

# **Work and Emotional Labour of Special Educators in Sri Lanka: A Case Study**

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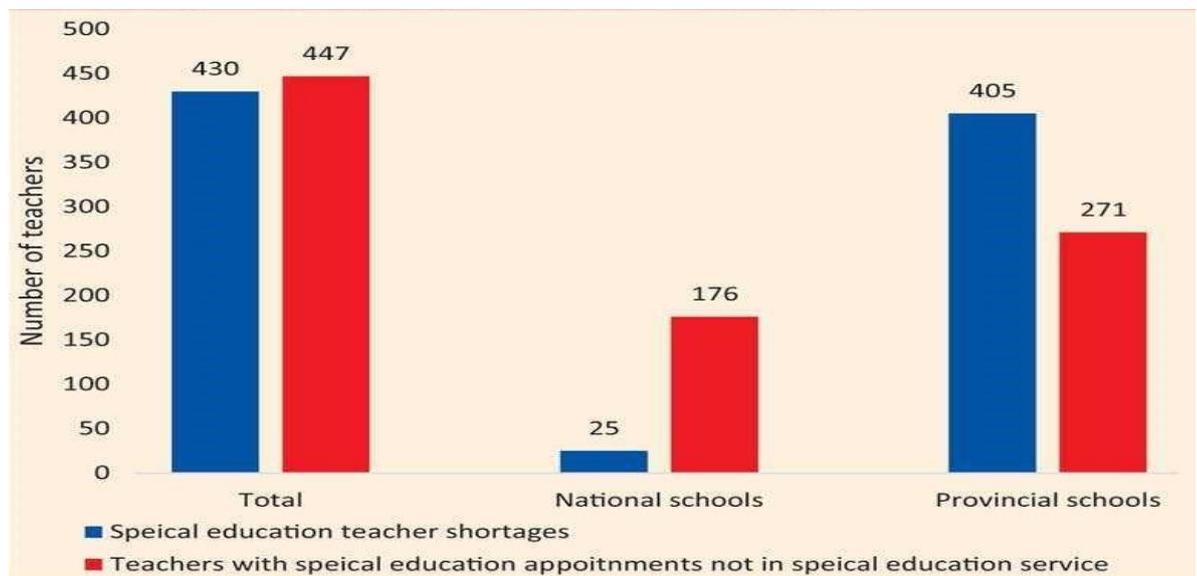
## **INTRODUCTION**

In the current context, different concepts and expectations of and about work have influenced on how one conceives the world of work. These concepts have been impacted by the socio economic, cultural and technological changes that have taken place in the world throughout history. This implies that the notion of work is a result of a historical process which is affected by different forms of human knowledge (Santos & Fontenelle, 2019), and this has paved the way for the emergence of different concepts and meanings for work in different countries and cultures. The concept of work is a broad concept which can be identified in different fields such as religion, technology, gender, leisure and education. However, the concept of work in the field of 'education' is rather blurred in terms of what the content of work is. Hence, identifying the concept of work perceived by special educators provides a clarity to a rather ambiguous phenomenon in the field of education. This emphasizes that the role of the teachers plays a crucial role in the field of education. However, there is a debate in the educational arena on whether a student's role is more important than a teacher's role depending of course on the cultural background in which the students and teachers exist. In the Sri Lankan context, the role of a teacher is very important as teaching is considered by many to be a noble profession that also contributes to the sustainable development of the country. These special educators perform a crucial role in and have an enormous impact on the lives of students with special needs. In special education systems, special educators can be identified as the main driving force that drives the social and emotional betterment of the students with special needs (Schonert-Reichl, 2017), where they must become pillars of strength and make an extra effort in order to guide and instruct their students.

When identifying the content of work, scholars have stated that there are a wide variety of sources that potentially influence the meaning of work, ranging from individual attitudes and organizational contexts to spiritual connections (Santos & Fontenelle, 2019). Hence, due to these variety of sources, it can be more complicated to identify what exactly constitutes special educators' work. Also, due to inherent complexity, the concept of work can be rather

broad. It is not only a part of economic orientation, but it also touches other orientations by intrinsically motivating and obligating orientations well. It can be seen that special educators perceive work in a different way when compared with teachers in other schools. For instance, many special educators perceive that maintaining a strong connection with their students is an integral aspect of their own work. Hence, due to the challenging job role of special educators and the complexity of the concept of work as it applies to these particular teachers, it is important to identify how special educators perceive the concept of 'work'. As stated above, the organizational context in which the work is carried out is considered one of the important sources when deriving the meaning for work ((Rosso et al., 2010). Special educators in different countries have different interpretations and perceptions when defining work based on their different beliefs and understandings. Thus, exploring how special educators perceive the concept of work in the Sri Lankan context is a theoretical contribution to the existing knowledge gap in the literature gap in this area.

In Sri Lankan context also, there is a shortage of special educators. Figure 1 portrays a graphical representation of the shortage of special educators in the year 2017.



*Figure1: Shortages of Special Educators in Sri Lanka in 2017*

**Source: Statistics Branch Ministry of the Education, 2017**

The figure 1 depicts the ratio between shortages of special educators and the rejections of special education appointments by special educators in both national and provincial schools. Given the fact that special education teachers have rejected their appointments, it is obvious that some teachers are reluctant to join the special education stream. In Sri Lanka, even though there are many special educational institutions, very little attention has been paid to

special educators. Consequently, though many research studies have explored the role of teachers in ordinary schools, they have only paid scant attention to the role of special educators. Special educators are the pillars that sustain students with special needs. Hence, it is vital that the needs of special educators are taken care of as there is a crisis in special educators in countries including Sri Lanka. One reason may be due to the high work intensity and commitment levels that the special educators face in an ever-challenging job role. Hence, they are confronted with many emotional challenges which is a part of their labour, proverbial as emotional labour. Many empirical studies have showcased that special educators are in a profession that deals with emotional labour (Gaan, 2012) in which these special educators are not supposed to become overwhelmed by and react to the emotions that they experience. According to Hoschild (1983), emotional labour is the suppression of feelings in order to sustain outward expression to other parties. Hence, it is important to identify the performance of emotional labour with regard to the work that these special educators perform. In order to guide and teach students who are mentally and physically challenged, the special educators, first and foremost, must be emotionally strong. Hence, it is important to explore the emotional work and emotional labor performed by these special educators. This research, therefore, fills a knowledge gap in this area, and thus becomes a pioneering study.

Firstly, it can be seen that special educators perceive the concept of work as a broad entity. This means that they deal with work of somewhat different nature, work which is more challenging and complex than the work of other teachers.

Secondly, due to the challenges and complexities inherent in the job role, it is important that special educators learn to manage their emotions. Since managing emotions is one aspect of a healthy life, it is a crucial factor that Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers need to be considered, as their profession deals with emotional labour. It is also crucial to identify the emotional qualities that special educators possess when dealing with students who have SEN. Thus, the objective of this study is ,

(a) to explore how special educators perceive their ‘work’

(b) to explore how special educators perform and manage emotional labour with regard to their ‘work’

It is expected that the findings of the research will help to conceptualize ‘work’ in the way it is perceived by special educators. Thus, understanding the complex nature of the job, which is the main reason why special educators often quit their job, will help to involve multi-tasking and the methods to manage negative emotions, will provide a ground solution for the issue of the shortage of special educators in Sri Lanka and will assist policymakers to identify and execute different strategies to reduce the complexity and tediousness of the ‘work’ perceived

by special educators and enhance their emotional wellbeing while overcoming the negative outcomes of the emotions they experience in their jobs. Moreover, the findings of the study will be useful to many stakeholders in the special education system.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Notion of Work**

Many empirical studies have explored different notions of the concept of 'work'. A broadly accepted definition is that work is an exchange of mental and physical effort for a monetary value (Livingstone, 2005). However, at present, scholars have furnished a broader definition of work where it is said to be a social relationship, a form of employment, or an activity of social production. But in human terms, it is the involvement of body, intelligence, analyses and interpretation (Dejours, 2006). According to an anthropological perspective, work is basic human involvement in the fabric of society (Applebaum, 1992). There are only a handful of studies that conceptualise work and among them, there are some models and theories forwarded by different scholars that help in doing so. Among these, the Heuristic Model deals with seven aspects of work namely, work centrality, economic orientation, interpersonal relations, intrinsic orientation, job abilities, meaningful work and obligation work (Snir & Harpaz, 2002). Other scholars have described work in four ways; as a job, as a challenging experience, as personally empowering and as something that structures life (Pillay et al., 2003).

### **Etymological Exploration of Work**

The term 'work' has its roots in different societies, and it is something that has progressed over time. Tracing the European roots of work is important in analyses as it paves the way to the modern understanding of work as something emerging through industrialization and globalisation. The connotations of the word work are threefold namely, factual, noble and dark. The factual aspect of work relates to the physical and mental effort exerted to achieve or produce something (Livingstone, 2005). The noble aspect of work can be identified as an outcome of a worker who accomplishes something where work is the sense of material or intellectual production that carries out an inner desire or a purpose (Russo, 2002). The third connotation of the word is something darker. In ancient Rome, the tripod tool, which symbolises torture, has been used to punish slaves. In this sense, work has sometimes been considered as a painful punishment (Adams, 2013).

### **Work In the Ancient World**

In the ancient world, prior to industrialization, a non-market or non-industrial culture prevailed. In this context, as people were not attached to industries, they were most often

engaged in domestic activities. Hence, in a non-market society, work mainly consisted of domestic work. In this era, there was a communal nature of work where each and every individual in the society was engaged in cooperative acts and tasks and was paid with different types of gifts, public facilities, goods and military security (Applebaum, 1992). A person's work in the society was classified according to his/her status. Women of low status were usually engaged in spinning, weaving, carding, cleaning, caring for children, serving food and bathing their masters while noble women engaged in weaving, spinning and making garments (Applebaum, 1992). Males worked mainly in fields performing tasks like ploughing, clearing, building fences as well as building walls. In early non-market societies, the work of a person depended not on that individual's preference, but according to his/her birth. Also, supporting oneself was one of the major incentives to work in all non-market societies (Applebaum, 1992). Based on the above reflections, scholars have presented the notion that work is an essential part of human life as recognized by all serious reflections on the value of human activity (Gibbs, 2008).

The concept of work has evolved over a period of time and has different aspects related to technology, gender, religion and education. In the current context, technology has become a vital part of human life and due to vast technological advancements, a trend towards replacing human work by different automated systems is evident. However, it is also arguable that work done by humans cannot be fully eliminated as human work is irreplaceable (Hirschorn, 1985). There is also a relationship between technological development and women's work where due to advances in technology, many women now engage in non-valued activities such as data entry work in which they earn inferior wages than men (Wright, 1988).

This brings us to the gendered nature of work. In ancient Greece, there was a high percentage of women slaves in patrician households. Prostitution was also a popular mode of work in the ancient period (Applebaum, 1992). However, some scholars argue that gender is irrelevant in the concept of work (Acker, 1990). There are different ways in which males and females can be distinguished at work. It may be in the way they answer a call, make policies or how they interact with one another (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). It is also evident that there are different dynamics associated with gender which make a female worker feel incompetent and devalued. Furthermore, it is argued that in order to improve the different aspects of work, there should be different gender stereotypes (Martin, 2006). Moreover, many researchers have discovered that female employment has been decreasing gradually over time (Raju & Bagchi, 1993). Scholars have also pointed out that tasks have been segregated according to a worker's sex and that there is a higher value placed on men's than women's work. Thus, gender has particular social constructions for both men and women (Chalmers, 2014).

Scholars have also considered leisure as a form of work. Leisure is a collection of all non-work activities (Kando & Summers, 1971) or the activities that have been freely chosen and intrinsically motivated (Iso-Ahola & Park, 1996). According to Kleiber (2012), leisure comprises enjoyment and opportunities for self-expressions while it is also characterized as an unpaid activity. According to Livingstone (1995), work is a purposeful activity which is done with an end in mind, which may either be paid or unpaid. He also pointed out that work is not only about paid employment, but also about domestic work, leisure and volunteer activities. After global industrialization, many activities classified as entertainment started to emerge and hence, many people of all statuses, including the lower, middle and upper classes, engaged in leisure activities, sometimes compromising their own individual work agendas. Some scholars have argued that sexual divisions of labour also shaped the patterns of earning and leisure allocation (Todd, 2005). Further, this concept of leisure has blurred the idea of the Protestant work ethic, “one must work, one must succeed”. This means, that in contemporary society, many people believe that one works with the objective of having enough money in order to relax. Thus, even though Protestants believed that reluctance to work is something evil, in today’s context, it is considered that work is something that needs to be more “fun” and “pleasant” (Braude, 1963). This contemporary view of work does not preclude the belief that people must work harder in order to live a lavish life full of leisure (Braude, 1963). As mentioned before, scholars have defined leisure as an unpaid activity.

There is also a relationship between work and religion. As explained above, in the etymology of work, there is a major impact from the noble aspect of work which related to the idea of doing and making, the act of karma (Russo, 2002). The Jews believed that people who were born as slaves and had to work under aristocrats had committed many sins which relates to the noble aspect in the etymology of work (Braude, 1963). Meaningful work includes the activities of being socially responsible, self-efficacy, creating positive effects and being spiritual (Rosso et al., 2010), and it involves finding the significance and purpose of work, the desire for and the positive contribution towards the greater good (Steger, 2019).

There is also a relationship between work and the field of education. According to the French legacy, work and education is an expression of personal liberty as well as a manifestation of national duty. Due to this belief, people started to think out of the box and they understood the need for higher standards of education leading to the belief that an educated worker would work in more productive ways. This led to important changes in the structure of society (Erickson, 2012). Some have argued that due to the emergence of work and education, attention has been given to the adverse effects of child labour. Some scholars have stated that education has been given to women unequally where many women in rural areas have been underprivileged with respect to education and many have been forced to engage in work

considered ‘dirty’ (Gordan, 1993). Dirty work can be described as an occupational level which forces members who engage in it to construct an esteem-enhancing social identity in society (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

In the South Asian context, traditionally, work has been considered as a collection of activities done for a certain pay or profits (Raju & Bagchi, 1993). In the Asian context, work focuses more on commodified work rather than non-commodified work (Raju & Bagchi, 1993). Commodified work refers to the production and monetary exchange of goods and services with a profit motive while un-commodified work means all the economic practices that do not have a profit motivation or any monetary exchanges. It is, basically, an unpaid form of work (Williams, 2004).

Sri Lanka has had a long history of working in the past and work was decided based on the caste system. Potters, drummers, cultivators, washers, fishers, dancers, jaggery makers and barbers are some examples for work that was based on the caste system (Occupations - Trades & Professions of Early Sri Lanka, 2020).

In Sri Lanka, economic or market activities have generally been considered as work while non-market or non-economic activities have not been included in the concept of work (Raju & Bagchi, 1993). Non-market activities in Sri Lanka can be considered as the household consumption of work performed by women (Hancock, 2006).

Secondly, it is necessary to analyse the relationship between work and religion in Sri Lanka.

*Table 1: Different Religions in Sri Lanka*

<b>Religions</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Buddhism	70.2%
Hinduism	12.6%
Islam	9.7%
Roman Catholicism	6.1%
Other Christianities	1.3%
Other	0.05%

**Source: Sri Lanka People 2020 CIA World Factbook, 2020**

Table 1 showcases the fact that Sri Lanka has many different religions. Of the total population of Sri Lanka, about 70.2% are Buddhists. In Sri Lanka, Theravada Buddhism is the most prominent doctrine and it has two goals; the attainment of supreme bliss nirvana where one

ends the cycle of birth and death, or the assurance of a good rebirth in heaven or as a human being. Rebirth is fueled by the concept of karma where good or bad results ensue to a person resulting from his/her prior actions (Egge, 2013). Hence, it can be argued that in the etymology of work, the noble aspect of work involves giving and making, and in this respect, the “work” that one is currently doing is based on the acts of karma that one has engaged in in past births. Hence, it can be said that there is a relationship between Buddhism and the concept of work in the Sri Lankan context.

Christians also believe that there is a relationship between work and their religion. According to them, their work is God’s work since God provides people with unique skills, gifts and talents so they can work towards ushering in His kingdom on earth (Work, 2021). In Islam, there is also a relationship between religion and work. Muslims believe that time should not be wasted and that men or women should work to earn their livelihood so as to be independent and self-sufficient (Ahmad & Owoyem, 2012).

When considering the relationship between work and education, the work of special educators needs to be explored since only a scant attention has been paid so far to special educators. In Sri Lanka, the role of a teacher is very important as teaching is considered by many to be a noble profession that also contributes to the sustainable development of the country. Among them, teachers of special education needs, who are also known as special educators, perform a crucial role in and have an enormous impact on the lives of students with special needs. In relation to the teacher’s profession, it can be stated that teachers also have to deal with different aspects of work depending on the environment in which they work. Hence, at present, different aspects of work have changed drastically due to the introduction of new policies, regulations and acts (Gray & Whitty, 2010). Teachers in average schools perceive work in a different way when compared with special educators. In the context of a special education institution, special educators should have a greater connection with and empathy for students with special needs, and that can also be considered as a main aspect of work that differs from that of other average schools (Mackenzie, 2012). Moreover, due the nature of the job in the special education system, special educators need to have more commitment and intimacy towards work. Further, they are required to have an in-depth knowledge about their own pupils and must know which method they need to incorporate to teach them (Lavian, 2015). Moreover, it is said that teachers have a strong personal commitment towards their profession and in order to maintain their own identities, it is necessary to work (O’Connor, 2008). Some have argued that there is an ambiguity when defining the work of teachers of special education institutions, but they have also stated that work carried out by special educators is not much different when compared to other average schools. It is stated that these teachers need to prepare their own curriculums which are appropriate for each student with

special needs and maintain behavior management policies and forms of discipline in different situations (Kilgore et al., 2003). Hence, there is not much difference in the notion of work related to teachers of special needs and teachers in average schools. Teachers in special educational institutions require particular skills when dealing with students with special needs. In their work, they need to be more concerned about its emotional aspects. For example, a teacher in a special educational institution may consider taking care of students with special needs with love and attention as a more important aspect of work than preparing a curriculum (Mackenzie, 2012). Therefore, there is an ambiguity in defining the concept of work of special educators, and the literature has pointed out the complex nature of the job and the difficulty in defining the concept of work engaged in by special educators. In the Sri Lankan context, as mentioned above, scant attention has been paid to the work of special educators. Hence, studying their work in the Sri Lankan context is worthwhile and it will make a theoretical contribution to the existing knowledge gap in the literature in this area.

### **Emotional Labour**

Emotional labour is inducing or suppressing feelings in order to sustain the outward expression that produces a proper state of mind (Hochschild, 1983). According to Grandey (2003), it is enhancing, faking and suppressing the emotions and modifying emotional expressions. Hochschild distinguished between 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'. Surface acting mainly focuses on and involves behavioral compliance which means that people act bogus in front of others through suppressing their feelings while deep acting is where actors internalize the feelings within them (Hochschild, 1983). When discussing the teacher's profession, what is relevant is the category of deep acting. Here, teachers should not act fake in front of students, but express real feelings towards them (Fineman, 1993). Emotional labour is also a key condition of social workers who have to manage their own emotions in order to act professionally in their jobs. Engaging in emotional labour can have both positive and negative effects on social workers (Moesby-Jensen & Nielsen, 2014).

Many empirical studies have shown that teaching is a profession that involves a high level of emotional labour. The study done by Gaan (2012) emphasized that teachers must suppress their own emotions which leads to a high level of burnout. This is a profession that has become the engine that drives the social and emotional wellbeing of students, but also is an occupation that involves very high levels of stress. Hence, ensuring the emotional wellbeing of its teachers is vital for a community and a country (Schonert-Reich, 2017).

Many studies reveal that special educators perform emotional labour amidst many emotionally challenging events (Humphrey, 2012). Gaan (2012) emphasized that these workers must suppress their own emotions which leads to a high level of burnout while on the plus

side, they have positive emotional experiences such as genuine care and love. In the Sri Lankan context, it has been revealed that surface acting is a significant predictor of burnout of teachers (Bhadra and Dias, 2014) and is negatively associated with job satisfaction while deep acting is positively associated with job satisfaction (Apsara & Arachchige, 2017).

In spite of negative impacts, many researches have also revealed some systematic changes that can be introduced to assist teachers helping students with special needs through implementing proper leadership to guide and help them in case of need. Introducing procedures to retain special education teachers such as providing mentors, staff development and support for them are necessary. Most importantly, it is vital to provide them with a proper culture which supports the concept of special education (Thornton et al., 2010). However, in the Sri Lankan context, many studies have been conducted on teachers in average schools while special educators have largely been ignored (Bhadra & Dias, 2014). Moreover, some studies that have been done on emotional labor have adopted the quantitative research approach (Dias, 2011). However, since the topic is related to emotions, some ideas are poorly revealed by numbers. Therefore, a qualitative research study can help to evoke the hidden ideas, feelings, memories and information of different scenarios. In addition, many extant studies have only emphasized the negative aspects of emotional labour while only a scant attention has been paid to the concept of work done by special educators and the performance of emotional labour and positive deep acting in their work.

In spite of negative impacts, many researches have also revealed some systematic changes that can be introduced for the teachers of students with special needs; implementing proper leadership to guide them and help them when they need, introducing many procedures to retain special education teachers such as introducing mentors, staff development and providing support for them, and also, most importantly, providing them with a proper culture which supports the concept of special education (Thornton et al., 2010). However, when considering the Sri Lankan context, many research have been conducted based on the teachers in other average schools rather than considering about the special educators (Bhadra & Dias, 2014). Further, some of the studies, which have been done about the emotional labor, have adopted the quantitative research approach (Dias, 2011) However, since this relates to emotions, some ideas are poorly revealed by numbers, but having a qualitative research study helps to evoke the hidden ideas, feelings, memories and information of different scenarios. In addition to that, when considering above factors, many of the studies have emphasized on the negative side of emotional labor and only scant attention given to the relationship of the concept of work by special educators and the performance of emotional labor with regard to the work they attend.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research has adopted a qualitative research approach which facilitates the researcher to achieve research objectives. It is stated that the qualitative research approach is analysed through the data that are gathered from different methods such as from direct fieldwork observations, in-depth open-ended interviews as well as written documents (Patton, 2005). As per Abrams (2010), the qualitative research is based on people's feelings and attitudes where the researcher has to deal with the personal feelings, perceptions, attitudes, experiences and behaviors of special educators which cannot be analysed through numerical scales such as Likert scales. Research strategy is the overall direction of the research that includes the process by which the research is conducted. Case study, experiment, survey, action research, grounded theory and ethnography are some examples for such research strategies (Wedawatta et al., 2011). The adopted research strategy is the case study method which is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Wedawatta et al., 2011).

As to achieve the requirements of qualitative approach, as described by Patton (2005), the data was gathered through fieldwork interviews, photographs and non-participant observations. One of the leading special education institutions in Sri Lanka was selected as the case site of the study.

This education institution is situated in Colombo sub-urban area, assumed to be as Mithsevana Special Education Institution which is a pseudonym. This was established in 2011 and founder of this institution is a renowned businessman in Sri Lanka. This institution is registered under the founder's name. This institution gives the opportunity for all the privileged and non-privileged students with special needs. Initially, this institution was established in 2006 for mainstream students with the motive of improving their living standards and for the overall wellbeing of children from nearby areas. And, this institution was improved to the present status in 2011 and since has been further expanded by establishing branches all over the country.

The institution has sports activities, indoor and outdoor activities such as cookery, gardening, yoga, music, dancing, ICT practical sessions, sewing, waterplay, sand play and other academic activities in which the special educators must also participate with students. Further, most of the students are taught in one language due to their mental disability, and therefore, most of the teachers employed are thorough in the Sinhala language. Special educators are joined on voluntarily basis or permanent basis based on their academic qualifications and experiences. The institution is divided in to three separate sections named as preschool,

primary school and the upper school. Furthermore, the authority has taken steps to allocate two teachers per each classroom in preschool and primary school. At present, there are around forty (40) teachers in the entire school. The table 2 showcases the identified data sources with regards to the Mithsevana special education institution.

*Table 2: Identified Data Sources*

<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Data sources of Mithsevana special education institution</b>
Individuals	Special educators of Mithsevana Special education institution
Texts	Published and unpublished journal articles, magazines, scholarly books and websites
Artifacts	Information displayed on the walls about the history of the organization, photographs and posts that were hanged on the notice boards which show different special education programs organized by the school
Events and happenings	Special programs organized by the school Ex: trips and sports meet

**Source: Author Compilation**

Ten (10) special educators were used to gather data using semi structured interviews. Purposive sampling method was used where deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities of participant possesses (Etikan, 2016). The table 3 shows the information of the ten (10) participants that the researcher has adopted in the research study.

*Table 3: Basic Information about the Participants*

Interview No	Name (Pseudonyms)	Designation	Experience	Section	Religion
01.	Heshani	Class Teacher	4 Years	Primary 1	Buddhism
02.	Vishaka	Art Teacher	5 Years	Art Section	Buddhism
03.	Thamasha	Class Teacher	3 Years	Primary 1	Christianity
04.	Prasadinika	Class Teacher	4 Years	Primary 03	Buddhism

05.	Sayani	Class Teacher	5 Years	Primary 03	Buddhism
06.	Vinoka	Class Teacher	9 Years	Primary 03	Buddhism
07.	Rangani	Class Teacher	8 Years	Primary 02	Buddhism
08.	Udini	Class Teacher	3 Months	Pre School	Buddhism
09.	Nirmala	Class Teacher	3 Years	Upper School	Buddhism
10.	Theja	Class Teacher	10 Years	Upper School	Buddhism

**Source: Author Compilation**

Pseudonyms are used instead of the research participants real names to protect the confidentiality of them.

Three primary data generation methods were incorporated when gathering data namely semi structured interviews, observations and photographs. The researcher conducted semi structured interviews by making an open discussion with the special educators in Mithsevana special education institution. All the interviews were carried out based on pre structured set of questions (refer annexure 01) and from time to time, questions were had to be adjusted according to the circumstances. By incorporating this method, the researcher was able to clarify the areas that were vague in nature and help to collect ideas and interpretations revealed by special educators according to their viewpoint.

First of all, the researcher made sure that all the participants were aware of the researcher's objective of executing research in this nature, and then obtained the consent of the research participants to record the entire interview process. All the interviews were lasted for around 20 to 30 minutes and the interviews were conducted in Sinhala language as to make them comfortable in answering the relevant questions.

Nonparticipant observations were also used to gather more reliable and meaningful data with a lesser involvement by the researcher and to understand participants' body language. And important observations were noted down which later helped the researcher in data analysing.

The next data collection technique was taking photographs which helped the researcher to gather rich data. Scholars have also stated that it would evoke feelings, memories and

information of different scenarios (Glaw et al., 2017). Further, it is stated that visual methodologies enhance the richness of the data by adding more meaning and creating more knowledge which lead participants and researchers toward a common understanding (Glaw et al., 2017). The researcher captured all the photographs relevant to the study. Photographs helped the researcher to highlight what the research intends to bring up. And also, photographs help to increase the trustworthiness of the findings (Glaw et al., 2017) Hence, this method was implemented into the research area as a new, unique as well as an innovative method.

Scholars have also pinpointed that photograph help the researcher to describe a topic or a phenomenon with more new insights (Hill, 2013). Since this research is dealt with work and emotions and some ideas cannot be revealed by words, it helps to evoke the hidden ideas of the participants through photographs. In order to capture certain events, researcher used her own phone camera to make the participants less embarrassed. Apart from the primary data collection techniques, magazines, journals, scholarly books and other data sources also helped the researcher to identify the research gap with comparison to previous research studies. Further, as per the ethical concerns, the researcher distorted the photographs to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

The permission to conduct the fieldwork was given twice a week starting from the mid of January 2020 to the end of February 2020. The researcher attended the school twice a week from 9.00 am to 4.30 pm or 1.30 pm depending upon the situation, and was able to conduct interviews during school time due to the fact that these teachers are fully occupied with their job role. All the interviews were conducted in their classroom premises as the special educators were engaged with their work during afterschool as it was also convenient for them. Further, the researcher had the freedom to visit any place in the school except for the upper school section due to security measures.

The researcher has adopted the thematic analysis to analyze the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis includes six main phases. All the interviews were conducted in Sinhala language as it is the native language of the participants. And after all interviews were completed, they were transcribed to English language. Next, the researcher got familiarized with the data by reading and rereading the transcripts. After familiarizing with the data, as the next step, the researcher highlighted different quotations in the transcripts which would answer the research questions. As the third step, the researcher identified different themes. The sets of codes that the researcher found in the second step, which addressed the research questions, were categorised into different themes. And also, in order to identify themes, not only the transcripts of the interviews, but also the notes that the

researcher made in nonparticipant observations were also taken into consideration. According to Dodgson (2019), qualitative research is contextual, and it occurs within a specific time and space between two or more people. It can also be explained that reflexivity is something that shows the way how a researcher thinks critically and confronts and often challenges his or her own assumptions (Mason J., 2002). As such, a researcher's role throughout the study is quite prominent and significant since the researcher is the main party to generate data and develop new ideas which are relevant to the study. However, in this research, precautions were taken not to communicate the researcher's beliefs and values as it may impact the thoughts, views and perceptions of the interviewees, and instead, the researcher gave the freedom to express their views and ideas. Thereafter, the researcher analysed the photographs that were captured which also support to achieve research objectives. Next, the researcher made some notes in the field notebook about the key information gathered from the photographs. And when identifying different themes, the researcher used some photographs in order to enrich the findings. After identifying different themes, some of the themes got reviewed back in order to make sure whether the researcher had enough data and enough literature to support the viewpoint. And in this revision of the themes, the researcher removed some from the list for not having enough data to support the relevant theme. And also, to support the main themes, some sub themes were also identified. Finally, after identifying the themes and sub themes, they were provided with meaningful names.

As per the ethical considerations, prior to commencing the interviews, the researcher disclosed all the details required by the participants such as the purpose and the background of the research. Further, the researcher was granted the permission from every research participant to record every interview and to capture photographs of certain events. And the researcher had to make them be aware about the research in order to get their consent in a voluntarily basis and not to reveal any confidential data of any participants while conducting the interviews. And conducting the research study in anonymous was another attempt taken to conduct the study ethically. The other data collected during the research were also taken for the academic purpose and the confidentiality of the data will be protected. Moreover, since the researcher took photographs to collect more rich and reliable data, in order to protect their confidentiality the researcher distorted the photograph

## **RESULTS/ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The main purpose of the study is to explore how the special educators perceive work and the performance and manage emotional labour with regard to the work they engage in. Following set of themes are identified to achieve the first objective.

## **Work as a Paid Activity**

Under the etymology of work, work can be identified under three connotations namely factual, noble and dark. Hence, under the factual definition it is said that work is the physical and a mental effort to achieve or to produce something (Tournoyet al., 2008). Under the paid work, one can identify that work as the mental and physical efforts that are exchanged for a monetary value.

Many participants have also put forward the same idea. Nirmala pointed out that she is doing all these tasks because she is getting paid.

*“... I do this job as I like it and also, we all do a job to earn a salary. So, we think of this salary and do this as a job to get paid”* (Nirmala)

According to Nirmala's point of view, she views that work is something for one gets paid and in return one needs to provide a mental and physical effort. This means, some believe that work is something that is needed to conduct with the motive of getting something for your livelihood, for which in return you need to provide mental and physical efforts.

And, another participant also seconded the same idea where she perceived work as a paid job with mental and physical efforts. *“..., earlier I haven't worked with these special needs students, my friend Thamasha recommended this place.....actually I have a guilty feeling whether I will be able to work with such students for long....”* (Udini)

As per Udini's viewpoint, she has a guilty feeling of whether she will be able to work with these students. This guilty feeling implies that she has joined this field without any prior experiences, and only for the reason of having a good salary. Her friend Thamasha has also implicitly stated that she has also joined this job as she is getting a good salary compared to other average schools.

*“...Actually, I went to an interview for another job, but then the interview board explained to me that they have another job like this and asked whether I [Thamasha] like this job [Special Education stream] or not, but I didn't have any clue about these special needs students ...”* (Thamasha)

This also implicitly explains that she has chosen this occupation over the other due to the monetary value offered by this job.

Further, 'work' can be derived as something which gives them an inner satisfaction and self-esteem.

*“There is no any special reason for this job, and even when I joined this field I had a small wage, it is really small, you people can’t even imagine how small it was, if I had thought about the salary, I would have rejected this job, actually I am enjoying this profession and I love this field”* (Rangini)

According to Rangini, she is satisfied with the job. And she is willing to work for the betterment of the students in special education. As per her, the paid work is something when you are engaged in a self-satisfied work. The same idea was supported by another participant where she pinpointed that she has joined this field voluntarily.

*“From the very beginning up to now, my target has been to serve these students with special needs, because these students are disregarded by the society., Hence, I wanted to work with such a group of students”* (Prasadinika)

On the other hand, another participant put forward a different viewpoint.

*“Normally teachers are coming to the school around 8.30 a.m. and then we have an assembly. After the assembly we start the school right at 9.00 a.m. After 9.00 a.m., most of the time we are doing classroom activities, then we do outdoor activities”* (Heshani).

Here she pinpoints that she is getting paid for this job for conducting activities that have been scheduled and assigned as requested and demanded by the administrative staff. This implies that adhering to given rules and regulations of the organization is another aspect of paid work which is exchanged for a monetary value. As per the above ideas and interpretations forwarded by the participants, it can be viewed that the special educators interpret work as a job which has a monetary value and which is exchanged for one’s mental and physical efforts as well as inner satisfaction, and this was also emphasized by few scholars that work as a job, is the most basic conception of work, which viewed work as means to an end with a focus on monetary, security and survival needs (Pillay et al., 2003). However, adhering to rules and regulations under paid work can also be identified in the research study.

### **Work as an Unremunerative Activity**

Work can be derived as a purposeful activity done with an end mind. It is stated that work is not only about a paid activity, but work can also be considered as domestic and community services without a wage. Hence, the discussions about work now have a broader area in which it can be considered as domestic labour and community volunteering (Livingstone, 2005). This showcases that there should be some activities that are unpaid, but those activities can be exchanged for a monetary value. According to the observations, the researcher has identified aspects of work that need to be directly related with paid work even though it gets unpaid.

And in order to describe further, the researcher has used separate sub themes such as work as a devoted activity and work as a recreational activity.

### **Work as a Devoted Activity**

Committed or devoted work is an aspect of work in which include the activities with emotional attachment or involvement towards the organization, and also it refers to the feeling of obligation to continue employment (Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009).

One research participant stated that she has been really devoted to the work of this Mithsevana institute and has enjoyed being with students with special needs. According to her explanation, she is one of the oldest teachers in the school and she has worked in Mithsevana school for around ten (10) years.

*“I am really happy to work here ,even parents keep trust on us ,on our work, that is why they [parents ]are sending their children here .....Actually, I want to build up the confidence of these students ,somehow I need to do that and I am doing that.....Also these students are being able to do their own work by themselves if we all are [parents and teachers ] teaching them from the very beginning .And sometimes I take students who can’t write or do anything and am willing to teach them.” (Theja)*

According Theja, it showcases that she is committed to the work, and she is never concerned about the workload that she has to undergo. In her explanation it showcases that she is willing to do that beyond the given work agendas in the school. In this, she explains that she can work with many students and she considers that as her own work.

*“I’m really happy to do this job, this job is more like a part of my life, I attend to the school every day even if I get sick” (Theja)*

This also showcases that even if she gets sick she is devoted to her own work and she enjoys doing that. As per Theja, being devoted to work and doing as much as for the wellbeing of the students is an aspect of work. This implies that Theja is willing to attend the school each and every day and teach students. And it can be stated that Theja can be paid for her continuous attendance as an incentive for her. But she does not get paid for her continuous attendance. During the informal discussions had with these special educators, the researcher identified that teachers only get a monthly salary and they do not get paid for any other activities. Hence, according to Theja, her **continuous attendance is an effort for committed work** which should be paid and rewarded.

Prasadinika, another research participant in the primary section, also stated that she is enjoying this profession. And she is also willing to do anything for the betterment of these students with special needs.

*“ I stay here until 4.30 pm every day, and in that time, I write all today’s activities, schedule tomorrow’s agendas...and sometimes if I won’t be able to finish the set work, I will take them home and do.” (Prasadinika)*

As per the above discussion, it is clear that Prasadinika is engaged in committed work; work beyond the set norms. As per the above quotation, it implies that she continuously works until 4.30 pm completing all the set agendas, and also it shows that sometimes she takes some of her work to home as well. Hence, it can be stated that she is **works until late, takes work agendas home and willingly fulfils** other responsibilities, and this can be viewed as the work that is directly related to paid work although it is not.

Another research participant shared the same idea about the committed work.

*“.... we are always with these children, we are always keeping our eye on their work, we sing songs for them to listen, we have storytelling sessions, children [students with special needs] can’t understand anything but still we never think that they can’t do. we never assume that they can’t do anything, we always believe that they are listening to us ....” (Rangini)*

This also shows that Rangini never gives up on her students, she is **courageous** to teach them no matter they listen or not. Being courageous on her activities and her willingness to never give up on students can also be considered as an unremunerated activity.

When considering the above ideas put forward by research participants, it can be explained the concept of devoted work that includes the activities which are directly related to paid work even though they are not paid.

### **Work as a Recreational Activity**

Another sub theme that is identified under unremunerated work is that work as a recreational activity or as a leisure activity. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, leisure means the freedom provided by the cessation of activities or the time free from work or duties. Today’s scholars have stated that leisure is something which is freely chosen or it is the collection of activities associated with sense of enjoyment, or it can be the activities which are beyond the time where they are remunerated and obligated to conduct as an activity (Lewis, 2003). Hence, according to views of the research participants, they perceive leisure as an aspect of work under unremunerated work.

*“ I even take my work home and do.” [with an adoring expression] (Vishaka)*

Vishaka stated that she takes the work agendas home. According to her explanation, she takes many of her work agendas home and finishes them at her home. Hence, it can be considered that the activities which are associated with a sense of enjoyment as leisure. Therefore, as this teacher enjoys taking the work agendas home, it can be considered as an aspect of work under leisure.

*“No, I don't carry my work home as a married person when I go back home, I have to be concerned about home chores, so most of the time I use to finish my work in the school itself, I don't take that home.” (Nirmala)*

Nirmala's viewpoint is completely different from Vishaka's viewpoint. Vishaka implied that leisure is not something that suggests engaging in work agendas all the time. According to her, leisure is the activities which are done through engaging with the family members.

Further, Vishaka stated that,

*“There are parents who are staying in the school on behalf of their students, and most of the time parents waste their time while just waiting without any work...so I'm willingly conducting sewing and cookery programmes for them when I'm free” (Vishaka)*

This showcases that she is willing to conduct cookery and sewing programmes on behalf of these students' parents. According to her explanation, in order to improve the mental conditions of these parents, she is willing to participate in these activities without any payment in return. As per the researcher's observation, she is engaged in this activity for her own satisfaction and happiness. And these can be considered as the activities which have a sense of enjoyment. Hence, the **satisfaction and happiness** can also consider as another aspect of work under leisure.

*“Yes, every day they[parents] use to come and talk to us, if they have a personal problem, they use to talk with us, and normally, we use to talk during the lunch time, because at 12.30pm their [special needs children] buses arrive to pick them up and during this time we use to communicate with parents about their homework” ... (Heshani)*

The parents assist their children with special needs during the lunch hour and during this time, special educators have their break. However, the special educators use their leisure time to communicate with parents about students' progress, following day work schedules and homework that need to be completed by the students. These activities can be considered as the activities which are beyond remunerated and obligated to conduct. Hence, **communicating with parents** can be identified as another aspect of work under recreational activity.

## **Work as a Comforting Activity**

Work can be identified as a comforting activity which highlights love and care. Scholars have also put forward the idea that taking care of students with love and attention as a main aspect of work (Mackenzie, 2012). According England (2005), providing an emotional support or treating or rewarding someone are some aspects under love and care. In this study also it shows that being friendly with students, giving advices to students and being strict with them are some aspects of work under love and care.

*“I participate in many activities with these students .... even if we go to the dancing class we are with students, and I make them friendly with me, I go with them to have a walk or I let them play something .....” (Udini)*

According to Udini’s viewpoint, she also accepts that love and caring is a crucial work that they need to do as a special educator. According to her profile, even though she is new to the special education field, she also believes that they should care for the students and give them the maximum attention as much as they can. And she also pinpointed that being **friendly and giving attention** to these students are considered as an aspect of work under love and care. According to scholars, giving an emotional support is more like being friendly and giving attention to these students.

*“This child [any special need student], can be beaten up by someone in future, and live somewhere, can be helpless and can become a child that no one accepts, so I want to teach them everything and care for these students, I love them, I love each and every student” (Sayani)*

Sayani, has about five years’ experience in the special education stream. And as per her explanation, she is a mother of a differently abled child. Hence, she pinpointed the fact that to make a future of a special need child successful, everyone must willingly give required love and care. And as per her explanation, love should be given through advices where she pinpointed the idea that if these students are given enough advices, then only these students are able to face the world successfully. Hence, as per her view, by **giving proper advices** they can make their future a success.

But Vinoka implied a different idea about love and care.

*“Some students are inside the drainage lines, we carry them to the class with our hands and we teach them while closing the doors of the class” (Vinoka)*

Another participant, who has around nine years of experience is also one of the oldest teachers in the Mithsevana special education institution. As per her explanation, caring can be

taken in any forms, and it is not always about talking to students kindly and lovingly. On some instances, caring can be expressed through harsh words, but it is also for their betterment. The above quote implies that she has become bit harsh with the students in order to carry these students from the drainage lines to the classroom. But those harsh words imply a hidden story about the love and care that they have given to these students with special needs. Hence, it is clear that **being strict** can be considered as another aspect of work under love and care.

Hence, it can be perceived that the ‘work’ love and care is as being friendly with students, giving advices to students and being strict with them. Many empirical studies have showcased that students with special needs need to be provided with special love, attention and care (Murray & Greenberg, 2001).

### **Work as a Goal Achievement Activity**

This implies that special educators view work as something to achieve a particular objective. It is stated that students with special needs report significantly fewer success and less competency levels when compared with other students (Beck & Garguilo, 1983). Hence, the special educators must take an extra effort to improve their academic progress and social skills. According to Erickson (2012), activities engaged to achieve a good status in the future can be identified as an aspect of work.

*“...Now, think of a situation where a student [special need student] is able to pick up a ball, that is also an achievement in our field. For an example, if those students are able to do something that we’ve asked we really feel happy about it” (Heshani)*

According to Heshani’s viewpoint, there are no big achievements for these children. But no matter how minor the target is for these students, these special educators do necessary activities in order to help achieve that ultimate goal of the student. According to the above quotation, it is suggested that they have an inner happiness through these achievements. Heshani engages in activities to have an inner satisfaction. The inner satisfaction she is getting is the happiness she feels by the achievements of the students. Hence, from Heshani’s point-of-view, any kind of activity that is done on behalf of one’s own **inner satisfaction** can be considered as ‘work’ under the goal achievement definition.

*“...If that student is not good at learning anything, at least I want to make them able to write their name. So that makes me happy. And now around 90% students are able to write their names alone ...” (Theja)*

This participant also has the same idea as Heshani, and they perceive this goal achievement as an aspect of work, as this is providing an inner satisfaction for the teachers.

Further, she also stated that,

*“...I am conducting exams for these children according to their knowledge levels, for example if it's the Sinhala language I want to make them able to write the name, address and the telephone number” (Theja)*

This implies that conducting exams for students in order to measure their progress levels can be identified as a goal achievement task. According to Theja's explanation, she needs to develop the confidence levels of these students and make them able to handle their lives by themselves without others. She explained the importance of teaching them how to write the address and the telephone number in an emergency situation. Hence, **conducting exams** can be viewed as another aspect of work under goal achievement as it improves the confidence levels of the students.

*“... We are writing a progress report for students, it includes what we are concerning and how we are doing that, at the beginning they may not adhere to what we say, but after some time, they will start to adhere to what we say, likewise they will develop gradually .... they will start to write a letter, then they will be able to draw a line, if not at least they will be able to paste something alone ....” (Nirmala)*

As per Nirmala's explanation, she has also given the same idea as Vishaka where they spend time on preparing and scheduling the work of the students in order to make them achieve academic goals. As stated above, they maintain progress reports for each student separately. The students have different targets based on their conditions. And the above quotation suggests that teachers are committed themselves to write and maintain the progress of these students, even though it is a challenging task. Hence, it is said that the **activities they conduct in scheduling and preparing the progress reports** are also be considered as another aspect of work under goal achievement.

Furthermore, when the author raised the question about the other special programmes that are conducted by the schools, their response was quite interesting.

*“... Sometimes, we take them to watch films, there are some students who have never been to a film hall before, some parents don't like to take their students outside because the society will look at their children as retarded students, so in order to develop their social skills we take them to film halls.” (Sayani)*

According to Sayani's explanation, they take these students in order to develop their social skills. Further, this showcases that from these special activities, the students are able to interact with the people in the society. This indicates that special educators take an extra

effort in planning, organising and executing such activities with the intention of improving the mental and the social skills of the students.

*“...The main thing I want from these children is to build up their confidence, I don't want to make them another set of students who always think we can't do this and that.... if they want, they have to fight, you should be able to fight ...likewise I want to build up the confidence in them.” (Theja)*

According to Theja, she wants to build up the confidence in the students. And this implies that in order to achieve that objective these teachers give their maximum efforts and provide protection for these students. In order to build up that confidence, the students must first feel safe. So, **providing the feeling of safety** can be identified as another aspect of work under goal achievement definition.

As per the study, it was revealed that doing activities for inner satisfaction, scheduling different activities to measure progress levels of SEN, conducting exams, preparing syllabus, interacting with parents, taking extra efforts on planning, organising and executing special programs giving them the feeling of safety are aspects of work under goal achievement aspect.

### **Work as an Inspirational Activity**

Work can be considered as an essential part of human life and it is a serious reflection on the value of human activity. This theme showcases that motivation is also an aspect of 'work'. Gibbs (2015) pointed that having a supportive educational environment encourages the learning levels of students with special needs.

*“We don't keep them whole day in the classes, we do outdoor activities with them like yoga, cookery, sand play, water play ...” (Rangini)*

As per Rangini, she thinks that giving the understanding of both inside and the outside environment makes the students motivate to concentrate on the activities of the school. As per her view, motivation is an important aspect of work, and in order to motivate and concentrate these students, they must be engaged in **different outdoor activities such as yoga, cookery, sand play and water play**. It showcases the importance of engaging these students in outdoor activities (Entertainments, 2018).

*“Sometimes, I become harsh to them, but I'm not always being harsh to them...I talk with them kindly or else I give them a big right mark with a star and ask others to clap for the good student” (Theja)*

Theja explained that special needs students are difficult to control and manage. Hence, in order to make them concentrate, she states that **being authoritative and strict** is a must.

*“If they don’t listen to me, I talk with them kindly, or else I show and appreciate the work of others and ask other students also to do like that...” (Nirmala)*

Nirmala pointed that appreciating a student in front of others is an aspect of work under motivation. In addition to that, she points out that kindness is also an aspect of work under motivation. Being kind to the students and care for them motivate them. Hence, Nirmala says that **appreciation and kindness** are work perceived by them under the motivation definition.

*“Most of the time I display the creative work done by students, and I want to make the environment a pleasant and an attractive place for them to learn” (Vishaka)*

According to Vishaka’s idea, she makes an extra effort to make the school a pleasant environment for them. And they organise various kinds of activities to make them motivated. As Vishaka is the art teacher in the school, she always decorates the surroundings of the entire school to make the school a pleasant environment. Also, in informal discussions with her she stated that she uses mainly bright colours for these decorations in order to stimulate their mind. Hence, Vishaka pinpoints that the activities used to **maintain a pleasant environment** is an aspect of work under the motivation definition.

*“...Most of the decorations are done by us, not like other average schools, we have vacation only for one week time, students have the vacation for one whole month. And during that vacation period we prepare and make these decorations” (Tamasha)*

Thamasha has given the same idea as Vishaka . As Thamasha is a classroom teacher, she also takes many efforts to make the classroom a pleasant environment in order to motivate these students.

*“This teacher [Sayani] gives toffees and chocolates [both Vinoka and Sayani are smiling] and tell these students if they do this task they will be provided with these toffees and chocolates. And that motivates children to do work” (Vinoka)*

According to her explanation, Vinoka?? pinpoints providing **that material benefits** for the students also motivates them to concentrate on their activities. Hence, providing material benefits can also be considered as another aspect of work under the inspirational definition.

*“Normally, these students are lazy by nature when compared with other students, so my method is that I tell them that next activity is something that these students like to do, but before that we have to do this” (Prasadinika)*

According to Prasadinka, letting these students know what they like motivates these students. In order to motivate these students to do a particular target, as a benefit of achieving such targets they are given the freedom to do what they like to do. Hence, providing **freedom** for students on what they like to do is also considered as another aspect of work under motivation.

This theme showcases that they perceive motivation is also as 'work'. One scholar stated that having a supportive educational environment encourages the learning levels of students with special needs (Lavian, 2015). Engaging students in outdoor activities such as yoga, cookery, sand play, being strict and kind, maintaining a pleasant environment through decorated classrooms, appreciating the activities of the students, maintaining an inter relationship with parents, providing material benefits such as gifts and giving them the freedom can be considered as different aspects of work under inspirational activity.

### **Work as a Meaningful Activity**

According to this theme, it is identified that helping the needy that is ignored and cornered by the society, offering something to someone with a pure intention, being socially responsible, being honest and truthful can be identified as aspects of work under the meaningful definition. Many scholars have also stated that being socially responsible, personal engagement in the work, self-efficacy, creating positive effects to others and being spiritual can be considered as work as a meaningful activity (Rosso et al., 2010).

*".... In our religion it says always give a hand to the people who are being neglected by the society, hence these students are also being ignored and cornered by the society. So that is why I have selected this field" (Prasadinika)*

Prasadinika is a catholic. And according to her religious backgrounds, she sees work as something that gives a helping hand for a needy. And according to her explanation, she observes that any act that is done in order to help a person who is ignored and cornered by the society is perceived as a 'good work'. And she points out that this profession is something similar to those kinds of acts in which you help differently abled students who are cornered by the society. Hence, **helping a needy person** is an aspect of work under the meaningful definition of work.

*"...when I was pregnant, my water bag just broke, and my baby was delivered only after two days, according to doctors if a baby stays for two days without a water bag inside the womb, it will definitely become a special need child. But I believed that the reason why my child was saved without any harm was due to this field I am in ...." (Vinoka)"*

According to Vinoka's religious viewpoint, she believes in good virtues. If one does something good to someone, it will come back in an unaccepted way. That is the concept of giving and receiving. Hence, as per her explanation she believes that this job is with lots of good virtues, and it is more similar to giving something with a pure intention which is why she believes that she was able to save her child without any harm from that tragedy. Hence, she believes that in the concept of '**giving**' and '**receiving**', giving something with a pure mindset is an aspect work under the meaningful definition of work. According to scholars, the idea of 'giving' and 'receiving' as an act of karma. The Jews have believed the people who were born as slaves and worked under the guidance of aristocrats have done lots of sins in their past births which forwarded the idea of noble aspect in etymology of work (Braude, 1963).

*"...Actually, I view it is as an act of a providing a service to the society, but not always as a job." (Sayani).*

According to Sayani's idea, she thinks this special education is a field which provides a better service to the society with a humanitarian purpose. This shows that Sayani's view is being **socially responsible** as an aspect of work under this definition of work. And this is more like working as a social worker in the society. Scholars have derived that social worker is a distinct occupational group with certain rights and duties dealing with a goal of humanitarian purpose (Lawrence, 2016).

Whereas Vishaka put forward,

*"...I personally like to become a teacher and after my diploma, I was interested in this field and I love to work with these children and also I believe this is a profession that is good for the next birth as well..." (Vishaka)*

And as per the idea given by Vishaka, she explains that she has selected this field because she enjoys this field, and even she has stated that she has rejected other jobs as she enjoys this field of special needs. She also believes the idea of 'giving' and 'receiving' as same as Vinoka. Hence, **self-satisfaction** can be seen as an aspect of work under the meaningful definition.

### **Work as an Unpleasant Activity**

Scholars have stated that special education stream is a quite challenging task (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983). It is explained that special educators consider 'work' as something hard, unpleasant, not freely chosen, drudgery and difficult. This is more like the notion of dirty work (E. Ashforth et al., 2007).

This theme has identified that there are some different aspects of work under unpleasant activity. The activities that make teachers dissatisfied, activities which impede the mental and physical conditions and hard work which is tainted by the society can be identified as aspects of work under the social definition of work. Moreover, scholars have stated that teachers conduct many activities with many mental tolls of challenges (O'Connor, 2008).

Hence, by identifying the above seven themes, the researcher has ultimately conceptualized work as perceived by different special educators.

*“...Actually, many people don't like to do this job.....many young people are reluctant to join this field because they have a believe that they will also have babies like this [ with physical and mental disorders] ...” (Vinoka)*

As stated above, dirty work is defined as something that harms the society physically, socially or morally (Ashforth et al., 2007). Hence, according to Vinoka's view point, it can be identified that this is a profession that young women are reluctant to join in due to the norms and believes in the society. Vinoka implies this profession as a **hard work which is tainted by the society.**

*“...Sometimes, I am really fed up with this job ...I feel like to stop this job now [feeling exhausted] .... sometimes they scream and that makes me so uncomfortable and fed up...and now I can't hear from one ear.” (Nirmala)*

According to Nirmala's explanation, she sometimes views this is as a stressful job, and now even her health conditions have deteriorated due to that. Other than that, she says she does not have any reason to remain in this job as this is a job that costs her physical and mental conditions. Hence, it can be identified that she views this job as a work which leads to **impede physical and mental wellbeing.**

*“...Actually, there are lots of challenges I have faced in this field.... I have stayed with autism children, hyper active students ...so most of the times they sleep inside the drainage lines, so we need to carry them inside to the class ...many students have beaten us, some of them have even chewed us.” (Sayani)*

As per Sayani's explanation, she also gives the same idea as Nirmala. It is stated that they have to undergo many challenging situations in this field. On the aspect of work as something unpleasant, Sayani forwards her idea that they have to undergo many physical harassments and mental harassments when conducting activities. It can be identified that Sayani also explains such activities impede **physical and mental conditions and it** can be identified as an aspect of work under the unpleasant activity.

*“I have worked with many special needs students, some of them are difficult to handle, I have met students with depression, they are really difficult to control..., on some instances some students have expressed their feelings for me which has become a huge burden for me sometimes.” (Vishaka)*

According to Vishaka, she has put forward the idea that the **personal dissatisfaction** can be identified as an aspect of work under unpleasant activity.

This theme has identified that there are some different aspects of work under unpleasant activity. They are the activities which impede the mental and physical conditions and taint the hard work and they can be identified as aspects of work under the social definition of work.

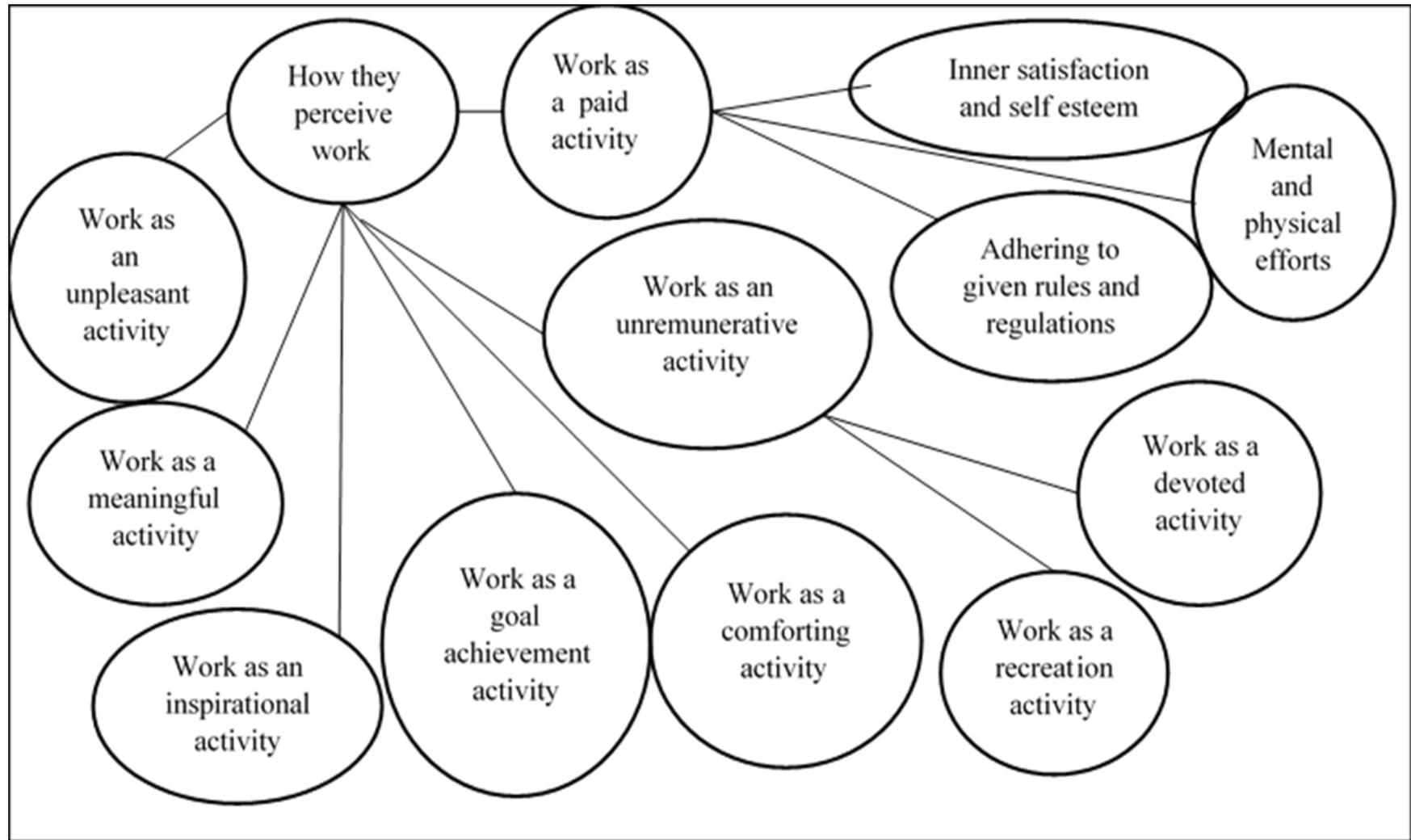
Hence, by identifying the above seven themes, the researcher has ultimately conceptualised work, as perceived by special educators,

*“as the spine which structured the way they live through monetary terms, how they make contact with social reality through comforting and inspiring others with no boundaries in space or time, the way they believe as noble, as meaningful but with a sub-domain of unpleasant and the way they achieve personal fulfilment and satisfaction.”*

The figure 2 showcases the thematic map that has been developed by the researcher to achieve the first objective of the research study which is to explore how special educators perceive their work.

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Figure 2.: Thematic Map to Explore How Special Educators Perceive Work



Source

:

Author

Compilation

## **Performance of Emotional Labour**

According to Hoshchild (1993), emotional labour is inducing or suppressing feelings in order to sustain the outward expression that produces the proper state of mind. In other words, it refers to the management of emotions done for a particular wage.

## **Emotional Labour -Deep Acting**

It is stated that deep acting is something that modifies the inner feelings to match the expressions (Grandey, 2003). Further, it is specified that deep acting is something they?? internalise within them (Hoschild, 1983). Described below are the positive emotions related to deep acting

## **Care and attention**

Many scholars have stated that 'care' to work can be the main reason for wanting to work in special education stream. They have identified it as one of the main reasons for educators to join this field (Mackenzie, 2012).

*“ There is a student called Anil who no one can control, that is because his parents are really harsh to him as he is a special need child, his mother beats him, scolds him ...so he is too aggressive which is a burden to us, I can understand it, so I never scold him, I always ask him to keep his head on the table.” (Theja)*

So according to Theja's point of view, there is a challenging nature of the job. And even though it is challenging, she manages it somehow with a true feeling towards her students. In this quotation it has explained that this teacher tries to face any challenge on behalf of students. During this discussion, she has explained the hardships she has to undergo to control this student. And this teacher understands the real situation of this student and she never uses anger or harsh words as a controlling mechanism, instead she gives love and kindness to that child. As per her explanation, she is used to sing him songs while massaging his head. And those true feelings were noticed in her eyes when she got tears as she explained about that situation. And this explains the devotion and care given by the teacher for these students despite the fact how difficult it is to manage the situation. And not giving up on the student and being courageous can be considered as committed work.

*“... They are not normal children, most of the time they beat us, now take Mithma [special need child] as an example, she always pinches us ...but we don't have any hard feelings for that child because he or she can't understand us, but sometimes ...” (Prasadinika)*

According to Prasadinika's idea, she pinpoints that special educators have to face many kinds of harassments. It can be either physical or mental. But the important fact is that they never consider those as harassments, instead they react by showing care and attention to these students.

*This child [Any special need student] can be beaten up by someone in future, and live somewhere, can be helpless and can become a child that no one accepts, so I want to teach them everything and care for these students, I love them, I love each and every student” (Sayani)*

According to what Sayani has stated, she provides care, love and attention for these students as she thinks that providing care and attention is an aspect of work under unpaid work. Hence, she expresses true feelings for these students from the act of ‘care’.



*Figure 3: Maternal Aspects of Teachers*

**Source: Author Compilation**

The figure 3 displays the maternal aspect of teachers. This shows that the special educator is dedicated to her work and treats these students as her own children. The smile of the child implies the warmth of love and care received by the special educator. His smile also explains the trust that he keeps on his teacher as he is receiving a true love like from his own mother.

### **Passion and empathy**

It is said that those special educators perform this aspect of deep acting through the concept of ‘passion’. They showcase that due to the inner and true feelings that they have on this field. And some scholars have stated that this passion makes them say that these individuals are born to be the special educators (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019).

*“...I believe that everyone can't work on this profession. because this is a job which is decided by the god and only a selected set of people can remain in this field, but others will stay here temporarily. They will come and go.” (Sayani)*

Sayani has put forward the idea that there are only few groups of people who view that work of special education stream as something meaningful, and also only few people have the passion and the willingness to join this stream. According to her idea, it implies that only few people can have the passion for the work of special education.

*“I work here from the bottom of my heart and I enjoy this profession” (Theja)*

This implies that Theja has true feelings towards her students and she has the utmost passion for being in this profession for her own's inner satisfaction. The above quotation showcases that engaging in the special education stream itself satisfying. Also, it showcases that being an advocate for children with SEN is a passion for her and this distinguishes work in SEN from other aspects of curriculum work.

## **Love**

Scholars have stated that love is another aspect of showcasing deep acting (Grandey, 2003). Most of the research participants have explicitly discussed about their love for the job, and continuing the job as a special educator for a long period of time also implies about the love for the job. This indicates that special educators love their occupation since they perceive work as something meaningful.

*“.... I have volunteered in this field for around three years, and after getting this experience, I started to love this profession, and even I have rejected other jobs because I have started enjoying this field...so I will continue to stay in this job...” (Vinoka)*

Vinoka has stated that she loves this profession. And this quotation has showcased that even she has rejected many other jobs, and she accepts this as her job. And as per her explanation, she has been in this school for around nine years which implies the continuation of the same challenging job for all these years. And, it shows that Vinoka perceives work as a meaningful activity, and with that meaningfulness she works actively very willingly in the form of showing love towards the job.

*“I'm really happy to do this job, this job is more like a part of my life, I attend the school every day even when I get sick” (Theja)*

Theja is the most experienced?? teacher who has been in the school of Mithsevana special education institution for about ten years. And as stated above, being devoted can be considered as an aspect of work under goal achievement definition. Hence, it can be viewed that they devote for their occupation because they love it.

From the above explanation it is clear that teachers of Mithsevana special education institution perform emotional labour in the aspect of deep acting under the classification done by Hoschild (1995), and this performance of emotional labour is done through how they perceive 'work'.

### **Emotional Labour -Surface Acting**

Surface acting mainly focusses and involves with behavioral compliance which means that they act bogus in front of others while suppressing their actual feelings (Hoschild, 1983). Further, it can be stated as "painted on" or "faking" (Grandey, 2003). Participants explained about the difficulty they face when dealing with students with SEN. This implies that these special educators discriminate certain set of students who are difficult to control. This showcases that special educator acts fake or bogus in front of these students.

*"...I can manage even the entire school except for autistic students" (Theja)*

This is an idea put forward by Theja, and by most of the ideas forwarded by this participant, it can be noticed that she is a devoted and faithful teacher. However, from the above quotation it implies that this teacher acts bogus in front of students. Therefore, she discriminates a certain set of students who are really difficult to control. This means that due to the challenging work of these autistic students, she acts fake or bogus in front of these students.

*"I have worked with many special needs students, some of them are difficult to handle, I have met students with depression, they are really difficult to control..." (Vishaka)*

The same idea has given by Vishaka where she also explicitly mentions that it is really difficult to work with students with depression. It implicitly states that they act fake in front of these children due to the difficult nature of work.

*"Sometimes, I am really fed up with this job ...I feel like to quit this job now [feeling exhausted] .... sometimes they are screaming and that makes me so uncomfortable and fed up...and now I can't hear from one ear." (Nirmala)*

Nirmala has explicitly mentioned that she is fed up with her profession. Further, she has explained in her informal meetings that she is planning to stop this job as soon as possible. And she has stated that even her family is forcing her to stop this job as this a stressful and a challenging work that is hard to tolerate. This also shows about the surface acting.



Figure 4.: Creative Handicrafts Made by the Students

**Source: Author Compilation**

The figure 4 shows creative handicrafts made by students. But it is arguable whether these students with special needs are able to complete these handicrafts in a neat and tidy way. This can be interpreted in way that since working with these students, which consumes a lot of energy and time, is challenging, these special educators are more focused on completing the tasks rather than being patient and coping up with these students. Hence, this can also show as an example for how they act bogus in front of students with special needs.

Scholars have stated that as they have surface acting the effectiveness of these teachers may lead to stress and burnout situations which can be considered as a negative side of emotional labour (Gaan, 2012). Some of the negative emotions identified were,

**Stress**

Stress was a common answer given by most of the participants. This is mainly due to the extreme disturbances caused by the students. Also, in most of the discussions, the participants have mentioned about stress managing mechanisms. This implies that almost all the special educators face stress. This is also due to the heavy work due to which they are unable to balance the work and family life.

*“...When I get stressed a bit, I use to sing songs loudly while clapping. and when I get over stressed, I take some time and sit down for a while” (Thamasha)*

Thamasha specifically mentioned that she gets stressed. And when the researcher raised the question about stress, her answer was about stress managing mechanisms that she executes. It implies that she is uses those stress mechanisms frequently to cope with the stress.

*"I use to come out from the class when I get stressed" (Udini)*

The same response was given by Udini where she has mentioned about the stress coping mechanisms. Also, it should be noted that Udini has about three months of experience about this stream of special education, but for that shorter period also she has faced so many stressful instances.

*". sometimes, I use to get stressed, because it is really difficult to be patient when they are screaming continuously..." (Theja)*

Theja is one of the oldest teachers in the special education stream and she also states about stress explicitly. And when the question about stress was raised, her facial expressions implied that she was in the burnout stage of getting stressed.

### **Isolation/Alienation**

Another negative impact was the feeling of isolation. Participants have implicitly mentioned the feeling of isolation when working in SEN where students do not 'belong' to them and their lack of attachment to a particular class.

*". most of the time they can't understand about what we say, even if we scold them they can't understand [with a sad facial expression]." (Thamasha)*

Thamasha's explanation portrays the feeling of isolation when dealing with these types of students. She explains the feeling that these students do not belong to them and the lack of attachment to a particular class.

This can also showcase the process of being alienated where the teachers of SEN detach from the self and others. When considering about the detachment of self, it is basically when the teachers present a new self to students. Further, the special educators detach from 'others' when they become socially alienated. This is due to the juggling nature of the job and they don't have non-teaching time to maintain their interpersonal relationships with other peers. Alienation is the process whereby people become foreign to the world they live in (Marx, 1974).

*when one student is crying, another is starting to scream from other side, and when we make someone to sit-down, some other student starts to run...so it is really difficult to work with them." (Thamasha)*

Thamasha has explained the juggling and the busy nature of the job. She has stated the challenging nature of the job when managing these students amidst other activities such as preparing and scheduling activities and academic activities for students, preparing necessary documents and the

reports which are requested by the administrative staff. And due to the juggling nature, they lack non-teaching time, which leads to the feeling of isolation.

### **Frustration**

Special educators get frustrated themselves due to the challenging nature of the job role. This is mainly due to the extra work and pressure in the job role. The feeling of lack of knowledge is about how to deal with challenging and aggressive students and paperwork. Some participants have explained that the only reason they want to continue this job is to have a salary. This exemplifies that special educators are frustrated about their profession otherwise.

*“Sometimes, even our mind also gets upset, and sometimes I get angry when I can’t take it anymore, ...and the favourite day of the week is Friday, because that is the day with lesser work” (Nirmala)*

The above quotation also showcases that she has been undergoing a lot of pressure when dealing with these students. And also, she requested me to stop the recorder in order to explain about the frustrated relationships that she has undergone. And according to her explanation, she has got pressurized from these students as well as from the workload given by the administrative staff.

According to Mackenzie (2012), there are positive and negative impacts from the emotional work. Isolation, frustration, stress can be cited as some examples. Further, it is stated that stress and frustration levels can be different from one special educator to another due to personality differences (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983).

### **Overcoming and Managing**

Scholars have stated that in order to manage and cope up with negative emotions, these special educators use different techniques such as physical exercises, recreation activities, hobbies and meditation (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983).

*“I attend yoga sessions with these students, it relaxes me...I sing songs with students, dance with students .and also i and Vishaka use to talk with each other ...” (Sayani)*

According to Sayani’s explanation, she **engages in recreational and mind relaxating** activities such as dancing, yoga and singing. And as per her explanation,doing these activities is important in order to cope up with these students.

*“I use to walk to Theja, and I share my grievances with her ...or else I ignore the screaming students, I don’t listen to them (Nirmala)*

As per Nirmala’s idea, **maintaining inter relationships** with other teachers and sharing their thoughts and ideas help them to overcome their stress and burnout situations.

*“We have workshops about special education ...and I take advices from someone who is elder to me”*  
(Prasadinika)

As per Prasadinika, the importance of obtaining **the advices from the elderly parties** helps them to reduce the stress and feel of isolation.

*“. sometimes, I get stressed, because it is really difficult to be patient when they are screaming continuously. yesterday I visited the temple to make my mind relax”* (Theja)

As per Theja’s ideas, **being spiritual and engaged in religious activities** also relax the mind. And she has explained the importance of the relaxed mind through engaging in such religious and spiritual development activities. And she has also explained the importance of having a relaxed and a calm mind when dealing with these special needs’ students.

*“I sing songs loudly while clapping. and when I get over stressed, I take some time and sit down for a while”* (Thamasha).

According to Thamasha, engaging in **aesthetic activities** reduces the stress.

Hence, it is clear that in order to manage and cope up with negative emotions these, special educators use different techniques such as physical exercises, recreational activities, hobbies and meditation (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983). As per the data, the stress coping strategies are engaging in religious and spiritual development activities, engaging in aesthetic activities, maintaining inter relationships with other special educators and engaging in recreational activities.

The figure 5 shows the thematic map developed by the researcher to achieve the second objective of the study which is to explore how special educators perform and manage emotional labour with regard to the work they attend.

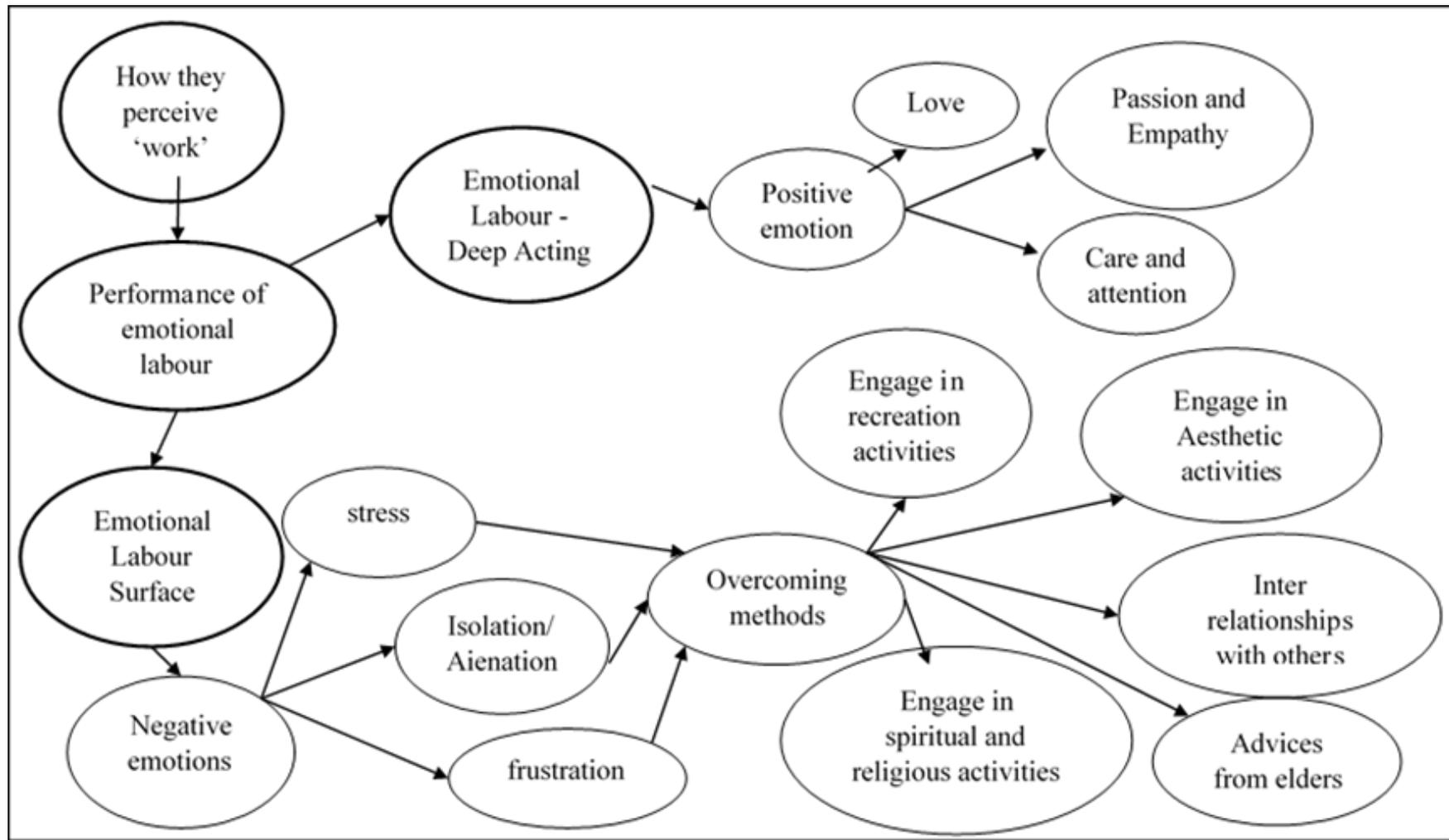


Figure 5: Performance and management of Emotional Labour with Regard to the 'work' They Attend

Source: Author Compilation

## **CONCLUSION**

This study is sought to explore how the special educators perceive 'work' and how special educators perform and manage emotional labour with regard to the work they attend.

It confirms that special educators define 'paid work' not only in monetary terms, but also as something which gives an inner satisfaction. On the other hand, work can be identified as an unremunerative activity which is directly related to paid work, even though it is unpaid. Unpaid work can be considered as a devoted and recreational activity. Another key finding is that work can be a comforting activity. This can be considered as having sympathetic feelings for others. Similarly, work is a goal achieving activity. Work as an inspirational activity is another way of perceiving work. The activities which are executed by the special educators in order to motivate students can be considered as another main aspect of work. Further, under work as a meaningful activity, it can be identified that there is a relationship between work and religion.

When considering the above factors, it shows that special educators perceive work in two aspects; those related to the concepts of 'self' and 'others'. To build the concept of 'self', educators perceive work as activities which provide personal pleasure, inner satisfaction, self-efficacy, social recognition, psychological fulfilment, personal identity, status and power. Special educators also subscribe to the concept of 'others' where they perceive work as activities performed for the betterment of others. These include being empathetic, showing love and care, and engaging in freely chosen leisure activities for the betterment of 'others' (England, 2005). Special educators perceive work as something meaningful while others perceive it as an unpleasant chore (Adams, 2013). It is also found that special educators perceive the same types of activities under different definitions of 'work'.

Secondly, under the objective of performance of emotional labour with regard to work they attend the researcher has demonstrated two aspects of emotional labour under the classification forwarded by Hochschild (1983). Teaching is a profession which involves expressing true emotions in front of students, which emphasises deep acting, which gives positive emotions such as expression of empathy, love, care, attention and passion. On the other hand, discriminating against a certain set of students who are difficult to control exhibits the surface acting behavior of special educators which leads to negative emotions such as physical and emotional stress, isolation and frustration. The feeling of isolation or being alienated from 'self' and 'others' is due to special educators' lack of knowledge about how to deal with aggressive students which is aggravated by the workload they have to bear. Further, this study noticed different stress coping strategies adopted by special educators such as spiritual development and engagement in religious and recreational activities.

## **Theoretical and Empirical Contribution**

In Sri Lankan context, there are no qualitative research findings about how the special educators perceive the concept of work which is something ambivalent and difficult to conceptualize. However, the findings of this research study can contribute to a variety of fields where they?? help to conceptualize ‘work’ as perceived by special educators. Hence, by incorporating the findings of this study, work performed by special educators can be perceived as, “*the spine which they live through monetary terms, how they make contact with social reality through comforting, inspiring others, with no boundaries in space or time and it is the way they believe work as something noble or unpleasant*”. Hence, this research study contributes to full fill the existing literature gap. Further, only ample amount of research findings have been done to showcase the relationship between the emotional work and emotional labor performed by the special educators. Hence, the contribution of this research study towards the existing literature is assumed to be significant.

### **Managerial Implications**

The findings will also be useful to many stakeholders in the special education system. Authorities in special education can gain insights into the challenging nature of the job, policymakers can execute strategies to overcome negative impacts of emotions. Finally, these findings provide many managerial implications for special education institutions in managing challenging work and powerful emotional demands. These include giving reasonable attention to special educators who are beginners in their careers, providing a flexible policy framework in order to reduce their emotional work, and arranging training and compensation programs which help them to manage the complex nature of their job. Also, providing special educators with non-working time to create and enhance interrelationships with other peer special educators enables them to overcome the feeling of isolation.

The main limitation of the study was that the researcher was not permitted to attend the special education institution everyday which restricted the observations to gather more rich data. Further, this study expects to lay the surface for future researchers to conduct in the Sri Lankan framework in different contexts such as identifying the differences and similarities of work and emotional labor of special educators and mainstream educators.

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