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# Practices, Challenges, and Opportunities of Inclusive Curriculum Implementation during COVID-19: The Case of One Teacher Education University in South Africa

**Preya Pillay**

Curriculum Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

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**Abstract** By mid-March 2020, major business and education institutions had been closed down. Emergency remote teaching and learning (ERTL) became the modus operandi, a solution that affected the most socially disadvantaged students in order to reduce the loss of learning time. This study explored teacher educators' practices, challenges, and opportunities of inclusive curriculum implementation in an ERTL programme during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were obtained using semi-structured interviews via WhatsApp and focus group interviews through Microsoft Teams. Three female teacher educators who teach at the undergraduate level in The School of Education at one higher education institution in Gauteng, South Africa have been purposively chosen. The findings suggest that careful selection and sequencing of curriculum content and consideration of spatiality and assessment practices can offer possibility and hope for a blended approach to teaching and learning beyond 2020. However, in charting a way forward, curriculum implementers need to consider the needs of learners and commit to principles of inclusion, social redress and justice within the higher education context. Curriculum implementers need to be much more deliberate and add a sense of urgency to meet the diverse needs of students in a responsive way. Nevertheless, even these challenges offer opportunities to rethink curriculum innovation and routines, and to reimagine and recreate human institutions. The paper concludes with a discussion on the implications of these findings for curriculum implementation at higher education institutions. The findings also have the potential to ignite debate as it relates to re-imagining the purpose of curriculum and education.

**Keywords** Emergency Remote Teaching (ERTL), Curriculum Implementation, Pedagogical Reasoning, Inclusivity

## 1. Introduction and Background

South Africa's President, Cyril Ramaphosa, declared a National State of Disaster in mid-March 2020 due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. South Africa (SA), like the rest of the world, was threatened by a global disease, so the President declared a national lockdown, which began on March 26 [1], based on the recommendation of the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC). Following the declaration, all South African tertiary institutions implemented measures to ensure the social isolation mandate while continuing to conduct their core

business. In an environment of ongoing uncertainty, tertiary institutions were forced to adapt their educational practices and provisions to rapidly changing circumstances. To ensure adherence to national regulations concerning the pandemic, tertiary institutions have ventured into offering "emergency remote eLearning", pointing to a rapid shift away from face-to-face classes and toward online learning systems [2]. With no time to adjust and without proper planning, higher education (HE) teachers in SA had to adapt their curriculum to the new learning system. Curriculum designed for face-to-face learning needed to be modified to make it suitable for online instruction.

The transition to an online format raised concerns about students' access to necessary equipment and services [3]. Students struggled to obtain computer equipment that had previously been provided for their studies by their universities. Students not only faced increased difficulties in terms of access to education facilities, loneliness, and mental/physical health [3], but also lost access to campus services such as housing, food, income, and healthcare [4]. Many students were forced to live hundreds of kilometers away from campus with family members. Considering the learning challenges students faced in transitioning to an online environment, curriculum implementation had to take into account ideals of inclusivity aligned to the use of information and communications technology (ICT). The emphasis on inclusiveness was less on the particulars of student disabilities or additional support needs, and more on the curriculum responses considered relevant to the needs of students [5].

Curriculum considerations on how to effectively assist and satisfy the requirements of various learners at a university while simultaneously adapting to the online environment and coping with the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive challenges of online learning were crucial [6]. To create opportunities for connection, cooperation, co-construction, and contribution, the HE teacher had to reimagine the curriculum. This study examines three teacher educators' practices, challenges, and opportunities for integrating curriculum in inclusive ways in an ERTL program during the COVID-19 pandemic, with an emphasis on how the pandemic exposed learning challenges in education, particularly in terms of inclusivity.

### 1.1. Problem Statement

Literature reveals that many studies on HE teachers' perceptions of technology integration have been carried out internationally [7, 8, 9, 10]. Little attention has, however, been given to researching how inclusivity has been considered in the application of the current teacher education curricula and what needs to be learned in the SA context within a changed COVID-19 context. This study seeks to address this contextual gap.

### 1.2. Significance of the Study

The study's findings will provide HE institutions with valuable insights into curriculum implementation in the integrated teaching environment of ICT, allowing institutions to focus critically on curriculum quandaries in order to better prepare HE teachers to address the various requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the findings will be of benefit to HE teachers as they will be given the opportunity to reconsider not only the latest modern, online, and educational opportunities, but also the basic goals of HE education, and how the refreshed conceptions of education and curriculum implementation can be used to build more democratic and just societies [11]. In a similar way, the findings of this study will also provide valuable knowledge to people in management positions in HE on the introduction of curricula and the issues of access and outcome inequalities in emerging pedagogical spaces, and how they could be mitigated in teaching and learning post-COVID-19.

### 1.3. Research Questions

How did HE teachers mediate inclusive curriculum implementation during COVID-19?

What challenges and opportunities did HE teachers face in implementing an inclusive curriculum during COVID-19?

### 1.4. Literature Review

#### 1.4.1. Transitioning to Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning

Due to the suspension of face-to-face classes as a result of COVID-19, teaching and learning had to be delivered online. Emergency remote teaching (ERTL) was implemented as a temporary change in tertiary education delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ERTL necessitates the use of entirely remote teaching solutions for training or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face as blended or hybrid courses. Following the resolution of the crisis or emergency, teaching would resume in face-to-face, blended, or hybrid formats [12]. During ERTL, a mixture of asynchronous and synchronous modes of instruction is used. Asynchronous online teaching includes the distribution and storage of readings and training materials on Learning Management Systems (LMSs) with the inclusion of annotated PowerPoints that HE teachers have narrated [13]. Synchronous online teaching includes one-hour long live lessons provided by video conferencing tools (VCTSs). These are held a few days after the students obtain the materials of the session [13]. Initially, synchronous online teaching was optional and were intended to open conversations on the content of the session, where students could ask questions, and session activities could be addressed.

1.4.2. Inclusivity at the heart of curriculum implementation

Inclusivity helps to meet the challenge of providing the best possible learning experience for all students. According to Forlin [14], inclusive education seeks to include all students who are perceived to be at educational risk as a result of marginalization due to minority group status, such as disability or socioeconomic and/or psychological factors. In this statement, she finds an ally in Foreman [15], who insists that inclusivity extends far beyond disabled students and that all schools should strive to provide optimal learning environments for all students, regardless of their social, cultural, or ethnic background, or their ability or impairment. Despite the substantial steps taken by HE institutions in bridging education during the pandemic and ensuring the needs and well-being of students are taken into account, the pre-existing inherent inequalities in the SA education system cannot be ignored [16]. Equity and access have been government priorities since the National Higher Education Commission (1996), as stated in White Paper 3 [17]. White Paper 3 outlined the need to remedy access, participation, and success inequalities and expand SA's competitive participation in the global context [18]. According to The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Teacher Task Force [19], digital technology in Sub-Saharan Africa can allow students to access information, communicate with their HE teachers, and with each other, but approximately 56 million students, particularly black learners, live in areas without network connectivity. Furthermore, active mediation of learning is required for online learning, which is disproportionately unequal between rich and poor households [19]. Notably, most students - particularly those from impoverished areas - do not have a viable space for learning. Hence, teaching remotely during COVID-19 requires universities to carefully rethink how they implement their digital curriculum taking into consideration principles of inclusivity. As HE teachers accept remote teaching and learning in emergencies, it is important that they critically reflect on ethical issues associated with transforming practices so that the new standards do not merely mix old problems [12]. HE teachers need to ensure that they rebuild their curricula, realizing that it is the individual that precedes the intellect, and that what we teach or are taught honours the unity, reality and goodness of all individuals [12].

1.4.3. Curriculum Implementation during COVID-19

Curriculum can be defined in a number of different ways [20, 21, 22]. The curriculum, according to Grumet [21], is what and how much (past, present, and future) teachers want their students to understand standardized subjects taught at an educational institution. For Tyler [23] and Taba [24] a curriculum can be described as a plan with elements. The goals, material, methodology and assessment of the curriculum are certain elements of the curriculum. Aoki [20] contends that, while the curriculum should be planned and taught, it should also be taught as lived (curriculum-as-lived) in order to allow students to criticize or advocate for decolonization as needed. The curriculum, according to Pinar [22], is an interdisciplinary study of educational experience. An educational experience necessitates more than just the subjects covered in the course. It encompasses attitudes, beliefs, and world views that are learned, unlearned, re-learned, re-formed, deconstructed, and reconstructed as part of the degree-earning process. Making a case for a digitized curriculum is not simply about changing content and pedagogy. Instead, it is thinking about how students experience the university differently [22]. It is about the careful nature of a learning experience that involves students in the purposeful use of technology to solve real problems [25]. HE teachers as curriculum planners and implementers should become agents of change and engage in a deep discussion addressing past social injustices and a renegotiation between knowledge systems within a digitized curriculum. Rethinking and updating the curriculum requires HE teachers to consider the exposed mechanisms of oppression and condemn complicity in a discourse of global solidarity that denies the reality of deprivation and injustice for millions of tertiary students living on the margins of poverty [12].

Curriculum coherence in a digitized curriculum can be improved by applying recontextualizing principles to decisions about what [knowledge] is chosen, how it is sequenced, paced, and evaluated [26]. It is the responsibility of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) systems and curricula designers and implementers to be aware of and account for [knowledge selection and sequencing] choices [27]. During COVID-19, Blignaut [28] argues in favor of this, claiming that curriculum and pedagogic change will be successful only if we embrace new ways of viewing knowledge as well as multiple knowledge traditions.

Many different sorts of politics are included in the university learning process, according to Soudien and Harvey [16], therefore what is learned and taught inside politics should now be more prominently incorporated in our debates regarding HE curriculum and expected learning. In the South African context, the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) takes a knowledge-based approach, requiring that all ITE curricula include specified proportions of disciplinary learning (including educational theoretical knowledge, as well as knowledge of the subject material and its associated skills), pedagogical learning (including general pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge), and practical learning (knowledge gained through study), situational learning (understanding the numerous settings in which education exists) and fundamental learning (universal knowledge and competences that are not special to teachers but may be important in the day-to-day work of teachers) are two types

of learning [29]. The basic question, however, remains: How can the curriculum be aligned with a redesigned university education that includes global infectious diseases like COVID-19, as well as national issues like deep social injustices and inequalities that are still present in South Africa [28] and issues of global competence within a globalized population?

### 1.5. Theoretical Framework

This study will draw on Grundy's [30] work exploring curriculum as "praxis" and Shulman's [31] pedagogical reasoning to understand how curriculum was implemented and enacted in technology enhanced learning environments where Information and Communication Technology tools are used to support and facilitate learning. These theoretical constructs build on each other to facilitate the transformative experience of curriculum implementation during the ERTL programme.

#### 1.5.1. Curriculum as praxis

Curriculum as praxis [30] is a term drawn from a human well-being orientation that makes a clear commitment to human spirit emancipation. The dynamic interaction of the learning group is used to continuously evaluate the learning process and outcomes. As a result, the curriculum evolves as a result of the learning process [30]. The curriculum, as Grundy puts it, is not merely a set of plans to be implemented, but rather "an active process in which planning, acting, and evaluating are all mutually related and interwoven into the process [30].As a result, praxis takes place in the real world, with action being informed and committed at its core. On their learning journey, students must make sense of ICT-based concepts and theories, as well as establish meaning and connections to real-world applications of knowledge. The curriculum design process is not a simplified linear approach that defines what has to be learnt and how it should be learned without considering students [30]. A vital component of learning is the environment or context in which it will take place. The theory of curriculum as praxis is a good lens for considering how the ERTL incorporated inclusivity in the curriculum.

#### 1.5.2. Shulman's (1987) model of pedagogical reasoning

The teacher's ideals of what education is for and how society might be [32] are included in pedagogy. Curriculum, in this view, is a pedagogical domain. Shulman's [31] pedagogical reasoning model suggests that teachers are accountable for their students' care and education and make a large number of teaching assessments and decisions every day for and about their students. With the number of students in the classroom and the material taught, the teacher engages in several loops of pedagogical reasoning on a regular basis. Shulman's [31] pedagogical reasoning model depicts a teacher's thought process during the teaching process, which includes: perception of subject knowledge, translation of subject knowledge into teachable representations, teaching, assessment of learning and success of students and teachers, reflection, and new understandings. Shulman's logic is used as a framework for understanding the teacher's instructional logic when using a digitized curriculum. Sharing the teachers' curriculum implementation reasoning patterns will assist them in developing deeper justifications for their classroom practice during COVID-19.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design and Methods of Data Generation

This study used a case study approach of one teacher education programme. Three teacher educators at one university in SA provided insights on how they responded to inclusivity during curriculum implementation as they transitioned to remote/online teaching and learning. A case study allows researchers to gain in-depth understandings of real-life occurrences in which various situations occur [33]. For this research, the author wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of three teacher educators working in an ERTL space during the COVID-19 space and how issues of inclusivity were considered during the implementation of curriculum.

Because the author was unable to use traditional methods of data collection due to restrictions on face-to-face interviews and observations, the author used alternative methods of data collection that allowed for distance-oriented approaches [34]. For data collection, semi-structured interviews via WhatsApp and focus group interviews via Microsoft Teams were conducted with three teacher educators from a single public tertiary institution. Since the interviews were of a semi-structured nature, the questions posed were flexible, iterative and continuous, rather than prepared in advance and cast in stone [35]. A collection of pre-planned guiding questions was developed to ensure that the semi-structured interviews were done properly, such that the same areas were covered with each interviewee. A focus group interview was also used as a data collection strategy because, as Rossman [36] suggested, focus group interviews allow the researcher to detect trends/key themes in the participants' perceptions and opinions. Similarly, the researcher was able to uncover and examine the essential ideas of teacher educators' experiences implementing an inclusive curriculum through the use of a focus group interview.

### 2.2. The Research Participants

The participants were sampled purposively. They comprised of three academic teacher educators with responsibility for academic planning and curriculum implementation for undergraduate studies. The three participants discussed curriculum implementation at their

university from a variety of perspectives, focusing on personal experiences, actions, and plans and documents generated in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

The data from the WhatsApp semi-structured interview and the Microsoft Teams focus group [37] were analyzed using thematic coding methodologies. Codes were grouped together as data from cumulative and open coding became available, and axial coding formed. Data points have been compared to those sought after by construction categories on numerous occasions. The code for each data point has been captured and compiled into a master list of codes that help clarify categories. Various data components had to be re-coded and updated as part of this ongoing re-evaluation process [38].

### 2.4. Ethical Considerations

The researcher received permission to perform this study from the Ethics Committee of the institution where she works. To protect the names of the teacher educators who took part in the study, pseudonyms were utilized.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1. Rethinking Selection and Sequencing of Curriculum Content

Teacher educators provided insight as to how they have responded to demands of curriculum selection and sequencing in relation to inclusivity. Extracts from interview responses revealed:

> *Lolo: I had to carefully think about what are the key concepts and skills to be taught. I often found myself making notes focusing particularly on the level of detail required, and selecting material, which would be relevant to students… In the framework of COVID-19, the most important question for me was what information is most useful and how it should be cultivated through the university curriculum. For example, I had to consider the legitimacy of the content chosen in order to ensure that the topics were not outdated. For this to be achieved, I had to regularly check on the curriculum content and replace it if necessary. In addition, I had to consider how to arrange structured learning in this context and under these conditions without ignoring the perspectives of students.*

> Zama*: I had to think about selection and sequencing of knowledge and what I want to do with the learners in the lesson and what learners should do to make it a worthwhile lesson. Understanding my students' living realities also helped me to make particular curriculum choices…. To add that the selection and sequencing of content was also influenced by the knowledge structure of the discipline and pre-requisites for the course… however, ultimately making this content relevant for students during this pandemic was of importance. I used the Learning Management System to communicate curriculum content by creating an online orientation and welcoming video designed to calm my students and share my intent to support them during the course.*

> *Mike: I have used my knowledge of learners, as well as my knowledge of pedagogical content, to choose methods and learning strategies that matched the content. A thinking of how to organize the curriculum online from the student point of view and provide a course roadmap, making it easy for the student to navigate the module had to be considered. It was also important to establish a weekly pace to help students manage their time and for me as an academic to manage the tasks. The course content was often labelled on the LMS site for easy navigation for students and was supported by frequent announcement of task expectations. I even remember communicating learning schedules, a tour of the course and additional support materials that could help my students take responsibility for study online.*

All participants in the study indicated that the pandemic provoked deliberative dialogues on the aims of education. What knowledge is most valuable, what counts as knowledge and what kind of knowledge has been carefully considered by all participants. For Lolo and Zama, the collection of information and values used for inclusion or exclusion, the organization of material and the implications of the different choices and arrangements were at the core of their curriculum decisions. Curriculum content drew from experiences of students' everyday life. According to Grundy [30], it is critical to create a culturally appropriate curriculum that needs teachers to recognize that students are not a deficit and that they carry with them powerful and rich experiences. For Mike, thinking about how to organize the curriculum online and ways to communicate learning expectations helped mediate his action, providing principles for learning that were then translated into practice. Blignaut [28] supports Mike's approach by stating that curricular transformation will only be successful if new ways of understanding knowledge and various knowledge traditions are embraced. Of importance, all teacher educators spoke about their role of embodied knowing as a dimension of their own pedagogical reasoning and action. In other words, curriculum sequencing and content involved a sense of all teacher educators having to design their curriculum by focusing on approaches to teaching that endure through changes in learning context, learning content, and pedagogies whilst not deviating from core prerequisites [39].

### 3.2. Considering Spatiality of Curriculum Content

Teacher educators also spoke about content breadth and depth, as well as selection and foci of curriculum implementation in relation to inclusivity. Their responses are captured below:

> Zama: *Taking into mind the inequitable conditions of the lockdown and understanding my student's background, I had to find ways to reduce the amount of content that should be covered. This did not mean lowering academic standards but rather rethinking learning outcomes. I had to look at the existing curriculum and carefully modify the existing curriculum without increasing inequities in opportunity to learn. For example, I created an activity/task where I asked students to write about their experiences of assessment since the start of lockdown. The question was very open-ended and students were free to interpret the question in any way they saw fit. The purpose of this task was to see how well students understood assessment concepts. I assessed work according to the use of appropriate concepts.*
>
> Lolo: *The quick conversion of courses from traditional face-to-face to online learning has resulted in a new degree of student underpreparedness, as well as a reduction in content and assessment. It was crucial for me to get to the core of learning during my planning and implementation, which was to consider essential concepts and significant understandings. For example, rather than focusing on surface learning and test-worthy knowledge, I focused on deep learning and life-worthy knowledge. I always remember the university's plea for less is more hence…less is more became a valuable way of thinking about what content is most essential.*
>
> Mike: *For me, the curriculum needed to be changed and diversified, with smaller chunks of module content, discussion forums, and mini assessments being created. A key aspect of curriculum structuring was to consider what graduates should know as professionals and what they should be able to do when they finish their educatio*n.

All participants indicated that content breadth and depth, selection and foci had to be carefully selected and aligned to embrace the social injustices and inequalities which existed in their institutions. Zama and Lolo spoke about the abnormal educational circumstances which required them to rethink what content they should prioritize for the well-being of the students. For Mike, he had to shift to a decision- maker who designs his educational technology learning environment as needed, in real time, by focusing on approaches to teaching that endure through changes in learning context, learning content and pedagogies [39]. This process enabled him to critically structure the most important aspects of the curriculum. It is against this background that prioritization of educational outcomes had to be considered as well as particular pedagogical choices. "Less is more" was considered by all participants to ensure that rigour in teaching and learning took place without compromising quality and ensuring prerequisites of the curriculum were fulfilled. As Blignaut [28] notes, an excessive curriculum has a debilitating effect on student motivation; more and more work does not mean better teaching or improved learning - it more likely adds more pressure. Similarly, Malkus [40] notes that learning under lockdown is much more than coverage of the official curriculum; the obvious learning is how to use a computer, for some, and how to navigate the many different online learning platforms available through the university. Hence, "less is more" is a useful starting point for thinking about the content breadth and depth, selection, and foci.

### 3.3. Designing Appropriate Assessment

Teacher educators also spoke about how assessment in the online curriculum was considered to enhance inclusivity. Extracts from interview responses revealed:

> Zama: *Assessment frames what students do. It is therefore important to think very carefully about how assessment tasks are designed so that they can have a positive backwash effect on students' learning. For example, I had to carefully think about structuring tasks by making sure that assessment tasks are clearly linked to and in alignment with objectives and teaching. I designed and implemented online formative assessment tasks that encouraged three types of interactions (learner-content/activities, learner-others, and learner-self) because these interactions can boost not only participation in the learning process, but also mutual awareness of learning goals and expected outcomes. In order to create an interactive online learning environment, I also facilitated these types of interactions through e-quizzes, discussion forums, and self-tests, which enabled learners to build, share and compare understandings and experiences.*
>
> Lolo: *I integrated on-going, clear, specific, learning-focused and understandable online formative feedback that was characterized by promptness as well as provided learners with opportunities to repeat and/or revise the unsatisfactorily submitted task. Additionally, I used exemplars to communicate expectations more clearly to students. Using exemplars was helpful during Emergency Remote Teaching as students who did not attend virtual classes could refer to the exemplar for guidance. I also included detailed grading rubrics. This communicated clear expectations to students.*

> Mike: *For me, effective design and integration of online learning-oriented assessment into the curriculum facilitated meaningful teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction and supported learners' productive learning. I employed performance-based assessment methods such as e-portfolios, as these methods required learners to demonstrate learnt skills in an authentic way. Performance-based assessment tasks also allowed for direct observation of learners' abilities and encouraged learners' active engagement in the learning process.*

All participants spoke about how assessment had to be carefully designed to increase learners' opportunities to learn. For Mike and Zama, they used differentiated assessment methods such as performance-based tasks, e-quizzes, discussion forums, and self-tests to support deep learning [41,42]. All participants seemed to agree that formative assessment would support learner autonomy and motivate learners [41,42]. Formative assessment was also used so that learners could take responsibility for their own learning. For Lolo, using exemplars and clear and transparent rubrics were also spoken of to provide students with concrete guidelines for managing learning in the context of home dwellings that impede learning in different ways.

### 3.4. Challenges of Inclusive Curriculum Implementation

Teacher educators reflected that despite trying their best to accommodate all learners and ensuring the curriculum adequately took into consideration students in low and middle-class homes, there were significant challenges to curriculum completion:

> Zama: *Despite universities offering student's data, laptops and cutting down significantly on curriculum content, many of our students, specifically Black students, have difficulty obtaining basic essentials such as food. Students wrote to say that they were required to use their NSFAS at home (the National Student Financial Aid Scheme is a government fund with the function of allocating bursaries and loans to disadvantaged students at public HE institutions )to help pay for the electricity and rent as their parents have lost their jobs. As a result, they are hungry and cannot concentrate on their learning activities. This was a problem difficult to assist with as the university itself did not have the financial capacity.*

> Lolo: *Students also did not have electricity whist studying at home, so despite efforts to accommodate all students, many students from rural and township areas could not complete online tasks and activities on time. Of course, yes, I did try to accommodate them by giving them an extension on their submission. But this had become an on-going issue and at times these students do not respond for weeks. Now the problem with this is that the university also has deadlines for marks…..... Despite learning differences, students were implicitly expected to keep up with the pace and volume of academic work. Also, I received emails from students indicating that they could not study because of the noisy home environment.*

> Mike: *During Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning, two major challenges caused a challenge for me in completing the curriculum. The first was a situation in which a student emailed me to say that she had been assaulted at home and therefore cannot complete her assessments. I referred the student to our centre for crisis development but unfortunately, I got to know later in the semester that the student had dropped out. The second was the huge amount of admin work which we, as academic staff, have been doing, which almost in a sense leads to frustration and burnout. This posed a serious threat to dealing with students' issues of online learning effectively.*

While the concern about educational inequality centered on access to computers and internet access in the completion of the curriculum, in the attempt to reconstruct university at home there were much deeper inequities at stake. Participants indicated issues of abuse, noise, lack of food, and academic burnout as factors attributed to learners' difficulty in accessing the curriculum. For Lolo and Zama, the question of the social context of learning shows that the question of out-of-university education is much more than simply one of access to online facilities. It is about contexts in which social inequalities and educational inequalities merge to create profoundly negative experiences of learning under lockdown. Black learners, according to both Zama and Lolo, were the ones who had the most issues with online learning. Consequently, despite the university's efforts to address basic needs, the links between educational inequity and food insecurity, housing and employment insecurity, poverty, health care, and racism have grown more visible than ever. Back, communities have been disproportionately badly struck by coronavirus; many working-class families have been compelled to remain in frontline labor or have lost their jobs; some live with inadequate access to healthcare, minimal governmental services, and continual anxiety, says Malkus [40]. This racialized disparity, according to van der Berg & Spaull [43], is not a mistake - it is not a weakness in the system. It represents something about South African capitalism as a whole, a profound logic that delivers the same results over and over. Mike found that the increased workload of teacher educators in the use of technology increased their workload in content preparation, resulting in a lack of necessary assistance for students. However, we cannot necessarily blame teachers for the shortfall, according to Soudien [12], because the current situation of

Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) and the dilemma that teachers face can be compared to a surgeon who has previously been asked to perform heart surgery with only a rusted pocket knife and is now asked to do so in the dark. COVID-19 has shown us how incredibly unequal our SA universities are.

### 3.5. Opportunities for Inclusive Curriculum Implementation

The participants did, however, indicate that despite the challenges they faced with implementing an inclusive curriculum, some opportunities were evident. Their responses were as follows:

> Zama: *I've always been a slacker who has never tried new ways of learning. Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning assisted me in thinking critically about what to include and exclude from the curriculum in our unequal societies. If we were not affected by COVID-19, I probably would replicate the same curriculum content every year.*
>
> Lolo: *During Emergency Remote teaching and learning, I improved my problem-solving skills, critical thinking abilities, and adaptability among the students, despite the challenges of curriculum implementation. The curriculum choices which I made were systematically done taking into consideration what the received curriculum meant for my students.*
>
> Mike: *The e-learning methods enabled me the opportunity to customize my curriculum based on the needs of the learners. Also, there were many online tools available which was important for an effective and efficient implementation of curriculum. I used the learning management sites to enact the curriculum and this maintained a human touch to my lectures.*

All participants indicated ERTL did provide opportunities for creative and critical thinking. In a sense ERTL necessitates a paradigm shift when thinking of curriculum inclusivity. Jantjies [44] states that societal problems and challenges do not come neatly packaged to fit into disciplinary thinking, it requires disruptions through careful considerations. As such, all three participants stated that curriculum implementation during ERTL provided opportunities for rethinking and reimagining traditional modes of teaching and learning in ways that foster engagement. This is an excellent time for self-reflection and re-strategy. It is also a good time to rethink and reimagine the purpose of the curriculum in an unequal terrain.

## 4. Conclusion and Suggestions

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled teacher educators to adopt a new way of thinking and acting, allowing them to rethink and reimagine the purposes and values of education. The systemic shock of COVID-19 to tertiary institutions encouraged HE teacher educators to think more critically about curriculum as praxis. Educators were forced to think of the curriculum in deeper and more inclusive ways. Teacher educators in this study reflected on how they had to take into consideration students' experiences, their interests, learning profiles, and their readiness to learn during curriculum implementation. These considerations influenced how particular curriculum choices were made and implemented while considering the unequal educational terrain which most students in HE face. Considerations of curriculum sequencing, spatiality and assessment during ERTL highlighted moments of possibility and hope for a blended approach to teaching and learning beyond 2020. Universities would, however, need to increase investment in mapping a way to meet their students' social, emotional, and mental health needs [45]. On the one hand, combining online resources and building effective learning environments might encourage teachers to try new things, look for novel solutions, and reflect on their own practices [46]. What is required is a higher degree of coordination among university management, teacher educators, students, parents and the rollout of the curriculum. The digitization of institutions and the planning and implementing of curricula will require consideration of resources that some students do not currently have access to. Moving forward, research into the reimagined purpose of education is required. If learning is used to evaluate a university curriculum, it [the curriculum] should be significant and sensitive to the country's problems and challenges in a global context.

It should be remembered that this is a small-scale analysis, so the results are not generalizable. The data and results demonstrate what has happened in this specific context. The data and results, however, provide significant and genuine insights into the curriculum activities of teachers, underpinned by and consistent with their pedagogy at a time of (inter)national emergency. Further, the findings also have the potential to ignite debate as it relates to re-imagining the purpose of curriculum and education.

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