



21st-Century South African teachers in turbulent educational waters

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(Received: 16 February 2023; accepted: 4 October 2023)

Abstract

Teachers in the South African education system face numerous challenges that negatively affect their well-being and contribute to the high attrition rate in the teaching profession. Given that few studies in the South African context focus on teacher well-being, this article fills that gap by exploring how teachers experience profession-related challenges and how these affect their well-being. By merging the force field model (Samuel & van Wyk, 2008) and the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) as theoretical frameworks, four forces, namely contextual, institutional, programmatic, and biographical, were used as a lens to explore the push and pull factors that impact the well-being of teachers. Data were collected using eight electronic open-ended questions and eight semi-structured individual interviews (case studies). The findings revealed that factors teachers identified as pushing them away from the profession were unsatisfactory remuneration, lack of resources, uninvolved parents, learner diversity, and an overwhelming workload. Pull factors that attracted them to the profession were the stability and convenience of following a teaching career, feeling valued, and being passionate about facilitating learning.

Keywords: teaching challenges, teacher well-being, teacher coping strategies, the teaching profession, teaching rewards

Introduction

Compared to the education systems of other emerging and underdeveloped countries, South Africa's education system is regarded as expensive, inefficient, and underperforming. Moreover, the system remains in poor condition, failing to meet contemporary challenges or to profit from international advancements (Workman, 2020). Despite excessive sums spent on education, several issues that threaten the viability of the South African education system, including a dearth of professional and well-trained teachers, a lack of community aid and parental support, and a lack of resources are underscored. Classrooms remain overcrowded, while the dropout rate continues to increase at an alarming rate (Naape & Matlasedi, 2020).

Literature review

The high prevalence of teacher stress and consequent annual resignation is one of the causes of the education crisis (Msila, 2007; Naidoo, 2017). Lack of funding (Carelse, 2018), insufficient teacher qualifications, overcrowded classrooms (Jansen & Blank, 2014); unruly, disruptive learner behaviour; learner diversity where learners from different cultures, population groups, and intellectual abilities share a classroom; and a lack of support from management and parents have all been cited as reasons for this teacher attrition. Further, bad working conditions, discipline issues, an excessive workload, and time demands all contribute to high levels of emotional and physical stress (Klassen et al., 2012; Rechtshaffen, 2014). Moreover, the experiences of teachers with these issues affect their relationships with learners, making effective teaching demanding and challenging (Engelbrecht et al., 2003). Dibakwane (2019, p. 34) pointed out that teachers must teach “despite threats of attacks directed at teachers by learners and parents” in her report for a recent South African Council for Educators training session on teachers' rights, responsibilities, and safety. The media, such as the *Daily News* and *News24*, constantly report on acts of violence, physical attacks, and even murder committed by learners in what was once a safe and secure environment.

The challenges that teachers must shoulder lead to “widespread concern for teacher well-being, with stress and trauma studies in educational contexts figuring alongside those of other professions such as nursing, policing and firefighting” (Naidoo, 2017, p. 23). According to Long et al. (2017), many teachers have lost their way, and some may temporarily lose their purpose and commitment. As a result, the sense of calling or vocation and the related identity of a professional teacher have been weakened. Long et al. (2017, p. 11) raised crucial questions, such as: “Is it fair to place sole responsibility for quality education on teachers?” and “Why are teachers being bombarded from all directions?” “Are teachers still in control, and are they still respected?” and the final question, which deserves an answer: “Will teachers remain committed to their profession and energised while they are repeatedly chastised and underutilised?” As Frias (2015, p. 2) rightfully asked, “As a culture, why do we disregard teachers' social and emotional well-being?”

That last is a relevant question because few studies in South Africa focus on teacher well-being and, specifically, on how teachers could be supported and equipped to deal with these

challenges. This article aimed to fill that gap by highlighting key factors that could improve the well-being of teachers in South Africa, identifying factors that have a negative impact on teacher well-being, and determining why teachers continue to teach despite the challenges they face. In other words, we set out to identify the factors that might influence teacher well-being and motivate teachers to remain in the field.

Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework defines and introduces the theory that explains why the research problem exists; it is the structure that can hold or support a research study's theory (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). This research is underpinned by Samuel and van Wyk's (2008) force field model (FFM) of professional development as well as Seligman's (2011) PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and accomplishment) model of well-being.

The FFM of professional development

The first theory, the FFM, was initially designed to investigate the factors that influenced the professional development of student teachers. It can also be used to determine which forces affect the well-being of teachers. The FFM uses "the analogy of an electron in a charged force field where it is being pulled and pushed by various forces" (Samuel & van Wyk, 2008, p. 140). Different fundamental forces determine push and pull, factors also known as positive and negative influences in the teaching practice (Samuel, 2008). For this article, the model explains different forces that may determine teachers' experiences and that might subsequently encourage or deter the decision to retain their positions in the teaching profession. Individual identity is influenced by varying interpretations of the forces' full effect. These forces can manifest in the following categories: contextual, institutional, programmatic, and biographical.

This framework was chosen in order to give a voice to teachers to showcase their teaching experiences and to determine the strengths and obstacles embedded in the profession. The goal was to identify what factors energise and motivate teachers to remain in the teaching profession despite the numerous challenges. This theory guided the researchers in understanding the various factors that enhance teacher well-being and why teachers keep teaching despite the challenges they face.

The PERMA model of well-being

The second theory used for this research was the PERMA model of well-being, developed by Martin Seligman (2011). This model identified five elements that contribute to well-being. The first is positive emotion, which suggests that if one concentrates on positive emotion, happiness will follow. This element focuses on remaining positive in the face of one's history, and present and future prospects (Seligman, 2011). The second element is engagement, which refers to a psychological bond with a certain cause, activity, or work environment (Khaw & Kern, 2014). The next element is relationship, which can be defined as

a sense of belonging within relationships, and is associated with favourable outcomes such as less depression and greater overall health (Tay et al., 2013). The meaning aspect relates to “feeling connected to something larger than the self” (Khaw & Kern, 2014, p. 23), and can be regarded as a sense of purpose in life. The last element is accomplishment, which refers to accomplishing goals and receiving recognition. That last is also a personal element because one’s achievements bring a sense of success (Butler & Kern, 2016). These elements emphasise emotional or internal forces influencing well-being, whereas the FFM emphasises external variables influencing teacher wellness.

The merging of the two models

A closer look into the FFM indicated that the model focused primarily on external forces that were beyond the teacher’s control. Even the FFM’s biographical force involved fixed variables such as culture, religion, race, and so on. As a result, it left room for a second model to address the possible gap, hence, the PERMA model was added to account for subjective, personal elements that the teacher can manage. The researchers thus combined the two models to serve as a lens for assessing and understanding teacher well-being.

Research methodology

This article, using an interpretivist paradigm, explored a primary research question: “How does the current classroom context affect the well-being of South African teachers?” Secondary research questions were posed to assist with answering this primary research question: “Which push and pull forces influence the well-being of teachers, and how do teachers address their well-being?” The interpretivism paradigm relies on the human mind, values, and perceptions, which must be interpreted through an individual’s eyes in a specific context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, this paradigm allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing teacher well-being.

A qualitative approach using a case study design was adopted. A case study was the most appropriate design because the researchers have no control over the events that have a bearing on the topic under investigation (Yin & Campbell, 2018). This multiple case study included eight teachers, each from a different teaching context. The participants had to be from various school settings and ethnic groups, have multiple experiences in teaching, and we also wanted a representation of gender. The participants were interviewed to explore their experiences in the teaching profession. Data were collected in two stages: the first stage used voluntary sampling, and the second stage used purposeful sampling.

Firstly, the researchers posted the purpose of the study on three different pages on Facebook, requesting participants to participate in the study. Facebook was selected because of its diverse array of pages dedicated to teachers and educational matters, making it the platform with the most extensive collection of such pages when compared to other social media platforms. All three Facebook pages were multicultural and used English as a medium of communication. After participants had been briefed regarding the objectives of the study, they had to click on a link that took them to a Qualtrics form. By clicking on the link, the

participants gave informed consent. They were then asked to complete a biographical section that we deemed necessary for the study. Thereafter, they were asked to complete eight open-ended questions. Eighty-eight participants completed this stage.

After reviewing the data generated by the open-ended questions, eight of the 88 participants were contacted; the selection depended on the various situations in which South African teachers teach. Thus, gender, population group, school type, and the geographic areas of schools had to be reflected in the cases. Semi-structured interviews were used in this section of the study to collect relevant data. This data collection method is suitable for researchers who want to delve more deeply into a phenomenon or condition under investigation (Ruslin et al., 2022). The eight participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule to understand their experiences in the teaching profession. We decided to use semi-structured interviews because we wanted to follow up on the responses we had gained from the open-ended questions in Stage 1. Although the phenomenon under study is not new territory, we felt that the different views of the participants would give a voice to the well-being of South African teachers.

The data analysis process involved transcribing all the data sets and evaluating each one independently. According to Miles et al. (2014), similarities and differences are found and categorised. With a thorough understanding of the two theories that underpinned the study, the researchers realised that the categories could be related to the FFM's different forces and the PERMA model's elements. The data content was analysed and labelled in a descriptive manner with verbatim quotes. The flexibility of qualitative research analysis enabled the transformation of raw data into plausible study conclusions.

University of Pretoria granted permission for the research to be conducted. All ethical principles of informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, honesty and openness, access to findings, and avoiding harm, as described by Maree (2017), were adhered to. Pseudonyms were used and no schools were identified during the data dissemination; the researchers ensured the anonymity of all participants. Qualtrics made this possible because participants did not need to provide names, and were contacted through email addresses if they indicated they would willingly answer the open-ended questions. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time during the study.

Results, findings, and discussion

In exploring how the current classroom context affects the well-being of teachers in South Africa, the selected codes and categories fell within the different forces of the FFM and PERMA model. As mentioned earlier, the FFM addresses primarily the external factors that influence teacher well-being, whereas the PERMA model addresses the internal factors—the biographical forces. The categories were organised into the following themes, which are explicated in turn below: contextual forces, institutional forces, programmatic forces, and biographical forces

Theme 1: Contextual forces

The first theme underscores the uniqueness of the holistic school/educational context of the teacher (participant). The contextual forces include all the experiences that teachers have throughout their careers, regardless of the conditions in which they teach—thus, the universal experience of all teachers in all contexts.

The influence of professional benefits on teacher well-being

The impact of professional benefits on teachers' well-being developed as a contextual force category. Professional benefits relate to all the advantages connected with teaching as identified by participants. The emerging codes included job security, salary, and fringe benefits.

Being a teacher provides individuals with a sense of safety. Knowing that they have a job despite the country's socioeconomic situation is reassuring. Hussain and Saif (2019) defined job security as employee concern about losing a job or losing a desired employment need, such as a lack of advancement opportunities, current working circumstances, and long-term career options. Feeling safe or belonging in the teaching profession is closely related to the salary teachers receive at the end of the month, and discourages teachers from leaving the profession.

Although the participants did not indicate that their incomes were adequate or satisfactory, they did mention the security of having a consistent monthly income. In other words, earning consistent wages, even if lower than desired, provides teachers with financial certainty at the end of the month. Seventy-four per cent of participants reported that they spent more than seven hours at school, excluding time spent at home on marking, preparing for classes, and administration. Therefore, teacher wages at the time of the research did not correspond to their average working hours per day. According to the literature and research data, one of the main reasons for teachers leaving the profession is low salaries.

The last code refers to the benefits of the teaching profession, such as four vacations each year. A teaching career is especially appealing to mothers because it allows them to spend more time with their families. Existing literature supports that, stating that women made up 72,5% of the teaching population in South Africa (Skosana, 2018). The four paid vacations are not to be confused with free time. Most teachers spend their vacations catching up on administration, preparing for the following term's classes, or attending DBE-approved workshops (Simic-Muller, 2018).

Job security, remuneration, and fringe benefits could all serve as pull forces within this category, whereas only remuneration might serve as a push force, driving teachers away from the profession.

Theme 2: Institutional forces

Institutional forces are forces that are unique to a single school—the school’s lived history—and will change if a teacher changes school. These forces include learners, stakeholders, and school environment (infrastructure, resources, geographical location, and school type).

The influence of learners on teacher well-being

Learner growth, behaviour, and encouragement as well as learner absenteeism serve as forces influencing teachers’ decisions to leave or stay in the profession and thus their well-being. Participants expressed a strong desire for their learners to achieve, pass, or reach their goals. One of the most important reasons why teachers like their jobs is to help learners flourish. Making a difference in a learner’s life, and witnessing a learner pass or achieve a goal is motivating. Although participants stated that they did not always see the gratitude and influence they had, they were aware that it was present in the lives of some learners.

Learner misbehaviour contributes to a negative work environment, and was mentioned by most participants. Discipline problems experienced by teachers can be attributed to the diversity of learners, socioeconomic environments, literacy levels, disrespect, and other variables such as the gender of the teacher and different teacher characteristics. However, learner behaviour can also act as a pull force. Learners’ words of encouragement tend to reward teachers and give them an incentive to stay in the profession. Learners appreciating their teachers by saying, “thank you,” or praising them encouraged the teachers to continue teaching.

The last contributing factor within this category relates to the high absenteeism rate of learners. Learners’ persistent absenteeism has a direct impact on teacher well-being because it creates a situation in which the teacher must spend extra time to facilitate the learning content that the learner missed when absent. This adds to teachers’ already overburdened schedule.

Learners’ growth and positive behaviour contribute to the reasons why teachers stay in the profession, and improves their well-being, but absenteeism and poor behaviour push teachers away from the profession and have a negative impact on their well-being.

The influence of stakeholders on teacher well-being

The second category involved the role of stakeholders and refers to a school’s management team (SMT), the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and parental involvement. Participants did not frequently refer to the management of the school, but the cases where it was mentioned were positive in the sense that the participants explained that most principals and heads of department had an open-door policy and that they felt that the SMT did what it could to manage the school to the best of its ability. Moreover, when participants referred to the SMT, phrases like “being appreciated” or “being acknowledged” surfaced. When teachers feel that their work is being recognised, they tend to work harder, and this serves as motivation for them.

The lack of focus on the DBE can be attributed to the fact that Data Set 1 was gathered during the Covid-19 lockdown period, which meant that teachers were at home, and removed from the school environment; they thus had limited involvement in the DBE's administrative demands and school visits. In other words, the DBE and SMT were not actively involved in the teachers' role throughout this period. But, when the DBE was mentioned, participants seemed frustrated. Participants believed that the DBE was out of touch with their responsibilities as teachers and therefore required them to conduct unnecessary administrative work and attend workshops after school, or even during school holidays.

The data analysis revealed that parents were the main contributing factor adversely influencing teacher well-being. Throughout the data sets, participants referred to a lack of parental involvement, limited parental support, uneducated parents, and unsatisfactory communication between teachers and parents. The two most frequently mentioned factors that fell under parental involvement, and that are discussed briefly here, were the unemployment of parents and uneducated parents. Uneducated, in the scope of this article, means that parents either did not complete their school career or that they were illiterate. A high unemployment rate among parents/caregivers leads to poverty-stricken households. It is difficult or even impossible for illiterate parents or caregivers to give academic support. Even though parental support is one of the institutional forces that affect teacher well-being, the literacy levels of parents are a challenge that will not change soon.

When teachers are not supported, they are more likely to leave the school or the profession altogether. To support a person is to provide them with necessities for survival, or to keep their spirits or bravery up in the face of adversity (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Parental support or lack thereof should be considered. To begin with, uninvolved parents are less likely to motivate their children to meet academic requirements, advise their children about inappropriate behaviour, and support teachers when learning issues occur.

The influence of school environment on teacher well-being

Given South Africa's multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual character, and the big divide in socioeconomic classes, the reality of different school environments with different traditions, values, and challenges is understandable. The codes identified within this theme overlap, but are presented here as school environment and socioeconomic factors.

The concept, school environment, in this article refers to all the characteristics within a specific school including safety, atmosphere, and overcrowded classrooms. Firstly, the safety of the school environment was mentioned in Data Set 1 as an answer as to what influenced teacher workplace well-being. These data are supported in the literature by the Teaching and Learning International Survey (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), which stated that South Africa was the country with the highest frequency and variety of school safety incidents among all countries and economies participating in the survey. Secondly, participants reported a positive school atmosphere as a factor that enhanced their well-being. Teaching in a favourable school environment motivated teachers to do their best and kept them in the profession. Lastly, teachers struggled to teach effectively in the overcrowded

classrooms that are the norm in township and rural areas. Overcrowded classrooms as a challenge is a combination of an increase in population, a shortage of qualified teachers, and a decrease in funding from the DBE. These classrooms aggravate existing challenges such as behavioural problems and a lack of individualised attention.

The second category in this theme is the role of the socioeconomic environment on the lived biography of a particular school. Many South African learners attend schools with poor infrastructure, which has a direct impact on academic performance. Many learners in historically poor metropolitan neighbourhoods attend schools that lack resources. In analysing the data on the socioeconomic environment in a specific school setting, it was found that teaching in rural and township schools presented different challenges to teaching in private and urban schools. This does not exempt private and urban schools from these challenges; rural and township schoolteachers simply experience these challenges more frequently. Although socioeconomic issues were primarily reported as a push force, not all participants faced the problems that the socioeconomic environment presented. Four of the eight participants who served as case studies worked in schools with abundant teaching resources. And those participants reported having data projectors, whiteboards, and interactive resources and an abundance of teaching media as giving them a variety of options for teaching content in a creative way.

Both codes can push or pull teachers away from or into the profession, and therefore influence their well-being.

Theme 3: Programmatic forces

Programmatic forces refer to “the formal (official), non-formal and hidden curriculum, the espoused curriculum and the experienced curriculum of the school” and the impact it has on the experiences within the teaching–learning situation (Samuel & van Wyk, 2008, p. 141). In analysing the data, we realised that participants did not refer to the curriculum as such, but rather to the workload associated with the curriculum as well as the diversity of learners that influenced the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Hence, this theme was captured under the following two categories presented below: the influence of learner diversity on teacher well-being, and the influence of curriculum on teacher well-being

The influence of learner diversity on teacher well-being

When discussing the influence of learners on teacher well-being within programmatic forces, special emphasis is placed on the diversity of learners. Learner diversity does not refer to language and cultural differences only but in this context, relates to the impact of the different socioeconomic contexts in which schools are located. Participants revealed that the diversity within the school setting necessitated ongoing adaptation in terms of the way in which learning was facilitated and the classroom handled. Not all learners are on the same cognitive level; furthermore, linguistic barriers between teachers and learners hinder communication between teacher and learner. According to Palane and Howie (2020), numerous learners are not taught in their native language, a drawback that causes issues with the pass rate and with

classroom management. When learners do not understand the content, they become disruptive. The data analysis revealed that the diversity of learners could be taxing teachers' well-being, and that learner diversity may be one of the reasons why teachers leave the field.

The influence of curriculum on teacher well-being

The curriculum and the workload of the teacher are very closely related. Nowhere else is inequality as evident as in the schooling system, and it seems that the current education system is perpetuating this disparity through a "one-size-fits-all" curriculum (Amin & Mahabeer, 2021). Those authors posited that the curriculum should be changed to meet society's needs and warned that "the revised curriculum ignores the contextual distinctions amongst schools" (Amin & Mahabeer, 2021, p. 499). They suggested that the curriculum be trimmed by removing outdated and irrelevant content, and rather focus on content that is important for a particular group of learners, and reorganised by grouping similar topics across subjects to reduce curriculum overload.

When considering that there have been four curriculum changes in the education system since 1994, each one requiring training, orientation, and skills development as well as administrative work to prove competency in curriculum implementation (Govindasamy, 2018, p. 2), it speaks for itself that the changing nature of the curriculum has resulted in an increased workload given that teachers need to prepare new assessments, lesson plans, and material. Teachers feel overwhelmed by the assessment plans set out by the DBE and struggle to get through the content that needs to be covered per term. Due to the district or provincial examination papers now being written by most schools, teachers are forced to cover all content, which leads to difficult content not being thoroughly explained, and to struggling learners falling even more behind. In addition to this, the administrative responsibilities of teachers add to their frustration and workload.

According to the literature, the additional effort imposed by the curriculum adds to teachers' workload and therefore generates additional stress, acting as a negative or push factor that has a detrimental impact on their well-being.

Theme 4: Biographical forces

Samuel and van Wyk (2008, pp. 140–141) explained biographical forces as "different individuals' cultural, racial, ethnic and religious identities which predispose them to think, act, or behave in particular ways with learners, school authorities, and school subjects." These forces, therefore, are a function of teachers' lived history and can influence teachers' well-being. Although these inherent forces are acknowledged, they can be regarded as set attributes that the teacher has no control over. The PERMA model's biographical forces were therefore merged with those of the FFM and, in this article, are regarded as internal forces that the teacher can regulate. The model's five elements—positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and accomplishment—are presented as categories and described below.

Positive emotion

The first category explains how positive emotion contributes to teachers' well-being. Positive emotion refers to all emotions that one cultivates to improve one's well-being. This element was visible across both data sets with many participants referring to their love and passion for the profession. These findings are corroborated by Keller et al. (2014) who stated that teaching is an emotionally rewarding career. And Klassen et al. (2014) argued that teaching is a profession that is strongly anchored in emotional experiences. The desire to continue teaching was cited by participants as the most compelling reason.

In the teaching profession, a deep love for children combined with a desire to help them attain their greatest potential is critical to teacher well-being. The positive emotions that teachers experience act as a pull force that keeps them in the profession and enhances their well-being.

Engagement

The next element of the PERMA model refers to engagement. To be engaged in one's profession means to be emotionally resourceful and focused. Seligman (2011) argued that when one is doing something one enjoys, one prefers to live in the present moment and is thus completely focused on what is going on around one. In other words, when one is engaged, one is emotionally connected. Moreover, engagement refers to the achievement of challenging tasks by using skills and strengths. Translating these perspectives to the teaching profession, engaged teachers can be defined as people who have discovered their life's purpose through providing a satisfying and fulfilling service.

In analysing the data, it became evident that participants agreed that the diversity within the school setting called for constant adaptation, and posed a challenge regarding the way in which learning was facilitated and the classroom was managed. To empower oneself, one must ensure that one is equipped with skills to take on a challenging situation. This means that teachers could cope with challenges or hardship by seeking counsel and support from management, colleagues, or even by relying on their faith. Coping mechanisms are further discussed under the relationship element. However, data collected from participants revealed that they found solace in discussing problems with colleagues and valued an open-door SMT policy. Relationships therefore play an important role in the coping mechanisms of teachers, as discussed in the next section.

Relationships

The relationship element in the PERMA model underscores the importance of various relationships in the workplace by highlighting their ability to enhance well-being. According to researchers, those who have supportive and fulfilling relationships have better mental and physical health.

Teaching is a relationship-based profession (Dreer, 2021) and if those relationships are properly managed, they can help retain teachers in the profession and improve their well-

being. Throughout this article, the importance of healthy relationships between teachers and their colleagues, learners, management, and parents has been underscored. When these role-players have healthy relationships, it improves the teachers' well-being and gives them a sense of sharing their burdens. Literature, as previously discussed, concurs that the ability to develop meaningful relationships with all stakeholders is necessary for a teacher's well-being. It is evident that various relationships influence the decision whether a teacher decides to stay in, or leave, the teaching profession. As previously stated, the relationship factor is associated with positive emotion.

The final relationship explored was the role religion plays in motivating participants to continue teaching in the face of adversity. Five of the eight participants said that they trusted God to guide them, that they did their best and trusted God to do His part, and that spending time with God drove them on.

Meaning

A human being's primary motivation in life is to find meaning. Meaning is the fourth element in the PERMA model of well-being. Meaning in this article refers to teachers' need to feel valued and worthy, which includes serving something greater than themselves.

Participants widely reported that the teaching profession was rewarding because they felt they were being appreciated. They believed that they were adding value to the future by playing a part in the education of learners. To be acknowledged for working hard and being recognised kept teachers from leaving the profession. Participants referred to the smiles they received from learners, and to past learners greeting them with love and affection when they walked past them in public.

Accomplishment

The last element relates to the importance of accomplishment. Accomplishment refers to achievement, and to mastery or success at the highest level possible within a specific sphere (Forgeard et al., 2011). When teachers feel they have accomplished their goal, it enhances their well-being and therefore also serves as a pull force. The goals they want to accomplish vary from seeing learners pass, to learners making a success of their lives after leaving school. These accomplishments serve as a driving force to set and reach career goals.

Hence, when asked where participants pictured themselves in five years' time, 46 participants in Data Set 1 reported that they would still like to be in the teaching profession. Some of them mentioned that they hoped to obtain a higher position within the education sector either as head of department or even as a lecturer at a higher education institution. This finding is reassuring when viewed against the backdrop of all the challenges teachers face in the teaching profession, and is in agreement with a study in which the researchers found that "the career orientation of the teacher is primarily value-driven," and concluded that the realisation of a calling is the most important asset and determinant in teacher training and provision (Steyn & Kamper, 2015, pp. 273–274).

The PERMA model's elements serve as positive or pull factors that enhance well-being. When these elements are present in teachers' lives, they experience a greater sense of well-being and would be more inclined to stay in the profession.

The opposing forces can drive teachers away from the profession while also adding to the deterioration of their well-being. Although most participants demonstrated a positive attitude towards the teaching profession and had the majority of the elements of the PERMA model present in their lives, some participants did not share this sentiment.

Most of the participants reported a lack of support from parents and therefore that relationship element acts as a push force. Moreover, not all participants felt that the profession held meaning for them. Some participants revealed that they were teaching for the sole purpose of providing for their families, or that they taught because there were no other options.

Recommendations for policy and practice

Based on the reviewed literature as well as the empirical findings and aims of this article, recommendations are offered to serve as suggestions and to propose options for responding to the article's primary findings. If the following suggestions are considered, teachers' well-being could be ensured. Recommendations are set out below for higher education institutions (HEIs), the DBE, school governing bodies, SMTs, and teachers.

Firstly, there should be collaboration between the Department of Higher Education and the DBE. Both departments have the education of the country's learners at heart and they should therefore liaise consistently. Next, HEIs ought to revisit the curriculum of student teachers to include training in teacher well-being. A thorough study of teacher well-being should be made and should be emphasised as part of teacher training.

Furthermore, the DBE must prioritise the delivery of textbooks and relevant learning materials. Timeous planning and communication with various school districts could ensure that textbooks are ordered and delivered before the school years commence. The scope of teacher administration needs to be revisited because numerous studies consistently report on the heavy administrative load of teachers, which they find unnecessary and overwhelming. Moreover, South Africa is a nation with learners from diverse backgrounds in terms of race, culture, language, and religion. Teachers ought to have the flexibility to interpret the curriculum in such a way that it applies to the school environment in which they teach. More focus should be placed on different sets of skills, depending on the socioeconomic environment and geographical locations of a school.

When considering recommendations for SMTs, considerations such as parent involvement, teacher support, and the establishment of a personal well-being management plan require attention. Lastly, teachers should empower themselves. Teachers must take responsibility for themselves by developing techniques and coping mechanisms to deal with the challenges they encounter. These strategies should focus on an internal locus of control, where teachers

take responsibility for, and ownership of, challenges and move away from harbouring a victim mentality where they feel constantly overwhelmed by the challenges they face.

Conclusion

Teachers' well-being in South Africa must be prioritised because they are key individuals who can effect meaningful changes in the country's future through their educational roles. As Long et al. (2017, p. 11) asked: "Will teachers preserve their commitment to this vocation and continue to be motivated and energised despite being constantly blamed and not being supported?"

Despite the numerous challenges that teachers face daily, we believe that the majority of teachers will continue to be dedicated to their career. Teachers will be inspired to stay in the profession if their well-being is considered by various role players and if they are enabled to take ownership of their careers.

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