them but as the researcher, I still had the responsibility of managing and directing the conversations to where it would be beneficiary to answering the research questions, and achieving the aims of the study. In addition, to show that a researcher is part of the conversation during data generation, various nods and hand gestures during data generation showing agreement with the participants when they were making excellent insights. It is possible that all this was done subconsciously because it is underpinned by the prior knowledge I have about the phenomenon. These direct or indirect gestures again the challenges associated with bracketing off one's prior knowledge of the study one is responsible for.

However in more instances, the participants were allowed to detail their experiences without any form of interjections and gestures from the researcher, irrespective of whether I agreed or disagreed with what they were saying. Most participants commended those partial disengagements or gestures from the researcher. This is seen from Jameson's compliment on his concluding remarks who said, *"I think you've covered most of the areas regarding large classes. I like how you handled this conversation and I enjoyed it. You let me speak for a long time without you saying anything, and that is a good interviewing skill"* (Jameson). Jameson's observation is in concurrence with most of the participants' concluding remarks about my conduct during data generation.

It can be concluded that bracketing off one's prior knowledge about the research topic is not an impossible task, even though it may be challenging. Furthermore, a strong phenomenological analysis of the participants' experiences should use a combination of suspending the researcher's prior knowledge about the phenomenon, with partial use of the researcher's knowledge whenever needed, in order to achieve the research objectives. However, whatever the approach used for a phenomenological study, the aim of the researcher is always to explore the inner world of participants' lived experiences.

## **6.7. Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided the theoretical discussion of the findings. This chapter began by giving the rationale for choosing interpretive phenomenological analysis, and then focused on the findings of the study by discussing the life-world of participants. Thereafter, the chapter moved to discuss the intentionality of participants by discussing their conscious acts as influenced by noema and noesis. The chapter ended by discussing process of bracketing off and how challenging it was to put aside past knowledge about the phenomenon under study. The following chapter focused on the summary, major findings, recommendations and conclusion of the study.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Major Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions**

#### **7.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter analysed and theorised findings using interpretive phenomenological analysis focusing on the life world of participants. This study set out to critically explore education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education. The study sought to answer the following research questions: What are education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education? How do education academics experience teaching large classes in South African higher education? Why do education academics experience teaching large classes in South African higher education the way they do? This chapter presents summary of the study, recommendations and conclusion derived from the findings. The chapter begins with a summary of each of the seven chapters, discusses major findings, followed by suggestions for further research before the chapter ends with recommendations.

#### **7.2. Summary of Chapters**

This study focused on exploring education academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South Africa higher education. The study was made up of seven chapters, with chapter one being the outline of the study, and the literature review on chapter two. Chapter three was a theoretical discussion. Chapter four dealt with research design and methodology while chapter five was the presentation of data, with chapter six theorising the findings. Chapter seven presented major findings, recommendations and the conclusion of the study.

##### **7.2.1. Chapter One**

Chapter one provided an introduction to the research study by providing the focus, objectives and research questions, as well the context in which the research took place. The chapter also discussed the rationale of the study, gave a brief outline of literature around large classes, before

a short overview of the theoretical framework. The chapter ended with an overview of the research design and methodology of the study

### **7.2.2. Chapter Two**

Chapter two provided a broad contemporary literature on large class teaching and how this phenomenon affected higher education institutions. The chapter also briefly discussed the relationship between massification and decolonisation to get a holistic view of higher education transformation. The literature reviewed showed that, in most cases, large classes emerged as a result of conscious policy decisions from relevant authorities, especially with democratisation of, and improved access to, higher education as more countries sought to transform their higher education to redress past injustices. Overall, this literature revealed that large classes were here to stay and needed to be better managed to improve educational outcomes.

### **7.2.3. Chapter Three**

In this chapter, phenomenology was discussed as a theoretical framework framing this study. The researcher gave a detailed explanation of the concepts that made up phenomenology as a theoretical framework. The chapter differentiated between Husserl's descriptive phenomenology that emphasises the process of bracketing off one's prior knowledge and Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology which emphasises interpreting life-world of participants affected by the phenomena. The different phenomenological concepts discussed were life-world, intentionality, noema-noesis and bracketing off. The chapter also gave different research examples where phenomenology has been used by international and local researchers to explore and interpret lived experiences. The chapter ended by explaining the rationale for selecting interpretive phenomenological analysis for this study.

### **7.2.4. Chapter Four**

This chapter focused on the philosophical underpinnings of the study by describing qualitative research and the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm focuses on meanings and attempts to understand the context and totality of each situation by employing a variety of qualitative methods. The chapter further discussed the data generation and analysis process followed, and concluded by detailing how ethical issues were addressed.

### **7.2.5. Chapter Five**

This chapter is where the study findings were presented. This chapter provided a thematic analysis of data which allowed for the “data to speak for itself” through verbatim quotes from participants. This was done by presenting findings as themes that emerged from the reading of transcripts several times using in-text comments to highlight experiences and challenges of the participants. The findings showed revealed that the study participants were mostly frustrated by large class teaching, even though there were minor positive experiences.

### **7.2.6. Chapter Six**

This chapter provided the theoretical discussion of the findings to make theoretical sense of those findings. The chapter began by giving the rationale for choosing interpretive phenomenological analysis, and then focused on the findings of the study by discussing the life-world of participating education academics. These findings were theorised in relation to phenomenology as a theoretical framework of the study and the literature on large classes, infused to make the arguments more compelling. The chapter concluded that the life-world of participants teaching large classes was full of frustrations and bracketing off one’s prior knowledge during research was a challenging process.

## **7.3 Major Findings**

The major findings are drawn from coding of themes and theorising of the findings. These findings were informed by three critical research questions: What are education academics’ experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education? How do education academics experience teaching large classes in South African higher education? Why do education academics experience teaching large classes in South African higher education the way they do? In answering these questions, eight themes that emerged from the data were: large classes as a recent phenomenon, challenges with class attendance, limited infrastructure, negative impact teaching large classes has on participants’ social life, challenges with assessment, challenges with remote learning, other notable experiences of teaching large classes, and limited positive experiences about teaching large class. It is important to note that each participant had his or her own way of experiencing temporality, spatiality, materiality; but each of these coordinates must be understood in relation to each other to understand how the participants’

individual experiences contribute to the overall understanding of the phenomenon to highlight and enrich the holistic experience. The findings were further explained as follows:

### **7.3.1 Large classes a recent phenomenon**

The findings revealed that teaching large classes were fairly a recent phenomenon, particularly as all participants experienced large classes in the last four years or so. As much as most of the participants had seven or more years of teaching experience in higher education, they mostly agreed that large classes were a recent phenomenon, especially since year 2016/2017 onwards. These participants argued that massification of higher education resulted in large classes credited to many factors like 2015 students protests for fee free education, enhanced democratisation of higher education to increase access, and increased enrolment at higher education institutions to meet transformation requirements. They mostly concluded that large classes were here to stay; hence academics should come up with ways to better manage them.

### **7.3.2 Class Attendance**

Participants mostly agreed that teaching large classes could be a daunting task. They argued that sometimes large classes could have negative effects on the students themselves. Students did not attend classes as often as they are supposed to because they did not enjoy learning under such an environment. These participants noted that students attended classes for various reasons like attending classes because they were interesting and the academic in charge created a positive learning environment, while other students disliked attending classes but attended just because it was compulsory to do so. They concluded that, under the current environment, the most effective way of ensuring and maintaining class attendance was creating positive learning environment for every student.

### **7.3.3 Shortage of Resources**

The findings suggested that participants were stressed and frustrated as they had to deal with teaching large classes amid resource limitations. The participants reported resource shortage as a constraint to positive learning environment. The term infrastructure is used to refer to support facilities like office spaces, lecture halls, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services, and availability of data to students for effective remote learning. The findings also indicated that participants were not adequately prepared or supported by the university in dealing

with the challenges which made them feel neglected. As a result, all this had a negative effect on their overall experience of teaching large classes.

#### **7.3.4. Major challenges with large class assessments**

The findings revealed that large classes posed a huge challenge to participants when it came to assessments. The participants indicated that they resorted to many strategies to successfully administer assessments. The participants reported that they preferred class presentations, tests, multiple choice questions (MCQs), group work, exams and essays as a form of assessment or a combination of all, for holistic assessment. However, the challenges associated with assessments were compounded by large numbers of tasks to be marked. Successfully marking and giving constructive feedback to students usually left participants with no social life. Even when they used MCQs for assessments as they were easy to mark, it was a challenge because MCQs tended to test surface knowledge rather than test critical deep-thinking skills necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge economy.

#### **7.3.5. Negative impact on social life**

Participants indicated that teaching large classes came with huge costs on their social lives. They constantly had to think of the workload they had. Even when they were out of office, they were anxious about the huge workload waiting for them. They indicated that large class teaching affected their social lives in that, they ended up taking large chunks of work home. The time that they were supposed to be spending with family or doing other social activities, was devoted to academic work. Large class teaching deprived them of a good working environment, and also had negative impact on their well-being.

#### **7.3.6. Challenges with remote learning**

The Covid-19 pandemic forced many academics across the country to conduct their teaching and learning remotely. According to study participants, this remote learning came with its own challenges like lack of laptops for students, insufficient provision of data for students, and some students residing in places without efficient network coverage. All this was compounded by the fact that, not all academics were technological savvy, and the training or workshops on conducting remote learning not being adequate for many. They argued that the whole idea of pre-recording a lesson felt bizarre, as they had to pretend as if they were talking to students when they were talking on their own. In class or office consultations were better than consultations by

email. All this had a negative effect on their overall experience of teaching large classes and on educational outcomes.

#### **7.3.7. Other experiences of teaching large classes worth noting**

During the analysis of data, there are findings that emerged which were neither positive nor negative but were worth noting. Most participants concurred that large class teaching did not promote deep learning. Instead, such environments promoted surface learning leaving students with little to no critical thinking skills. The participants noted that, as much as it was challenging to implement deep learning strategies in a large class environment, it was not impossible to practice them. Participants also expressed their frustrations with limited engagement with large class teaching, as it was difficult to give and get each and every student's attention. Sometimes lack of engagement was because of language barrier, leading to difficulty to engage academically in class. These findings are neither positive nor negative to large class teachings, but they were worth noting.

#### **7.3.8. Minimal positive experiences of teaching large classes**

It should be noted that, although all participants did not enjoy large class teaching, there were positive experiences that could be taken note of. Most participants had minimal positive experiences with teaching large classes. The most positive experience of large class teaching was that it made them better academics and prepared them for future challenges associated with large class teaching as large classes were there to stay. They indicated that they enjoyed making a difference and influencing many students at once. This shows that, not all was lost with regards to large class teaching. As few as they may be, these positives were enough to be celebrated and expanded on.

### **7.4. Suggestions for further research**

The literature that was reviewed revealed that few studies have been conducted on the impact large classes have on early career academics in South African higher education. In order to close this gap, other researchers should consider looking at how lack of support to early career academics affects their teaching of large classes. Further studies could be done on exploring academics' experiences of teaching large classes through remote learning in the South African higher education. It would also help to research how other institutions of higher learning

negotiate the issue of resource inadequacy and assessments when it came to teaching large classes.

## **7.5. Recommendations**

### **7.5.1. Need for assistant lecturers**

The findings revealed that some participants may do better with the help of assistant lecturers. This may help alleviate some of the pressure the participants had as some of the administrative work will be delegated to the assistant lecturers.

### **7.5.2. Better training for remote learning**

Some of the participants argued that they could do better with enough training and capacity building workshops to facilitate remote learning. This is because some of the participants indicated that they struggled with remote learning as they did not have sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the technological tools to facilitate remote learning. This could also be done by employing more technicians to help struggling academics with technical support.

### **7.5.3. Allocate greater budgets for resources**

The findings revealed that there was shortage of resources to meet the current student enrolments. Participants complained about the classroom sizes, meaning new bigger classrooms needed to be built and more office space, especially for non-permanent academics. The other aspect that needed special attention was the purchase of laptops for disadvantaged students to improve academics' wellbeing with or without Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this called for an increased budget from university management and the State.

### **7.5.4 Continue with remote learning**

The findings also revealed that higher education institutions could and should use the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity to take most of the teaching and learning digitally, to mitigate the challenges of classroom sizes and other challenges associated with teaching large classes. Furthermore, remote learning can alleviate the manner and frequency of student protests that have somewhat negatively impacted higher education, since, whenever students protest, they tend to burn infrastructure that is already limited. Therefore, higher education institutions could take their teaching and learning remotely without exacerbating inequalities that exist between the haves and have-nots.

## **7.6. Conclusion**

This was an interpretive research study that sought to explore academics' experiences of teaching large classes in South African higher education. An extensive reading literature revealed that large classes were problematic to conducive learning environment for both academics and students' alike. In concurrence with the existing literature on large classes, the findings of the study revealed that participating academics were mostly frustrated by teaching large classes, and as result, they had negative experiences. These participating academics lacked support and were unable to connect with individual students. To successfully navigate around large class teaching, more support is encouraged from relevant authorities with the aim of improving the quality of South African higher education.

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## Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



19 June 2019

Mr Mlamuli Hlatshwayo 59225  
Ms Thabile Zondi  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Hlatshwayo and Mr Zondi

Protocol reference number: HSS/0240/019

Project Title: RE-centering and re-presenting students' and lecturers voices in the South African higher education curriculum and transformation discourses.

### Full Approval – Expedited Application

Your application dated 04 April 2019, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 1 year from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

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

Yours faithfully,

.....  
Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)

/px

cc Academic Leader Research: Dr A Pillay

cc School Administrators: Ms S Jeenarain, Ms M Ngcobo, Ms N Dlamini and Mr SN Mthembu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)



Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za) / [snymanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymanm@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

## **Appendix B: Consent Letter**

University of Kwa Zulu-Natal

College of Humanities

School of Education

Curriculum Studies

Dear Prospective Participant

### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

My name is Thabang Mokoena. I am a Masters candidate at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education. I intend doing research aimed at exploring academics' experiences of teaching large classes in higher education. With this letter, I would like to request your permission to participate in this research study. Should you agree, your participation in the study will take an hour or less in the form of a semi-structured interview session. The times and dates session are negotiable to ensure that you are not distracted from your duties.

Please note that:

- You are given a choice to participate or not participate in this study. Furthermore, you have a right to stop participating at any time. You will not be penalised so, nor expected to provide a reason for your withdrawal.
- Any information that you share cannot be used against you, and the generated data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- When participating in this study, your confidentiality is guaranteed since I will use pseudonyms when reporting findings.
- The generated data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after five years.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes, and there are no financial benefits involved.

If you agree to participate in the interview session, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether you agree to the audio recording of the session:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio recording		

If you have any concerns or questions, please feel to contact me at:

E-mail: tmokoena00@gmail.com

Cellphone: 073 766 6500

My supervisors are Dr Mlamuli Hlatshwayo and Ms. Thabile Zondi. They are located at the School of Education, Edgewood Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Their contact details are as follows:

Dr Mlamuli Hlatshwayo

E-mail: Hlatshwayom@ukzn.ac.za

Tel: 031 260 3927

Ms. Thabile Zondi

E-mail: Zondit2@ukzn.ac.za

Tel: 031 260 1379

You may also contact the Research Office through:

Ms. Duduzile Dlamini

HSSREC Research Office administrator

E-mail: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

Tel: 031 260 4557

Thank you for your contribution to this research study.

## **DECLARATION**

I..... (Full name and surname of participant) at this moment confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research study, and I consent to participate in the research study

I am aware that I am at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time, should I wish to, and a copy of this document is available upon request.

Signature of participant

Date

---

---

## **Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule**

### **Section A: Preparing modules for large classes**

1. How do you prepare your module for large class? Readings/course outlines?
2. What challenges do you face when preparing your module for large classes?
3. What are different strategies do you use when preparing an online class especially during the current health pandemic?
4. What are challenges do you face when preparing an online class especially during the current health pandemic and what have you done to mitigate those challenges?
5. What has been your negative experience when preparing your large class module?
6. How do these challenges affect your personal and professional life?
7. What has been your positive experience when preparing your large class module?
8. What can be done to change and mitigate these negative experiences or strategies of preparing modules for large classes?
9. What can be done to improve and reinforce these positive experiences or strategies of preparing modules for large classes?

### **Section B: Actual teaching of a large class**

1. What does a typical class look like in your module; can you describe it for me?
2. How do you monitor your class register?
3. What strategies do you have to motivate class attendance?
4. What are some of your experiences that have shaped how you approach teaching?
5. What are strategies do you use when teaching an online class especially during the current health pandemic?
6. What are challenges do you face when teaching an online class especially during the current health pandemic and what have you done to mitigate those challenges?

7. What teaching methods do you often use in contact class?
8. What challenges do you often face when teaching large class?
9. How do you mitigate those challenges?
10. What strategies or incentives do you use to ensure students participate in your class?
11. How effective group presentations/class debates/discussion in a large class?
12. What do you enjoy the most when teaching a large class?
13. Would you say your teaching strategies promote surface learning or deep learning, why?
14. What can be done to improve these positive experiences or strategies of large classes?

### **Section C: large class assessment**

1. What are the different kinds of assessments you use, and why do you choose them?  
Which assessments would you prefer if you did not have the challenges of large classes
2. Academics often experiment to multiple choice questions to avoid essays and other intensive assessment methods. Why have you or not ever used them?
3. How has the current health pandemic influenced your assessment strategy?
4. What are some of the challenges do you encounter with assessing a large class?
5. How do you negotiate with those assessment challenges?
6. How do these challenges affect your personal and professional life?
7. Is there any external or internal help with hep? Here I want to find out the role of teaching assistants if they have any?
8. Would you say your assessment methods promote surface learning or deep learning, why?
9. What do you enjoy the most about assessing a large class?
10. What can be done to improve these positive experiences or strategies of large classes?

## **Appendix D: Turn It In Reports**

19 New Gem Gardens

28 Marainhill Road

Pinetown

3610

### **RE: Motivation for the Turn It In Certificate**

I write this motivation to clarify on the high percentage similarity in the turn it in report. The similarity index that is indicated in the turn it in certificate is listed as 40%. This brief motivation explains the reasons behind such a seemingly high percentages score.

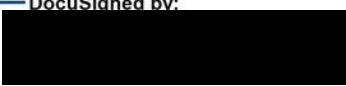
The student had submitted his literature review, theory and methodology chapters on turn it in as working drafts. This created copies in the system that picked itself up when the student submitted his thesis for examination. As supervisors we did communicate with turn it in to see if they can delete these copies and allow us to submit the entire thesis, this does not appear to be done. We have attached the turn it in report, together with our communication with the Turn It in company as well, confirming that they have deleted our previous chapter drafts. They do not appear to have done so.

Should you need any further information or clarity on the attached, please do not hesitate to get back to us through the university research office.

Kindest regards,

Dr Mlamuli Hlatshwayo

Date: 13/01/2021

DocuSigned by:  
  
73E249C48045477...

## MED thesis

### ORIGINALITY REPORT

40%

SIMILARITY INDEX

10%

INTERNET SOURCES

6%

PUBLICATIONS

40%

STUDENT PAPERS

### PRIMARY SOURCES

1

Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal

Student Paper

38%

2

Submitted to Mancosa

Student Paper

1%

3

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Internet Source

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4

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**Re: Turnitin Help Desk Case 01149191 [ ref:\_00D30H14.\_5001W1kRQef:ref ]**

 **Mlamuli Nkosingphile Hlatshwayo** Tuesday, 15 December 2020 at 12:01

**To:** Turnitin; **Cc:** Thabile Zondi

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**From:** Turnitin <[Turnitin@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Turnitin@ukzn.ac.za)>  
**Date:** Monday, 07 December 2020 at 14:51  
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**Subject:** RE: Turnitin Help Desk Case 01149191 [ ref:\_00D30H14.\_5001W1kRQef:ref ]

I have received your request and will let you know once Turnitin has confirmed deletion.

Regards,  
Lungi

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**From:** Mlamuli Nkosingphile Hlatshwayo <[HlatshwayoM@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HlatshwayoM@ukzn.ac.za)>  
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Please see below, the paper IDs of the submissions that I wish to be deleted;

- 1464512197
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- 1354896759

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Thank you for all the help.

Please advise when all the above have been deleted.

Kindest regards,  
Mlamuli

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