

**Primary school teachers managing learners' academic needs in
overcrowded classrooms**

by

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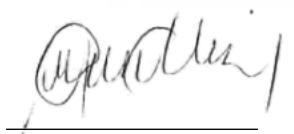
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This serves to confirm that the dissertation, *Primary school teachers managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms* by **Sean Mare Botha** was edited. The language, presentation, and referencing system (both in-text and against the Reference List), were checked and corrected.



M Grundling

30 March 2022

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I, Sean Botha declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree of Masters of Education Management, Law and Policy at the University of Pretoria is my own work, and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.



.....

Mr S. M. Botha

March 2022

Declaration of Authenticity and Ethics



Faculty of Education

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Faculty of Education Ethics Committee
Integrated Declarations Form

Ethics Reference No. EDU159_20

Investigator's Declaration

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Supervisor's declaration (If applicable)

I, the supervisor, Dr. N. Sing of the following study, titled:

Primary school teachers managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms

hereby declare that:

1. The research activities for which ethics approval was provided by the Ethics Committee were conducted in accordance with the conditions of approval and the regulations of the University of Pretoria and Faculty of Education.
2. There have been no significant changes to the project which render the approval of the Ethics Committee invalid.
3. The investigator obtained formal permission and informed consent/assent from all parties involved in this project and will submit these for inspection if required.
4. There were no adverse experiences or undue risks experienced by participants in the course of the study that require the attention of the Ethics Committee.
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Start date of study: January 2020

Date of submission of thesis/dissertation: December 2022

Until which year will data be stored: ____2036____

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Abstract

Overcrowded classrooms have been the topic of discussion by multiple researchers in the field of education. It has been looked at from various angles because of the numerous challenges that are caused by it. Researchers such as Khan and Iqbal (2012), Marais (2016), and Muthusamy (2015) investigated the effects overcrowded classrooms have on teachers, and found that teachers who teach in such classrooms deal with many challenges, such as being unable to provide learners with individual attention, and being unable to use innovative teaching strategies. These teachers also experience high levels of stress and fatigue. Although numerous studies investigated the challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms, a gap in the available literature suggests that there is a need to investigate how teachers can manage large classrooms successfully. This dissertation builds on the currently available research on overcrowded classrooms by examining the management strategies that teachers use in these challenging situations, thus contributing to the field.

Using a qualitative approach, this study purposively sampled twelve participants from two schools with overcrowded classrooms in Midrand, South Africa. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The study found that teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms experienced problems when dealing with learner disciplinary issues. Teachers experienced unique ordeals with learners who did not work well or constructively in overcrowded classes. Their peers easily influenced these learners with distracting and petty non-academic conversations. Unfortunately, this has a ripple effect on learners' achievement of their academic goals, as it was also found that teachers had to cope with the educational gap these learners in large classrooms experience, due to a lack of basic reading and writing skills. One of the most prominent challenges that teachers faced in overcrowded Grade 4 to 6 classrooms, was that they felt helpless when they could not support learners who struggled with basic tasks. Teachers felt stressed when they could not provide these learners with individual attention, as they had to choose to either be assertive and maintain constant discipline, or lose classroom control if they gave personal attention to learners in need. However, some teachers overcame these problems by allowing the students to participate in creating classroom rules that they enforced with each other.

This study found that teachers who succeeded in managing overcrowded classrooms, did so by doing their best in establishing a positive rapport with the learners, by making them part of the process, and by being actively engaged in their own learning and academic development. A key finding was that successful teachers formed positive working relationships with their learners through discipline negotiations and shared mutual educational goals. The teachers were successful in creating a classroom environment in which learners were able to satisfy essential needs. The study found that successful teachers establish feelings of belonging with their learners being motivated to persevere and still try to have fun in a safe space, as described by William Glasser's Choice theory, the theoretical underpinning of this dissertation.

Key Words: overcrowded classrooms, classroom management, academic needs, self-efficacy, positive work relationships

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Acronyms

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FAL	First Additional Language
FPE	Free Primary Education
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HL	Home Language
HOD	Head of Department
LCPS	Low Cost Private Schools
PAM	Personnel Administrative Measures
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

“Overcrowded classrooms have been considered one of the most challenging problems faced by teachers” (Ayu, 2018 p. 1). Overcrowding in school classrooms - a problem which occurs when the student-teacher ratio in a given classroom is very high - is a growing problem faced by many schools around the world, and is a problem experienced by schools in developed as well as developing countries. This issue gripped researchers around the world in the field of education, and triggered a lot of academic research on the topic. Out of London, authors Blatchford, Basset and Brown (2011) examined the effect of classroom size on pupil-classroom engagement and teacher-pupil interaction. Küçüjker and Kodal (2019) investigated how language teaching is handled in overcrowded classrooms and what activities are useful to apply in Istanbul, Turkey. Shirley (2017) researched the effects of overcrowding on student academic performance in Kentucky High Schools in the United States. Moving away from developed countries, in Ghana, authors Osai, Amponsah, Ampadu and Commey-Mintah (2021) examined teachers’ experiences with overcrowded classrooms, and Ayu (2018) studied interactive activities for effective learning in overcrowded classrooms in Indonesia. Another study, conducted in Nigeria by Dabo (2015), investigated the effect of teacher-pupil ratios on the teaching and learning process. The list of studies on this topic internationally goes on.

In South Africa, a considerable number of public schools are overcrowded and is a widely researched topic. Matshipi, Mulaudzi and Mashau (2017) investigated the causes of overcrowded classrooms in rural primary schools in South Africa. West and Meier (2020) published a research paper with the title: “Overcrowded classrooms - The Achilles heel of South African education?” and Marais (2016) investigated the phenomenon of overcrowded classrooms through the eyes of student teachers. Muthusamy (2015) examined teachers’ experiences with overcrowded classrooms. This is only to name a few studies carried out in South Africa.

In South Africa, overcrowded classrooms mostly occur in public schools as opposed to private schools. Alam and Tiwari (2021, p. 2) define a private school as “any school that is not operated by the government but is controlled and managed, whether for profit or not, by a private body.” The main distinction between South African public and private schools is that private schools acquire most of their financial resources through non-state sources. This is stated in the South African Schools Act as, “The state must fund public schools from public revenue on an equitable basis to ensure the proper exercise of the rights of the *learners* to education and the redress of past inequalities in education provision” (The Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 24). The South African Schools Act also allows for subsidies from the government to private (otherwise known as an independent schools), but it is not guaranteed. Therefore, private schools can demand high school fees and show prospective students the door if they cannot pay. A study done by Baum, Cooper and Lusk-Stover (2018) show that over 11% of primary and 19% of secondary learners in Sub-Saharan Africa are enrolled in private schools. They also demonstrate that these numbers have shown growth over the last decade and a half. This is also the case in South African schools. According to a study done by McKay, Mafanya and Horn (2018), there is a vast increase in enrolment in South African private schools, and attribute this increase to an unmet demand by public schools, as well as other additional factors such as providing a smaller learner-teacher ratio. They point out that on average, South African private schools have 16 learners in a classroom compared to public schools with an average of 30 learners per class (McKay et al., 2018). Private schools are characterised by small teacher-learner ratios as they can appoint teachers and build classrooms according to available financial resources. Parents who can pay school fees are welcomed. Parents who want to enrol their learners in private schools but do not have the required finances are forced to take their children to the nearest public school. However, private schools do not only refer to schools for the rich elite. There is another phenomenon that emerges from the inadequacies of the South African public education system, and is referred to as Low Cost Private Schools (LCPS). LCPS was initially seen as private schools financed entirely by tuition fees, with a monthly tuition fee not exceeding the daily wage of a labourer, but in practice, LCPS is a school that charge up to 15% of household income in tuition fees (Alam & Tiwari,

2021). This shows that there are two classifications of what constitutes a private school. According to McKay et al. (2018), the two main reasons why enrolment in private schools are increasing is a strong unmet demand for education that the state cannot provide, and parents that view private schools as offering a better education. Overcrowding has also not been documented in private schools; therefore, this study focusses on South African public schools.

South African public schools are funded by the state. However, due to an effort to rectify past inequalities, schools are ranked into a financial distribution system called a quintile system. Schools are awarded a quintile rank between 1 and 5. Schools that fall into quintile 1-3 are classified as 'no-fee schools', and they are not allowed to charge school fees, as they are situated in the poorest socio-economic areas. These schools also have fewer resources and fewer teachers, because there are no finances for anything but the necessary. Quintile 4 and 5 schools are located in areas with a higher socio-economic status and are allowed to initiate means of raising more funds, usually through charging school fees, and are mostly well-resourced. The basic education received in quintile 4 and 5 schools are also generally of a higher standard and quality (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021). This creates a systemic problem, as quality education is becoming a 'product' that can only be afforded by the rich. "We now have a situation where the demand and supply of education (a public good) resembles the sale of a retail product in a competitive market" (Maistry & Africa, 2020, p. 2). Parents who can afford it, have the opportunity to send their children to schools that offer superior quality education, low teacher-learner ratios, and more overall opportunities, leaving the remainder of the learners with problems such as overcrowded classrooms and under resourced schools. Quality education thus becomes a marketable and sellable product, instead of a basic human right, equally available to all South African learners.

Although it is yet to be proven that smaller classrooms amount to academic success, poor performance, and grade repetition, is associated with overcrowded classrooms (West & Meier, 2020). Academic literature shows that overcrowded classrooms have a negative effect on student achievement. For example, Okechukwu and Oboshi (2021) argue that student achievement is negatively impacted by occurrences such as teachers struggling to deliver instruction,

inadequate seats, classroom management issues, and the non-availability of school facilities. Likuru (2021) adds to this by stating that overcrowded classrooms are also characterised by rampant noise, less individual focus, discipline issues, and struggling students that fall behind. There is no study that clearly shows that overcrowded classrooms have a negative impact on student achievement, because there are too many variables to take into consideration if such a study would be conducted. Therefore, we are left to conclude that the well-documented challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms is enough evidence to lead to the conclusion that overcrowded classrooms have a negative influence on student achievement.

There are numerous reasons why schools are overcrowded, the most common being that there are not enough schools, teachers, or resources to build more schools and appoint more teachers. The finances that are currently awarded by government to education are not enough to build an adequate number of classrooms and appoint enough teachers to solve this problem. Classrooms are being built every year, but it is not nearly enough to meet the demand. The backlog of classrooms needed to eradicate overcrowding in 2020 was 4095 classrooms in 716 schools; out of this, the department delivered about 406 classrooms (Gauteng Department of Education [GDE], 2020). This statistic illustrates that the rate at which classrooms are being built is not adequate. The number of learners that enrol into public schools also increases each year, which means that as long as a backlog of classrooms exist, overcrowding in South African public schools will not be eradicated.

In addition, owing to irregular expenditure, the designated funds are not used, and have not been used, effectively. Konte (2021) showed that the corrupt behaviour and ineffectiveness of government officials in Sub-Saharan Africa increase the probability of poor school resources being experienced by locals. The annual report by the GDE (2019/2020) discloses an amount of R 1,030, 657,000 in irregular expenditure in Gauteng alone.

Another reason why many South African schools are overcrowded is because of past inequalities under the apartheid government. "Apartheid is a former South African policy of separate (racial) development that was created by the then National Party to economically and politically subjugate the non-white population" (Chirinda

et al., 2021, p. 3). McKay et al. (2018) explain that during apartheid, the state allocated most of the education budget to white schools, rendering schools for all other races under-resourced and understaffed. Pienaar and McKay (2014) contribute to this argument by stating that most of the current quintile 4 and 5 schools (well-resourced schools) are still demographically in what was known as 'whites only' areas during apartheid. Many formerly disadvantaged schools that were under-resourced and understaffed are still playing catch-up.

According to West and Meier (2020), one of the main characteristics of the South African school system is a shortage of teachers and inadequate infrastructure. Considering this insufficiency, it is understandable that schools are overcrowded. Teachers experience a variety of problems teaching in overpopulated classes. Among others, available time to spend on instruction and individual attention is lacking in bigger classrooms (Blatchford et al., 2011), and the class is more prone to problems with discipline (Marais, 2016). Considering that education is already a mentally demanding profession, it is not sustainable for teachers to deal with these challenges effectively, without the requisite support structures in place.

According to Matshipi et al. (2017), more than 11 million South African learners continue to receive their education in overcrowded classes. A few reasons reported in the study by Matshipi et al. (2017) include a lack of infrastructure, a single school serving a big community, a shortage of teaching staff, and principals looking to enhance their salary by increasing enrolment, despite the ramifications. Khan and Iqbal (2012) state that a classroom is overcrowded when the number of learners exceeds an optimum level, and cause a hindrance in the teaching and learning process. This study thus argues that if the number of learners in a classroom makes it difficult for a teacher to teach, the classroom can be viewed as overcrowded. Another definition of overcrowded classrooms is that it occurs where the learner to teacher ratio exceeds the recommendation of the educational policy of a given country (Asodike & Onyeike, 2016). Numerous governments are starting to implement policies that demand that classrooms have fewer learners. For example, the Indonesian government suggests that classrooms should have no more than 28 students (Ayu, 2018). However, this does not automatically change the situation in the given country. In South Africa, the acceptable norm for classroom sizes is a

maximum of 30 learners per class for a Grade R class and a maximum of 40 learners per class for all other grades. In addition, the minimum space allocated must allow 1m² per learner and 7m² for the teacher (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2013). Classes with learners equal to or exceeding these numbers are not optimal. Therefore, it poses a challenge for effective classroom management by teachers. In Gauteng in 2015, only 21% of children were in classes with 35 or fewer learners (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2016). This study argues that such conditions raise a concern for the quality of teaching and learning outcomes to be achieved by the other 79% of learners in an average overcrowded classroom in Gauteng.

The least that can be said is that teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms, and learners who learn in overcrowded classrooms, operate in substandard conditions that are not favourable to teaching and learning. As such, literature argues that overcrowded classrooms create a barrier in the activities of the teaching and learning process (Ayu, 2018).

1.2 Background to the study

Overcrowded classrooms are not a problem unique to South Africa. This section now detours to present an international perspective from literature on the nature of teaching and learning in schools burdened with overcrowded classroom sizes. Khan and Iqbal (2012) verify to that the average number of learners in a classroom in Pakistan ranges from 70 to 120. Since the implementation of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy, the Kenyan classes are sitting at an average of 40 learners per classroom (Wachira, Mwenda & Muthaa, 2011).

Overcrowded classrooms are a highly researched topic worldwide, faced with their respective contextual challenges (Hassan, Mustafa, Ibrahim & Ayoub, 2014; Khan & Iqbal, 2012; Marais, 2016). There is a sizable body of literature that puts forward an understanding that overcrowded classrooms have a negative effect on educational practices (Kambuga, 2013; Marais, 2016; West & Meier, 2020). Wachira et al. (2011) investigated the FPE programme that was implemented in Kenya in 2003. The programme was established to eradicate school fees in public primary schools, with the positive notion of providing access to schooling for all.

However, the implementation of this programme resulted in high enrolment figures for learners, owing to this, the resultant concerns with overcrowded classrooms emerged. The study by Wachira et al. (2011) investigated the impact of high enrolment on the management of learners, teachers, physical resources, and curriculum implementation, and found that one of the most difficult areas of classroom management for teachers was overcrowding. They further explained that overcrowded classrooms affected classroom management, specifically in managing discipline and effective learning. The study reported that it was difficult to maintain discipline in classes that were overcrowded, as learners were unruly and noisy. Teachers were encouraged to use guidance and counselling as an alternative means of managing discipline, but teachers felt that they lacked training in this regard and the techniques were ineffective. A study conducted in Nigeria by Dabo (2015) advises that teachers are unable to use innovative teaching strategies in overcrowded classrooms, and that they only use the lecture-teaching method. Teachers attribute this to a lack of motivation (Dabo, 2015).

Getting back on home track, in South Africa, one of the main factors that influence poor performance and grade repetition is overcrowded classrooms (West & Meier, 2020). Teachers and learners experience challenges as a result of this, because the teaching and learning process is overall negatively impacted by too many learners in one classroom.

Teachers are restricted in the initiatives they can take in terms of innovative teaching strategies, according to a study conducted by Singh and Singh (2017), who investigated pre-service science teachers' experiences with overcrowded classrooms. They state that "large science classes were a challenge for most students as they were unable to use innovative strategies to deal with teaching science to a large group" (Singh & Singh, 2017, p. 177). Matsepe, Maluleke and Cross (2019) found that stimulating learners' interest and engaging learners in critical thinking and problem solving activities were two of the main issues affected by overcrowded classrooms. They explain that a large number of learners in a classroom influences discipline during the teaching and learning process, resulting in learners having no interest in reading, writing, discussions, and demonstrations. West and Meier (2020) add increased noise levels, fighting, and vandalising of

resources to this list. Findings of a study by Matsebele (2020) strengthens this argument by confirming that ill-discipline and poor academic performance are inseparable from overcrowded classrooms and that it triggers misconduct. A lack of resources and infrastructure, didactical neglect, and negative teacher attitudes are some of the challenges reported by West and Meier (2020). Finally, in overcrowded classrooms, individual support is impossible, as there are simply too many learners in a classroom and this result in weak learners falling behind (Marais, 2016).

The above sections show that there is an urgency to investigate overcrowded classrooms, as it greatly contributes to poor performance in South African schools. Teachers and learners are facing immense challenges because of overcrowded classrooms. There is no easy fix for the problem of overcrowded classrooms, owing to the great financial investment required to eradicate the substantial backlog of classrooms and appoint a great number of teachers. At the rate that classrooms are being built in South Africa, this problem will take many years to address. Therefore, the management of overcrowded classrooms need to be studied to find new and creative ways of mitigating the problem in the immediate future. Every study done on overcrowded classrooms adds to the body of knowledge available to policy writers and other stakeholders in the education field, allowing them to make a difference. This study aims to contribute to best practice in non-optimal contexts.

This study also aimed to address a gap that exists in academic literature by investigating best practices in South African overcrowded classrooms. Challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms have been well documented and there is no real need to further investigate this, although these studies are of great importance in allowing other researchers to add to their work. Having a firm grasp on what the challenges are in overcrowded classrooms allow researchers to take it a step further by investigating how these challenges could be managed. Another phenomenon that has been well-documented is the multiple reasons why classrooms are overcrowded. Once more, this creates a space for researchers to further investigate. There are, however, fewer studies that considered how teachers and school management teams could deal with the complication of overcrowded classrooms, and this is the gap where this study finds itself.

The strategies that teachers implement to cope in overcrowded teaching and learning situations have not been well-documented. Therefore, it is important to understand how teachers may keep large classrooms controllable and manageable. It is important to understand how teachers manage large classrooms effectively, as this might be the only temporary solution to a problem that has the potential to be effective long-term. This study adds value to the field of knowledge by presenting an informed understanding of how teachers deal with all the challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms.

1.3 Problem statement

Teachers need to create a good working environment for learners, and school management teams need to create a good working environment for teachers to focus on teaching and learning. This is a very difficult task to accomplish in schools with overcrowded classrooms. A classroom that is overcrowded and defined by discipline problems, a lack of resources, and low teacher motivation is not a good working environment and results in low job satisfaction. Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) confirmed that there is a positive relationship between working environment and job satisfaction. This means that if the work environment is positive, teachers should experience job satisfaction, and if the work environment is negative, teachers may experience low job satisfaction. According to Toropova, Myrberg and Johansson (2021), three aspects of the working environment significantly contribute to teacher job satisfaction, namely learner discipline, teacher cooperation, and teacher workload (Toropova et al., 2021). Poor learner discipline and teacher workload is two problems experienced in overcrowded classrooms, resulting in low job satisfaction. Low job satisfaction gives rise to a lack of self-efficacy. Teachers with high self-efficacy, when challenged, do not give up and they put in more effort to succeed, whereas teachers with a low level of self-efficacy quit from difficult tasks and have a weak commitment and low willingness to succeed (Gkolia, Belias & Koustelios, 2014).

Taole (2015) asserts that overcrowded classrooms make it difficult, if not impossible, for teachers to implement the curriculum in creative or impactful ways. “Curriculum implementation refers to how teachers deliver instruction and assessment through the use of specified resources provided in a curriculum”

(Nevenglosky, Cale & Aguilar, 2019, p. 5). Findings from another study by Marais (2016) show that overcrowded classrooms tend to be chaotic and unmanageable. This experience is supported by Singh and Singh (2017) who explains that student teachers experience large classes as a problem, as they are unable to devise innovative strategies to teach science to large groups. This study contends that the above-mentioned issues makes teaching an occupation with a lot of day-to-day challenges, and represents an unattractive career choice; thereby posing a systemic challenge for a new generation of quality teachers.

There is ample scholarly work that exposes the struggle and the magnitude of problems caused by overcrowded classrooms (Dabo, 2015; Shirley, 2017; Singh & Singh, 2017). The reality is that countless teachers manage overcrowded classrooms on a day-to-day basis. However, the methods they use to manage the academic needs of a large group of learners remain unexplored. Marais (2016) argues that overcrowding is a part of South African public schools, and will remain a problem, perhaps for the long-term future. This study argues that solving the problem of overcrowded classrooms will perhaps not only be expensive but a long-term goal, as many new schools and classrooms will have to be built and a large number of new teachers need to be appointed. There is also no guarantee that learners who need individual attention will be able to overcome their learning challenges in overcrowded classrooms, highlighting the need for teachers to learn how to effectively manage these classrooms.

Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to address the identified gap of the effective management of an overcrowded classroom. This was done by investigating how teachers that work in South African public primary schools with overcrowded classrooms manage the daily academic needs of a large group of learners. The findings of this study aimed to contribute to a larger body of knowledge on successfully dealing with overcrowded classrooms. By grasping a better understanding on this topic, the discussion will progress. The education sector will move one step closer to a better understanding of dealing with the problems experienced by both learners and their teachers in overcrowded classrooms. Therefore, the phenomenon being studied is the management of learners' academic needs in crowded classrooms.

1.4 Statement of purpose

Many South African teachers are confronted with managing classrooms with high student-teacher ratios. Various studies have pointed out how this phenomenon negatively impacts teachers and the teaching process. Yet, there emerges a gap in the academic literature when one investigates the strategies and techniques that teachers have in place to manage these situations as to create a thriving learning environment for students. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to understand how teachers manage the academic needs of learners in overcrowded classrooms, despite all the challenges created by their teaching situations. Data was gathered in the Midrand area of Gauteng Province in South Africa, by conducting semi-structured interviews with twelve participants at two public schools.

1.5 Rationale of the study

Overcrowded classrooms are a global phenomenon that is also experienced by fellow South African teachers. Numerous studies point out the effects of overcrowded classrooms on learners and teachers. Internationally, trends are similar as it was found that in crowded classrooms in Kenya, teachers also struggle with classroom management in terms of maintaining discipline and teaching effectively (Wachira et al., 2011). A study conducted in Pakistan found that teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms faced problems performing curricular and co-curricular activities (Khan & Iqbal, 2012). According to Kambuga (2013), teachers in overcrowded Tanzanian classrooms apply the lecture teaching method as the overcrowded nature of the classrooms make it impossible to use other innovative teaching strategies. Internationally, overcrowded classrooms are a well-researched topic. However, it is not as widely researched in the South African context. West and Meier (2020) identified didactical neglect, problematic behaviour, and negative teacher attitudes as some challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms. This is supported by Marais (2016) who found that there is neither individual learner support nor proper assessment in overcrowded classrooms in South Africa. There was a lack of learner motivation, and no variety of teaching strategies was apparent. Alternatively, the causes of overcrowded classrooms in rural schools were identified by Matshipi et al. (2017) as a lack of infrastructure rather than the shortage of teachers. As such, overcrowded classrooms present an

overwhelming problem that has no easy fix, which can remain a problem for the foreseeable future.

Understanding the best practice of how teachers manage learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms is the gap that this study aims to address. The learners' academic needs understand learning goals, getting constructive feedback from teachers, and experiencing a safe learning environment that makes for an academic enabling classroom culture. The closest comparable study to this is a study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal by Muthusamy (2015) titled *Teachers' experiences with overcrowded classrooms in mainstream schools*, where the key finding was that teachers experience overcrowded classrooms as stressful due to conditions such as inadequate classroom space, disruptive learner behaviour, and a lack of support from management.

However, the study by Muthusamy (2015) focussed on the overall experience of the teachers. This study focuses on strategies that teachers draw on to manage large classrooms.

1.6 Research aims and objectives

1.6.1 Main research aim

The main aim of this study was to understand teachers' experiences managing the academic needs of large groups of learners. The researcher aimed to understand the challenges based on teachers' experiences of the school context and, sometimes, uncontrollable circumstances and events that take place in overcrowded classrooms when teachers attempt to manage the academic needs of a large group of learners. The objective was to understand the measures engaged by teachers to best address the learners' educational needs.

1.6.2 Sub research aims

Alternatively, this study investigated the various challenges that teachers experience in managing the academic needs of learners in large classrooms, as well as how various teachers and school management teams successfully

addressed the challenges. Despite challenging classroom contexts, the aim was to discover and encompass best teaching and learning practices.

1.7 Research questions

1.7.1 Main research question

How do teachers manage learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms?

1.7.2 Sub research questions

1. How do teachers manage learner discipline in overcrowded classrooms?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter in managing the academic needs of learners in overcrowded classrooms?
3. How are the challenges in managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms addressed in respective schools?

1.8 Significance of the study

Firstly, this study's findings will have the potential to contribute to a larger body of knowledge in the field of education management and policy studies, allowing other researchers to further investigate the topic. This study fills a gap in the available literature on overcrowded classrooms and the impact thereof.

Secondly, the findings can be used in training pre-service teachers to manage overcrowded classes effectively. Marais (2016) conducted a study that found that student teachers experience overcrowded classrooms as unmanageable and chaotic, and suggested that the management of overcrowded classrooms is still largely unaddressed in South African schools and teacher training institutions. This study can be used as reading material in those institutions.

Finally, the findings can be used as material in in-service training of school management teams in assisting teachers to deal with overcrowded classrooms.

1.9 Structure and outline of the study

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 is a general introduction to the study, justifying the necessity and context of the study. The questions that the researcher hopes to clarify are available in this chapter. Finally, the chapter includes the significance of the study and the challenges experienced while conducting the study.

Chapter 2

This chapter explores all relevant literature on the topic of the study. It also introduces the theoretical framework that was used to guide the research and explains the application thereof in the study.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 explains the methodologies used to conduct the research, reasons for choosing specific sampling methods, and data collection strategies are also explored in this chapter.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 introduces and describes the participants that took part in the study. This is followed by an analysis of the collected data, divided into applicable themes and subthemes, to enable the researcher to derive appropriate findings.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 is a description of research findings derived from the analysed data. The applicability of the findings for policy and practice is described, as well as the limitations of the study. The final part of the chapter is recommendations made for further research on the topic.

1.10 Limitations

Establishing contact with the teachers was more difficult than expected. Unfamiliar circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic required creativity. Teachers in one school were operating at 50% capacity, and they had to be reminded that they

were being interviewed about their normal teaching situations during the interviews. However, the fact that the schools were operating differently created an opportunity to explore other areas of questioning that were not available before.

However, conducting interviews through platforms such as Zoom may have made interviews seem less personal, making it difficult to establish participants' trust. Participants might not have been willing to share honest information if there was no support from the school management team, as they did not want to appear disloyal to their institution. There was also the possibility that the members of the school management teams would not be honest about not being able to manage overcrowded classrooms. In both regards, the participants' anonymity was assured in order to invite complete honesty.

1.11 Summary of the chapter

The first chapter acted as an introduction to the study. An explanation of the problem that needed investigation, which was the management of overcrowded classrooms, was provided. The reasoning behind choosing this topic to study was clarified and justified using relevant literature. The research questions used to conduct the study were also clarified. The next chapter comprises of a detailed analysis of the available research on the topic of overcrowded classrooms, as well as a description of Choice Theory, which is the theoretical framework that guided this study.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the study and explained the need to conduct the research. The research questions that guided the study were clarified and possible significance and limitations were highlighted. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a review of what has been researched on the topic of overcrowded classrooms. Doing so places this study within the scope of the available academic literature, and clarifying the gap that this study intends to fill. “This process enables researchers to justify their work and set it within the context of other studies and ideally, advance the body of knowledge on a particular subject” (DaCosta, 2012, p. 61). The literature review provides a straightforward frame of reference on what has been researched on the topic. This literature review aims to show research that has been done on the topic of overcrowded classrooms, as well as other topics that is influenced by or influences overcrowded classrooms.

The problem investigated in this study was the management of learners’ academic needs in overcrowded classrooms, with the main research question being: “How do teachers manage the academic needs of learners in overcrowded classrooms?” As discussed in the previous chapter, how teachers manage the academic needs of learners in overcrowded classrooms is a concern in South African schools and other schools around the world.

2.2 Main concepts of the study

The problem of overcrowded classrooms is difficult to solve, as schools need to be built and teachers need to be appointed, which are solutions that require a significant financial investment. Matshipi et al. (2017) recommend that if this is not possible, additional classrooms should be built and teachers should be employed to match the learner-educator ratio as prescribed by departmental policy. However, it is not realistic to expect solutions such as these to be implemented, as financial resources are required. Therefore, the key purpose of this study is to highlight the importance of understanding the strategies that teachers use to effectively manage overcrowded classrooms, and to teach student and novice teachers how best to

deal with overcrowded classrooms; considering that it is realistic to expect that overpopulated classrooms will remain a problem, at least for the near future.

The overcrowded nature of school classrooms is a significant problem that causes numerous challenges for teachers and learners, thus it has received a lot of attention in the area of educational research. The most apparent topic in literature is the impact that overcrowded classrooms have on teachers and teaching. However, this literature review provides a broad scope, not only on the most apparent literature, but also on any other literature that may be of importance. International and national research is referenced to provide a complete depiction of what has previously been researched. The literature review covers all possible topics in addressing the main research question, as well as the sub-research questions, and is divided into the following units:

1. Overcrowded classrooms (Definitions, impact, causes, possible fixes)
2. Classroom management (Managing overcrowded classrooms, discipline, academics)

2.3 Overcrowded Classrooms

2.3.1 Defining overcrowded classrooms

Overcrowded classrooms are considered one of the most challenging problems teachers face (Ayu, 2018). Providing education in overcrowded classes impacts performance of both the learners and the teachers. Teachers in overcrowded classrooms need to address the needs of many learners but with fewer resources (Shirley, 2017). Having a large number of learners to manage effectively is a difficult task, as an increased number of students in a class inhibit an instructor from teaching effortlessly (Küçüjker & Kodal, 2019). This in turn places extra pressure on teachers, and negatively impacts teacher motivation, which renders them ineffective in the classroom. Overworked and unmotivated teachers are not innovative, and this alters students' achievement levels. Below are various definitions of overcrowded classrooms found in academic literature and the reasons why overcrowding occur in classrooms.

Khan and Iqbal (2012) view a classroom as overcrowded when the number of learners in the classroom exceeds an optimal level, and causes a hindrance in the teaching and learning process. When a teacher is unable to perform everyday teaching operations, or learners struggle to keep up with learning activities due to a high number of learners in a class, the class can be viewed as overcrowded. Dabo (2015) uses this same definition in his study and adds that students spend most of their time, hopefully, in an environment that is conducive to learning.

According to Küçüjker and Kodal (2019), classes bigger than 25 students pose challenges in learning literary texts through conversation and writing. The regulations relating to the minimum uniform norms and standards for public school infrastructure, as published by the DBE (2013), states that the maximum number of learners in Grades 1 to 12 classrooms should not exceed 40 learners. However, 40 learners are still a significant number of learners to manage for one teacher, and can cause an array of challenges.

It is also essential to distinguish between overcrowding in schools and overcrowding in classrooms. Overcrowding in schools happens when the ratio between learners and teachers in the whole school exceeds a certain level, leaving a small number of teachers to manage a large number of learners. A school that has enrolled more students than the school was built to accommodate, is seen as overcrowded (Shirley, 2017).

This study supports the definition of overcrowded classrooms in South Africa as aligned to policy guidelines, where the learner to teacher ratio at a school is very high, for example, 40 learners per one classroom managed by one teacher.

The definition of an overcrowded classroom used and referred in this study is: *When teachers find it difficult to teach and learners also find it difficult to learn due to the high number of learners in a classroom. A classroom of 40 learners and above is seen as overcrowded as 40 learners is a considerable number of learners to be managed by one teacher.*

2.3.2 Policies on overcrowded classrooms, internationally and locally

Notwithstanding the definitions above, the maximum capacities for classrooms internationally are clearly defined in the educational policies of various countries. Over 30 states in the United States have approved classroom size reduction policies. Governments of England and Wales opted for classes with no more than 30 learners per classroom (Blatchford et al., 2011). The ministry of education in Columbia recommends that classrooms should not have more than 32 learners per classroom (Jiménez, 2020).

Policies by the Indonesian government suggest that classes should not consist of more than 28 learners for elementary schools, and no more than 32 in secondary or high schools. However, this is rarely the case, as most classes have more than 30 learners and a lot of classes have more than 40 learners per class (Ayu, 2018).

Drawing into Africa, Nigerian policy proposes no more than 35 learners per class at the primary school level, and no more than 40 learners for the secondary level; however, schools are still overcrowded (Dabo, 2015). And finally, as stated above, South African educational policy states that Grade 1 to 12 classes should have no more than 40 learners per class. Comparing this policy to the educational policies of other countries, 40 is more than most policies allow.

2.3.3 Causes of overcrowded classrooms

There are multiple reasons why classrooms are overcrowded, with the most obvious being that there are too few schools and too few educators to accommodate the number of learners. In Kenya, one of the main reasons for overcrowding in schools is the FPE programme. This programme was intended to do away with all tuition fees in primary education, but this led to high enrolment figures and because of this, resulted in overcrowded classrooms (Wachira et al., 2011). A similar situation occurred in Papua New Guinea, where classes started to become overcrowded after the implementation of the Tuition-Free Education Policy, owing to the fact that there were no extra classrooms built to accommodate extra learner enrolment, and no additional teachers were recruited (Loh Epri, 2016). In Pakistan, Khan and Iqbal (2012) argue that government schools are overcrowded because of the population increase, limitations of economic resources, and budget constraints.

Back to Africa, according to Dabo (2015), schools in Nigeria are overcrowded due to the general lack of teachers in the country. In Egypt, an increase in the enrolment rate of students led to the overburdening of the available infrastructure and resources, as the state could not provide classes to accommodate the growth, leaving classes overcrowded (Ayoub, 2019).

Singh and Singh (2017) found that South African classes are overcrowded due to a lack of infrastructure. This happens when there is too little space in a classroom to accommodate the number of learners who needs to be facilitated. The findings of another study conducted by Matshipi et al. (2017) agree, and reported that classes in South Africa are overcrowded due to a lack of infrastructure. The study found instances where one school serves a big community, leaving the parents and the schools with no other choice. The situation is further exasperated when the Department of Education (DoE) takes too long to build additional classrooms, leaving the schools with little room for action. Shortages of teaching staff occur when teachers choose not to work in remote areas. Additionally, a study conducted by West and Meier (2020) affirms that the South African education system is characterised by a shortage of teachers and a lack of school infrastructure, which causes the overcrowded nature of South African classrooms.

Unfortunately, an element of corruption occurs when principals look to increase enrolment in their schools to enhance their salaries (Matshipi et al., 2017). A principal's salary is determined by the grading of a school, which is done in accordance with the amount of teacher posts allocated to the school (DoE, 1999). The number of teacher posts awarded to a specific school aligns with the needs of the school. Sephton (2017) outlines the following ten variables considered in the formula to establish the number of teachers needed per school: maximum ideal class size applicable to a specific learning area; the number of periods for each teacher; a need to promote a learning area; number of grades; the size of the school; number of languages of instruction; disabilities of learners; access to curriculum and what subjects are offered; poverty; and the level of funding. As the number of the learners in the school increases, so does the need for more teachers. The more teachers employed by the school, the higher a principal's salary.

Consequently, some principals allow continuous enrolment of learners, disregarding classroom size.

Figure 2.1 below illustrates a table from the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document of 1999, on the growth of a principal's salary in accordance with the number of teacher posts at a school.

Figure 2.1: Grading of schools and principal salary range

Educator posts on the departmental establishment of the school	Applicable salary range	Grading	Minimum posts required for up-grading	Number of posts to which the establishment must drop before the institution will be down-graded
1	Minimum notch code: 56 Maximum notch code: 138	One person school	2	-
2 – 3	Minimum notch code: 108 Maximum notch code: 186	P1	4	1
4 – 12	Minimum notch code: 126 Maximum notch code: 201	P2	13	2
13 – 24	Minimum notch code: 144 Maximum notch code: 215	P3	26	10
25 – 45	Minimum notch code: 159 Maximum notch code: 218	P4	47	22
46 +	Minimum notch code: 180 Maximum notch code: 221	P5	-	43

Source: Department of Education (1999)

2.3.4 Influence of apartheid

It is also noteworthy to position that rural South African schools inherited a fragmented and racially divided education system stemming from the policies of apartheid (Matshipi et al., 2017). Inequalities in the provisioning of education, combined with high poverty levels, resulted in the inheritance of deeply rooted

differences between Black and White educational resourcing, infrastructure, and teacher quality (Chisholm, 2012). The schools inherited by Black, Coloured, and Indian communities, and people who were negatively affected by the policy of apartheid are still battling to catch up. Many of the former privileged schools remain advantaged and are supported by wealthy communities (Maistry & Africa, 2020). The policies of apartheid also resulted in some districts not having enough schools to accommodate the needs of the community; consequently, schools that are located in areas that still have a low socio-economic status, remains overcrowded.

As a means to rectify these past inequalities, the quintile system was created. This involved awarding a ranking of quintile 1 to quintile 5 to public schools - quintile 1 being schools in the poorest areas, and quintile 5 being schools in the wealthiest areas. Schools that fall under quintile 1-3 are classified as 'no-fee' schools and are not allowed to ask for school fees, as they receive all their funding from the state. Quintile 4 and 5 schools are allowed to raise financial resources to improve the school infrastructure and appoint more teachers. This is usually done by asking for school fees. The quintile system is designed to assist poor families in providing their children with an education; however, Maistry and Africa (2020) explain that the demand and supply of education now resemble the sale of a retail product in a competitive market. Schools that do not have the means of generating income cannot build classrooms and appoint teachers. Therefore, schools in areas classified as quintile 1, 2, or 3 remain understaffed and under-resourced, resulting in a lower standard of education than in quintile 4 and 5 schools. Pienaar and McKay (2014) conducted a study that mapped the correlation between geographical location and Grade 12 (matric) pass rates in South Africa. The study found that geographical location significantly impacts student achievement. They state the following: "The highest matriculation pass rates (85% or more) are generally found in quintile 4 and 5 schools located in former white geographical areas, and it is most likely that this finding is the drive behind the school commute and/or causing parents to move house to access such schools" (Pienaar & McKay, 2014, p. 118).

The literature referred to above clarify that overcrowded classrooms is a problem that education systems face worldwide. It also establishes multiple reasons why schools in South Africa are overcrowded. The point of this is to show that the South

African education system's problems that relate to overcrowded classrooms are not a problem that could be easily addressed or eradicated. To deal with the above-mentioned problems, a tremendous amount of time and financial investment will be required by the state to build more schools and appoint more teachers. According to Marais (2016, p. 1), "Overcrowded classrooms are unfortunately part of South African education and will remain a part for the immediate future and even perhaps the long-term future." Therefore, this study argues that teachers' methods and strategies to manage overcrowded classrooms effectively are worthy of investigation and potentially significant in this field of study.

2.4 Classroom management

A considerable amount of the challenges faced by teachers due to overcrowded classrooms falls into the category of classroom management. A crowded classroom is generally more difficult to manage because of the challenges it causes. Therefore, in this section of the literature review, the concept of classroom management is clarified, and a few classroom management strategies that teachers use are explained.

2.4.1 Defining overcrowded classrooms

Classroom management is an essential factor that plays a significant role in various aspects of education. It is defined by Babadjanova (2020) as a variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students orderly, focussed, and academically productive during a class to increase student engagement. The ability to successfully manage a classroom, which is to say that learners are working productively, disciplined, and motivated, is a vital skill set that teachers need to build to succeed. Lazaridesa, Wattb and Richardson (2020) explain that classroom management is crucial for beginner teachers' well-being and student achievement. Saleem and Muhammad (2020) concur with this and argue that one of the most critical aspects of teaching is how well a teacher can manage a classroom.

The field of education is overall understood as a mentally demanding profession (González, Daigre, Araneda, Salgado & Sandoval, 2019). A study done by Mefi and Asoba Mefi (2021) concur with this by expressing that occurrences such as ill-discipline and vandalism of school property (that teachers experience daily) add to

the already high-stress levels of teachers, and advises that it is of vital importance that schools innovate better intervention programmes that may assist teachers in overcoming stress. Managing a classroom full of learners under normal conditions can be a daunting and stressful task, with challenges ranging from substandard classroom conditions to clear acts of misbehaviour (Allen, 2010). However, managing an overcrowded classroom can be extremely difficult as the challenges are just magnified.

Classroom management serves as a holistic description of the actions taken by teachers to create an effective learning environment (Allen, 2010). Having skills to manage a classroom effectively are essential for teachers (Freeman, Simonsen, Briere & MacSuga-Cage, 2014). Freeman et al. (2014) also found that many teachers receive inadequate classroom management training before their teaching careers commence, and feel unprepared to deal with the demands of managing student behaviour. The challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms create an environment that is not favourable for learning, and teachers should be able to address these challenges. How a classroom is managed has an immense effect on various schooling factors. A study done by Gollner and Trautwein (2018) argues that classroom management and social support is closely related to secondary school learners' general school adjustment. Allen (2010) conducted a study in which she argues that the social structure and dynamics of a classroom can promote inappropriate behaviour such as bullying. A significant concern in classroom management is the time spent managing student behaviour rather than on class instruction (Nagro, Fraser & Hooks, 2019).

In lieu to the challenges teachers face regarding classroom management, it is important to also look at current strategies teachers use to manage their classrooms, as achievement might be higher in well-managed classrooms (Aldrup, Klusmann & Ludtke, 2018). Overcrowded classrooms are tough to manage due to all the well-documented challenges they pose. The management of overcrowded classrooms is a topic that has received less attention in academic literature.

The known literature on this topic is discussed to show what has already been done, and highlight a gap in the literature that this study aims to fill.

2.4.2 Effects of overcrowded classrooms on teachers

A classroom is the most crucial area within a school, and students hopefully spend most of their time in classrooms that are conducive to learning (Dabo, 2015). Overcrowded classrooms affect teachers in various ways. One of the most common effects of overcrowded classrooms on teachers is physical and emotional challenges. Khan and Iqbal (2012) reported on the problems that teachers face in overcrowded classrooms in Pakistan. He found that effective teaching was not possible in overcrowded classrooms because of physical, discipline, instructional, and evaluation problems. The problem, as mentioned earlier, occurs because of the overcrowded nature of the classroom and affects the academic outcomes of learners. Disciplinary problems due to overcrowded classrooms that teachers face is a topic that regularly appears in this line of discussion. A study done in Kenya found that large classroom sizes affect the classroom management in terms of maintaining discipline among the learners (Wachira et al. 2011). Being accountable for the education of 40 learners is a huge job. It is challenging to manage such a high number of learners, and it is especially difficult to manage discipline, instruction, evaluation, and other academic needs of learners in a class of 40.

Regarding a management strategy, Jiménez (2020) states that in overcrowded classrooms, teachers use methodologies that place learners in a more passive role, making discipline easier to manage. In the context of modern teaching, it is said that teachers need to adapt their lessons to make them interesting for the learners and to evoke the love of learning among young people. This requires teachers to be innovative and use various new strategies when teaching. A study undertaken in Nigeria found that teachers are unable to use creative or modern teaching strategies because of overcrowded classrooms (Dabo, 2015). Marais (2016) agrees with the findings by Dabo (2015), and report that teachers cannot give learners individual attention or give learners proper feedback on completed tasks. It is reasonably understandable that teachers are not able to use new and exciting strategies in overcrowded classrooms because there are far too many other aspects to manage, such as classroom control, the inability to work with or provide support to the individual learners, and so forth. Another study conducted in South Africa by Singh and Singh (2017), posit that science teachers could not do demonstrations,

experiments, conduct laboratory work, or use any innovative teaching strategies because overcrowded classrooms were too tricky to manage. These studies clearly show that overcrowded classrooms cause many academic and management problems.

Teachers struggle to manage overcrowded classes, but it is not clear what experienced and novice teachers do to deal with the problem of crowded classrooms effectively, or how they manage it. All the challenges referred to in the section above affect teachers and influence learners and their academic achievement. A classroom is a diverse space with learners that have different and varied needs. Some learners need more assistance than others to perform well.

Establishing a positive working relationship with the learners is essential in this regard. Positive relationships in classrooms are associated with motivation, participation, and learning activities (Miller et al., 2017). Hassan et al. (2014) argue that one of the main effects of overcrowded classrooms on learners is that it leads to a drop in their grades. He continues by stating that in overcrowded classrooms, teachers are not able to have one-on-one time with any struggling learner who needs assistance or support. The weak learners will be left behind in overcrowded classrooms.

In some cases, teachers will not even notice the struggling learners and who require extra assistance because they are too busy managing other challenges. It is complicated to form a good teacher-student relationship in this regard. Learners become a number and are not noticed in an overcrowded classroom, and due to this, they tend to act out. Marais (2016) conducted a study by looking at the challenges faced by student teachers studying to teach in the Foundation Phase. She found that learners in overcrowded classrooms tend to scream, fight, bully, and vandalise resources. She also found that learners showed a lack of motivation. As mentioned above, all the problems that impact learners are negative and are bound to lead to underperformance. Again, the need to understand how to manage overcrowded classrooms is emphasised.

A study was conducted in Tanzania that is very similar to this current study, to investigate teachers' coping strategies in managing overcrowded classrooms. The

study revealed that teachers manage large classrooms, group discussions, lecturing, shift strategy, peer learning, and dividing classes. Another finding made by the study was that teachers find it difficult to recognise individual learners that need maximum support - similar to the study referred to above (Charles, 2020).

Nagro et al. (2019) suggest that teachers should use proactive classroom management strategies to spend less time managing difficult situations in the classroom. This suggests that while planning their lessons, teachers should anticipate the possible challenges they might face before they occur, and in this way, they will be better prepared to deal with them. Asodike and Onyeike (2016) strengthen this argument by stating that adequate planning is needed to manage large classes. Although planning is essential in managing a class effectively, this strategy does not always apply to overcrowded classrooms, as the challenges posed by overcrowded classrooms cannot simply be eradicated by planning for them. The events that take place in any classroom are unpredictable, even more so in overcrowded classrooms.

Some studies show that parental involvement impacts classroom management significantly. Research conducted by Kraft and Dougherty (2013) found that teacher-family communication greatly impacts learners' behaviour and participation. Another study done in 2018 connects with this study, as it found that a teacher's level of classroom management was positively correlated with parental involvement (Cheng & Chen, 2018).

According to two studies, a teacher's self-efficacy (the way in which teachers deal with change and failure) regarding classroom management also plays a significant role in a teacher's ability to manage a classroom effectively. One study done by Hicks (2012) found that teacher self-efficacy and student behaviour are directly linked. A similar finding was made by Lazarides et al. (2020, p. 10) that states, "teacher's initial self-efficacy functioned as a personal resource that positively predicted their perceived teaching behaviour in early career".

The above research shows that teaching in an overcrowded classroom can be a daunting task with complex challenges. Multiple governments have policies that are supposed to regulate teacher to learner ratios in classrooms, but it is ineffective as

the guidelines do not reflect reality. Additional research on this topic is required to fully understand how to mitigate and manage overcrowded classrooms.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

Researchers refer to a theoretical framework when they analyse data. A theoretical framework as described by Kivunja (2018, p. 46) is a “synthesis of the thoughts of giants in your field of study.” He continues to explain that a theoretical framework comprises of what leaders in a field of research say about the research question and about the problem that is being investigated, and may even include how to interpret findings in the data.

In this section, the theoretical framework that guides this research, as well as the reasons for using it is thoroughly explained and backed up by literature. The subsections will include: an explanation of Choice Theory, the relationship between Choice Theory and this study, and finally the relation between Choice Theory and the research questions.

2.5.1 Choice Theory – William Glasser

Choice Theory, formerly known as Control Theory, is a behavioural theory developed by William Glasser and is based on the idea that all humans have five basic needs written into our genetic structures (Glasser, 2010). These five needs are 1) surviving and reproducing, 2) belonging (to love and be loved), 3) acquiring power, 4) being free, and 5) having fun (Tanrikulu, 2014). The theory suggests that our behaviour (choices) is aimed at satisfying one or more of these 5 needs. Therefore, every act is intentional (Irvine, 2015). Positive feelings are related to meeting one or more of these needs. William Glasser argues that the biological purpose of pleasure is telling us that these needs are being fulfilled (Glasser, 1997). Glasser (2010) explains that a person or situation, besides ourselves, does not control anything we do. However, we tend to believe external people and situations have control over us. Choice Theory suggests that it is of great importance to understand that we are only able to control our behaviour and not the behaviour of others. When people experience a problem with someone else, they tend to want to change that person’s behaviour instead of controlling their own (Tanrikulu, 2014).

Another vital aspect of Choice Theory is the ‘quality world.’ Tanrikulu (2014) explains this as an imaginary world, consisting of pictures and perceptions related to people, subjects, and phenomena that one wants to exist in the real world. This is the world exactly as we want it to be. In our quality world, we include people and things that we find most satisfying (Glasser, 1997). In other words, we welcome people and things into our quality world that most satisfy our needs.

2.5.2 Relation between Choice Theory, the research problem, and research questions

According to Choice Theory, all children possess the five needs mentioned above. In overcrowded classrooms, it is likely that some learners’ needs are not being satisfied, resulting in their academic needs becoming even harder to achieve.

In the problem statement, this study argues that teachers experience physical, disciplinary, instructional, and evaluation problems due to crowded classrooms, thus there is a need for a study on how to manage overcrowded classrooms. In his book titled *Choice theory in the classroom*, Glasser (2010) states that hungry learners think of food, lonely learners look for friends, and powerless learners seek attention. Learners will not learn if they have needs that are not addressed by education at the time. Glasser (2010) explains that learners who can excel but do not, may feel that their needs are not satisfied by education. The challenges that teachers face in overcrowded classrooms are likely to manifest because of learners’ needs not being satisfied. Learners need to include teachers in their quality world so that they associate teachers with people that help them satisfy their needs. This is as opposed to Stimulus/Response theory, which argues that people do not control their behaviour, but instead that it is due to responses to stimuli outside themselves (Glasser, 1997).

The following research questions were formulated using Choice Theory as a guide. These research questions were used to steer the rest of the study. A thorough explanation behind the thought process of each research question is explained below:

2.5.2.1 Main research question

How do teachers manage learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms?

This question served to establish how teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms manage the academic needs of such a large number of learners. As pointed out in the literature review of this study, there is a clear gap in the knowledge we have of overcrowded classrooms, and it needs to be addressed. Choice theory suggests that if either the academic environment or teachers do not address the needs of the learners, they will not learn. In an overcrowded classroom, learners' educational needs are likely of less importance to themselves, as they are subconsciously focussed on fulfilling other needs such as belonging and acquiring power, for example, in the sense of receiving recognition for work well done, which is difficult to satisfy in a crowded setting.

2.5.2.2 Sub questions

What academic needs do teachers in overcrowded classrooms identify in their learners?

With academic needs being less important to the learners, it was helpful to find out how the teachers in overcrowded classrooms become aware of their learners' academic needs.

What challenges do teachers encounter in managing the academic needs of learners in overcrowded classrooms?

Managing learners' needs in an overcrowded classroom presents many challenges. This research question aimed to find out what challenges make it difficult to manage the various academic needs of learners in overcrowded classrooms. Academic needs referred to in this section include grasping complex concepts and retention and application of important information.

How are the challenges in managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms addressed in respective schools?

Different schools have different ways of managing challenges such as overcrowded classrooms. This question assisted in understanding the different ways in which schools manage learners' needs in overcrowded classrooms and in what ways various school management teams help the teachers in the management of overcrowded classrooms.

If correctly understood, teachers in overcrowded classrooms may incorporate this theory into their classroom management strategies. Therefore, it is vital for teachers in overcrowded classrooms to understand the needs of the learners. The Choice Theory also explains that it is essential to understand and be aware that teachers are unable to control the behaviour of learners; teachers are only able to give them information and hope that they will apply the knowledge by making good choices.

2.5.3 Application of Choice Theory in the management of large classrooms

The five needs (surviving, belonging, acquiring power, being free, and having fun) described by William Glasser are unlikely to be fulfilled in overcrowded classes. In a classroom with 40 learners, it is improbable for a learner to feel safe or find a place to belong, as opposed to a classroom that is not overcrowded. Other than that, the need for acquiring power is difficult to satisfy as it is challenging to stand out. It will also be difficult for a child to feel free in a classroom with a lack of space. Finally, the need to have fun will also be difficult to satisfy in an overcrowded setting, as discipline problems and other problems such as bullying are prevalent in these circumstances. The understanding of Choice Theory allows for the realisation that learners behave in specific ways during certain situations because they feel the need to satisfy their psychological needs.

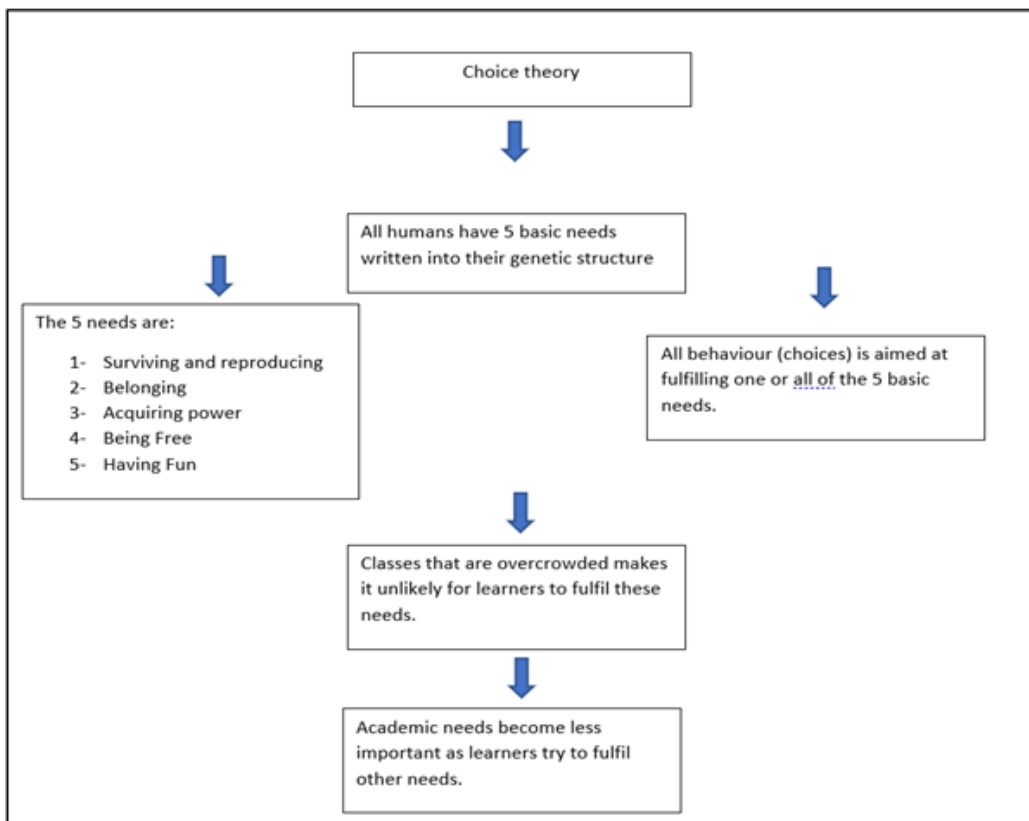
Choice Theory was applied to this research by addressing how teachers manage the needs of learners, specifically looking at how they manage learners' academic needs with respect to not being able to meet their other needs. For example, the feeling of belonging (being part of a group as it may be challenging to do group work in large classes), being free (able to express oneself in a role-play, as there is no space or opportunity to do so), or having fun (teachers are focused on routine to maintain discipline, and the probability of controlled activities where behaviour is moderated). The academic needs referred to in this section are the learning and

understanding of new and difficult concepts, and retaining and applying important information. In all subjects offered in primary school, learners need to learn new and complex ideas. If they are subconsciously focussed on fulfilling the basic needs referred to in Choice Theory, these academic needs will not be important to them.

The research questions were used as a guide to constructing interview questions that were posed to teachers. Teachers were asked questions mainly on how they deal with specific challenges in the classroom. Data were analysed using Choice Theory as a lens. Classroom management was looked at through the lens of Choice Theory.

Below is a diagram that encapsulates Choice Theory. At the top of the diagram is the name of the theory, Choice Theory. The block below the title is a short explanation of the main proposal of Choice Theory - that all humans have 5 needs written into their genetic structure. Below this, there are two blocks, one on the left-hand side, and one on the right. The one on the left shows the 5 needs referred to above, and the block on the right explains that all behaviour is aimed at fulfilling one or more of the 5 needs on the left. Finally, at the bottom of the figure, the things that are influenced by this process are illustrated. It is difficult for learners to satisfy these needs in overcrowded classrooms, therefore academic needs become less important to them.

Figure 2.2: Illustration of Choice Theory



Source: Adapted from Glasser (2010)

2.5 Summary of chapter

The purpose of this chapter was firstly to provide a clear range of what has already been researched on the topic of overcrowded classrooms and classroom management. This is important as it acts as a setting for this study and clarifies the necessity and importance of the research. The theoretical framework that has been referred to during this study, as well as the application thereof in this study, was also explained in detail. In consulting the available literature, it seems that there are international correlations on the topic. Firstly, countries such as the United States, England, Wales, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Kenya all have educational policies in place to prevent overcrowded classrooms. However, these policies are not always adhered to, and classrooms are still overcrowded. The most apparent reason for internationally overcrowded classrooms is that there are not enough schools to accommodate all the learners in various districts, and not enough teachers. South Africa's overcrowded classrooms are also characterised by a lack of infrastructure

and qualified teachers, as well as a lack of financial resources. However, past injustices unique to South Africa also adds to classes in some districts lacking infrastructure, qualified teachers, and financial resources. There is a correlation in the literature about the challenges in managing overcrowded classrooms and managing classrooms under normal circumstances. Managing an overcrowded classroom requires teachers to deal with disciplinary problems. Teachers also find it difficult to support individual learners who require extra attention.

The next chapter introduces and explains the research methodology that was used to conduct this study. Justifications for making specific selections are presented. Sample methods and sizes, as well as the rationale behind choosing it are clarified. The full process of data-gathering and analysis is thoroughly explained and grounded in academic literature.

Chapter 3 – Research paradigm, Approach, Design and Data Collection Methods

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, relevant research on overcrowded classrooms was discussed to show the gap in the literature that this study intends to fill. The following sections clarify the various research methodologies that the researcher used during this study. Methodologies are the methods that researchers use to carry out a research project. Briggs, Coleman and Morrison (2012, p. 15) state the following, “Methodology is the theory (or set of ideas about the relationship between phenomena) of how researchers gain knowledge in research contexts and why”. Choosing a methodology is a complex but fundamental process, as it informs the entire study. The methods should be based on relevant research theory and fit the research topic. These methods may include interviewing, observation, or the collection of textual or visual data (Maree, 2016).

This chapter describes the various methodologies that were used to conduct the research and explains the reasoning behind choosing to use those specific methods.

3.2 Research paradigm

3.2.1 *Ontology*

A researcher’s range of perceptions about the nature of reality can be described as ontology (Briggs et al., 2012). In other words, what a researcher believes about what reality is and how it exists, is known as the researcher’s ontology. In this study, the researcher subscribes to the realist ontology, meaning that the view is that there are multiple realities and interpretations; therefore, being actively involved in the study enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding. The realities of 12 different teachers were recorded and analysed to gain new knowledge.

3.2.2 *Epistemology*

The epistemology of a study is the researcher’s theory about knowledge and is divided into various research paradigms. A research paradigm can be defined as

traditions about understanding, pattern, reason, and compiling research evidence (Briggs et al., 2012). The researcher subscribes to the interpretive epistemology, also known as the constructivist paradigm, meaning that data was interpreted to understand underlined meanings and make conclusions.

3.3 Research approach

The methodology that was used was based on the selected ontology and epistemology; therefore, a qualitative method was used. A qualitative research approach, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018), explores individuals or groups that ascribe to a social or human phenomenon. In this case, teachers were the individuals, and the management of overcrowded classrooms was the problem.

3.4 Research design

A research design refers to a strategy or plan that initiates the study and describes how participants were selected, and how data will be gathered and analysed (Maree, 2016). This study was conducted using a case study design. A case study assumes that in examining the content and other complex conditions related to the case, the researcher advances towards understanding the subject (Yin, 2012). In this instance, the content and other complex conditions were the management of learners' academic needs (content) in overcrowded classrooms (conditions). As suggested in the title of this study, the researcher intended to understand and describe the experiences of South African teachers that manage learners' academic needs in overcrowded primary school classrooms. The case study research design fits, as the researcher developed an in-depth analysis of the case (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Another reason why a case study was fitting, was because it investigated a contemporary phenomenon in-depth, and within its real-world context (Yin, 2018). The study was conducted by interviewing teachers whose reality is that they teach in overcrowded classrooms on a daily basis.

The following section thoroughly explains the case study design, where Bassey (2012) posits that an educational case study is an empirical enquiry which is:

- conducted within a localised boundary of space and time (a singularity)

- into *interesting* aspects of an educational activity, programme, institution, system, or work of an individual
- mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons
- in order to inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners or policy makers
- or the theoreticians who are working to these ends, and
- such that sufficient data are collected for the researcher to be able to:
 - explore *significant* features of the case
 - create plausible interpretations of what is found
 - test for the trustworthiness of these interpretations
 - constructs a *worthwhile* argument or story
 - relate the argument or story to any relevant research in the literature
 - convey *convincingly* to an audience this argument or story
 - Provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings or construct alternative arguments.

3.4.1 Advantages of the case study design

The use of a case study design was favourable to this study as it allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive, narrative, real-world understanding of what teachers in classrooms with more than 40 learners experience daily. No other research design would have had the desired outcome. The case study method allowed the researcher to directly explore interesting aspects of teaching in overcrowded classrooms, by conducting semi-structured interviews to collect data. The case study design also allowed for interpretation during the analysis phase, which was fitting considering the collected type of data.

3.4.2 Disadvantages of the case study design

Establishing contact with twelve different teachers at two different schools while working full time was challenging. However, the schools that were visited were in close proximity to the researcher. As for time, the researcher exercised good time management skills to complete the study in time. As with most qualitative studies, subjectivity remains a risk because of data collection methods such as interviews, and the fact that the findings rely on the researcher's interpretation. Therefore, the

interpretation and analysis skills of the researcher must be significant (Padilla-Diaz, 2015).

3.5 Target population

The target population of this study was primary schools in Midrand. The reasoning behind choosing primary schools was to enable the researcher to analyse a specific case in-depth. Using primary and high schools would have drawn the risk of cluttering the investigation. The objective of this study was to get a clear understanding of specific cases, and to streamline findings into sensible results. Exclusively investigating primary schools allowed this focus to occur. The study participants were experienced and novice teachers of two schools in Midrand, purposefully sampled. It is important to understand the experiences of people who work in the field.

One of the main criteria of the participants was that they had to be teaching and working in schools with overcrowded classrooms. Therefore, the sampling method that was applied was a purposive sampling method. Maree (2016) explains that purposive sampling happens where members of a sample are chosen with a purpose to represent a specific phenomenon. As the participants in this study needed to be representative of teachers in Midrand who worked in overcrowded classrooms, purposive sampling was the best sampling method to apply. The practicality of the study, given the resources available to the researcher, was an important factor to keep in mind when a method of sampling was chosen. While sampling schools, some challenges presented themselves, such as struggling to make appointments with teachers and gaining access to the schools, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on movement.

3.6 Sampling

3.6.1 Sample sites

Participants were purposefully sampled from two primary schools in Midrand with overcrowded classrooms. These schools have been selected as the researcher has worked in one of the schools and the other is a neighbouring school with similar circumstances. Researcher bias was avoided by making sure that the interview

questions were on point. Other than that, verbatim transcripts and audio recordings were made and are available on request. The average classroom size in these schools was 40 learners per classroom, deeming them perfect for collecting relevant data. Establishing contact with these schools was not too difficult, as the contact details of some teachers and school management team members in at least one of the two schools were available.

3.6.2 Sample method

The purposive sampling method was applied to accurately represent the general population. The criteria that were used when sampling teachers to interview was that the teachers' class size consisted of at least 40 learners.

3.6.3 Sample size

A total of twelve participants were purposively sampled. Six teachers were sampled from each school. This was done by first obtaining ethical clearance from the University and the GDE. Second, the principals of two schools (that were also purposively sampled) were contacted by the researcher to acquire their consent to interview teachers at their respective schools. Meetings were scheduled beforehand for the first school as the researcher had established a contact person in the school. Finding participants in the second school was done by entering the school and asking other staff members to find suitable teachers to interview. The initial plan was to interview three novice teachers and three experienced teachers at each school; however, this was not possible due to the school's demographics. Therefore, teachers who teach in the intermediate phase were interviewed. The interviews conducted with the participants were valuable and yielded sufficient data for analysis. Participants were relaxed and openly answered all questions asked by the researcher without hesitation.

3.7 Data collection instruments

The study was qualitative, meaning that data collection strategies had to be used to allow the researcher to interact with participants. Creswell (2009) explains that a significant characteristic of a qualitative study is that the researcher talks to, observes, and interacts with participants within their context. A case study looks at

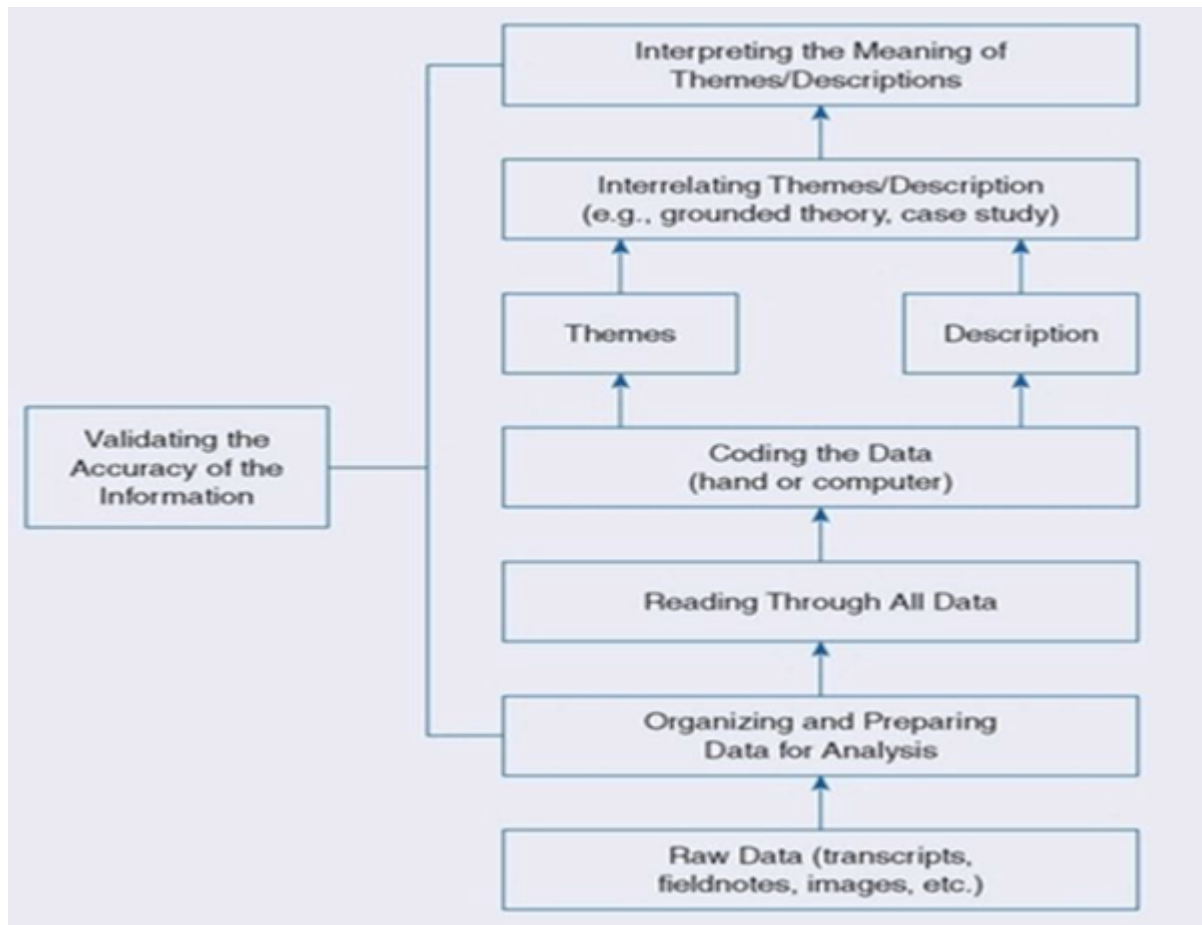
lived experiences, so data should be collected to enable the researcher to understand the physical experiences of the participants. The data collection method was semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms. A semi-structured interview is based on a line of inquiry established by the researcher in advance of the interview. But in the case of a semi-structured interview as opposed to the structured interview, the researcher needs to be attentive, as they are allowed to pursue new lines of inquiry that present themselves during the interview (Maree, 2016). This was very advantageous during data collection, as the researcher was free to have open conversations with the participants. In the interviewing process, if a topic presented itself that could be advantageous to explore, the researcher did so by following the prompts of the ongoing discussion. All interviews were recorded, with the written consent of the participants.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all safety protocols were followed. The researcher and all the participants wore facemasks and kept a social distance of at least 1.5 metres. The researcher's temperature was taken, and hands were sanitised and thoroughly screened before entering both schools. The necessary Covid-19 administration for entering a school was also completed at both schools visited. A separate document with interview questions was given to each individual teacher to prevent the spread of the virus, and after each interview, the document was destroyed and the participant's hands sanitised.

3.8 Data analysis

The process of data analysis has the purpose of explaining the nature of the phenomenon being studied, of arriving at general principles applicable to similar situations (Briggs et al., 2012). Although there are multiple strategies to analyse data, qualitative data often uses a general procedure. This procedure is explained by Creswell (2009), using the following diagram illustrated below:

Figure 3.1: Qualitative data analysis diagram



Source: Creswell (2009)

Creswell (2009) describes this diagram as linear and to be read from the bottom up, but in practice, all the steps are interrelated. The following steps as described by Creswell (2009) were used to analyse the data:

Step 1 - Preparation of data

Preparing the data to analyse started with describing the sample. This was done by defining the participants and the context in which the participants were interviewed and observed. Organising the data was the next step in preparing the data, and was necessary for keeping a clear mind and avoiding becoming overwhelmed by the amount of data. Interviews held with participants were recorded and were transcribed verbatim.

Step 2 - Reading the data

The next step in the data-analysis procedure was reading and re-reading the data. The first time reading the data was to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning (Creswell, 2009). The second time, data was read in detail to prepare for the third step.

Step 3 - Coding the data

The third step of the analysis process was coding the data. This step included carefully reading through transcripts and dividing them into meaningful units. Segments of data were labelled using descriptive words. The meaningful units were interpreted and described (Maree, 2016).

The following guidelines, as described by Creswell (2009), were used during the coding process:

- Reading all the transcripts and jotting down ideas as they came to mind,
- going through all transcripts in detail,
- making notes in the margin,
- formulating topics, abbreviating the topics,
- writing them next to appropriate segments, and
- Turning the topics into categories, organising the categories, and assembling all the data into the categories.

Step 4 - Description

This step involved creating a detailed description of the participants and dividing the data into themes that would later be used as headings in the findings section of the dissertation.

Step 5 - Representation

Describing the data in a narrative form was done during this step. In the case of this study, this step involved discussing themes and subthemes that emerged from the previous actions. A table with descriptive information on each participant was also included by the researcher in this step (Creswell, 2009).

Step 6 - Interpretation

This is the final step in the data analysis process, and it includes making meaning of the data. Creswell (2009) explains that asking questions such as “what were the lessons learned” captures the essence of the idea. The data was interpreted by firstly stating a finding by means of selecting relevant and useful quotations out of raw data, then confirming or disputing the finding in terms of the research questions and other available literature, and then finally adding the value of the finding to the study.

Proper analysis of the interviews enabled the researcher to explain teachers’ experiences in fulfilling learners’ academic needs in overcrowded classes.

3.9 Credibility

In qualitative research, the researcher is responsible for much of the data and how data is managed during the process of data collection, analysis, and reporting, as this positions the researcher as the main instrument in the study, collecting, analysing, interpreting, and reporting the findings of the study (Shufutinsky, 2020). This sets the opportunity for the researcher to be influenced by their own world views, ideologies, or culture. Therefore, it is essential to have systems in place to eliminate as much bias as possible. Shufutinsky (2020) further explains that self-transparency is important, and state that the reader should be able to understand what the researcher did while conducting the research. Therefore, explanations of exact procedures that took place to assure credibility are discussed below.

Maree (2016) names a few strategies that help to assure the credibility of a research project. These include the adoption of well-established research methods, a research design that fits the research question, and a theoretical underpinning that

is aligned with the research questions and strategies. The research method and design of this study are well in line with the main research question: “How do teachers manage learners’ academic needs in overcrowded classrooms?” A case study design allowed for a deeper understanding of the situation at both schools. The interview schedule that was used as a guide is attached to this dissertation as Appendix C. The only time the researcher deviated from the interview schedule was when an exciting line of inquiry presented itself. In this regard, the researcher was extremely careful not to guide the participant’s answers in a particular direction. The verbatim transcripts, as well as audio recordings of the interviews, are also available on request. As explained in the previous section, a transparent, step-by-step procedure was followed during the analysis phase of the study. The theoretical framework that underpins this research is aligned with the research questions that the researcher set out to answer.

3.10 Ethical and political considerations

Ethical considerations in research intend to keep participants safe from harm, build trust with participants, and ensure trustworthy outcomes from the study, which benefits society (Briggs et al., 2012). In this study, the researcher confirmed that the following was in place while conducting the research: Ethical clearance was applied for and accepted by the university's ethics board before contact was made with schools; schools that were contacted to participate in the study were asked to participate voluntarily, and they were not forced or persuaded in any way.

Participants were asked to sign a declaration that they were willing to participate (Appendix B). Permission was obtained from the participating schools by contacting and getting consent from principals, who were also asked to sign consent (Appendix A). The participants were assured that their identities and the identities of the institutions that they work for would be kept anonymous and would be given pseudonyms in the dissertation. They were not forced to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with, and no pressure was put on them to provide specific answers. The researcher embodied a passive role during the interviews. All participants were treated with the highest respect.

3.11 Significance of the study

The overcrowding of classrooms is not a topic that has received ample academic attention in South African literature. The findings of this study will contribute to the body of literature available on education management, law, and policy, allowing fellow researchers to use it as material. Teacher-training institutions can use the findings as material on how to manage overcrowded classrooms.

3.12 Limitations of the study

During the data-gathering phase of this study, it was anticipated that it would be difficult to establish contact with six school participants that were unknown to the researcher. However, one of the educators that worked at the first school where I conducted interviews had the contact details of the acting principal at the next school. Establishing contact after this was not difficult at all. Both schools were very accommodating and made the process easy and smooth without problems.

Another limitation that this study had was that the researcher had planned to interview three novice teachers and three experienced teachers from each school; however, the schools did not have this demographic of teachers working at the school.

This was mediated by interviewing intermediate phase teachers that were available during the days the researcher visited the schools. I believe that this adds a random element to the sample, which is positive as no bias whatsoever was used to choose participants.

3.13 Summary of the chapter

In chapter three explanations and justifications were provided on the specific research method used to conduct the study. The reasons behind sampling procedures and sample sizes were clarified as well as reasons for sampling particular schools. During this chapter, the researcher also explained in detail how data was analysed to draw the most accurate conclusions. Some ethical and political aspects were discussed as well as the limitations of the study. Finally, the possible significance of the study was addressed.

The following chapter shows the analysis procedure that was used and expands on the analysis of the raw data. The interview procedures that were followed are also explained and the participants that were sampled are described. Finally, analysis is done thematically.

Chapter 4 – Research Findings and Discussions

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 clarified the methodology used to do the research. This chapter discusses the findings of how teachers manage learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms. This is done by firstly describing the research settings and circumstances while conducting the research. The various participants (using pseudonyms) that were part of the study are described to create a complete picture of the setting. During the data analysis process, data was divided into themes; these themes are described comprehensively in this chapter. The complete data analysis process that was used is conveyed to make the process more transparent. Finally, the data is described and analysed using quotes as evidence from the participants.

4.2 Research setting and participants

It is important to note that while collecting data, schools were operating at a capacity of 50% because of Covid-19 restrictions. Logistically this meant that learners went to school in two groups – 50% of a class would be in the classroom on the first day, and they would be home the next day, while the other 50% of learners were in the school. This made for another exciting opportunity, as the research was about overcrowded classrooms, but classes were temporarily not overcrowded due to this legislation. This allowed for another interesting line of enquiry to be pursued simultaneously.

Below is a table and complete descriptions of participants' biographical data. This allows the reader become familiar with the participants that were interviewed, and to include the reader as transparently as possible.

Table 4.1: Participants' biographical data (n=12)

Participant	Gender	Experience	Subjects taught	Added experience
S1P1	Female	29 years	Afrikaans First additional language (FAL) Gr. 4 and 5	
S1P2	Female	18 years	English Home Language (HL) Grade 4 and 5, Afrikaans FAL Grade 7	
S1P3	Male	17 years	Mathematics Grade 6 and 7	HOD for Science and Mathematics
S1P4	Male	15 years	Creative Arts Grade 7, Social Sciences Grade 5 and 6, Life Skills Grade 5, Technology Grade 7	
S1P5	Male	21 years	Mathematics and Natural Sciences Grade 5	
S1P6	Female	8 years	Afrikaans FAL Grade 5-7, English HL Grade 7	
S2P1	Female	10 years	English HL Grade 7	HOD for languages
S2P2	Female	6 years	Life Skills Grade 4-6, Natural Science Grade 6	
S2P3	Female	32 years	Afrikaans FAL Grade 4	
S2P4	Female	25 years	English HL Grade 6	
S2P5	Female	15 years	Social Sciences Grade 6	HOD for Social Sciences and Economic Management Sciences. Before teaching: facilitator, trainer, curriculum development
S2P6	Female	30 years	Afrikaans FAL Grade 7	Deputy Principal

4.2.1 Description of the interviews

Interviews with teachers were held in their classrooms, or in the case of the unavailability of a classroom, interviews were conducted in another private room. Conducting interviews in private locations was to create a trusting environment where teachers were free to express their honest opinions. The availability of the teachers was a big concern, as the researcher did not want to put undue pressure

on the participants. The researcher ensured that teachers had enough time available for interviews. This was done by having teachers fill in schedules of when they had free periods and bookings were made in teachers' free periods.

Interviews were semi-structured, which meant that if a teacher mentioned something interesting related to the study, that line of enquiry could be pursued. This was done to ensure that the best possible data were collected. Two half working days were spent at the first school to accommodate the participants, and one whole working day was spent at the second school. The participants were very open and transparent and contributed willingly. Before all interviews, participants were asked to confirm that they were voluntarily participating in the discussions and if they were comfortable that the interviews were recorded.

4.2.2 Description of participants and schools

Participants were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, therefore in this section participants are referred to as S1P1 to S1P6 and S2P1 to S2P6.

All of the participants were teachers in public primary schools in the Johannesburg South area in Gauteng, South Africa. At the time of the interviews, schools were operating at a capacity of 50% to contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus. In practice, this meant that only half of the learners were going to school at a time.

The next section gives a brief summary of each of the participants.

S1P1 is a female teacher with 29 years of experience, mostly teaching in the Foundation Phase. She has been teaching Intermediate Phase since 2018. She describes herself as a passionate teacher who loves her job. She currently teaches Afrikaans FAL (first additional language) to Grade 4 and 5 learners. S1P1 teaches in classrooms of more than 40 learners. She believes that reading and writing are essential fundamental academic needs, but that these fundamental needs should be established in the Foundation Phase.

S1P2 is a female teacher with 18 years of experience. She currently teaches English HL (Home Language) to Grade 4 and 5 and Afrikaans FAL to Grade 7. The classes

that she teaches are at an average of 40 learners. She views writing and grasping new concepts as important academic needs and believes that struggling learners could be assisted by giving them extra time.

S1P3 is a male teacher with 17 years of teaching experience. He currently teaches Mathematics to Grade 6 and 7. He is also the HOD (Head of Department) for Mathematics and Science. The classes that he teaches also have an average of 40 learners. He believes that simple Mathematical principles are an essential academic need to foster in learners—simple addition, multiplication, and division skills.

S1P4 is a male teacher with 21 years of experience at the primary level. Before teaching in South Africa, S1P4 was a teacher in Zimbabwe. The classrooms that he teaches are at an average of 40 learners per classroom. He believes that participation is an important academic need, and because of social circumstances, some learners will not participate as they have other issues on their minds.

S1P5 is a male teacher with 15 years of experience. He currently teaches Creative Arts to Grade 7, Social Science to Grade 5 and 6, Life Skills to Grade 5, and Technology to Grade 7. The classes that he teaches are also at an average of 40 learners. He teaches in a public primary school in the Johannesburg East area that was operating at a 50% capacity during the time of the interviews.

S1P6 is a female teacher with eight years of experience. She currently teaches Afrikaans FAL to Grade 5 and 6, and English HL to Grade 7. The classes that she teaches are at an average of 40 learners per classroom. She believes that memorising and learning complex concepts is an essential academic need. She also recognises that there are language barriers in the languages she teaches, as Afrikaans and English are not the home languages of most learners in the school.

S2P1 is a female teacher with 10 years of experience. She currently teaches English HL to Grade 7 and serves as the HOD for English Home Language. The classrooms that she teaches are at an average of 40 learners per classroom. She believes that academics are important, but under current circumstances, coping skills are very important to teach the learners, as she notices that children are not coping well.

S2P2 is a female teacher with 6 years of experience. She currently teaches Life Skills to Grade 4, 5, and 6, and Natural Science to Grade 6. The classrooms that she teaches are at an average of 40 learners per classroom. She believes that out of a large curriculum, teachers must be able to extract what is important to teach. She also believes that it is important to know if learners are visual or auditory learners.

S2P3 is a female teacher with 32 years of experience. She currently teaches Afrikaans FAL to Grade 4 learners. The classrooms that she teaches are at an average of 40 learners per classroom. She believes that reading proficiency and basic Mathematical principles are fundamental academic needs.

S2P4 is a female teacher with 25 years of experience. She currently teaches English HL to Grade 6. The classes that she teaches are at an average of 40 learners per classroom. She believes that listening, reading, and writing skills are important academic needs. She is also of the opinion that participation from learners is an important academic need.

S2P5 is a female teacher with 15 years of experience. She currently teaches Social Sciences to Grade 6. The classes that she teaches are at an average of 40 learners per classroom. She is also serving as the HOD for Social Sciences and Economic Management Sciences. Before teaching, she was involved in educational training – she was an Early Childhood Development (ECD) facilitator, trainer, and curriculum developer. She believes that equipping learners with life and self-management skills is an important academic need.

S2P6 is a female teacher with 30 years of experience. She is currently teaching Afrikaans FAL to Grade 7. She also serves as the Deputy Principal of the school. The classes that she teaches are at an average of 40 learners per classroom.

4.3 Analysis of data

In the words of Walting and James (2012, p.1):

“Analysis is the researcher’s equivalent of alchemy - the elusive process by which you hope to turn raw data into nuggets of pure gold.”

Because this research study used a qualitative approach, the data analysis procedure relied on the researcher's skills to interpret the opinions and viewpoints of others. This meant that a series of deliberate, critical choices had to be made about the values of the collected data (Walting & James, 2012). Therefore, an interpretivist philosophy was used as a guide to extract meaning from data. Maree (2016) explains that when a researcher does this, they attempt to establish how participants make meaning of a specific phenomenon by analysing their perception, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings, and experiences. Maree (2016) explains that this is best achieved when research findings are allowed to emerge from significant themes in raw data, without the restraints of a more structured theoretical orientation.

The steps followed during the analysis of data are the steps described by Creswell (2009) that were explained in chapter 3 of this dissertation. These steps were as follows:

The first step in the data analysis process was preparing the data, which included transcription of recorded interviews. This was done firstly by importing raw recordings into online transcription software. The software produced transcripts were not extremely clear; consequently, recordings were played back while reviewing and fixing all transcripts to ensure maximum reliability. The researcher listened to the recordings of every participant several times while fixing slight errors made by the transcription software. Step two comprised of the researcher reading all transcripts multiple times, highlighting and extracting possible meaningful units that occurred. Color-coding was used to mark different units on the transcripts. Notes were taken while reading transcripts to extract possible themes that emerged from the units. Before representing the themes and subthemes, a full description of the participant's biographical data was made and was made available in the previous section as Table 4.1. The findings that emerged are discussed below.

4.4 Research findings

During the analysis phase of the research project, several themes emerged from the data that are discussed in this section. The themes emerged from answers given

to questions formulated using the research questions as a guiding reference. The identified themes thoroughly represent the data.

The table below illustrates the different themes that will be discussed:

Table 4.2: Emerging themes

Theme 1: The impact of Covid-19 on the management of overcrowded classrooms.	Subtheme 1.1: Impact of schools operating at 50% capacity Subtheme 1.2: Covid-19 impact on learners' emotional well-being
Theme 2: Managing academic needs in overcrowded classrooms.	Subtheme 2.1: Choice theory and overcrowded classrooms Subtheme 2.2: Managing discipline in overcrowded classrooms Subtheme 2.3: Negative aspects of overcrowded classrooms Subtheme 2.3: Dealing with the challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms Subtheme 2.4: Motivating teachers in overcrowded classrooms
Theme 3: How management supports teachers with overcrowded classrooms.	Subtheme 3.1: Understanding and support by the school management

4.4.1 Theme 1: The impact of Covid-19 on the management of overcrowded classrooms

Subtheme 1.1: Impact of schools operating at a 50% capacity

As stated in previous sections of this dissertation, schools were operating at a capacity of 50% during the interviews. This meant that for some time before the discussions, and during the time of the interviews, one-half of the learners would go to school on a particular day, and then the next day, the other half would go and receive the same lessons. This was done to lower the possibility of Covid-19 spreading in classrooms. However, this also meant that teachers were (for the time

being) not teaching in overcrowded classes. As a result, classrooms of 40, suddenly only had 20 learners at a given time. This out of the norm context created a perfect opportunity to try and understand the impact that these smaller classroom sizes had. This was also an excellent time to ask teachers about managing overcrowded classrooms because during this time they had 50% class sizes as a comparison. The opportunity was used to ask a few questions regarding the impact of the (then-current) situation. During this time, the curriculum was also amended by the DoE by editing the original 10-week curriculum into a 5-week curriculum, and removing work from the 10-week curriculum. This was done because learners would effectively only be at school for 5 out of 10 weeks (50% of the time). This so-called “curriculum trimming” involved removing less important and outdated content from the curriculum (Amin & Mahabeer, 2021). This allowed teachers to focus on the more critical work in the curriculum instead of putting pressure on them to complete the whole curriculum in half the time. The findings made in this regard, are described, and discussed in full in the section below.

It seems that the smaller classrooms during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic made day-to-day teaching easier for some teachers. Classrooms were smaller, and therefore easier to manage, and some challenges with discipline were eliminated. Teachers were also teaching in a less stressful classroom environment.

Yet, this did not seem to make a difference in the performance of the learners. However, this information could not be used as data to show the impact of smaller classrooms on academic outcomes because the situation had other variables. For example, learners were only going to school 50% of the time, teachers had to repeat lessons and teachers were unable to complete a full syllabus with the learners. These are just a few of the other variables. Therefore, the performance of the learners (under the described circumstances) was investigated and was used to show the influence of Covid-19 protocols on the academic achievement of learners in overcrowded classrooms.

Teachers had various viewpoints on the situation. Nonetheless, there were many correlations in the points made by teachers, and this made for interesting data. Below are some of the participant responses on the subtheme 1.1 - Impact of schools operating at 50% capacity.

Comparing the responses of the teachers, it seems that the reduction of the physical number of learners in the classroom made teaching easier and less stressful for teachers. Teachers also seem to feel that they have better control over the learners in their classroom. Under normal circumstances, these teachers would have an average of 40 learners in a classroom and would struggle in this regard.

S1P1 stated the following, *“I love it! If teaching could only be half of what we are used to teaching...”* and *“I’ve got control over everybody’s needs and challenges.”*

S1P2 suspected that in smaller classroom sizes, teachers are under less pressure and stated that, *“even as a teacher, you are not overwhelmed”*.

S1P4 believed that the smaller classrooms enabled teachers to manage their time more effectively, and that they could spend more time on individual learners as they physically had more time per learner.

S2P1 stated that under normal overcrowded circumstances, the behaviour was uncontrollable, but with the classes functioning at 50% capacity, the behaviour was easy to control.

S2P3 expressed that the half capacity allowed her to reach more children and enabled her to get to every individual child in the classroom.

In the disciplinary sense, S1P6 identified that a classroom with 20 learners was a lot easier to manage than a classroom with 40. The participant also declared that in a classroom of 20 learners it was easier to identify and work with learners that had fallen behind. She stated the following, *“At this stage, the slow learners, I can keep them on par with us, or I can give individual attention because I have more time to spend on teaching than discipline.”*

However, this participant also highlighted that it made teaching more convenient but also had no positive impact on academics. She also highlighted parental involvement is a challenge, *“The days’ learners who are not attending school have a tough day because they don’t complete the work. They don’t have the support at home.”*

The above statements made by participants show that teachers found it easier and less stressful teaching in classes that were not overcrowded. As shown above, this has been pointed out by a few of the participants, indicating accuracy. There is also academic literature that supports this finding. Muthusamy (2015) points out in a study that dividing learners in an overcrowded classroom into smaller groups makes them easier to manage. Asodike and Onyeike (2016) also strengthen this argument by stating that teachers prefer smaller classrooms, as they are easier to manage.

S2P4 stated the following regarding 50% capacity classrooms, *“...now that we have smaller classes, I’m able to form that relationship - even with children that have behavioural or academic problems, you know, you can speak to them and they know that you care, but in a big class of 40 learners, it’s lost.”*

The above statement from S2P4 was particularly interesting because Choice Theory, which is the theoretical framework guiding this research dissertation, explains that children have a need for belonging, and seek to fulfil this need in various ways. By establishing a kind of relationship or rapport with learners, teachers seem to be better in managing classrooms with a bigger learner-teacher ratio. More on this follows in the sections below.

Generally, parental involvement seemed to be a problem during 50% of school attendance. This may be because parents were working when learners were at home. The lack of their participation during this difficult time created other challenges that teachers dealt with during the Covid-19 pandemic. The problem of parental involvement was worse when learners had days off (days on which they did not have to attend school). Some participants complained that they would hand out work for learners to complete on these days and they would return to the school with the work not done. S1P6 stated that, *“they don’t have the support at home.”*

S2P2 remarked that the learners' academic performance may even have gotten worse, as the learners had less time with the teachers. Like others before her, she also highlighted that parental involvement was shallow during these circumstances, as parents were working when the learners were home. S2P2 stated, *“I think some kids are really, really falling behind because they don’t have that support at home.”*

Some parents are working so the kids are alone.” She also noted that discipline was easier to manage in a classroom of 20 learners than 40.

S1P3 was frustrated by the situation and said that, “...*actually, it’s a problem to us because you will be forced to repeat the same stuff and you are not actually going to finish the syllabus.*” The DoE already amended the syllabus, and still, some teachers found it challenging to complete. S1P3 also noted that teachers were forced to rush through concepts and were consequently unable to fully understand the complex concepts.

S2P5 explained that learners did not do the work they were given in their off days, which meant that teachers were limited to how much of the (already amended) curriculum they could cover. This also points to a lack of support or accountability from home. S2P6 concurred, stating that instead of learners working on the days they were not at school, they saw it as a holiday and did not do any work at all. She also observed that a strong partnership with parents would have made a big difference.

The statements above show that a lack of parental involvement makes it difficult to manage a classroom, even if the school is not overcrowded. This is supported in the literature by Segalo and Rambuda (2018), whose study show that parents are responsible for instilling moral values to support teachers. Without parental support, teachers are powerless.

These findings suggest that teachers teaching in overcrowded schools during the Covid-19 pandemic, under the protocols of the South African government, were impacted in the following ways:

- Classrooms and learners were easier to manage with regards to discipline. This was because only 50% of learners were in a class at any given time, taking the number of learners from an average of 40 per class to 20 per class.
- Teachers were able to provide more learners with individual attention, and were able to identify and assist more vulnerable learners easily.
- Teachers experienced problems with parental involvement, which might be due to parents needing to work on the days when learners were not at school.

Subtheme 1.2: Covid-19 impact on learners' emotional well-being

As mentioned, this research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic, and everything that came with it, had a massive impact on the way that most organisations function. It had a big influence on the emotional well-being of people around the world. While conducting the interviews for this study, there were some unique insights in this regard worth mentioning:

S2P1 stated learners were “*not coping with what is around them*”. After probing and pursuing this statement, she clarified that some learners were not coping very well with circumstances concerning losing family members, dealing with parents who lost their jobs, and the uncertainty of when schools will be open and closed. This teacher noticed that some learners were not coping well under these circumstances. She explained that it was for school management and staff members to be aware of the unique circumstances that the community was facing, and to be there for those learners to advise them. This finding is important to highlight because it shows that teachers pick up on these vital signs in smaller classrooms. In an overcrowded classroom, it is likely that a teacher would never notice particular challenges that learners face.

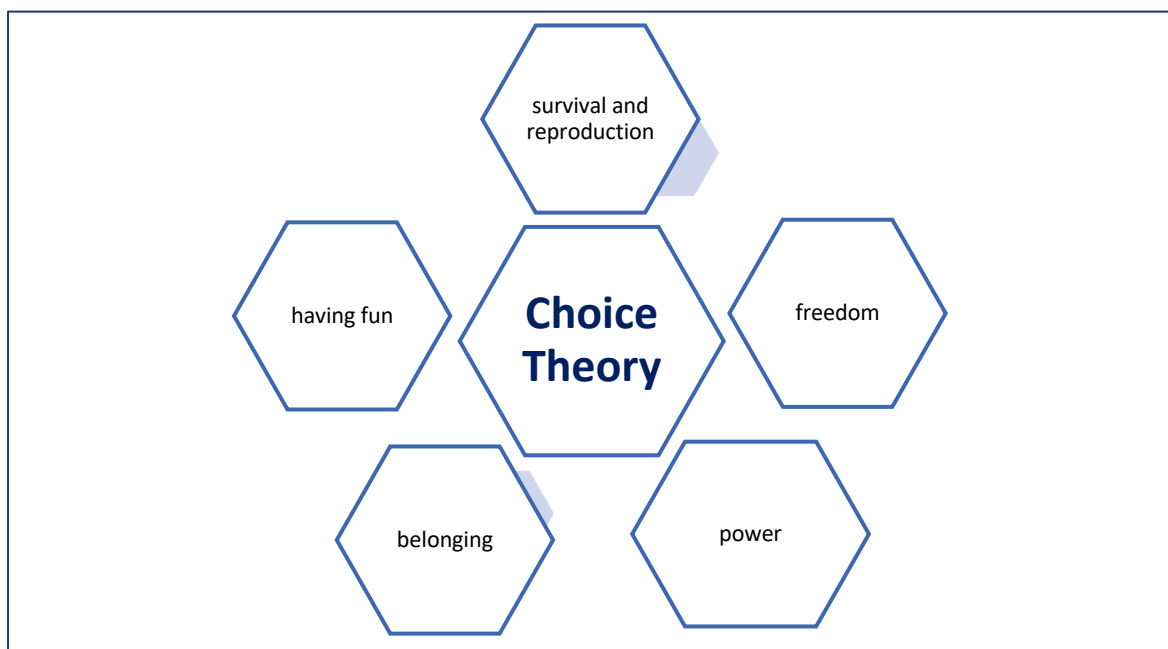
Although the previous theme and subtheme are not aligned with the research questions, the information gained from this unique data set is still valuable. This opportunity presented itself in the form of a possible route of inquiry, and this information might contribute to the body of knowledge available on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on school management in South Africa.

4.4.2 Theme 2 - Managing academic needs in overcrowded classrooms

Subtheme 2.1 Choice theory and overcrowded classrooms

The theoretical framework, on which this research study was based, is Choice Theory - a behavioral theory by William Glasser. The theory suggests that each person ultimately controls their own behaviour and is intrinsically self-motivated by five needs. The five needs diagrammatically represented below are survival, reproducing, freedom, and power, belonging, and having fun (Glasser, 2010).

Figure 4.1: Five needs of behavioural theory



Source: Adapted from Glasser (2010)

The theory suggests that every choice that we make is aimed at satisfying one or more of the five needs simultaneously or individually. If one or more of the five needs of a learner is not satisfied at school, it is unlikely that they will participate in activities and perform well. Moreover, in a classroom of 40 learners, it will be more difficult for learners to satisfy these needs.

Another critical aspect of the Choice Theory is the concept of our quality world. This is a version of the word that is viewed as perfect within each person. Inside the quality world, we include people and things that are most likely to assist us in satisfying our needs.

It is not possible to control the behaviour of learners in a classroom, but it is possible to create an environment where learners feel that they can satisfy some of their needs - an environment that makes learners want to include teachers in their quality world. According to Choice Theory, this will result in a classroom that is easier to manage and develop learners that are willing to work. A case study conducted by Irvine (2015) found that Grade 3 learners' needs for belonging were satisfied by a natural fluid structure of the classroom and constructive peer interaction. This was achieved by addressing problems in nonthreatening ways. In addition, group activities were built in to stimulate social interaction also addressing the learners' need for belonging.

The reason for mentioning this in the current section is because, during the interviews, some of the participants mentioned (in various ways) that to manage their overcrowded classroom, they created an environment where learners felt that they belonged, and such quotations are provided below. Other teachers mentioned that they tried to make learning fun. This was all done without having any prior discussions about Choice Theory with the participants, implying that some of the participants were unknowingly using the strategies explained by Choice Theory to enable them to better manage their classrooms. Below are a few responses by participants that suggest that they applied the basic principles of Choice Theory unknowingly, yet successfully in their classrooms.

S1P1 stated twice that she attempts to make teaching and learning as fun as possible - having fun being one of the 5 needs explained by Choice theory.

S1P5 was the first teacher to speak about belonging. When asked how he manages his classroom, he started by saying that, *"...a teacher needs to be vigilant, active and employ various techniques and strategies to be able to manage an overcrowded classroom."* After this he stated, *"Secondly, I make the learners belong"*.

This was interesting to as this seemed to be in accordance with Choice Theory. The researcher then continued to ask the teacher how he makes the learners feel like they belong. Upon which he replied that, *"... it starts with me showing respect towards them. And then in return, they will show respect towards me"*. This seems

to form a relationship between the teacher and the learners and helps him manage an overcrowded classroom.

S2P2 also explained that she creates an environment where the learners' needs for belonging can be satisfied. She stated that one of the first things she does to effectively manage an overcrowded classroom is to get to know the names of all the learners in the classroom - again, creating a relationship between the teacher and the learners. She also felt that it is essential to let the learners in the classroom know that every single one of them is recognised. By creating a relationship with the learners and building rapport with them, she creates an environment where learners feel like they belong.

Secondly, S2P2 stated that if the learners form a connection with the teacher, they tend to work harder as they feel recognised and important. She continued to state, *"As soon as I started building relationships with my children, then I didn't have discipline issues, so they would behave."*

This is in accordance with the statement by S1P5, *"start by showing learners respect, and in turn, they will show the teacher respect."* This builds a relationship between the learners and the teacher. Building a connection between these two parties seems to make the management of an overcrowded classroom an easier task.

S2P4 firstly stated that as a teacher in an overcrowded classroom, it is important to be on your feet, walking around because it makes learners feel that you are there, you are always present, and can be accessed at any time. S2P4 then concurred with previous participants that it is vital to build a relationship with the learners, and stated, *"... when they know you care and that you are really there for them, they start listening. It changes the dynamic in your classroom."*

This was the viewpoint of three different teachers. They all agreed that establishing a positive relationship, and creating an accepting environment where learners are enabled to fulfil their needs, make overcrowded classrooms easier to manage. What these teachers were describing, was that they make the learners in the classroom feel like they belong there. Doing this, they thereby created an environment where learners were able to satisfy their need for belonging and having fun, thus adding

the teachers to their quality world. The available literature supports this finding on Choice Theory. The people included in our quality world are associated with needs being satisfied and therefore play an important role in a person's life. We listen to people that form a part of our quality world (Glasser, 1997). Asodike and Onyeike (2016) confirmed that a harmonious classroom is dependent on keeping a good relationship between all members of the class.

Subtheme 2.2: Managing discipline in overcrowded classrooms

It is a well-known reality that managing an overcrowded classroom instead of a regular-sized classroom is demanding and perplexing. Due to the complicated undertaking of managing the discipline of learners, teachers use various approaches and often combine strategies to navigate the challenge of ill-discipline.

S1P1 was of the opinion that the teacher must set a goal, and the learners must understand the purpose from the beginning of an academic year - a strategy used by other participants as well. She also felt that to retain the learners' attention, teachers needed to keep up with the inclinations, fads, and trends that interest learners. She did this by watching videos on YouTube, which helped her to understand that sometimes an ironic comic meme on TikTok was an excellent ice-breaker to begin a lesson. The mind-set that learners must be aware of the teachers' goals from the beginning of a class lesson was a shared mind-set by a few of the other teachers as well.

S1P6 was strict in maintaining classroom discipline despite the apparent challenges. She stated that the learners knew exactly where they stood with her. The learners were made aware of the consequences of their actions and the possible disciplinary scenarios they may face. S2P1 concurred with the practice of setting ground rules upfront with learners' stating that, "*...they know where I stand at the beginning of the year when we draft our code of conduct.*"

The teachers from the school believed that learners must be included in the process of making rules, and that the learners should at least be clear on what the boundaries of the actions that were acceptable and non-acceptable of the classroom were.

S2P5 also highlighted the importance of setting ground rules, and like the other participants, she stated that the reason for this was, “... *so the learners know what to expect from each lesson*”. Examples of rules included that learners must raise their hand before speaking, learners must not interfere while the teacher is talking, and they must not be rude to the teacher or one another. She also concurred with other participants that learners must come up with their own rules so that they know that it is coming from them.

S2P6 thought that a teacher must “*lay down rules*”. She felt that there needed to be strict boundaries and clear consequences when those boundaries were exceeded. Some of the participants employed classroom management strategies that were not in accordance with their colleagues' methods. These strategies mostly had to do with managing disciplinary issues in overcrowded classrooms.

When asked how they manage an overcrowded classroom, S1P2 stated, “...*it's very difficult, you have to be firm, and you have to be alert. And you must know your kids.*” This participant found it difficult to manage an overcrowded classroom and her strategy to address the classroom ill-discipline was to be firm.

S1P3 stated, “...*when I get to the class, I have to institute discipline first because you can't teach effectively without discipline.*”

He also stated that he gave learners a lot of work so that they would not have time to play when their work was done. Another strategy that he used to manage the classroom was doing group work or having the learners work in pairs. S2P3 described that she manages her classroom “*with great difficulty*” due to the discipline issues caused by the number of learners in the classroom. She explained that teachers get stressed managing discipline as well as academics. Other strategies implemented by S2P4 included extra classes during break times, marking work thoroughly, and giving a lot of feedback - good as well as bad.

There were various strategies that teachers used to manage the discipline of learners in an overcrowded classroom. The most prominent was to set boundaries at the beginning of the year and include learners when setting those boundaries. Teachers explained that by doing so, the learners feel that when they break the rules, they break their own rules instead of the restrictions being forced upon them

by teachers. Other strategies included being firm and alert, giving learners a lot of work, doing group work, and giving regular feedback to learners. This finding is supported by Asodike and Onyeike (2016) who agrees that teachers should set and communicate boundaries early on. The finding is also partly substantiated by Charles (2020), who found that the strategies teachers use to manage overcrowded classrooms primarily include group discussions. Another study done by Tahir, Khan and Aurangzeb (2019) also found that teachers involve learners in formulating classroom rules and procedures.

This finding thus adds to the available literature on the management of overcrowded classrooms that teachers make rules, set boundaries, and communicate them to learners at the beginning of the year, and that these assist teachers to manage large classrooms.

Subtheme 2.3: Negative aspects of overcrowded classrooms

Teaching in an overcrowded classroom can be demanding, as it creates several challenges. The interviewed participants all teach in classrooms with an average of 40 learners per classroom. It is also important to note that they teach not only 40 learners but also multiple classes of 40 learners. Teachers that teach in classrooms that are not overcrowded are unlikely to face these challenges, or might encounter them in a less significant manner.

S1P1 mentioned that basic skills like reading and writing were lacking in her Grade 4 and 5 Afrikaans classes. This might be because learners were in overcrowded classrooms during the foundation phase and fell behind. Secondly, she stated that the learners were not focused or dedicated, resulting in learners falling behind. S1P2 said that learners did not do their work in class, nor did they complete their homework. When this happened, teachers had to give these learners a chance to catch up, and in an overcrowded classroom where teachers are already under time pressure, this created more stress. Time pressure seemed to be a problem faced by some of the other participants as well.

S1P3 stated, *“That’s the challenge! Time is not enough. Remember you’ll be teaching for an hour only, and if I have 40 learners, and let’s say 10 learners are*

actually facing challenges, for you to move around and help those learners individually, time won't be enough."

He believes that extra time is needed to help the weaker learners - extra time spent only with the more vulnerable learners in need of additional academic support. The first school visited by the researcher had a program called Re-teaching, which involves teachers staying after school during specific time slots for the individual subjects that they teach, to assist learners who do not understand work or who have fallen behind.

It is also the experience of S1P5 that learners do not work in class, he explained, *"Learners who don't want to listen, some learners who deliberately don't want to take instructions, uhm, poor cooperation from the learners and even from the parents."*

Again, highlighting parental involvement is a challenge. Almost all participants perceived the fact that learner's fall behind, and that they have no time to get to those learners to help them as a major challenge created by overcrowded classrooms. S1P4 agreed with these participants stating, *"So even if you identify a learner needs help, you might end up spending more time on one learner and ignoring the other learners."* He continued to say that this puts the other learners in the class at a disadvantage.

Correspondingly, S1P6 states, *"The challenge is then that you lose kids that don't understand the work or gasp as quickly as others."* Weaker learners tend to fall behind in overcrowded classrooms and teachers do not have the time or capacity to assist them.

S2P1 explained that she was unable to reach out to all the learners and struggled to make contact with individual learners. She also highlighted there not being enough time to get to all the learners in the classroom. S2P2 concurred with the above-mentioned participants stating that is very hard to keep track of all the learners that need support in the classroom. She also explained, like the other participants, that many learners need support in basic skills like reading and comprehending, and once more that learners do not have support at home, stating, *"... a lot of children don't have support at home, so they need extra support from*

the teacher and then trying to keep track of all of that, plus the administration that a teacher has...”

S2P2 stated, *“It’s impossible to get to every child you know, the classrooms are so jam-packed physically, it’s impossible to access every child because there is no room or space for walking and to go around and mark books and do observations and things like that.”*

S2P5 believed that the challenge that teachers face in overcrowded classrooms is mainly learner support, as it is very difficult to provide support to learners that are academically challenged, and there is no space for individual attention. She explained that teachers become despondent because they must now work during their lunch breaks and after school to provide the necessary support. She concurred with the other participants that this is very tiresome to teachers. She stated, *“The teacher becomes tired and restless because it’s a lot you know, the demand from the government in terms of documentation and forms - it’s a lot! If you have 40 learners in a class and you’ve got 10 learners that are struggling, it’s a battle.”*

S2P3 also explained that unrealistic administrative demands from the DoE, paired with the challenge of managing the academic needs of the learners in an overcrowded classroom, cause teachers to get fatigued and stressed out. S2P4 also discussed teacher fatigue.

In summary, teachers in overcrowded classrooms could not support learners who fall behind, and struggled to be there for learners that grapple with a lack of individual attention. It was also found that learners who did not do their work and fell behind were common in larger classrooms. Finally, it was also found that teachers got stressed out and fatigued easily in overcrowded classrooms. These findings are supported in the academic literature by Loh Epri (2016), who states that teachers found it difficult to assess students individually. Teachers could not support learners with special needs because they had too many learners in a classroom. This is also supported by another study that found that teachers cannot give enough individual attention in overcrowded classrooms (Kambuga, 2013). Concerning teachers’ stress levels, Khan and Iqbal (2012) also found that teachers in large classrooms felt discouraged, overwhelmed, and stressed with the space shortage.

The above findings are well-founded in academic literature. Teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms cannot provide learners with individual attention. This results in learners falling behind academically. It also means that learners who are already behind or struggling academically are struggling even more in overcrowded classes.

Subtheme 2.3: Dealing with challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms

This theme is dedicated to showing the strategies teachers implemented to deal with the challenges they were facing in overcrowded classrooms. In subtheme 2.1 on the Choice Theory in the classroom, the strategies that teachers used to manage overcrowded classrooms related to the Choice Theory was explained. In subtheme 2.2 teachers' approaches to deal with disciplinary problems were described. In this subsection, other techniques that teachers use to deal with challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms will be clarified.

S1P2 dealt with the challenges presented by overcrowded classrooms by ensuring that she knew her learners. In a classroom of 40 learners, it is not easy to see who is working and who is not working. S1P2 that if teachers know the learners they teach, this will not be a problem.

With challenges regarding non-submission of activities, S1P3 chose to engage parents to attempt to get parents involved in their children's academics. He also managed the classroom by giving the learners a lot of work to keep them occupied. Besides this, he made the learners write “end of unit tests” every two weeks. He thought that this forces some learners to prepare for other essential assessments. For learners that fell behind, “re-teaching” happens. Rete aching is where students who fall behind attend extra classes presented after school by the teacher who teaches a specific subject.

S1P5 stated the following, *“I employ a teaching strategy whereby I target the weakest learners, and then when I deliver the lesson, I make sure that the weakest learner understands. So, if the usually struggling learner understands, this means that probably almost all of the other learners have understood.”*

S1P6 explained that if a learner fell behind, she did not do anything to assist the learner, as the learner had to take responsibility. She stated the following, *“I leave them. You fall off the bus; you stay off the bus. So, you decide now, are you going to run behind the bus to get yourself on, are you just going to sit next to the road and sulk? Because I don’t have the time to go back and sit with you and make sure that you are fine to get back in the bus.”*

Setting ground rules is critical to S2P1. However, diligent planning of lessons and activities was most important to her. She believed that with proper planning, managing a large classroom is possible. She stated, *“So, my main teacher strategy is to plan, say for example, when I talk about planning, uh, for next week, my plan is ready, which means I have detailed information on what the kids are supposed to do per day.”*

S2P2 concurred with this, *“Have you prepared? Make sure that you are very prepared walking into the classroom knowing exactly what you are going to be doing with those children for the day.”*

She also reiterated that it was essential to form a relationship with the learners. She noticed that if learners did not have good relationships with teachers, they tended to have a block against those teachers, and they did not want to work in their classes.

S2P3 placed learners in groups according to personalities - she stated this allowed teachers to get the best out of everybody. She also stated that having groups in the class made moving around the classroom easier as there was more space. She also concurred with the previous participant that it is important to get to know the learners as it is easier to manage them if you know them.

S2P4 used WhatsApp groups and Microsoft Teams for better communication with her learners. She also has an open-door policy, which means that she is always accessible to her learners when she is at school.

S2P5 believes that she must keep the learners engaged and interested in the lesson. One of the ways she did this was by doing group work with the learners and

giving each learner in the group something like a simple task of timekeeping to be responsible for. She indicates that the learners love having responsibility.

There are various strategies that teachers use to deal with the challenges that present themselves in overcrowded classrooms. There is quite a variety of challenges that teachers deal with in these circumstances. The responses were vast, and no single strategy seems to be more effective than the others to deal with these challenges. These strategies include knowing the children you teach, being extremely well prepared for lessons, innovative classroom layouts, group work, and clear communication. None of these findings are well documented in academic literature; therefore, they can be categorised as a new contribution to findings in the field.

Subtheme 2.4: Motivating teachers in overcrowded classrooms

The previous sections and chapters show that overcrowded classrooms mostly have negative associations. Although it may be true that the situation of crowded classrooms is negative, the researcher thought it would be interesting to find out if teachers that teach in these situations sometimes have positive experiences. In other words, what motivates teachers in overcrowded classrooms? The data shown below are participants' responses when asked about positive characteristics of their teaching situation.

For S1P1, learners who did their utmost in the classroom and who showed improvement made her positive. She put it as, “...*the learner who started off struggling, to see that learner at the end of the year growing, showing growth, improvement. It is, I cannot describe the excitement, the reward that you feel at the end of the day.*”

S1P3 agrees with her colleague. A positive experience for her was to see results. “...*when you come with a new concept you teach the kids, then you can see that these kids understand, they participate, they will ask questions, they will show interest*”. She was also in accordance with S1P1 it was uplifting at the end of a year to see the learners who were achieving.

S2P3 also agreed with this by stating, *“It’s always been seeing children grow, seeing children respond to you, and getting them to feel positive about themselves and their academics.”* S1P2 also experienced cooperative learners as well as colleagues that were supportive and positive. S2P5 also added to this by stating that she felt positive when learners got good results and when they were working with enthusiasm. S2P4 agreed with him, explaining that a supportive teacher and HOD network helps. She said, *“So it’s great that I can go to any colleague and ask for assistance. Also, it’s great that management has an open-door policy where I can at any time speak to anyone in management about concerns.”*

S1P5 enjoyed creating a conducive environment for the children and being creative with how he presented his lessons. *“To make learners learn and enjoy learning and participate.”*

S2P2 also enjoyed the opportunity to get creative and she liked to challenge herself to be better in her situation.

The findings in the above subtheme are entirely new. Positive experiences of teachers teaching in overcrowded classrooms have not been documented at all. This finding is important from an educational leadership point of view as it reveals a few things that teachers are motivated by, even while teaching in substandard circumstances. An educational leader can use this information to motivate staff.

4.4.3 Theme 3: How management supports teachers with overcrowded classrooms

Subtheme 3.1: Understanding and support by the school management

Understanding how teachers manage the various aspects of overcrowded classrooms is essential and it is clear that managing overcrowded classrooms is not an easy task for teachers. Therefore, the researcher believed that it was important to investigate and understand how teachers were supported by school management teams in their struggle to manage overcrowded classrooms. This section will show responses by teachers when asked how school management teams help them deal with overcrowded classes.

It is also important to understand that school management teams alone cannot solve the problem of overcrowded classrooms in their respective schools - there are too many other influences. For example, schools that are in communities with a low socio-economic status cannot charge high school fees (or sometimes any school fees at all). This results in schools not appointing extra teachers or building extra classrooms. Therefore, it is vital to understand the role that school management teams can play in managing overcrowded classrooms.

S1P1 explained that school management teams could not do anything about overcrowded classrooms. However, she stated that the school management teams attempted to keep classes as small as possible by asking new parents not to enrol their learners in subjects that already have full classes. However, this attempt was not always successful, as pointed out by S1P6, who felt no support from management whatsoever. She explained that the classes that she teaches are already on 42, 43, and even up to 46 learners per classroom, but management would still put more learners in those classrooms.

S1P2 agreed that there is not much that school management teams can do about overcrowded classrooms. She believed that management teams should not accept more learners when classrooms have reached the maximum manageable capacity. She stated that management should turn away excess learners sent from the DoE, especially if the school has reached capacity. However, this is not as simple as it seems.

S1P3 concurred with the previous two participants that school management cannot do anything about overcrowded classrooms. He stated, *“What they can only do is to have more teachers if they have more teachers and more classes mean extra money to the school.”*

If the school does not have money or cannot raise a substantial amount of money, they cannot appoint teachers or build classrooms. S1P5 also believed that there was nothing that management could do regarding classes that were overcrowded, and that school management teams were under pressure from the DoE. He held the view that this caused the pressure to trickle down to the teachers to be able to deal with and manage overcrowded classrooms.

S2P1 believed that management could only play a supportive role in managing overcrowded classrooms. She explained that teachers who are a part of the school's management team have different timetables to the regular teachers. Therefore, management has the time to walk into teachers' classrooms and support them by assisting them with paperwork and marking. By doing this, management takes away some of the pressure that teachers feel in overcrowded classrooms.

S2P2 supported other participants' argument that there is very little that management could do about overcrowded classrooms. However, management supports teachers by ensuring that resources are available and working conditions acceptable. She stated, *"They make sure that we have paper, that there's ink, that all the things that we do need, uhm, they are trying to organize our smart boards and our WIFI and just trying to make the technical aspects in the classroom easier..."*

S2P3 also agreed with previous participants, stating, *"How can they? This is a government thing; they just do as the government says..."* She also believed that the only thing that management could do was to support teachers. Regarding disciplinary problems, S2P4 described that if there were any behavioural problems, management dealt with them immediately - she believed that this makes it easier to manage a classroom of 40 learners.

S2P5 also experienced management as playing a supportive role. She stated the following, *"...we all walk around, and if we find any issues and anyone, a teacher, we check with them, check to see if there are any issues. They will tell you and management, we normally take the child out, we, you know, give the child a talk - if it's beyond what we can handle, we get a psychologist..."*

In this way, management supports teachers by helping them to deal with disciplinary issues. S2P6 is the deputy principal of the second school. She also explained that management assisted teachers by helping them deal with children presenting disciplinary issues.

In the first school, none of the teachers felt supported by their management teams in the management of overcrowded classrooms. It was clear that school management teams alone could not eradicate the issue of overcrowded

classrooms; however, in the second school, all the teachers explained that they at least felt supported by management in dealing with the challenges that were presented by overcrowded classrooms. This showed that effective school management teams were able to play a supportive role for teachers who teach in large classrooms. Still, they could not necessarily solve the problem of overcrowded classrooms. These findings addressed the third research question, on how the challenges in managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms are addressed in respective schools.

4.5 Summary of the chapter

In chapter 4, the researcher described the raw data that was collected through interviews with participants. The situation during the time of the interviews was described as to equip the reader with a full picture of the case study. A total of two schools, six teachers per school participated in the study. A summary of all the participants who took part in the study was also depicted in this chapter, as well as the various roles they play at their perspective schools. Raw data was presented in the form of descriptions and quotations of answers given by participants to questions asked by the researcher. Data was divided into three main themes and eight subthemes to accommodate the process of data analysis. The main themes that were identified out of the data were the impact of Covid-19 on overcrowded classrooms; managing overcrowded classrooms; and how management support teachers in overcrowded classrooms.

The next chapter ties everything together by discussing the findings of the study according to the themes analysed in chapter 4. The significance of the study and possible contributions are also discussed.

Chapter 5 – Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction to the chapter

In chapter 4 the collected data was presented, and the analysis was done according to emerging themes. Chapter 5 attempts to use the analysed data to answer the research questions that were put forth at the start of this research study. A summary of the research findings will also be given. Furthermore, in this chapter, the researcher will align the findings according to the literature that is already available on the topic to show the knowledge gap that is being filled by the research. The implications of the findings will also be presented as well as recommendations for further study on the topic.

5.2 Retrospective summary

The process of researching and writing a dissertation has impacted my life greatly and taught me a lot. Being an impatient person, I have learned that patience is a vital part of any big project, as patience allows one to think clearly and make good decisions. I have also developed an appreciation for research and the part it plays in advancing knowledge.

The journey was not an easy one. I experienced a lot of challenges along the way, everything from serious health problems to problems in my marriage. However, this also taught me a valuable lesson - you will keep on facing challenges in life, so you have to be resilient and able to metaphorically “stand up” when the daily challenges of life weigh down on you.

I will forever be grateful for the valuable relationships that I have built with numerous people along the way, I am also grateful for the journey and the knowledge that I have gained. I believe that the experience and knowledge gained from writing this dissertation have laid an excellent foundation to pursue a PhD when my health and God permits.

The research questions that this study attempted to answer and guided my research endeavour were as follows:

Main research question:

How do teachers manage learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms?

Sub research questions:

1. How do teachers manage discipline in overcrowded classrooms?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter in managing the academic needs of learners in overcrowded classrooms?
3. How are the challenges in managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms addressed in respective schools?

5.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers that teach in overcrowded classrooms manage the academic needs of the learners in those classrooms. What are meant by educational needs are all needs that learners may have in an academic institution. In this dissertation, the needs referred to are things such as learning in an environment where one can achieve academically and getting the necessary support from teachers to be able to succeed.

The research questions were used to design an interview schedule (see appendices) to gather data from participants that assisted in answering the research questions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed by dividing the data into themes that emerged from the data. The themes that emerged were used to draw conclusions and to answer the research questions. The data was also compared to the available literature to indicate similarities and differences.

5.4 Summary of research design and methods

The research design used to conduct this research study was the case study design. This was used as two schools were investigated under real world circumstances. The two schools investigated during this study were situated in Midrand in the Johannesburg South district of Gauteng, South Africa. The sampling method that was used to sample the schools was the purposive sampling method. The reason for using this sampling method was that the researcher had to be able to find schools that had overcrowded classrooms - which are a specific criterion. For the

sake of convenience, the schools were located close to each other. A total of twelve teachers were randomly sampled by asking schools to allow the researcher to speak with 6 of the teachers in their respective schools. To keep the sample as random as possible, the only other criteria were that teachers had to be teaching Grades 4 to 7. Semi-structured interviews were held with participants, allowing the researcher to deviate from the interview schedule, should an interesting line of inquiry present itself.

5.5 Summary of Demographical data

Participants who took part in this study were all teachers who teach in schools with overcrowded classrooms in Midrand, South Africa. This information is depicted in chapter 4) as summaries the demographical data of participants.

5.6 Summary of the main findings

Firstly, the Covid-19 pandemic caused schools to adapt their policies on how learners were able to attend schools in South Africa. Schools were (at the time of the interviews) only allowed to operate at a capacity of 50%, which meant that half of the learners were at school at a time, and it also meant that teachers that were teaching in overcrowded classrooms, abruptly taught in classrooms with half of the learners. This created an opportunity to investigate the impact thereof on the management of overcrowded classrooms.

It was found that classrooms had fewer learners, making teaching easier for teachers. In smaller classrooms, teachers were able to manage their time more effectively, and they were able to get to learners who struggled in class. Teachers also found it easier to handle discipline in smaller classrooms and were more likely to notice challenges that learners were going through in their personal lives, enabling teachers to support learners on another level.

This study also found that teachers who were already able to create a good relationship with the learners in their classrooms could better manage their classrooms.

Teachers found it challenging to handle discipline in overcrowded classrooms. Teachers used various strategies to manage discipline in overcrowded classrooms, but not one particular strategy stood out.

Teachers struggled to support learners who fell behind in overcrowded classrooms as they did not have the extra time. Parental support was also lacking in both schools, leaving teachers with the responsibility to teach and support, which fatigued teachers and stressed them out. To deal with this, teachers needed to be extra prepared for their classes and know the learners they teach.

It was the teachers' perspective that their management teams were unable to deal with overcrowded classrooms as a whole and that this responsibility sits with the DoE. The only role that management was able to play (according to teachers) was to support teachers in dealing with the challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms.

The findings also showed that although teaching in classrooms was primarily negative, teachers still have positive experiences despite their respective contexts.

5.7 Main research findings – Significance of the study

In this section, the findings of this research study will be discussed diligently, and the significance thereof will also be considered. This is done by dividing the findings into themes of managing overcrowded classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic; challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms; successfully managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms, and school management's role in the management of overcrowded classrooms.

Managing overcrowded classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic

Although this study was not aimed at investigating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on overcrowded classrooms, the situation at the time of the investigation created an opportunity to find out from teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms how they were impacted by classrooms only being half full (not packed beyond capacity anymore). What follows are the findings that were made by this investigation.

The smaller classrooms had a positive impact on the way teachers in overcrowded classrooms teach. In smaller classrooms, teachers experienced less stress and did not get overwhelmed easily. Also, in smaller classrooms, teachers were able to get to individual learners and assist learners who were struggling academically.

Whilst this was not enough data to suggest that smaller teacher: learner ratios make a significant difference in quality education, it is still noteworthy as the data was collected by talking to teachers who were teaching in overcrowded classrooms as well as smaller classrooms in a very short time frame - they were, therefore, able to compare the experience of teaching in both situations truly. However, the smaller classrooms' impact on the learners' academic performance could not be investigated in this way, as other variables played a part.

Challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms

Teaching and learning can be daunting and very challenging in overcrowded classrooms. This study found that one of the many challenges experienced by teachers in crowded classrooms was disciplinary issues. In a classroom of 40 learners, teachers struggled to control the discipline of the learners, making it challenging to teach. Disciplinary issues faced by teachers in overcrowded classrooms were challenges such as learners who did not work in class (as this rarely gets noticed by teachers in classrooms with too many learners). Intending to mitigate this, teachers used the following strategies: They do their best to get to know the learners more personally. Teachers who knew the learners well knew who would work in class and who would not. It was also found that being well-prepared for classes really helped teachers to deal with the challenges presented by overcrowded classrooms. When disciplinary problems or problems of non-submission of work got too severe, teachers attempted to get learners' parents involved.

It was also found that in overcrowded classrooms, basic skills like reading and writing were lacking - this is possible because learners were also in overcrowded classrooms during their previous years, causing weak learners to fall behind and not catch up.

The challenge that most teachers in overcrowded classrooms faced was the issue of learner support. Between a large number of learners in a classroom and dealing with disciplinary matters, teachers did not have time during class to support learners who did not understand the work; causing learners to fall behind with work even more, creating more challenges for teachers. This was dealt with by teaching extra classes to the weaker learners after school as well as some teachers supporting learners during their lunch breaks. However, this added to the fatigue and anxiety that teachers in these strenuous situations already experience.

There are many learners in schools that require emotional support. This study showed that in overcrowded classrooms, teachers were not always able to help learners with emotional barriers as they sometimes did not even know or notice that learners have emotional barriers.

Successfully managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms

This study aimed to find out how teachers that teach in overcrowded classrooms successfully manage the learners' academic needs in those classrooms. It was found that the most successful way in which teachers managed learners in overcrowded classrooms, was to build successful working relationships with the learners that they teach. Teachers also described this as forming a connection with the learners. Teachers explain that as soon as they started building relationships with their learners, the learners would start behaving and working in class. Teachers who attempted to create a teaching environment where they made learners feel like they belong in the classroom as well as teachers who attempted to make learning fun, tended to be able to better manage a large group of learners.

This substantiates William Glasser's Choice Theory, which is the theoretical framework underpinning this study (see chapter 2).

Teachers who created an environment where learners are able to satisfy their needs as described by Choice Theory seemed to be able to manage learners in overcrowded classrooms better. Learners included teachers who enabled them to meet their needs into their quality world and excluded those teachers who try to use

discipline methods and old teaching strategies, enabling specific teachers to have a good working relationship with their learners.

The role of school management in the management of overcrowded classrooms

To reduce the teacher/learner ratio in school classrooms, schools need to be able to build extra classrooms and appoint additional teaching staff. School management teams are unable to fix the problem of overcrowded classrooms without having the required financial resources. Schools with overcrowded classrooms are primarily situated in areas with a low socioeconomic status, therefore rendering the schools in the area unable to source financial resources.

The fact that the school management teams cannot fix the problem of overcrowded classrooms does not mean that the school management teams play no role in the management of the crowded classrooms. This study found that teachers who experienced support from their management teams were generally more optimistic and willing to deal with challenges caused by overcrowded classrooms as opposed to teachers whose management teams did not support them at all.

School management teams can support teachers by being accessible. They can also support teachers by helping them deal with issues caused by overcrowded classrooms that make teaching difficult, such as disciplinary issues.

5.8 Implications of the study

5.7.1 Implications for educational policy

Educational policy writers can refer to this study when reviewing the current policies on classroom sizes as it will be informative on the issue of why classrooms should not be overcrowded. The study can also be used as a reference for determining how to distribute funding and teachers to different schools to begin to dispense with schools with large teacher: learner ratios - albeit one at a time. In light of teachers not being able to support learners emotionally, policy writers may use the findings of this research study to increase the number of educational psychologists/therapists that are allocated to public schools. Policymakers may also

gain insight into the fact that teachers are struggling to manage disciplinary problems of learners and that they need some sort of support from the department to enable them to deal with discipline.

5.7.2 Implications for practice

Educational training institutions can use these findings to inform and educate pre-service teachers about the situation in overcrowded classrooms and the challenges that teachers may deal with in these classrooms. This will enable teachers to be better prepared when they enter the teaching profession. Secondly, the findings of this study can be used to educate teachers on how to best deal with overcrowded classrooms, should they ever be confronted by them.

Management of schools can use the findings of this study to inspire teachers to build quality working relationships with their learners, as this will assist teachers with classroom management. The findings of this study should also motivate school management teams to find ways to support their teaching staff, as teachers genuinely appreciate it when they can rely on management for support.

Teachers can also read this study to find strategies other teachers use in overcrowded classrooms to deal with challenges.

5.9 Limitations of the study

Firstly, regarding the number of participants - this study could have benefited by having one more school and six more teachers to be interviewed. More participants from a different school would have allowed for better triangulation of findings. Also, interviewing teachers who do not teach in overcrowded classrooms could have made for interesting comparative data - this would have enabled the researcher to understand if the findings only apply to overcrowded classrooms.

The topic of creating an environment where learners are able to satisfy their needs according to Choice Theory only came up while interviewing the 5th participant. Exploring this finding earlier in the study could have made for fascinating findings.

More data collection methods would have added more perspective to the study, for example, a focus group interview with learners about the topic could have added great information.

5.10 Recommendations for future research

The topic of overcrowded classrooms is interesting to research. The issue of overcrowded classrooms is not simply eradicable. Therefore, more research should be done on the topic to add more knowledge to what is currently available. The following topics for future research would be interesting and will benefit the field.

- How can teachers form a good working relationship with their learners?
- How can Choice Theory by William Glasser be utilized for better classroom management?
- According to the Choice theory, are teachers' needs being satisfied in school classrooms?
- Is it possible to build a relationship where teachers' and learners' needs are being fulfilled?
- A comparative study between teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms as opposed to teachers who teach in "normal" classrooms.
- A similar study, but out of the perspective of the learners.

5.11 Conclusion of the study

This study set out to understand how teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms manage the academic needs of a large group of learners despite the challenges created by their situation. The motivation for conducting the study was to develop new knowledge and a new perspective on the management of overcrowded classrooms - in which this study succeeded.

Some findings made in this study are findings that have been made in the past, strengthening the arguments available in the literature on overcrowded classrooms. The role of the researcher in this study was further enhanced and developed by learning through the participants' practical narratives of how they coped with the challenges and circumstances of teaching and learning in overcrowded classrooms.

Most studies that were reviewed, suggest that teachers were unable to be innovative or to use innovative teaching methods in overcrowded classrooms. On the other hand, this study suggests that teachers should focus on building positive work relationships with their learners as this will assist teachers in successfully managing their classrooms, allowing them to use innovative teaching strategies. The study found that teachers in overcrowded classrooms use adoptive innovative methods to make learners feel like they belong in the classroom, as well as having attempted to make the classroom environment a fun place where teaching and learning is viewed as a mutually committed goal by learners, their peers and the teacher. This particular finding is important to this study because it substantiates the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Subsequently, this study argues that teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms will better manage their classrooms when they have formed positive working relationships with their learners.

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APPENDIX A - CONSENT LETTER TO PRINCIPALS



Faculty of Education

Dear Principal

I, Sean Botha, am an M. Ed student from the University of Pretoria. The title of my M. Ed degree research study is: "Primary school teachers managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms". The aim of the study is to investigate how teachers that teach in classrooms with a large number of learners, manage the various academic needs of the learners. The study will be conducted under the supervision of Dr Nevensha Sing, from the Department of Education Management and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria.

I hereby seek your consent to approach various teachers in your school in order to ask them to participate in this study. The study will be conducted by means of semi-structured interviews with teachers. The interviews will take place after formal contact time and will not interfere with day-to-day duties. Each teacher will also be given a formal letter inviting her/him to participate in this study.

During the reporting phase of the study, pseudonyms and codes will be used. No personal information such as the name of the school or the name of the teacher will be mentioned in the study. I undertake to provide your office with a soft copy of the full research interview on completion of the study, should it be requested. Any further information that might be required, can be requested from me. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Dr Sing.

Yours sincerely,

Sean Maré Botha
E-mail address: smbotha93@gmail.com
Contact number: 072 915 2955
Supervisor: Dr. N. SING
E-mail address: Nevensha.Sing@up.ac.za

✂=====

PRINCIPAL PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH

I, _____ (name), hereby give my consent to Sean Botha to include my school and staff members as participants in his research on **Primary school teachers managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms.**

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

APPENDIX B - CONSENT LETTER TO EDUCATORS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Dear Educator

My name is Sean Botha. I am an M. Ed student at the University of Pretoria. The title of my M. Ed degree research study is: "Primary school teachers managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms".

The aim of the study is to investigate how teachers that work in overcrowded classes, manage the academic needs of those learners. With this information, I will be able to give recommendations to policy makers as to ways in which to assist teachers that manage overcrowded classrooms. I am working under the supervision of Dr Nevensha Sing from the Department of Education Management and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria.

As a suitable participant for this study, I kindly invite you to participate. This will involve me having a semi-structured interview with you to ask you about your management strategies etc. The interview will be scheduled as per your availability and will take place at a venue convenient to you. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

However, due to the COVID-19 considerations, an alternative option of meeting virtually through the platforms most suitable and preferred by you: WhatsApp video call / Zoom/ Google Meet / Face Time / Facebook Messenger / or any valid suggestion will be considered. I am amicable to accommodate whatever option would suit you best.

I would like to reassure you that your participation in this study is voluntary and fully confidential. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the research study without any consequences or explanations. In the research report that I will write, your name will be replaced by a pseudonym to insure confidentiality. No participant names or personal information will be reported in the findings.

I hereby also request that I will be allowed to make audio recordings of the session. The purpose thereof is to make transcription of data valid and authentic. The recordings will be safely kept on a password-protected computer which only my supervisor, Dr Sing, and I will have access to.

We would also like to request your permission to use the data confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

If you have any concerns regarding the data collection procedures, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. As a participant, you will have the opportunity to access and verify the recorded views and the transcriptions of interviews made if needed. Please indicate your consent to participate by signing the form below.

Kind regards,

Sean Maré Botha

E-mail address: smbbotha93@gmail.com

Contact number: 072 915 2955

Supervisor: Dr. N. SING

E-mail address: Nevensha.Sing@up.ac.za

Educator Consent Form

I, _____ (name), consent to participating in an interview for Sean Botha in his study on primary school teachers managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms.

I understand that:

- Participation in this study is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- The semi-structured interviews will be audio/video recorded for the purpose of transcription.
- Confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed. Within transcribing and reporting the data confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed as recordings will be transcribed in a private setting or with the use of headphones and participants will be coded so that no names will be included in the transcriptions or report. If direct quotes are used in the report, no identifying information will be included. All gathered data will be securely stored on a password-protected computer and will only be accessed by my supervisor and me.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

✂ - - - - -

TEACHER PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH

I, _____ (name), hereby give my consent to Sean Botha to be included as a participant in his research on primary school teachers managing learners' academic needs in overcrowded classrooms.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule

Interview schedule for teachers

Firstly, I would like to thank you for agreeing to partake in this interview. The data gathered from this interview will help me in completing my master's degree. You, as well as your school will be kept anonymous and will be given pseudonyms in my research paper.

May I record this interview, as it will help me to correctly transcribe and analyse the data?

- 1) How many years of experience do you have as a teacher?
- 2) What are some academic needs that you identify in your learners?
- 3) How do you manage your classroom?
- 4) What are some of the negative characteristics of your teaching situation?
- 5) What are some positive characteristics of your teaching situation?
- 6) What challenges do you encounter when attempting to manage your learners' academic needs?
- 7) How do you deal with challenges that present itself in the classroom?
- 8) What are some of the effective strategies that you use to ensure the academic success of your learners?
- 9) In what way does management support you in dealing with overcrowded classrooms?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT EXAMPLE

Interviewer:

Before we begin the interview, could you please confirm that you are voluntarily agreeing to participate? (Yes) All right. First question. How many years of experience do you have as a teacher?

S2P5:

Okay. Um, as a teacher 15, 15 years at this school.

Interviewer:

So you started here?

S2P5:

No, prior to that I've been involved in education, training and development. So I've been basically an ECD trainer so I was based supporting Kwa Zulu Natal then I had to relocate and then ever since from 2006, I'm in this school.

Interviewer:

So, uh, ECD developer. Was that a ECD teacher or what did you do then?

S2P5

Ah, I was a trainer, facilitator, assessor and curriculum development.

Interviewer

You got into teaching? Yeah. Okay. What do you miss facilitating? Do you miss facilitating? (yes) Was it, was it better? (better) Really? Why

S2P5:

When you work with adults it's a different situation and it's not like school where you have to run behind the kids for work and stuff like that. So it was much better and less stressful.

Interviewer:

Okay. Less stressful because of the fact that you are not working with kids?

S2P5:

Yes. And also, the numbers, the numbers were not so large. And that thing, I think, where you exert a school, like your maturity level and what you want in life your focus is slightly different from like kids. Kids are still finding and peeling away so you don't get the same kind of commitment.

Interviewer:

Yeah. You just need to kind of drag it out of them.

S2P5:

Yeah. I mean, I do miss that, but I do also enjoy my work here because it's also like I'm working with teachers and stuff. So, um, um, at the moment that, I'm sorry, I'm the department head for social sciences and EMS.

Interviewer:

Oh, you're also teaching sciences and EMS? (Yes) For grades?

S2P5:

Not EMS but I am the HOD. I am teaching grade 6.

Interviewer:

Grade six social sciences? All right. Okay, cool. Um, so what are some of the academic needs that you identify in your learners? So a better way to ask the question is, um, what do you think is important to teach them

S2P5:

Basic knowledge and skills.

Interviewer:

Like what? Not subject specific, more general?

S2P5:

I think basically equipping our kids with life skills. You know because a lot of them have, um, issues and problems actually managing themselves you know, uh, as learners in the school, when you look at the learners holistically. Yeah, so there are a lot of issues, emotionally, intellectually, socially as well.

Interviewer:

All right, so do you think that stems from home?

S2P5:

Yes, most of them come home by, or some of, some of the learners also academically challenged, you know? So we have a big issue with learners' lack of that have, uh, barriers, uh, quite a few learners have extreme barriers because they come from other provinces and things. So there's this language barrier, you know, what home language was, is difficult. It's difficult.

Interviewer:

All right. Um, so at the moment you guys are operating at a 50% capacity, um, under normal circumstances, how many learners do you have in a classroom?

S2P5:

It's 40 per class, mostly. But some of the classes, maybe like 37, 36 (an average of 40) (yes)

Interviewer:

Do you find that that's a large number to manage?

S2P5:

Absolutely. Absolutely. Because the children that really need that, it's a battle to get that, um, you know, to provide that individual support and things to learners. Like, uh with 40 it's a lot, it's a lot. Yeah. You know, but then you teach going on monitor the work like now we work at half capacity - it's much more easier to manage the learners, provide the support to those that are academically challenged.

Interviewer:

Do you actually see an improvement in the academic marks of the learners now operating at 50%?

S2P5:

You know, that's a big question mark there because they are one day in and one day out you know, you know, and the day that some of them are really supposed to be working at home, they take it like a free day or holiday a relaxing day. So yeah, they don't work. So we do have challenges with that and it has its pros and cons when they come to school or they haven't done the previous day's work and homework and things like that. But I think overall our children are trying to do so.

Interviewer:

So would you say, sorry, I'm exploring different...Um, would you say that, uh, the children all or that the size of the classroom only, um, makes teaching easier or so it doesn't really affect the marks?

S2P5:

No. It makes teaching easier. As I said, some learners can work on their own and we get excellent results from them, you know? And then you get the other learners that can actually bring your subject averages down because they are not putting in the capacity. [inaudible] yeah. So they actually sometimes bring your class average marks and things down because they're not working then you get the ones that really work.

Interviewer:

Yeah. I think, I think it's difficult to say that the marks are going to increase with smaller classrooms because we've only been teaching in the smaller classrooms now for what, six months or was it, was it from last year, this time around, so about a year. Um, so maybe if we have a larger or a, um, a longer kind of sample, we can see an improvement that we can start to see an improvement since teaching will be easier. Maybe we can start to manage and it will become easier, but I'm deviating. Sorry. Um, so, um, I'm going to go to the next question. How do you manage your classroom?

S2P5:

Me, I think most important thing for me is setting up ground rules in the classroom. Yeah. You know, my rules that I set out. So the learners know what to expect from each lesson (rules like what?) - Don't move along, raise your hand when you want to talk, don't interfere and stuff like that, don't be rude, be respectful. And the learners also come up with their own I also make them come up with their own classroom rules as well. So they know they don't abide by it and they also come up with the consequences. So if you don't do this, that's going to happen. So it's coming from them.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Okay. Um, so what are some of the negative characters or characteristics of your teaching situation?

S2P5:

I mean, uh, you're you say, like challenges and then I think the kind of challenges is more when it comes to the learner support, the children that are, that are battling in the classes. So we do have like programs set for them, but how we wouldn't want to see it unfold is not what you see at the moment because of the one day in one day out. And Parental support, we don't get the support so that is also impacting negatively, even though we don't get all the support that do require.

Interviewer:

Okay. So, so parental support is definitely a challenge?

S2P5:

Yes. The learner support. Now. I mean, in the larger classrooms, it's actually very difficult to provide the support. (What kind of support are you talking here?) I'm talking for the children that are academically challenged, but we do have programs and things in place for them. But with forty in a class, like giving that individual attention and things, does, it becomes difficult. So then like, you know, teachers get frustrated they have to work during their lunch break by the support. They have to work after school to provide extra support.

Interviewer

So it fatigues the teacher?

S2P5:

The teacher becomes tired and restless because it's a lot you know, the demand from the government in terms of documentation and forms – it's a lot! If you have 40 learners in a class and you've got 10 learners that are struggling it is a battle.

Interviewer:

All right. Um, some positive characteristics of your teaching situation?

S2P5:

Well, I think, um, sometimes things will be the academic, uh, I mean the results sometimes enthusiasm.. you know... of the kids, the work ethics, but they work, some are getting more meaningful.

Interviewer:

Would you, would you say the positive outweighs the negative or the other way around?

S2P5

The positive outweighs the negative.

Interviewer

Well, that's, that's good. At least. Um, sorry, let me see here. All right. So, so when you manage a classroom of 40 learners under normal circumstances, what challenges do you find?

S2P5:

Well, one is like... the talking, the noise enables some children... working with children with different abilities in the classroom so some children, uh, uh, they get to FAL, they want to talk . Uh, some of them maybe, uh, if, if the lesson is taking too long explanation, then they become bored. Some of them who have worked and some of them that don't work, then you have to go through and collect their work and (inaudible) what the others are, you know, that are working and doing the work. And then like the, the behavior of learners as well.

Interviewer:

Ok so discipline overall?

S2P5:

Yeah. Well, I think it depends on each teacher. If you are firm, you use the set of certain things in your classroom, your classroom management is very important.

Interviewer:

All right. So, so, um, adding to that question, uh, what are some of the effective strategies that you find works in an overcrowded classroom to manage the class?

S2P5:

Getting the children really interested and engaged in what they're doing. So for me, uh, a little bit of noise, but group work helps, you know, collaborative work.

Interviewer:

How does group work help in an overcrowded classroom? Because the reason why I'm asking is, um, I've read research (and that doesn't make it correct, or right) - that people struggle to do group work, you know? So how do you manage group work in an overcrowded classroom?

S2P5:

(Inaudible) The children love groupwork. So it depends on what type of lesson I am teaching and I think, um, they like responsibilities given to them. So like with me, groupwork works – I have these little cards and I say, okay, today you are going to be the reader, you are going to be the scribe, you're going to be the reporter. (Inaudible) They love these little responsibilities to look forward to you the next time.

Interviewer:

Okay. You give them responsibilities. Each learner has a responsibility in the group that you give them power? (Yeah, I give them power)

S2P5:

Yeah. So one will be, the leader will lead the discussions, you know, uh, one won't be a timekeeper. So they will be watching the time. Then the other one is busy taking notes. And this also empowers the learners in both self-confidence self-esteem.

Interviewer:

So, so it gives them a sense of belonging in the classroom?

S2P5:

Yes, a sense of belonging, because, you know, you get the very shy ones, they shake and shiver don't want to listen, but so maybe we need to bring out that confidence and things and for me group work from OBE, I guess, because I was a facilitator and I use very much of those so I knew how to use it, engage with them effectively in the classroom. So classroom strategies are very important. The other thing is interactive use of the smart boards, videos and things, to keep them very grasped and very engaged. And you're not just standing there presenting and presenting you know?

Interviewer:

So you can't use, you know just a kind of lecturing method? It just doesn't work?

S2P5:

It doesn't work. You'll find that some teachers will have total control, even if it's 40 learners you have some teachers, especially the new ones really have a problem with classroom management and stuff. So you need to keep like, you know, and also keeping a track of disciplinary record... a track in place, like phoning the parents and SMSing them. Also giving them rewards, rewards work really well with us. We take them to Golf reef city, um, take them to McDonald's have a pool party. Depending on what grouping you belong to... how many demerits you lost and things. So the discipline system and the tracking is very useful in overcrowded classrooms. I am not saying that the positive always outweighs the negative - we do have serious issues teaching in overcrowded classrooms, we would love not to teach in overcrowded classrooms, but unfortunately it just goes beyond..

Interviewer:

Yeah. So the basic premise of the research that I'm doing is that, um, overcrowded classrooms is a problem. Um, it's not something that's going to be fixed in the near future. It's not something that's very possible to be fixed in the near future. So I'm trying to figure out how do we manage it? How do we deal with it? How do we, um, effectively manage... I'm looking for teachers that, that tell me, you know, this is the strategies that I'm using. This is what's working, and this is the challenges. This is, what's not working. So then I can compare the two and I can say, all right. So, you know, first year students, if you do encounter a, um, overcrowded classroom, here are some strategies that, that seem to work.

S2P5:

I think it's important that you keep your learners engaged, you lay your ground rules you know, and they know what to expect from you, and as a teacher, you're also got to be well prepared, you know, have an outset of your lesson - if you having a dabble of whatever it is, and you're telling them exactly what your expectations are, you know, what you're going to be doing in this lesson. But if you go as an unpaid teacher to overcome the class, you're going to have lots of challenges because you're neither here nor there, so show them what you can find... children actually size the teacher. They sum you up.

I am firm, I am very firm with discipline. If that's what I need to have, that's fine. I think your teaching strategy is very important.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Okay. And then finally, um, in what way does management support you in dealing with overcrowded classrooms?

S2P5:

Uh, well management of, well, we have our SMT, we all walk around and if we find any issues and anyone, a teacher, we check with them, check, see if there's any issues, they will tell you and management, we normally take the child out, we, you know, give the child a talk - if it's beyond what we can handle, we get a psychologist, (inaudible) we get the parents in like real bad issues with discipline problems.... We put our kids on a daily report. And we also have the merit system in place and we immediately make a call to a parent. I mean, teachers call from the classrooms.

Interviewer:

So, um, the, the management kind of helps with discipline?

S2P5:

Yeah. It helps because we maybe have a channel of communication, If a teacher feels that they can't deal, we also send in a grade head and if there's no progress there, then the child will be sent to the HOD. Then we follow up and make the call to the parent. We discuss the issues – If they are homework or behavior related or whatever. And then if we put the child onto daily report and then if that's still not working, then we call the child in, we call the parents in and we have a meeting and then we look at a way forward with them.

Interviewer:

So, so the management kind of, um, takes the, the, the unbearable learners out of the classroom, making it a little bit easier for the teachers to manage the rest of the kids?

S2P5:

Uh, no, not exactly. We don't want them to lose out on that, on the teaching time. If we see an issue, we just call the child, cause whenever the child will go in, but overall, we will intervene, we will communicate with the parents, make that call (inaudible) so we support our teachers in that way.

Interviewer:

Cool. Thank you. Ma'am I appreciate the interview. Appreciate the time.