

Relational well-being experiences of rural primary school teachers in South Africa

By

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Herewith I declare that this dissertation that is submitted in partial fulfilment for degree purposes for the degree MA Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been submitted previously by me for another degree at another university.

S Maseko

Signature

31 March 2023

Date

ETHICS STATEMENT

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this dissertation, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval.

The author declares that he/she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of Ethics for researchers and the policy guidelines for responsible research.

ABSTRACT

Places of work demand a great deal from individuals, and as such, are often associated with pressures which reduce their well-being. Teachers, particularly those teaching in rural schools, are not spared such challenges. Most studies focus on the resources that affect and contribute to the well-being of teachers. Little is known about the relational experiences and meaningful relationships that contribute to teachers' well-being, particularly in rural schools. Relationships are important to an individual's well-being. Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand relational experiences and meaningful relationships that contribute to the well-being of teachers teaching in rural primary schools. The sample for this study consisted of ten teachers, male and female, with teaching experience of five years and above from quintile 1-3 ordinary rural schools in South Africa. The sample selected for this study was purposive. The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews that were then thematically analysed. The study's findings reveal that schools can be spaces conducive to experience and forming positive interactional relationships. Additionally, teachers thrive through meaningful relationships such as nurturing interpersonal collaboration, finding purpose in life, fulfillment, and valued relationships. Such relationships enable teachers to strive for their best work performance. Encouraging interventions that allow teachers to experience positive and meaningful relationships is therefore recommended. Positive interactional relationships enhance the well-being of teachers and contribute to the success of education at large.

Keywords: Well-being; relationships; rural; primary school, teacher

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY	iii
ETHICS STATEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
<i>1.1. Introduction and Background</i>	<i>1</i>
1.1.1. Well-being	4
1.1.2. Relationships	5
1.1.3. Problem Statement.....	7
<i>1.2. Aims and Objectives</i>	<i>7</i>
1.2.1. Research Question	7
1.2.2. Objectives	8
<i>1.3. Justification</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>1.4. Structure of the study.....</i>	<i>9</i>
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	12
2.1. Introduction	12
2.2. Education in South Africa	14
2.3. Challenges faced by teachers in rural schools.....	17
2.4. Well-being of teachers	21
2.5. Relationships	25
2.6. Importance of relationships in the workplace	29
2.7. Theoretical Framework: Relational theory of Working.....	31
Chapter 3: Research Methodology.....	33
3.1. Introduction	33
3.2. Characteristics of Qualitative Research	35
3.3. Research Context.....	35
3.4. Paradigmatic Assumptions: Interpretivism	36
3.5. Research Design.....	37
3.6. Ethical Considerations.....	37

3.6.1. Informed Consent	38
3.6.2. Confidentiality and Anonymity	39
3.6.3. Emotional Risk	40
3.6.4. Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the study	40
3.7. Research Process: Sampling.....	44
3.8. Sample Description	49
3.9. Research Process: Data Collection.....	51
3.10. Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis	51
3.11. Chapter Conclusion	53
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions	55
4.1 <i>Theme Outline</i>	57
4.2. <i>Theme 1: Relational experiences</i>	58
4.2.1. Subtheme 1: Teacher/learner relationships.....	58
4.2.2. Subtheme 2: Teacher/parent relationships.....	59
4.2.3. Subtheme 3: Collegial relationships	60
4.2.4 Subtheme 4: Community relationships.....	64
4.3. <i>Theme 2: Meaningful relationships</i>	65
4.3.1 Subtheme 1: Collaborative Interpersonal Relationships	66
4.3.2 Subtheme 2: Purposeful Relationships	67
4.3.3 Subtheme 3: Supportive Relationships.....	69
4.3.4 Subtheme 4: Sense of fulfillment	70
4.3.5 Subtheme 5: Valued relationships	72
4.4. <i>Conclusion</i>	73
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	74
5.1. Summary Overview.....	76
5.2. Limitations	80
5.3. Theoretical Implications: Relational theory of Working	81
5.4. Implications and Key contributions	83
5.5. Future Recommendations.....	84
References	86
Annexure A: Ethics Approval Letter	111
Annexure B: Permission Letter from Mpumalanga Department of Education	112

Annexure C: Consent Form.....	113
Annexure D: Participant Information Sheet.....	116
Appendix E: Interview Schedule.....	121
Appendix F: Letter of Editing	122

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction and Background

In 1990, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) launched the Education for All (EFA) initiative at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand. The initiative was established in collaboration with the governments of 155 countries, and with development agencies, non-governmental organisations, civil society, and the media. The aim of EFA was to achieve universal primary education and to drastically reduce illiteracy rates by the end of the decade. The initiative was launched because education systems in many countries were failing to provide the quality education and skills necessary to ensure that everyone is able to flourish.

The World Declaration on Education for All recognised education as a fundamental human right and called for nations to intensify their efforts to meet the basic learning needs of all. Later, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, six objectives were established that focused on early childhood development, primary education accessibility, gender parity, equal learning opportunities for all young people and adults, adult literacy, and quality education (UNESCO, 2014).

Historically, education has been regarded as a public good that produces enormous benefits, not only for individuals, but to society as a whole (Kauppinen, 2014). Bourdieu and Passeron (2019) are of the opinion that education remains a social institution that reflects and reproduces the socio-economic and cultural disadvantages that prevail in the rest of society. This means that students from economically poor families have a higher opportunity to go to schools characterized by deficient infrastructure, fewer qualified teachers, less ambitious peers, and outmoded pedagogical

practices compared with those in more affluent areas, thus resulting in lower learning outcomes. Low and middle-income countries like Brazil, rural Pakistan, rural India, and Mexico have shown that increased educational inequality is linked with a higher probability of economical conflict (UNESCO, 2014). Le Grange (2016) argued that schools and universities function as miniature societies, reflecting the broader socio-political context of South Africa. Therefore, making these institutions independent can be a crucial step towards broader societal transformation. Under the impact of colonialism, neoliberalism, and globalization, education continues to produce a system in which student disengagement, inequality, and social justice continue to take place (McMahon & Portelli, 2012). The education inequalities motivated the zeal to carry out a study from a rural South African viewpoint. a study to be conducted from a South African context. In the next section, the researcher gives an overview of the structures around the public sector in South Africa.

Despite the changes to education since 1994, areas still remain in South Africa's education system that have yet to be addressed in order to fully eradicate the lingering legacy of apartheid (Department of Basic Education, 2018).

In South Africa, there are three levels of government, which include national, provincial, and local government. Their governance is subject to the provisions of the Constitution, which is the highest law and cannot be overridden by any other law or government action (The Presidency, 2014). The provincial and local governments carry out their responsibilities in accordance with legislative and policy frameworks provided by the national government. The policies and intentions of the national government are executed by the provincial and local governments. These share functions are known as concurrent functions. South Africa is comprised of nine provinces. Gauteng is the smallest province, followed by Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, North West, Limpopo, Western Cape, Free State, Eastern Cape, and Northern Cape, which is the largest

province. The country has a population of approximately 59.6 million people, with over 450 993 teachers and approximately 13 419 971 learners in primary, secondary, combined, intermediate, and middle schools (Department of Basic Education, 2022). A high quality of education and teachers are fundamental aspects of the development of every country (Hanushek, 2011). According to Motshekga (2011), teachers play a fundamental role in society as they are viewed as role models for learners, but the demands they face can be emotionally challenging (Hynds & McDonald, 2010). Keller et al. (2014) stated that being a teacher in the education sector can be a highly emotional job that can lead to increased stress levels, job dissatisfaction, psychological problems, and overall decreased well-being.

Seligman (2011) explains well-being as a condition that comprises happiness, psychological health, and positive affective states. Dehaloo (2011) argues that teachers working in socio-economically challenging contexts face adverse working conditions that can negatively affect their well-being. Beehr (2014) argues that the working environment can induce psychological problems resulting in individuals feeling inadequate. These factors can negatively impact employees' overall well-being and have long-term consequences on their mental health. Research has shown that up to one-third of teachers are extremely stressed (Geving, 2007 & Thomas et al., 2003). Msila (2017) reports that up to 4000 teachers quit the teaching profession annually in South Africa due to frustration. Many people perceive teaching as a gratifying and meaningful career that assists learners to perform at their best. However, due to various unfavourable learning contexts, teaching can be a complex and demanding profession (Wessels & Wood, 2019). Teachers play an essential part in the quality of education, and as such, improving their well-being is of paramount importance (Fredrickson, 2013).

1.1.1. Well-being

The concept of well-being lacks a universally accepted definition, however, most people agree that it involves feeling positive emotions and moods, such as happiness and contentment, and a lack of negative emotions, such as anxiety or depression. Additionally, it encompasses a sense of fulfillment, satisfaction with life, and positive functioning. Diener (2009) suggested that well-being occurs when life is judged positively and the individual feels good. In the context of public health, physical well-being, such as experiencing health and high levels of vitality, is considered an essential component of overall well-being (Veenhoven, 2008). Seligman (2011), a leading figure in the field of positive psychology, introduced the PERMA model, which is a multidimensional framework for well-being. The acronym represents the five important building blocks of well-being and happiness, namely: positive emotions; engagement; relationships; meaning; and achievement. Seligman's PERMA™ theory of well-being (2011) is an attempt to respond to important arguments related to flourishing and what enables it.

The pursuit of well-being can be approached in two distinct yet complementary ways: hedonic pursuit, which focuses on pleasure and comfort (Huta & Ryan, 2010), and eudaimonic pursuit, which emphasizes self-development and the realization of meaning (Ryff, 2014; Waterman, 2008). While the former emphasizes enjoyment, the latter highlights personal growth as means to attain well-being.

The literature reveals that studies that have analysed the relationship between well-being and performance have a limitation, which is their excessive focus on hedonic well-being (for example, job satisfaction or job-related affective well-being) at the expense of the eudaimonic experience (for example, meaning at work or purpose in life) (Peiro et al., 2014). Huta and Waterman (2014) proposed two complementary approaches to explore well-being: the hedonic pursuit of pleasure

and the eudaimonic pursuit of meaning. Seligman (2011) raises the question of whether one should pursue pleasure or purpose to have more hedonic or eudaimonic experiences. The pursuit of optimal well-being is a perpetual challenge for humans.

According to Roos and Du Toit (2014), well-being struggle and thriving for wellness can be encouraged by building good relationships.

1.1.2. Relationships

According to Hargie (2011), relationships are continuous, reciprocal verbal and non-verbal interactions between people. Individuals can maintain relative comfort, security, and freedom from anxiety through reciprocal relationships of caring, warmth, satisfaction, and trust (Brownie & Hortsmanshof, 2012; Chigeza et al., 2013). The well-being of people is strongly influenced by successful relationships (Smith-Acuña, 2011). Smith-Acuña (2011) also believes that people in satisfying relationships can express and address their own needs as well as those within the relationship. Well-being and relationship development emphasize the importance of valuing difference and diversity as a state of being comfortable, healthy, and happy (Holmes, 2005). According to Stewart-Brown (as cited in Roberts, 2007), well-being is the “holistic subjective state, which is present when a range of feelings, among them energy, confidence, openness, enjoyment, happiness, calm, and caring, are combined and balanced” (p. 6). This state may potentially result in the creation of constructive and positive connections. Adolescents may develop positive connections with their natural environment, which can strengthen their relationships and promote critical thinking, autonomy, collaboration, and responsibility. This state of well-being incorporates various aspects of education and can offer benefits such as reducing stress, providing work assistance, offering a support system, fostering mutual support in projects, and promoting social and emotional development. According to Martin (2013), positive interpersonal relationships can

provide these benefits. Mastroianni and Storberg-Walker (2014) also suggest that work interactions can enhance well-being when these are trusting, collaborative, and positive, and employees feel valued and respected. Scholars such as Ryff (2018), Seligman (2011), and Wong (2012) have emphasized the importance of meaning in well-being.

The importance of meaning to one's well-being has been emphasized by several scholars, including Ryff (2018), Seligman (2011), and Wong (2012). Meaning in life consists of three elements; these are comprehension, purpose, and an individual's perception of life as worth living (Martela & Steger, 2016). The concept of meaning in various cultural contexts, as proposed by Wissing et al. (2020), is shaped by values and has a strong correlation with relational well-being outcomes. According to Ryff (2018), meaning in life is accepted as an indicator of wellness. Lavigne et al. (2013), also state that there is an association between the dimensions of life meaning and the personality traits that derive more meaning in health, family, and success at work. According to Donnell et al. (2014), the concept of meaning is closely tied to connections between individuals, as relationships serve as a means of connecting people in various ways. Delle Fave (2011) suggested that relationships are a crucial and enduring source of meaning, irrespective of the respondents' cultural background, gender, or age. The author notes that people consistently acknowledge relationships as an essential component in the formation of meaning (Delle Fave, 2011). Steger et al. (2008) suggested that individuals who perceive their lives as meaningful are more inclined to engage in behaviors that foster positive relationships. Meaning in life motivates individuals to seek out and maintain close connections with others. Furthermore, Steger et al. (2008) proposed that meaningfulness is linked to a variety of positive outcomes, such as greater well-being and personal growth.

1.1.3. Problem Statement

Despite 25 years of democracy, there has been minimal progress in enhancing educational standards and learner achievement in rural schools (du Plessis et al., 2019). Teachers in rural schools experience numerous serious challenges and they often have less access to support services (du Plessis et al., 2019). The challenges faced may affect or hinder the positive relational interaction that contribute to the well-being of teachers in rural primary schools. Most of the research done on teacher well-being focuses on teacher salaries, and professional development in the urban context (Armstrong, 2014; Wessels & Wood, 2019; Falk et al., 2019; INEE, 2021; Viac & Fraser, 2020). According to Roos and Du Toit (2014), good relationships are the key to fulfilling official roles and promoting mental health and well-being. Research based on understanding teacher relational well-being dynamics in rural school communities is limited. It will be interesting to explore how teachers in rural areas experience relationships and the meaning attached to these relationships considering their geographic location and the challenges associated with it.

1.2. Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the relational experiences and relationships that contribute to the well-being of teachers teaching at rural primary schools. To achieve this aim, the following objectives and subsidiary research questions guide the research process:

1.2.1. Research Question

What are the relational well-being experiences of teachers teaching at a rural primary school?

What are the relational experiences that contribute to their well-being?

1.2.2. Objectives

To understand the relational well-being dynamics of teachers at a rural primary school.

To explore the relationships that give meaning and contribute to teachers' well-being.

1.3. Justification

Hanushek (2011) has asserted that high-quality education and teachers are essential for the development of any country. The challenge of attracting and retaining quality teachers remains a persistent issue in the field of education worldwide (Sutcher, et al., 2015). Teacher shortages are a critical problem in poor rural schools in most developing countries (McEwan, 1999) and in some developed countries (Miller, 2012). In resource-poor environments, Wessels and Wood (2019) believed that teachers often face obstacles that can negatively impact their well-being and hinder their ability to deliver the curriculum effectively. The presence of motivated and enthusiastic teachers is crucial for delivering high-quality education and enhancing their well-being. (Keller et al., 2016). Fredrickson (2013) emphasized the crucial role of teachers in shaping the quality of education and underscored the significance of enhancing their well-being. Roos and Du Toit (2014) are also of the opinion that good relationships are the key to fulfilling official roles and promoting mental health and well-being.

Tough et al. (2017) stated that social relationships are seen to be vital to human functioning, both in terms of psychological functioning and physical health. Relationships are a cornerstone of well-being and have been linked to greater happiness, life satisfaction, and physical health outcomes (O'Donnell et al., 2014). The beneficial effect of social relationships is also highlighted by the work of social psychologists that explore well-being and have repeatedly demonstrated that positive social relationships lead to higher levels of well-being (Seligman, 2011). According to

Chiao et al. (2019), involvement in an interactive and socially stimulating environment promotes psychological well-being and reduces symptoms of depression. Thus, the research question that guided this study is: what are the relational well-being experiences that contribute to the well-being of teachers teaching in primary rural schools in South Africa? In this context, gaining an understanding of the relational experiences of teachers would lead the Department of Basic Education to finding interventions that can enhance teachers' well-being and continue to contribute to the good quality of education in South African rural schools.

It was interesting to explore how teachers in rural areas experience relationships and the meaning attached to these relationships considering their geographic location and the challenges associated with it. Research based on understanding teacher relational dynamics in rural school communities is limited. Thus, the objective of this study is to acquire an understanding of the relational interactions and their importance, considering their location and the challenges that come with it.

1.4. Structure of the study

The contents of this thesis comprise of five chapters, which are outlined below. This chapter, Chapter 1, outlines the introduction to this study's topic and research objectives. This will be followed by Chapter 2, which engages in an in-depth literature discussion of sub-topics related to this study. Initially, a concise depiction of the educational background in rural South Africa will be provided, after which the obstacles encountered by educators in this context will be presented. Then, the explanation of teacher well-being will be examined, and the link between relationships, meaning, and well-being will be explored. The final section of the chapter will encompass an overview of the theoretical framework that serves as the foundation for this study.

Chapter 3 focuses on the study's research methodology and will begin by describing the research context of the study and explaining the study's paradigmatic assumptions. Second, the research design, and the ethical considerations which guided the execution of this study will be outlined, concluding with a detailed description of sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

In Chapter 4, the findings of this study will be presented in two main themes: relational well-being experiences.

Chapter 5 will conclude this dissertation by discussing the limitations of this study and providing recommendations for future research.

Below is an overview of the chapters included in the dissertation. Figure 1 below depicts the structure of this dissertation and the sections discussed thus far.

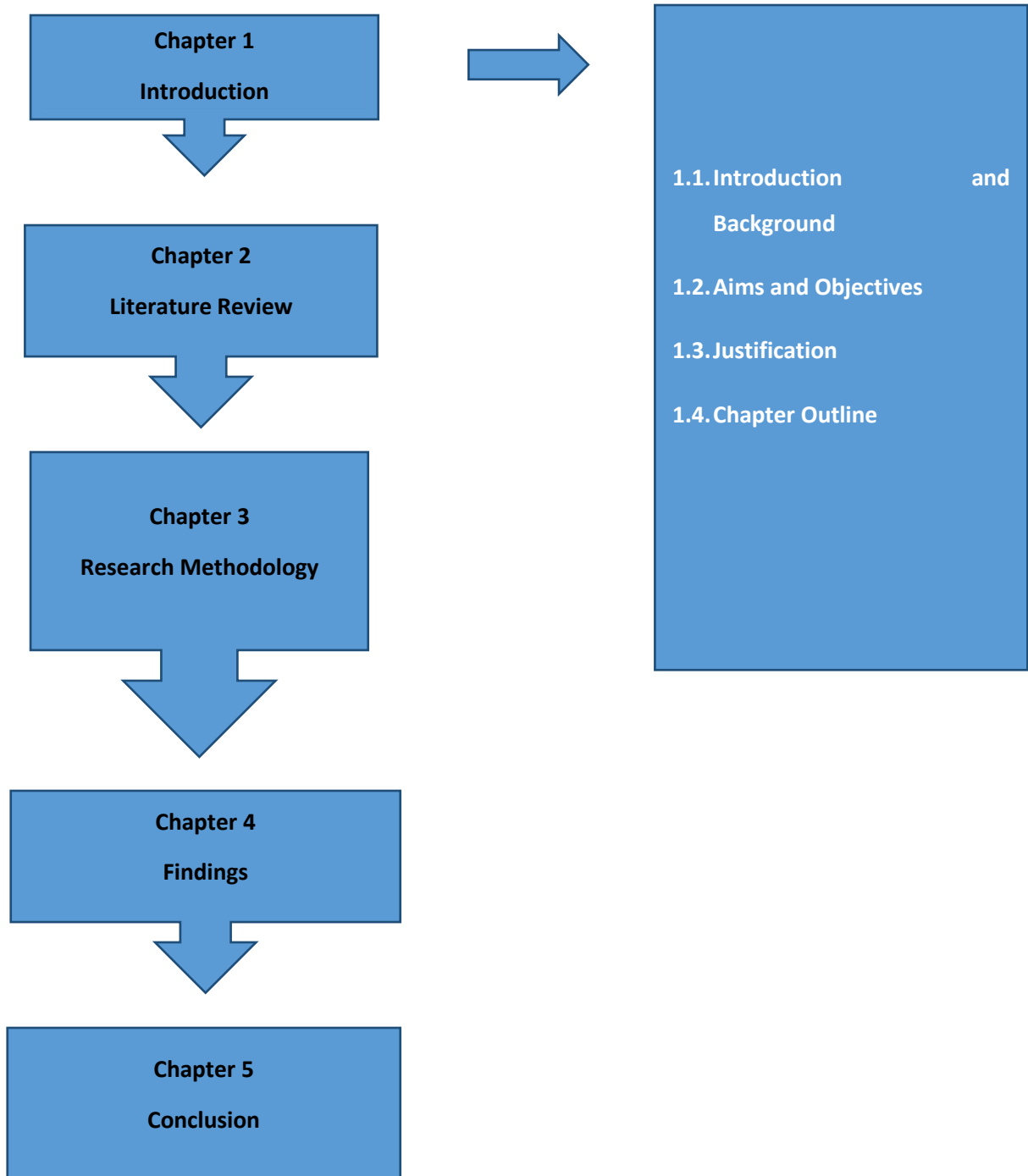


Figure 1: Outline of Chapter 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The aim of Chapter 2 is to provide a background and a breakdown of the concepts that are relevant to this study. The researcher starts with a discussion of background literature on Education in South Africa, followed by a review of the difficulties teachers experience in the rural context, a discussion on the well-being of teachers, relationships, meaning, and the importance of relations and meaning. The theoretical framework, the Relational Theory of working, will be unpacked. The layout of the literature review in the context of the whole dissertation is shown in the figure below.

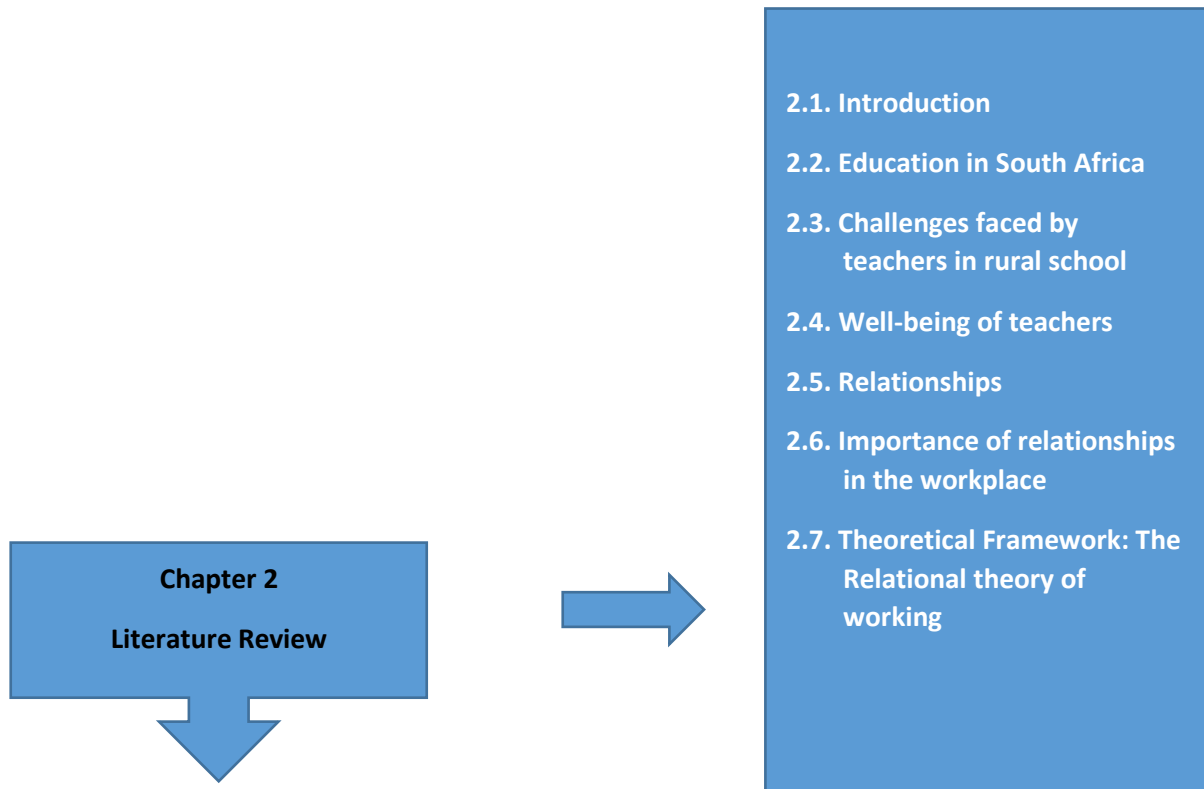


Figure 2: Outline of Chapter 2

2.2. Education in South Africa

Maree (2000) proposed that researchers can analyze different literary works to identify any gaps in the literature related to their area of interest. This process can help researchers develop research questions based on the identified gaps and improve their understanding of the topic. Mhlongo (2013) argued that conducting a literature review allows a researcher to consider the perspectives of other writers on their research topic and identify its strengths and weaknesses. The researcher can then address any weaknesses, fill any gaps, and amplify any silences. The current study aims to address the gap in research related to the relational experiences and meaningful relationships that contribute to the well-being of teachers in rural primary schools. The findings of this study are expected to inform interventions that can help retain high-quality teachers and improve the quality of education in South Africa.

Internationally, emerging economies place a high premium on good quality education. According to Hanushek and Wößmann (2007), educational quality is crucial in assessing policies related to developing countries. This is based on the premise that education is the foundation for the attainment of further knowledge and skills (Dreyer, 2017). The global recognition of the importance of education has motivated developing countries to strengthen their education systems (Al-Shuaibi, 2014). Teacher education is recognized as a vital component in economic competition and growth (Tang, 2015). Regarding both demographic changes and evolving school instructional policies, many teachers experience an increasingly wide range of student learning differences regarding academic, behavioral, physical, and cultural perspectives in their classrooms (Munthe & Rogne, 2015). This concern significantly requires teacher training that helps teachers become innovators and researchers in education, laying the educational foundation for continuous learning and practical change in the workplace (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). Teacher self-efficacy

is the belief that teachers have in their ability to impact student outcomes, even in challenging contexts. This belief is not only related to personal skills and competencies, but also to contextual factors such as available resources that affect effective teaching and student support. When teachers feel that the school context does not support their efforts to manage the learning environment, it can result in lower academic engagement and more problem behaviors. However, research has shown that teachers with high self-efficacy tend to have better instructional behavior and student outcomes (Ross et al., 2012).

The full realization of addressing the legacy of apartheid and strengthening the education system in South Africa has been hindered since 1994, as there are still some areas of education that remain untouched, according to the Department of Basic Education (2018). South Africa's population consists of approximately 59.6 million people, including more than 410,000 teachers and almost 14.2 million learners in primary, secondary, combined, intermediate, and middle schools, as reported by Statistics South Africa (2019). The national schooling system in South Africa, as defined by the South African Schools Act (1996), is divided into two categories: public and independent schools. Public schools are controlled by the state, while independent schools are privately governed. The majority of public schools are situated in rural areas (Gardenier, 2008). Unfortunately, rural areas often lack basic infrastructure such as sanitation, water, roads, transport, and electricity, which can negatively impact the provision of high-quality education, according to du Plessis (2014). To understand the term 'rural context', it is necessary to define 'rural' since there is no single definition of the term, and it is characterized by contextual diversity.

The Rural Education Draft Policy (2017) defines 'rural' as settings that are sparsely populated and where agriculture is the major means of economic activity. Anderson and Chang (2011) and Gagnon and Mattingly (2012) define rural areas as those regions outside urbanised areas with a

population of less than 2 500, which are classified as rural by Statistics South Africa. Understanding the nature of a rural school can be aided by examining certain location characteristics. For instance, public schools in rural areas may be located on government land, communal land, or private land, typically on farms or church land. Additionally, these schools may be characterized by isolation and remoteness, as well as dispersed settlements. According to the Department of Education (2005), a rural school can be defined as any public school located on government land, communal land, or private land (primarily on farms or church land) in areas that are isolated and remote, or in dispersed settlements.

Other characteristics of rural schools could include the “school phase; various social and economic deprivation factors; poverty; distance from service/facilities and service delivery; the physical and cultural environment; and the size of the school” (DBE, 2017a, p.15). Therefore, in this study, the rural context refers to scattered areas with high economic deprivation that leads to socio-economic issues which negatively affect society. Poverty and a high level of unemployment remain the major socio-economic issues negatively impacting the system of schooling, as national service delivery is slow in these areas (Chibba & Luiz, 2011). The major factors in rural areas include inadequate basic services; poor physical conditions of schools and a lack of infrastructure; long distances to travel between the school and towns; poor quality of education in schools (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Transitioning from pre-service teaching to professional teaching in rural-based schools, can be a challenging journey for teachers due to the unique context of rural communities, which is characterised by various social and economic deprivation factors (DBE, 2017b). These factors include poverty; distance from service/facilities and service delivery; the physical and cultural environment; and the size of the school.

Du Plessis (2014) found that most rural school teachers have never utilized technology in their classrooms, despite the curriculum policy in South Africa promoting learner-centered teaching and the use of various teaching aids and strategies. The lack of support from district officials and access to teaching resources, poor infrastructure, and curriculum changes all contribute to the difficulty teachers face in implementing the curriculum in rural areas. Additionally, newly appointed teachers lack experience and are expected to ensure smooth teaching and learning processes in the absence of necessary resources. Furthermore, Kim (2020) highlighted the professional isolation and lack of support that teachers in rural areas often experience. Despite education regulatory frameworks emphasizing equal access to quality education, socioeconomic challenges in rural areas create disadvantages for learners in rural schools, including a shortage of classrooms and limited access to essential services such as the internet, telephones, and school libraries (Wessels & Wood, 2019). Accordingly, the children in rural areas find it difficult to attain a good quality of education (Taylor & Mulhall, 2001). The above-mentioned challenges also hinder teachers from delivering quality teaching and learning (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Many teachers do not feel supported by the education system, and the general view is that a division exists, where and management have very little understanding of rural school life and leadership challenges (du Plessis, 2014).

2.3. Challenges faced by teachers in rural schools

According to Motshekga (2011), teachers play a crucial role in society and serve as exemplary figures for their students. However, the challenges they encounter can be emotionally taxing (Hynds & McDonald, 2010). Gardiner (2008) revealed that rural school teachers often confront difficulties such as a shortage of classrooms, inadequate access to basic services like water and electricity, a lack of landline telephones, and no access to the internet or school libraries.

According to Wessels and Wood (2019), most classrooms are overcrowded and under-resourced, negatively affecting teachers' well-being (Dehaloo, 2011). Willemse and Deacon (2015) are of the view that teachers in African countries face poor job conditions and high job demands which lead to negative attitudes towards work and experiences of meaninglessness. Ebersöhn (2014) adds that poverty, societal violence, health problems, and education infrastructure are social ills that teachers are confronted with daily in rural and township schools. Working in the education sector as a teacher is an emotional profession associated with high levels of stress that may be the cause of job dissatisfaction, psychological disorders, and reduced well-being (Keller et al., 2016). In their study of teaching staff in the UK, Grenville-Cleave and Boniwell's (2012) findings focused on teachers, in particular those in rural schools, rated their well-being as significantly lower than other professional occupations such as health, social work, finance, and human resources.

Rural schools are most in need of the resources that are crucial for teaching and learning, this includes limited textbooks and a lack of up-to-date computer programmes, updated laboratories, and equipment such as photocopying machines (du Plessis & Raj, 2019). These are some of the issues that are common within this context and directly impact the performance of learners. According to Makori and Onderi (2014), using different assessment strategies to assess students is difficult because of limited textbooks. Du Plessis (2014) indicated that in some rural areas, schools have no science laboratories although they offer science subjects. The lack of laboratories and science equipment make it difficult to conduct practical sessions for science learners (John, 2019). Government-guiding policies, such as CAPS and SASA, advocate that teaching resources are a necessity for a child in any school. According to (DBE, 2011), it is one of the school's responsibilities to provide basic resources for teaching, such as textbooks, calculators, stationery,

and computers. In addition to these challenges, Du Plessis (2014) asserted that some rural schools encounter financial constraints as they are non-paying schools and government funding is inadequate to meet their needs. State funding is school-dependent: schools are financially supported based on their enrolment. The lower the school enrolment, the less funding is allocated, and vice versa. Furthermore, “poor funding in rural schools is one of the greatest challenges faced by rural education” (Du Plessis, 2014, p. 1114). Boadu (2020) stated that internal funds are limited to support teaching and learning, and as a result, some schools are unable to make the necessary teaching and learning material accessible to teachers and learners. This puts rural learners at a disadvantage in comparison to urban learners.

The literature has identified the shortage of teachers in rural areas as a major cause of the high workload experienced by existing teachers who are required to cover multiple subjects or classes due to the lack of staff.

The literature reveals that in rural areas, the shortage of teachers, and resultant high workload is frequent and significant complaint among teachers in these areas (Masinire, 2015). This leads to teachers teaching subjects they are not passionate about, and consequently, a decline in pass rates. Additionally, teachers experience work overload because rural schools find it difficult to attract good and suitable teachers due to fewer financial resources available (Du Plessis, 2014). Other reasons for teachers’ reluctance to teach in rural based schools are the quality of accommodation, classroom facilities, school resources, and access to leisure activities (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). As a result of the context of rural schools, teachers end up having to multitask, juggling the roles of teaching, administration, mentoring, discipline, and coordinating extra murals within their working environment (Esau, 2017). These strenuous demands appear to negatively impact

teachers' time management, planning, and well-being as they become overwhelmed and overburdened, which possibly leads to demotivation and burnout (Du Plessis, 2014).

In the education system, parental involvement is viewed as an important support channel (Ncama, 2021). Parents can involve themselves in several ways: becoming a school board representative, being concerned about their children's academic performance, attending formal school meetings and follow-up meetings with subject teachers to identify and understand the challenges facing their children (Hattie, 2013). Parental involvement further includes home-based education, where parents assist their children and ensure they complete homework activities, update their workbooks, and develop their reading abilities (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Ncama (2021) highlighted the crucial role of maintaining a strong connection between the school and its community, as it is essential for enhancing teacher performance.

When parents have better communication with teachers, they learn to value the work and the challenges that teachers face, and this contributes to teachers feeling appreciated and helps the teachers to get to know their learners better, enabling them to teach in a more personalised and effective way (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). According to the Centre for Child Well-Being (2010), when parents are involved in learners education, it offers many opportunities for improvement, and advances the childrens' morale, attitude, behaviour, and social adjustment, as well as their academic achievement across all subject areas. However, Subramanien and Du Plessis (2014) stated that in most rural areas, parents face socioeconomic issues such as poverty and illiteracy, and as a result, they are less able to be part of their children's education. Msomi (2019) argued that a lack of parental support negatively affects the implementation of the curriculum because it comes with numerous challenges. Learners whose parents are not involved in their education are less likely to participate in school activities.

Teaching is often viewed as a fulfilling career that enables students to excel, but challenging learning environments can make it a difficult and demanding job (Wessels & Wood, 2019). This stress, particularly in rural areas, may cause teachers to violate policies or even leave the education field for a less stressful job (Simbula et al., 2012). According to Geving (2007), nearly a third of teachers experience severe stress, and Msila (2017) reported that up to 4,000 teachers quit each year due to frustration. Workplace stress and mental health issues can arise from high emotional or cognitive demands, lack of opportunity, workload, or feeling undervalued (Beehr, 2014). Additionally, teachers in under-resourced settings face obstacles that can affect their well-being and ability to teach effectively (Wessels & Wood, 2019; Motshekga, 2011). Motivated and enthusiastic teachers are essential for delivering high-quality education and enhancing their well-being (Keller et al., 2016).

2.4. Well-being of teachers

McCallum and Price (2016) suggested that well-being is a dynamic and multifaceted concept that takes into account individual, family, and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities, and contexts over time. Although well-being is grounded in positive ideals, it is unique to each person and provides a sense of identity that deserves respect (McCallum & Price, 2016). Gillett-Swan and Sargeant (2014) envisaged well-being as “an individual’s capacity to manage over time, the range of inputs, both constructive and undesirable that can, in isolation, affect a person’s emotional, physical and cognitive state in response to a given context” (p.47). Some researchers proposed well-being as the balance point between an individual’s resource pool and the challenges faced (Dodge et al., 2012). The authors went on to suggest that, stable well-being is when individuals have the psychological, social, and physical resources they need to meet

a particular psychological, social, and/or physical challenge. Conversely, more challenges than resources, along with seesaw dips, negatively affect their well-being (Dodge et al., 2012).

Ryff (2014) defined well-being as psychological and subjective models. According to Ryff (2014), psychological well-being emphasises meaning making, self-realisation, growth, relatedness, and quality of relationships. However, well-being also subjectively reflects the extent to which people think and feel that their life is going well (Ryff, 2014). According to Burns (2016), psychological well-being refers to inter-and intra-individual levels of positive functioning that can include one's relatedness with others, and self-referent attitudes that include one's sense of mastery and personal growth. Subjective well-being are dimensions of affect and judgments of life satisfaction (Burns, 2016).

Research in positive psychology also includes efforts to contextualise subjective evaluations of well-being using cultural and socioeconomic dimensions as objective indicators of quality of life. From the hedonic perspective, the relationship between satisfaction with life and objective well-being indicators was widely explored (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). Several studies have considered age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and education level within the eudaimonic perspective of well-being, including works by Chirkov, Ryan, and Sheldon (2011), Keyes et al. (2008), and Park et al. (2006). Ryan and Deci (2008) and Ryff (2014) provided further clarification on well-being by differentiating between the hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives. The hedonistic model emphasizes work as a source of pleasure and enjoyment, as discussed in works by Turban and Wan (2016).

Eudaimonic well-being marks a meaningful, purposeful, and satisfying life through experiences, and assesses values, motives, objectives, actions, and environmental mastery and

functioning (Turban & Wan, 2016). While hedonic is often described as an emotional state, synonymous with subjective well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2008), a more comprehensive definition that has been used in contemporary literature considers hedonia not as a state or outcome, but rather as seeking pleasure or comfort in the present moment, through physical, intellectual, or social means (Huta and Waterman, 2014). The verified research on well-being displays a broad range of well-being models and related terminology, yet the two most influential approaches to understanding well-being appear to be ‘hedonic’ and ‘eudaimonic’ well-being, which stem from the disciplines of psychology and sociology (Cooke et al., 2016).

According to Leiter and Cooper (2017), workplace well-being encompasses physical health and comfort, mental health, a preponderance of positive over negative affect, and positive attitudes towards work. The improvement of the health and well-being of employees has become a priority for many organisations — either to improve productivity, or due to the recognition that organisations have a responsibility for employee well-being (Kelloway, 2017). Most research on creating workplace well-being suggests that there are certain limiting and facilitative conditions (contextual factors) within the individual, workplace, economy, and community that significantly influence (a) the relationship between work and well-being, (b) the effects of working conditions on well-being, and (c) the effectiveness of workplace interventions. This emerging holistic view is critical to understanding for anyone who is looking for a panacea or single solution to creating well-being at work (Karanika-Murray & Weyman, 2013).

In their 2012 study, Grenville-Cleave and Boniwell discovered that teachers rated their well-being lower compared to other professions such as health, social work, finance, and human resources. Aeltermann et al. (2018) defined teacher well-being as the outcome of a harmonious relationship between environmental factors and personal needs and expectations. Acton and

Glasgow (2015) described teacher well-being as a sense of professional fulfillment, satisfaction, purposefulness, and happiness, developed collaboratively with colleagues and students. The contextual characteristics such as gender, level of schooling, career stage, and subject specialization also affect teacher well-being, as suggested by McCallum et al. (2017). Similarly, McCallum and Price (2010) recommended that teachers should have a well-being strategy in place to ensure their effectiveness in the classroom. Sisask et al. (2014) claimed that teachers with high well-being are more likely to support students with mental health difficulties.

Similarly, several other studies presumed that the preconditions for teachers to improve the mental health of their students will be achieved by providing them with a good school environment, valuing the subjective psychological well-being of the teachers, and providing adequate training to fulfil their gatekeeper role (Roffey, 2011; Salter-Jones, 2012; Tyson, Roberts & Kane, 2009). In factors that impact teacher well-being, Acton and Glasgow (2015) distinguished between individual, relational, and external factors. McPrice and McCallum (2015) described the well-being of teachers according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. They utilised five systems of the ecological model to explore factors that impact teachers' well-being. Teachers operate and interact in numerous microsystems, including the school environment, home, community groups, friends, and many other agents. The first system, the microsystem, refers specifically to individual teachers and their relationship with their classroom and school environment and the many factors that influence them. The evolving interaction between the individual (teacher) and their environment is influenced by (teacher) perceptions, capacities, and the way they deal with the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

While the school environment is central to the teacher's well-being, contexts of family, friends, and networks (the mesosystem system) as well as wider organisational, system, societal, environmental, and cultural contexts (the exosystem level) interact with the teacher with varying effects. System and societal beliefs, values, and legislative influences (the macrosystem level) increasingly impact teachers' well-being. And finally, the timing of events, decisions, and actions (the chronosystem level) may play a pivotal role in influencing teacher well-being.

To fully comprehend and articulate the significance of relational well-being in promoting meaning and overall well-being, it is necessary to take into account the content and processes involved in human bonds as well as the connections and exchanges that shape the webs of meaning in relationships (Wissing, 2014). The experience of meaning is linked to various things valued by people, such as interpersonal relationships, as indicated above, but also spirituality, service to something larger than the self, nature, life work, material things, personal growth, and so on (Howel et al., 2013; Joshanloo, 2011; Steger, 2012). Meaning is thus also experienced in solitary pursuits of something significant to which connectedness is experienced. In building a model of meaning and relational well-being, these different connotations and phenomena of relatedness need to be considered. According to Roos and Du Toit (2014), well-being and thriving for wellness can be encouraged by building good relationships. Positive relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and leadership can have an affirmative influence on teachers' sense of well-being and this is an area worthy of further research (McCallum et al., 2017).

2.5. Relationships

Reis and Gable (2015) state that relationships may be the most important source of life satisfaction and well-being. Relationships are an important part of humanity. According to Hargie (2011), relationships are continuous, reciprocal verbal and non-verbal interactions between people.

Individuals can maintain relative comfort, security, and freedom from anxiety through reciprocal relationships of caring, warmth, satisfaction, and trust (Brownie & Hortsmanshof, 2012). Smith-Acuña (2011) also believes that people in satisfying relationships can express and address their own needs as well as those of the relationship.

According to Gerhardt (2015), warm and responsive early connections result in a more optimistic outcome of good psychosocial functioning. Relationships also have a significant impact on health and well-being outcomes (Warren & Donaldson, 2018). According to Greenaway et al. (2018), positive emotions and relationships are essential components of well-being. However, the specific ways in which relationships contribute to a sense of meaning in life may vary depending on the opportunities and constraints of the specific context. According to Wissing et al. (2020), the main identified life domains in which meaning was found are relational, namely, family, interpersonal relationships, society, community, and spirituality. Roffey (2011) identified the power of positive relationships across many contexts, including schools, organizations, and families. Healthy, positive relationships are one of the five pillars of authentic well-being identified by Seligman (2011). Allen et al. (2018) state that good social relationships support social and emotional well-being. According to Martin (2013), having positive connections with others can serve as a protective measure against stress and potential harm, as well as providing practical assistance with tasks, emotional support for daily challenges, companionship for shared activities, and contributing to social and emotional growth.

The hypothesis of the "need to belong" suggests that relationships can lead to beneficial outcomes, proposing how "human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.497). Martin and Dowson (2009) proposed that fulfilling the need for positive social

relationships can generate positive emotions, which in turn can drive motivation and engagement. They suggested that these positive emotions obtained from interpersonal connections can contribute significantly to an individual's overall well-being. In other words, favorable social relationships can provide a valuable avenue for obtaining positive energy and enhancing one's sense of well-being.

According to Spilt et al. (2011), interpersonal relationships between teachers have been explored as an indicator of teacher well-being. Teachers internalize experiences in representational models of relationships that guide emotional responses in daily interactions with students and their co-workers and change teacher well-being in the long run (Spilt, 2011). According to Mohd et al. (2016), one of the most fundamental elements in creating a positive work climate is the existence of positive interpersonal relationships and consistent support from the management. Peter (2008) stated that teachers who have a good relationship with their school management are likely to look for better ways to carry out their teaching job, and they tend to be more quality-oriented and productive. School managers who provide positive and healthy relationships between the school management and teachers contribute to student academic success (Adediran, 2011). Teachers are important adults in children's scholastic lives, and there is some evidence that teacher well-being, at least indirectly, has significant effects on children's socioemotional adjustment and academic performance (Moolenaar et al., 2010). Torrington et al. (2008) agreed that employees' motivation can be enhanced by fulfilling their psychological needs, such as forming good relationships and being recognised for their achievements. Kardas et al. (2019) added that gratitude and meaning in life are positively related to psychological well-being.

The experience of meaning has been theorized as an important component of well-being (Ryff, 2018) and has received increased attention as a study area in positive psychology (Martela &

Steger,2016). Meaning is closely tied to a vast array of well-being indicators. Some empirical studies focus on the important sources of meaning to provide a richer understanding of where it is that people find meaning in their lives (Delle Fave et al., 2013). Reker and Wong (1988, p.221) define personal meaning as the “cognizance of order, coherence, and purpose in one’s existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment” Wong (2016) defines personal meaning as a socially and individually constructed system, which endows life with personal significance. This meaning system includes five components: affective, motivational, cognitive, relational, and personal (i.e., personal characteristics and status in life (Wong, 2016). These components entail the four major psychological processes for living the good life: motivational (purpose, life goals, needs), cognitive (understanding, making sense of life), social/moral (responsibility, accountability, commitment), and affective (enjoyment/evaluation, positive emotions) (Wong, 2016).

A comprehensive way to define meaning is in terms of the PURE model (Wong, 2018), which emphasises four essential components: Purpose, Understanding, Responsible action, and Enjoyment/Evaluation. Life would not be meaningful in the absence of any of these ingredients. Datu and Salanga (2018) and Steger (2012) understand the meaning in life through two relative dimensions, namely, the presence of, or search for meaning. The presence of meaning refers to the extent that individuals experience meaning in their lives, while the search for meaning is the extent to which individuals intensely seek and desire an understanding of the purpose, significance, and meaning of their lives (Chu & Fung, 2020; Li & Dou, 2019; Newman et al., 2017; Steger et al., 2008). Meaning is when things are going well and people are enjoying pleasant, engaging, and successful activities. Positive emotions are probably sufficient to sustain a high level of subjective well-being (Wong, 2011). However, when people are going through very difficult times, meaning,

rather than positive emotions, becomes more important in maintaining some level of well-being (Wong, 2011). When the goals, interests, or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and hinder their efforts to accomplish the same goal, conflict arises (Kazimoto, 2013). There can be different pathways to achieving better performance at work; however, those that involve meaningfulness may be among the most effective (Wong, 2018). Generally, research suggests that the most common sources of meaning are relationships and the types of activities we are engaged in (Steger, 2012). This study seeks to understand how relational well-being experiences translate into meaning-making among the group of teachers teaching in rural areas who are faced with many challenges.

2.6. Importance of relationships in the workplace

Studies and reviews repeatedly point to interpersonal relationships as a core human need (Allen et al., 2018). On a descriptive level, interpersonal relational well-being is characterized by, for example, mutual trust, companionship, support, emotional security, concern, and caring, self-disclosure and sharing, positive reactivity, and moral action (Reis & Gable, 2015). Meaning in life is about what people value most. Various sources of meaning in life have been identified, with relationships (for example, with family, close others, community members, divinity, and ancestors) being one of the most often cited meaningful things for people across cultures (for example, Appiah-Sekyere, 2018; Delle Fave et al., 2016; Lambert et al., 2013; Onyedinma and Kanayo, 2013; White, 2017; Wissing et al., 2014; Wissing et al., 2019b).

The importance and significance of specific relationships can vary based on the cultural context and life situatedness (Khumalo et al., 2012; McCubbin et al., 2013; Onyedinma and Kanayo, 2013; Thomas et al., 2017). The centrality of relationships in human life for the experience of meaningfulness has been expanded on by Ryff and Singer (2013) and Ryff et al. (2014), who stated

that health and well-being benefit from loving relationships and purposeful living. Relationships are furthermore linked to a variety of other indicators of well-being (Harrell, 2018; Nwoye, 2017; Selvam, 2013; Warren and Donaldson, 2018). Greenaway et al. (2018) wrote that both social and professional relationships are vital as they offer support, interpersonal emotional regulation, companionship, motivation, and mentorship, which improves one's social and emotional well-being. Zedan (2012) believed that contact between parents and school, and parents' participation in parent-teacher meetings is important in building teacher-parent relationships, which in turn improve learners' performance in school. School-focused parenting practices are significant predictors of children's achievement (Stright & Yeo, 2014). According to Christenson and Reschly (2009), positive interactions between the teacher and parents spill over into helping to improve student engagement and learning outcomes. The centrality of relationships for the experience of meaningfulness was espoused in the "belongingness hypothesis" demonstrated in Baumeister and Leary (1995). Ryff and Singer (2008) stated that the experience of loving relationships and purposeful living is linked to better recovery from illnesses and also operates as protective and promotive mechanisms for health and well-being. The importance of interpersonal harmony for the experience of meaning and well-being in life was also indicated by Wang et al. (2018). Klein (6) showed that prosocial behaviour is linked to the experience of meaning in life on an intrapersonal level. Across many countries, empirical findings indicated that when individuals were asked what the most important things in their lives are, their answers most often referred to close interpersonal relations with partners, family, and close friends and to collegial relationships (Delle Fave et al., 2013; Mati et al., 2018; Wissing et al., 2019;).

The importance of well-being for the teaching profession is made clear by Coleman (2009), who argued that it hardly makes sense to tackle the emotional health of the learners in a school

without attending to the emotional health of the staff. McCallum and Price (2010) agreed, suggesting that teachers need a well-being strategy in place to ensure their well-being, thereby improving their effectiveness in the classroom.

2.7. Theoretical Framework: Relational theory of Working

Blustein's Relational Theory of Working emphasises the relationship between the working environment and the relativity of the people in it. Blustein (2011) argued how important interaction with others is, and conceptualises working as a foremost relational act. He further emphasised that work is primarily relational (involving relationships). Blustein (2011) argued that the importance of work relationships lies in the fact that they can provide individuals with a feeling of worth and satisfaction. Blustein described seven relational propositions in a working environment. The first proposition alludes to how people's thoughts and feelings about work influence how they think and feel about relationships. The second proposition suggests that an individual's problem-solving approach and career planning can be influenced by their attitudes and emotions towards past and current relationships. Examining the intersection of relationships and work in both caregiving and work contexts is the focus of the third proposition. The fourth proposition prospects how an individual's previous relationships can either assist or hinder their ability to make decisions and learn skills for work. In proposition five, the impact of work decisions on an individual's relationships with others is explored, which are shaped by their personal experiences, values, and culture. Proposition six explores whether an individual's cultural background influences their ability to find meaning in their work through their relationships with others. Finally, proposition seven explains how an individual's culture can provide a sense of belonging and security in relationships, which can be helpful in managing work-related challenges and transitions. In conclusion, Blustein's Relational theory allowed the researcher to explain the relational well-being

experiences of rural primary school teachers in South Africa. This was done by exploring participant reports on the relational well-being dynamics that unfold as teachers interact with each other as peers/colleagues and with the learners at an interpersonal and group level in a rural community. The contents of this chapter provide rich evidence of experiences of well-being. Well-being is of general concern to many professionals in varied contexts and this study's literature on relationships, meaning, and well-being is relevant in this case. However, the work of teachers is unique when compared to that of other professions and is often subjected to many governments' legislative requirements and reforms, making it an ever-changing landscape.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This study focuses on exploring the relational well-being experiences of teachers in rural schools. In this chapter, the researcher builds on earlier chapters that introduced this study, and reviewed the literature on teachers in a rural school, relationships, well-being, and the meaning linked to it. The central question of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of the relational experiences and meaningful relationships that contribute to the well-being of teachers in rural primary schools. This chapter reports the procedures used for data collection aimed at answering the research question.

Chapter 3 describes the research design and the methodological process followed in this study. The chapter begins with a description of the specific research context of where the study was carried out. The next section discusses the inside perspective and the identification of the research paradigm. The justification for the use of the research design and sampling, which covers the sampling method, sample size, and selection, are discussed. A detailed description of participants is also provided. The data collection method and instrument are provided and linked to the central and sub-questions. The researcher concludes the chapter with a discussion of aspects of data analysis, reliability and validity, trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations relevant to the study.

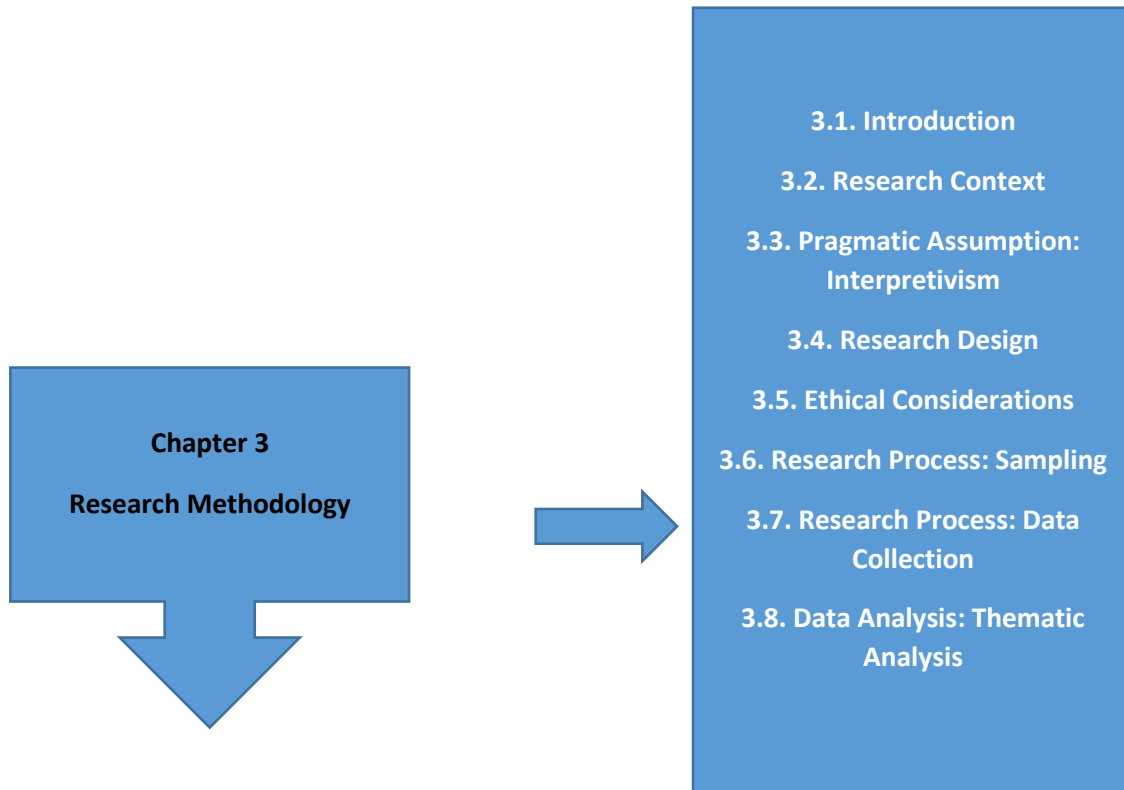


Figure 3: Outline of Chapter 3

3.2. Characteristics of Qualitative Research

The qualitative research design is characterised by the researcher deriving primary data through a direct conversation with participants, either in one-on-one interviews, or in a group interview, as it is based on people's everyday experiences (Mohajan, 2018). In this study, semi-structured interviews were used as a direct conversation with participants to gain a clear understanding concerning opinions, experiences, and feelings that shape their daily relational well-being experiences of teaching in a rural context. Mohajan (2018) stated that a researcher in a qualitative study must ensure that study participants, the setting, field, and institutions, gain a true reflection of behaviour patterns in their natural setting. The choice of a qualitative study was applicable to research how relationships contribute to the well-being of teachers in rural schools. The qualitative research assisted in the collation of rich descriptive data in this respect (Maree, 2007). The researcher benefited from using a qualitative study because participants provided meanings and explanations to the questions that were asked (Creswell, 2014). In turn, the researcher better understood what each participant spoke about regarding the relational well-being of teachers. Furthermore, qualitative studies allow for a broad explanation of behaviours and attitudes and have the advantage of answering micro-questions (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2014a). In the study, the researcher asked questions with the aim of acquiring data on relational well-being from the participants in rural schools.

3.3. Research Context

The study was conducted in a rural area situated in the Mpumalanga Province, which lies in the eastern part of South Africa, bordering Eswatini and Mozambique. The Mpumalanga province of South Africa, Mpumalanga lies in the eastern part of the country and covers a total area of 76 495 square kilometers (StatsSA, 2011). It is the second-smallest province after Gauteng, taking up 6.3

percent of South Africa's land area and with a population of over 4 million people (Census, 2011). The province is divided into three district municipalities, namely, Ehlanzeni, Gert Sibande, and Nkangala districts. The districts are further broken down into 18 municipalities. The province has approximately 5034 teachers across all phases (foundation, intermediate, and senior) (District Driven Data, 2020). The age ranges are clustered into phases as follows: Foundation Phase Grades R – 3 (± 5 – 9-year-olds); Intermediate Phase Grades 4 – 6 (± 10 – 12-year-olds); Senior Phase Grades 7 – 9 (± 13 – 15-year-olds); and Further Education and Training (FET) Phase Grades 10 – 12 (± 16 – 18-year-olds) (Department of Basic Education, 2018).

3.4. Paradigmatic Assumptions: Interpretivism

Qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). Researchers seek an understanding of the world in which participants live (Creswell, 2014). In this study the interpretivism paradigm allowed the researcher an opportunity to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants.

The focal point on understanding the depth of individual experiences is linked to this study's aim of exploring relational well-being experiences that contribute to the well-being of teachers in rural schools. In alignment with the ontological and epistemological stances of interpretivism, the study assumes that the participants' realities and experiences are subjective and context-based because they might have different histories and personalities, which could result in varied relational experiences. Therefore, subjectivity and context were important constructs to be considered from the inception of the study. These perspectives on reality and knowledge informed the research design, from the research question and aims, to data collection and analyses.

3.5. Research Design

According to Creswell and Poth (2017), a research design is an overall plan for converting conceptual research problems into the pertinent empirical research. This study employs a qualitative research study that will adopt a phenomenological approach within the interpretive paradigm. Phenomenological design is an approach within qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of the lived experiences of the targeted population within a particular context (Creswell, 2014). The primary goal of phenomenology is to arrive at a description of the nature of the phenomenon under investigation based on the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). Maxwell (2014) explained that the qualitative approach focuses on understanding the meaning of the participants, events, situations, the influences of the actions they are involved in, and the account they provide of their lives and experiences. In this study the participants described the unique relational well-being experiences that contributed to their well-being as teachers teaching in rural primary schools. The most important feature of the qualitative approach is that themes and categories are not pre-determined, as in quantitative research, but emerge from the data itself (Creswell and Poth, 2017). Therefore, the researcher analysed the data from semi-structured interviews on relational well-being experiences of teachers in rural schools and the meanings attached to these relationships. The interview transcriptions were analysed using thematic analysis through the identification of prominent themes discovered in the data and interpretations of the findings. The study used a phenomenological research design by acknowledging the participants' unique experiences, meanings, and realities of the relational well-being of teachers in rural schools.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

This research study was approved by the Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee, University of Pretoria (reference: HUM032/0521) before any data collection took place. The

detailed approval letter can be seen in Appendix A. Additionally, the Provincial Education Department of Education in Mpumalanga permitted the researcher to conduct research in their schools. This letter is attached as Appendix B.

3.6.1. Informed Consent

Informed consent involves briefing participants about the nature of a study and the benefits and risks associated with participating (Nnebue, 2010). The information should be presented in language that is accessible to ensure that their participation is voluntary (Nnebue, 2010). The choice of research participants was based on ethics and informed consent and involved several considerations, such as: 1) prospective participants were well-informed so that they fully understood their involvement as subjects; (2) prospective participants provided consent, which included an explicit statement that they understood and agreed to participate in the research; and (3) the decision to get involved in the research was voluntary, without physical pressure (violence, physical coercion) or psychological pressure, i.e., manipulation or lying (Ferreira & Serpa, 2018).

In addition to voluntary participation in this study, confidentiality was maintained to protect the participants' identity in the results. The researcher ensured that after reading the participant Information Sheet (Appendix D), every participant completed a consent form (Annexure C), which is regarded as written permission to partake in the study. Written informed consent was obtained from every participant before data collection. The forms were distributed via email to all participants. Participants were encouraged to send back the form at their earliest convenience, but within five days before the interviews. The researcher went through the information regarding the study with each participant before conducting the interview, emphasising the voluntary nature of participation, the freedom to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences, as

well as the freedom to decline to answer uncomfortable questions. Consent forms were made available in English. There was no reimbursement for participants of this study. The data collected from this study will be used for the researcher's dissertation, conference presentations, and publications. Once the study is completed, results will be available to participants on request. Interview transcripts and audio recordings are password protected and archived at the Department of Psychology for a period of 10 years. Future use of the data will be subject to future Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

3.6.2. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Hoft (2021) states that the practices of anonymity and confidentiality are used to protect the privacy of human subjects who are participating in a study while the researchers collect, analyse, and report data associated with the participants. The core ethical value that governs research is that of ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of participants by concealing their private information (Health Professions Council of South Africa [HPCSA], n.d.). In this study, only the researchers involved have access to participants' private information to ensure that it remained confidential. Participants' private information was stored on password-protected laptops and any shared databases restricted access to the researchers involved in this study. Anonymity refers to the inability to link a given response to a specific person (Babbie, 2016; Stangor, 2015), and every effort should be taken to safeguard the precise contributions and identities of the participants (Babbie, 2016). To ensure participants' anonymity, it is also important to keep any identifying details confidential. During the reporting of the data, pseudonyms were employed when reporting research results to maintain participants' anonymity. Therefore, in this study, teachers were described by using numbers, ages, and gender. For example, Participant 1, age 65, Female.

3.6.3. Emotional Risk

The principle of non-maleficence stresses that researchers should ensure that no harm should come to participants during the research process (HPCSA, n.d.). The anticipated emotional risks in the participation of this study were minimal. Participants were allowed break sessions in-between throughout the duration of the interviews to avoid fatigue. No participants encountered emotional discomfort and there were no reasons to for the researcher to refer any of them to a counselling psychologist who covers the Ehlanzeni, Gert Sibande, and Nkangala districts as outlined in the participant information sheet (Annexure D). The topic of the study, however, was not especially sensitive, so the risk of emotional distress was minimal and there was no incident of a participant being noticeably distressed during the research process.

3.6.4. Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the study

Various criteria were used to assess the quality of this qualitative study. Trustworthiness elaborates how qualitative researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability were evident in their research (Given & Saumure, 2012).

3.6.4.1. Transferability

Transferability reflects the need to be aware of and describe the scope of one's qualitative study so that its applicability to different contexts (broad or narrow) can be readily discerned (Given & Saumure, 2012). In this study, transferability was enriched through thick description by describing the relational experiences and their context to ensure that experiences become meaningful to an outsider/reader.

3.6.4.2. Credibility

Credibility is an essential procedure that offers authority to the participant's point of view. It creates confidence in the findings (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The methods to ensure credibility include member checking, data triangulation, and investigator triangulation (Brantlinger et al., 2005). In this study, credibility was ensured by using member checking to ensure that the researcher's documents interpret the participants' interview experiences as meant by the participants. The researcher used an audio recorder to ensure that all participants' verbal responses were accurately captured. The invaluable critique and evaluation of the researcher's work by the researcher's supervisors ensured that every component of the study was conducted in line with the appropriate research and ethical standards.

3.6.4.3. Dependability

The dependability criterion focuses on ensuring that researchers can replicate the research methodology and data collection processes (Given & Saumure, 2012). This makes it crucial for the study to have a logical and clear research methodology that can be replicated by fellow researchers in the future. To ensure dependability in this study, an audit trail was transparently performed to describe the research steps taken from the start of the research project to the development and reporting of the findings. The researcher ensured that data transcriptions and data analyses were peer-reviewed to avoid misrepresentation and triangulate the data for results. The co-coder was a colleague of the researcher, who is a researcher and knowledgeable in qualitative research.

3.6.4.4. Confirmability

Confirmability reflects the need to ensure that the interpretations and findings match the data (Given & Saumure, 2012). That is, no claims were made that cannot be supported by the data.

During this study, confirmability was implemented through the intervention of peer reviewers, which was done by the researcher's supervisor. A detailed methodological description of the study was provided.

3.6.4.5. Reflexibility

Reflexivity is a fundamental aspect of qualitative research that empowers researchers to make ethical decisions that accurately reflect the complexity of participants' experiences and social practices (Finlay, 2002a). This approach values subjectivity and encourages researchers to scrutinize their impact on research as meaning is constructed throughout the research process (Varpio et al., 2019). Researchers adopt reflexivity to achieve a range of goals, such as acknowledging, neutralizing, explaining, or capitalizing on their subjectivity (Gentles et al., 2015). In transcendental phenomenology, the "bracketing" process helps researchers set aside personal aspects that might affect their study (Neubauer et al., 2019). Reflexivity can be approached through various methods, including epistemological and personal reflexivity (Willig, 2013). By acknowledging the role of reflexivity in research, researchers can improve their understanding of the phenomenon under study and shape the research process accordingly.

3.6.4.5.1. Epistemological Reflexivity

Epistemological reflexivity encourages us to reflect on the assumptions that we have made during the research and about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings (Saunders et al., 2012). Epistemology can be explained as the study of the criteria by which the researcher classifies what does and does not constitute knowledge (Hallebone & Priest, 2009). In simple words, epistemology focuses on what is known to be true. It is a way of thinking in contrast to ontology. Epistemology is a vast field with multiple areas and issues. An assumption that the researcher held about reality is that teaching in rural areas is difficult due to the challenges

surrounding the school, which can result in stress for anyone. This is reflected in the choice not to study teachers in general, but specifically teachers in rural schools. Therefore, to make sense of the findings, the researcher ensured that participants' experiences were interpreted in a way that objectively explained the results, or that were more a reflection of how they experience/explain relationships and well-being, rather than imposing assumptions about challenges in teaching on the findings. Furthermore, the researcher's supervisor critically reviewed the initial drafts of this study's findings to ensure that the recorded observations and conclusions reflected what the participants were saying, rather than any bias on the researcher's part due to pre-existing assumptions about reality. As such, the supervisor played an instrumental role in minimizing the extent to which knowledge biases shaped the final presentation of findings.

3.6.4.5.2. Personal Reflexivity

Researchers need to engage in personal reflexivity by examining and making clear their expectations, assumptions, and both conscious and unconscious reactions to contexts, participants, and data. (Gentles et al., 2015). The researcher's participation is a significant aspect of the research process that should be analysed and interpreted. Engaging in personal reflexivity should go beyond disclosing each researcher's background and training; it should include descriptions of how the researcher's prior experiences and motivations might influence the decisions made throughout the project (Finlay, 2002b), and whether that influence is positive, negative, or neither. Personal reflexivity ought to occur continuously across the duration of the investigation and should be interwoven with all aspects of the project i.e., from the project's conception to research outputs. Additionally, personal reflexivity should address the impact of the research on the researchers (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017). Engaging in a personal reflexive exercise can be a powerful learning experience (Mann et al., 2009) that can reshape a researcher's practices and catalyze other kinds

of change (Koopman et al., 2020). However, it is also essential to consider potentially negative impacts; for example, discussing loss and grief with participants may trigger intense emotions in researchers who share those experiences (Rowling, 1999).

Reflecting on the researcher's thoughts and feelings regularly assisted in ensuring that participants' interviews were approached without bias as the study progressed. This helped the researcher to gain a deeper understanding and a broader perspective of her own life and career. The researcher is a 33-year-old black female Psychology Master's student whose home language is English or isiZulu, and who lives in Pretoria, Gauteng Province. The researcher grew up in a strict and emotionally detached household and was always curious about the well-being of others. When the researcher started university, she decided to major in psychology. The desire to help others remained constant. The researcher gained knowledge, competence, and skills in the education sector, government administration, and non-governmental organizations throughout the course of a ten-year career. The researcher's interest in communities and society, the health and well-being of teachers, and relationships, has been a constant during the course of employment as a Research Assistant and as a Department of Basic Education employee. Engagements with teachers through various projects have shaped my views on their knowledge, practical guidance, difficulties, and insights. I've realized that their upbringing, experiences, and ideals differ from mine. As a result, I empathise with their viewpoints and perspectives on life. As the study's researcher, I am aware of my direct and personal role in the data collecting and analysis and I have given considerable thought to the research process.

3.7. Research Process: Sampling

Definitions of sampling are diverse across the literature (Ncama, 2021). According to Gentles et al. (2015), sampling refers to the selection of specific data sources from which data will be

collected to address the research objectives. Etikan (2016) noted that the stage of choosing a study sample is crucial in any research project since it is rarely practical, efficient, or ethical to study the whole population. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argued that in a qualitative study, only the sample should be selected to represent the overall population. Gentles et al. (2015) shared this view that it is not possible to study the whole population in research, and hence, a group, or individuals with special characteristics should be chosen to represent the entire population. Therefore, the objectives, as well as the characteristics of the study, play a vital role in determining which and how many people to select. Martínez-Mesa et al. (2014) believed that factors such as time allocated, resources available, and study objectives are major factors that influence the sample size of the study.

According to Crossman (2018), purposive sampling is the most common and suitable sampling strategy in qualitative research as participants are grouped based on preselected criteria that are suitable to address the research questions and the focus of the study. Crossman (2018) stated that purposive sampling also refers to judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. This sampling method focuses on common characteristics of the overall population that are of interest in the proposed study, which enabled me to answer the planned research questions. Crossman (2018) further asserted that this sampling method is most suitable in cases where the researcher needs to reach proposed participants quickly. This method of sampling relies directly on the researcher's judgement in terms of selecting the unit of analysis to be studied. In purposive sampling, personal judgment is used to choose cases that help answer research questions or achieve research objectives (Saunders et al., 2012).

According to Battaglia (2008), a purposive sample, also referred to as a judgmental or expert sample, is a type of nonprobability sample and its main objective is to produce a sample that can

be logically assumed to be representative of the population. Purposive sampling often involves utilising expert knowledge of a population to select a non-random sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population (Battaglia, 2008). The researcher utilised purposive sampling to select ten participants, which included both males and females from the foundation and intermediate phases. Teachers from two primary schools were included in the study. The researcher sought permission from the department of education to conduct a study in quintile 1-3 schools in Mpumalanga Province (See letter attached to Appendix B).

The schools in South Africa are categorised (Republic of South Africa, 2015) into five quintiles. Quintile refers to a category system which differentiates the poorest from the least poor schools in the province. The ranking is based on the unemployment rate and literacy rate of the community in which the school is located, with Quintile 1 indicating a poor/impoverished school, and Quintile 5 indicating a wealthy/affluent school. In this study, only teachers from two schools in quintiles 1-3 in Mpumalanga Province were included. The data was gathered in the above-mentioned province, which was convenient for the researcher as this is her home area. Due to the purposive sampling of this study, inclusion criterion was stipulated. The inclusion criteria for the selection of suitable participants in this study were as follows:

- Teachers who were willing to participate.
- Teachers with teaching experience of five years and above from quintile 1-3 ordinary rural schools.
- Both males and females teachers.
- Teachers who use English as a medium of instruction were included.

The exclusion criteria included teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience and Heads of Departments (HOD). After the sample was selected, interviews were scheduled with ten teachers

from two rural primary schools in Mpumalanga. The sample was inclusive of teachers with a variety of teaching experiences. All the data was transcribed and presented in the findings of this study. The table below describes the participants whose transcripts were used in this study.

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender
Participant 1	47	Female
Participant 2	30	Male
Participant 3	46	Male
Participant 4	53	Female
Participant 5	33	Female
Participant 6	50	Male
Participant 7	53	Male
Participant 8	47	Female
Participant 9	56	Female
Participant 10	48	Female

The above table indicates that the interviewed sample included 6 females and 4 males. The age groups ranged from 30 years of age to the highest recorded age of 56 years old.

3.8. Sample Description

The study consisted of 10 South African teachers who work in rural schools in Mpumalanga Province. As per the inclusion and exclusion criteria of this study, the participants were chosen based on: their willingness to participate; teaching experience of five years and more from quintile 1-3 ordinary rural schools; both males and females teachers; and teachers who use English as a medium of instruction were included. The conversations with the participants were held at a time convenient for them. In this study, the participants were identified using numbers, age, and sex, for example: (P1, 47, female). (Participants 1-10).

Participant 1(P1)

P1 is a 47-year-old female teacher who has been teaching foundation phase at a rural school for 25 years. She was born and raised in the same village where she is teaching. She acknowledges her relations with her peers and community, valuing the learners the most. Most of the learners' parents know her personally and communicate concerns they have about the school through her.

Participant 2(P2)

P2 is a 30-year-old Mathematics and English male teacher. He has been teaching foundation phase grades for eight years. P2 values his relations with his peers because of the mentorship he received since starting his career in a rural school. He is still studying to ensure he is eligible for a promotion, as well as to develop himself.

Participant 3(P3)

P3 is a 46-year-old teacher who has been teaching foundation phase grades for six years. P3 loves music, teaching, and is a pastor at a local church. He is compassionate and loves his learners.

Participant 4(P4)

P4 is a 53-year female teacher who exclusively teaches Grade 3 learners. She relocated to Mpumalanga to explore teaching in a rural context and enjoys it. The relationships she has with her learners go beyond the classroom. According to her description, she has become their second mother and assists the unprivileged learners.

Participant (P5)

P5 is a 33-year-old, female foundation phase teacher. She has been teaching for eight years and is currently advancing her studies in foundation phase teaching. She values the respect and support she receives from her fellow teachers.

Participant 6 (P6)

P6 is a 50-year-old teacher, who has been teaching for 12 years in rural schools. He is also the physical education teacher for the foundation phase and enjoys seeing learners play. He believes learning occurs both inside and outside the classroom.

Participant 7 (P7)

P7 is 53-years-old and has been teaching for 15 years. He loves teaching and is aiming to be in a management position in the next five years of his career. He highlighted that working in the rural context is challenging, yet seeing the learners excel keeps him motivated.

Participant 8 (P8)

P8 is a single, 47-year-old lady with three children. She started teaching in 2009 as a junior primary teacher working with learners from grades 1-3. She has health challenges but her drive to see her learners succeed drives her to teach against all odds.

Participant 9 (P9)

P9 is a 56-year-old teacher who has been teaching for 20 years. Her teaching years started at a township school and 10 years later she moved to teach in a rural school. She is passionate about empowering the community and exposing learners to further learning opportunities.

Participant 10 (P10)

P10 is a 48-year-old teacher who has been teaching for 15 years in rural schools across South Africa. Her main concern is related to the question why parents in rural schools fail to support their children.

3.9. Research Process: Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured telephonic interviews (Creswell, 2014) (See Appendix E) to adhere to the COVID-19 regulations. Semi-structured interviews can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data that provide the researcher with the opportunity to use a blend of both open and closed-ended questions (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2014).

The interviews were conducted in English. In this study, the questions that guided the interviews were as follows: Please tell me your experiences of working at this school. How do you relate with students, peers, and the community around this school? What are the most meaningful relationships that contribute to their well-being? The duration of each interview was scheduled to take 60 minutes per participant. All the interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. Interviews lasted for 50 minutes on average, and they were recorded using a digital audio recorder for Microsoft (MS) Teams.

3.10. Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Putting oneself in another person's shoes and seeing the world from their perspective is a crucial component of qualitative research, and the most important part of data analysis is to be true to the

participants (Sutton & Austin, 2016). Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that thematic analysis should be a foundational method for qualitative analysis, as it provides the core skills for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts. The researcher closely examined the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly. The researcher followed the six steps by Braun and Clarke (2006) of thematic analysis which includes data, generating, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and report writing.

The following phases outline the process of the thematic analysis according to (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

Step 1

The data was collected from the field, organised, and prepared for analysis using the Excel programme. At this stage, the data were transcribed verbatim and were ready for exploration.

Step 2

This step includes a thorough reading of the data. Each interview transcript was carefully explored to look for common thoughts or ideas shared by participants that are related to the research question. During this step data reduction took place, where unrelated information was removed, particularly the kind of information that does not necessarily respond to the initial research question, though in some instances these may contribute to original ideas. Most importantly, the common themes were coded together using the Excel programme.

Step 3

To address the research questions, the coded themes were analysed in detail in an attempt to build descriptions of the themes. This means that the themes coded together were attached with

the meanings they represent to produce core themes. This stage, therefore, produced the main themes that directly respond to the main research questions.

Step 4

The core themes produced by the coded themes were then represented by meanings and reported as findings of the study.

Step 5

Before the final stage, the findings of the study were interpreted and aligned with the objectives of the study. The interpretation of the findings included a close check of the original data to make sure that what was said aligned with what was interpreted by the researcher. Also, in this process the relationship between the findings and previous studies was closely checked to validate the implications.

Step 6

The final stage was to validate the accuracy of the findings and their implications. This was done through the process of member checking. The good rapport the researcher developed during the data collection period assisted in this process as respondents tried to be open and honest throughout. As a result, accuracy validation was not complicated.

3.11. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter aimed to describe the research methodology that was employed in conducting the study, which involved a qualitative approach. The research design facilitated the selection of 10 rural school teachers for the interview. The choice of the sampling strategy, identification of the unit of analysis, sample size, and selection of the participants were motivated in detail by the researcher. The use of the interview and the semi-structured interview guide assisted the researcher

to gain detailed responses from most of the rural school teachers. The researcher employed steps in ensuring that ethics were considered during this study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

This chapter is a presentation of findings from the data collected during the semi-structured interviews. The presentation of the findings is guided by the following aim: to understand relational experiences and meaningful relationships that contribute to the well-being of teachers teaching at rural primary schools. The presentation of the findings is guided by the following research questions: (i) What are the relational experiences of teachers teaching at a rural primary school; and (ii) What are the meaningful relationships that contributed to their well-being? The objectives of this study were to: (1) understand the relational dynamics of teachers at a rural primary school; and (2) explore the meaningful relationships which contribute to their well-being. A thematic data analysis was used to analyse the data. This chapter aims to provide a detailed account of the participants' experiences. The findings are divided into themes and sub-themes which are listed in the table below. In presenting the excerpts in the chapter, the information in the parentheses next to participants' excerpts (for example, "Participant 1(P1), age (47), sex (Female) refers to the participants' number, ages, and gender. The figure below outlines the contents of this chapter.

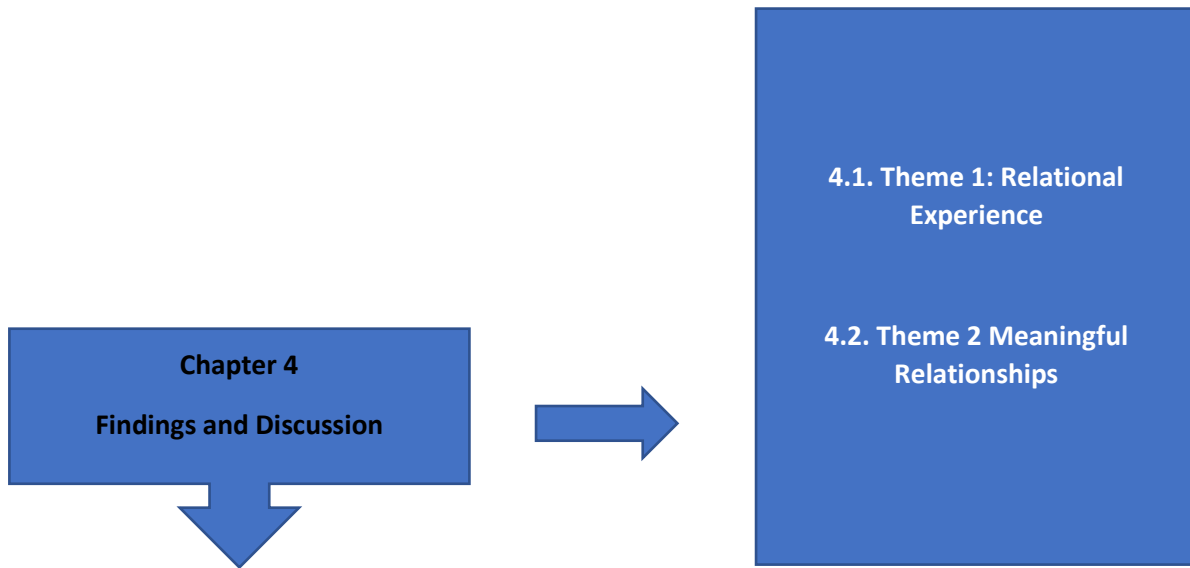


Figure 4: Outline of Chapter 4

4.1 Theme Outline

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Relational experiences	a) Teacher/learner relationships b) Teacher/parent relationships c) Collegial relationships d) Community relationships
2. Meaningful relationships	e) a) Collaborative Interpersonal Relationships f) b) Purposeful relationships g) c) Supportive relationships h) d) Sense of fulfilment i) e) Valued relationships

4.2. Theme 1: Relational experiences

According to Reis and Gable (2015), relational experiences are integral to who we are as human beings. This is because relationships are an important source of one's well-being. The teaching-learning process needs the involvement of teachers and learners for it to be successful and effective.

In this study, the relational experiences were described through how teachers relate with learners, parents, colleagues, and the community.

4.2.1. Subtheme 1: Teacher/learner relationships

The following sentiments were expressed by the participants on how they relate to their pupils. The participants expressed this in the excerpts below:

"My relationship with the learners is nurturing and it gives me the joy to see them happy."

(P1, 47, Female)

"The relationship is very good. We have a close and open relationship." (P2, 30, Male)

"I do enjoy it a lot with the learners because sometimes they make jokes, and they talk innocently. I enjoy teaching..." (P4, 53, Female)

"These relationships are connected. As a teacher, it feels good." (P6, 50, Male)

The sub-theme highlighted the importance of the learner/teacher relationship as a pinnacle that contributed to teachers enjoying their work and positively impacting their well-being. It is noted in the findings that most teachers appear to experience positive, good, and open relationships with their learners, and this contributed to them being motivated and encouraged to look forward to going to work every day. The above excerpts agree with da Luz (2015) who stated that the link between good learner-teacher relations improves learner performance and fulfills and satisfies

teachers in their work. Literature from Gottfried (2009) supports these findings by agreeing that teacher-learner relationships can keep learners from falling behind and close the achievement gap in education. Sheldon and Epstein (2002) echoed the sentiments that positive relationships with learners are beneficial for the teacher and can reduce their career changes and provide a greater sense of fulfillment in their careers.

4.2.2. Subtheme 2: Teacher/parent relationships

Teacher/parent relationships were mainly described as challenging. It is always expected that parents should be active agents in promoting the relationships between the school and the learner as this moulds the learners' education. In this study, it appeared to be the opposite of that. The following participants expressed:

"I feel that there is a lack of support for us as educators. The parent doesn't show support even when you write a letter to them. It always leads to me as a teacher feeling like I failed the learners like I'm helpless because I can see they have potential but alone I cannot do it.
" (P5, 33, Female)

"Rural schools are sometimes problematic. The learners' parents are not participating, and they don't help their kids. The parents are not concerned about their children's education. It makes me feel bad because with these children, if their parents can be on board, we're going to produce a lot of great kids and that would help us in our community. (P4, 53, Female)

"When you invite parents to come to collect the learners' quarterly results and share their progress they are not interested. Parents in rural areas don't care but expect learners to pass. It's problematic. (P6, 50, Male)

“Parents only participate in school activities only if they will benefit from them.” (P7, 53, Male)

“We discussed the learner’s problems, and we have parents’ meetings, but they just do not come to meetings.” (P9, 56, Female)

The above findings showed that there is a lack of positive relationships between the parents and teachers. This is caused by the lack of parental involvement to support both the teachers and their children’s education. Lack of parental involvement has created a lot of challenges for teachers in creating good and reciprocal relationships with the parents for the benefit of the children. Based on the excerpts above it appears there is a lack of reciprocal teacher/parent relationships which is a major cause of concern to teachers and has strained their relationships. The lack of communication between teachers and parents appear to have resulted in negative emotions, which led to teachers feeling helpless and discouraged. Smith-Acuña (2011) supported this notion, believing that people in satisfying relationships can express and address their own needs as well as those of the relationship. Zedan (2012) agreed that contact between parents and school, and parents’ participation in parent-teacher meetings is very important for building teacher-parent relationships, which in turn improves learners’ performance in school. Stright and Yeo (2014) were also of the opinion that school-focused parenting practices are significant predictors of children’s achievement. Christenson and Reschly (2009) echoed the sentiments that positive interactions between teacher and parents spill over to help improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

4.2.3. Subtheme 3: Collegial relationships

This subtheme addresses the experiences of teachers and their colleagues (other teachers, the principal, heads of departments, circuit managers, and other staff in schools). Their relationships

were described in terms of the support and assistance they render each other. To illustrate the teacher-colleague relational experiences, some excerpts are presented below:

“Working together is the most important key in an institution. So as teachers, we need to support each other.” (P1, 47, Female)

“It’s a healthy relationship because we have fun, and we help each other.” (P2, 30, Male)

“The good part is that we have a principal who is cooperating and always willing to assist. She’s also a good listener and makes you want to come to work daily. She is hands-on and involved in all school activities while she’s also teaching grade 4 to grade 7 learners.” (P3, 46, Male)

“I can walk to the principal’s office and ask a question about something I don’t understand and get support.” (P5, 33, Female)

“With my colleagues, it is different to an extent that you sometimes come to work with baggage from home and you speak to of our colleagues and assist you with the problem. This shows how honest and trustworthy they are.” (P10, 48, Female)

“I do enjoy being with my colleagues. I take them as my sisters because 90% of my life I spend here with them. Our relationship means a lot because I’ve learned something from each one”. (P5, 33, Female)

“It makes me feel good because I will become open and transparent about the child’s needs and learn from each other about the child.” (P4, 53, Female)

The participants shared mostly positive experiences regarding their relations with their colleagues and school principals. They emphasised that they work well together, support each

other, and have a healthy relationship. The excerpts portray how relational cohesion and the bonds created motivated the teachers to work well with their management. The elements of support among co-workers assisted with strengthening relationships between the teachers and higher management. In support of the findings, Split (2011) pointed out that teachers who experience representational models of relationships, which guide emotional responses in daily interactions with learners and their co-workers, improve their well-being in the long run. Moda et al. (2016) also believed that one of the most fundamental elements in creating a positive work climate is the existence of positive interpersonal relationships and consistent support from the management. The excerpts above also revealed how teachers are dedicated and value the relationship they have with each other as colleagues. The findings corroborate Peter's (2008) statement that teachers who have good relationships with their subordinates and school management are likely to look for better ways to carry out their teaching job and are more quality-oriented and more productive. Adediran (2011) also stated that school managers who promote positive and healthy relationships between school management and the teachers contribute to student academic success.

The findings also revealed that teachers have not only developed work relationships, but also connected emotionally and supported each other and have become like a family. Below are excerpts from some of the participant's experiences:

“The most important one is the one with my peers because having a good relationship with peers makes the working environment and conditions much more enjoyable and you'll be able to perform very well. They can help and assist you where you have difficulties. So, it's simple to talk to anyone and engage them for assistance.” (P2, 30, Male)

“The one with the people I'm working with. Because we are a community now ourselves, we are family. We are there for one another all the time. It's good. Very good. It makes me feel good because I know whenever I'm not feeling good. Some people pick up the phones and check on me. When someone has lost a loved one, we are there for this person. They know my children. Talk to them about my children even make, even if they have not met them, but they know them by name.” (P9, 56, Female)

From the above excerpts, it appears there is a sense of community and belonging among the participants. This is expressed through how they assist each other right with their work obligations and personal problems they face. According to Geue (2017), when workplace relationships are characterized by cooperation, trust, and fairness, it fosters future interactions that promote mutual respect, confidence, inspiration, enhancing overall performance. Teachers also indicated that they live in harmony and are always there for one another in times of need. Greenaway et al. (2018) also described social and professional relationships as vital, as they offer support, interpersonal emotional regulation, companionship, motivation, and mentorship, thereby improving one's social and emotional well-being.

In all human relational interactions, there are bound to be disagreements (Valente & Lourenço, 2020). It is noted in the findings that although there are cordial relationships among colleagues, they also experience disagreements. Here are some of the sentiments from the participants.

“We quarrel as human beings, but it is not that bad in such a way that will fight not talking to each other. We disagree but that does not mean we are fighting. The truth is that 90% of our relationship is good. It is a working relationship.” (P3, 46, Male)

“Like any human, I feel angry sometimes when other colleagues refuse to be team players.” (P7, 53, Male)

In the above excerpts, it appears that conflicts between colleagues arose with good cause. The conflicts seem to have strengthened their relationships and to have assisted them in achieving good goals for the benefit of the learners they teach. Kazimoto (2013) also believes that disagreements may arise when the goals, interests, or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and an attempt to achieve the same objectives. Wong (2011) and Wong (2018) are of the view that uncomfortable experiences of conflict management play a role in individuals thriving in any work situation.

4.2.4 Subtheme 4: Community relationships

Schools are situated within communities and are influenced by their surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, communal relationships are described as those relationships the teachers have with members of the community, this includes political leaders, church leaders, and municipality councillors. The relational experiences with the above-mentioned are expressed in the excerpts below:

“The political leaders of this place are so supportive of our school. Even the church leaders from the Presbyterian Church have given to the school. We find that we would have problems, maybe the school has got no water and that there's so much support.... Yes, so there are very good for us.” (P10, 48, Female)

“It's a positive relationship because they come to me and ask questions regarding things they don't understand or seek clarity on certain questions.” (P2, 30, Male)

“One day we had a challenge with electricity, and we went to the house just nearby the school and they managed to assist us for the sake of the learners without expecting payment.”

(P3, 46, Male)

“I feel that this is a type of community that you want as a teacher and they respect the work of a teacher, and they embrace education.” (P3, 46, Male)

The above findings indicate how the community makes an effort to show an interest in school matters by providing resources in areas where the schools are challenged. The teachers appreciated the relationship, support and involvement of the community in school activities. This resulted in them feeling respected as teachers, and appreciated for their work. In support of these findings Clark and Mills (2012), stated that a relationship with the community is important as it plays a significant support role in the school and communal motivation. They further described care and concern for the welfare of others as lying at the heart of building close and supportive interpersonal relationships. Crocker et al. (2017) are also of the opinion that relationships are inherently interdependent in nature and communal motivation to care for others is essential to ensure the well-being of both parties, which in this case, are the teachers and community. According to the UNESCO IIEP Report (2019), the involvement of communities and families is a key pillar of education.

4.3. Theme 2: Meaningful relationships

This theme describes meaningful relationships that contribute to the teachers' well-being. These relationships were described through sub-themes, namely collaborative interpersonal relationships, purposeful relationships, supportive relationships, sense of fulfillment, and valued relationships.

4.3.1 Subtheme 1: Collaborative Interpersonal Relationships

According to Mohd et al. (2016), one of the most fundamental elements in creating a positive work climate is the existence of positive interpersonal relationships. This subtheme described the experiences of teachers (other teachers, the principal, heads of departments, circuit managers, and other staff in schools, learners, and the community) in collaborative relationships within the school context as meaningful to them. To illustrate the collaborative interpersonal experiences, some excerpts are presented below:

“The importance of collaboration effort from learners, colleagues, and the community and that these relations need to be nurtured”. (P4, 53, Female)

“So that's why I'm saying that I make sure that I nurture the relations. I believe in everyone playing their part.” (P1, 47, Female)

“The collaborative relationship has assisted me in developing more strategies to deal with young people and minds and in basically dealing with people.” (P2, 30, Male)

The participants described the importance of nurturing positive collaborative interpersonal relationships among parents, learners, their colleagues, and the community, as this promotes connectedness. The connectedness of these relationships motivated the participants to explore better ways to interact with each other, which in turn promoted positive emotions. The findings revealed that participants highlighted the importance of all parties being in a collaborative interpersonal relationship and nurturing their relationships to enhance connectedness. The relationship of this kind seems important, providing meaning to participants who value it as a channel that enhances classroom teaching and learning quality. This kind of relationship appeared

to be important, providing meaning to the participants, who value it as a channel that enhances the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Basford and Offermann (2012) found that employees reported higher levels of motivation when interpersonal relationships with co-workers were good and when the interactions were trusting, collaborative, and positive. According to Spilt et al. (2011), interpersonal relationships between teachers and learners are representational models of relationships that guide emotional responses in daily interactions with learners and their co-workers and change teacher well-being in the long run. Moolenaar et al. (2010) supports Spilt et al. (2011) by stressing that teacher-learner relationships are important in children's scholastic lives, and there is some evidence that teacher well-being, at least indirectly, significantly affects children's socioemotional adjustment and academic performance (Moolenaar et al., 2010). Martin (2013) showed that positive interpersonal relationships have been proposed as a buffer against stress and risk, instrumental help for tasks, emotional support in daily life, companionship in shared activities, and a basis for social and emotional development.

4.3.2 Subtheme 2: Purposeful Relationships

The PURE model (Wong, 2018) defines meaning through four essential components as Purpose, Understanding, Responsible action, and Enjoyment/Evaluation. This subtheme focused on purposeful relationships as experienced by teachers in a rural school context. To illustrate the purposeful relationship experiences, some excerpts are presented below:

“The most important relationship is with the learners because I am here for them and must embrace and protect them.” (P3, 46, Male)

“They build my character, and they bring about change, even in my personal life. Especially in my relationship with the learners, we have formed a bond.” (P3, 46, Male)

“I’m not here for the money but I’m here for my interest. I’m here for the kids. It makes me proud that I’ve done something in the community.” (P5, 33, Female)

“I feel I should be a role model. I should be someone with whom I should be trusted, and they are indeed being entrusted as well.” (P7, 53, Male)

“Being a teacher is my calling.” (P10, 48, Female)

“It made me feel proud and it makes me want to do more good.” (P8, 47, Female)

Following the above excerpts, purposeful relationships that gave meaning to the participants were described through embracing their work and making a difference in their learners’ performance. They also mentioned that having a good trusting relationship motivates them to want to do more for the learners. Teachers also revealed that investing in their learners’ performance contributed to them valuing their professions and motivated them to continue assisting the community. This is supported by Dzokoto et al. (2019) who stated that work-related meaning is associated with doing significant work that contributes to the greater good of others. Mason (2015) attributed meaning to a sense of connectedness, direction, relational dependency, and the need to give back. Ryff (2014) also believed that human beings experienced meaningfulness through purposeful relationships that contribute to their well-being. The findings further revealed that participants expressed a belief that purpose and meaning is embedded in building the community through the learners they teach, with no expectations of any form of financial gain. In support of this, Du et al. (2016) stated that meaning in life is linked to work-derived identity, experiences of self-worth, and impact on others through service and social connections afforded by their work. Ryff, and Singer (2013) and Ryff et al. (2014) also emphasised that health and well-being benefit from loving relationships, and promote purposeful living.

4.3.3 Subtheme 3: Supportive Relationships

This subtheme revealed that good supportive relationships with colleagues and community members contributed positively to the performance of teachers in rural schools.

“I need my peers, SMT, and the community. We need each other and I cannot do it on my own. I need them.” (P1, 47, Female)

“Working together is the most important key in an institution. So as teachers, we need to support each other.” (P1, 47, Female)

“The political leaders of this place are so supportive of our school”. (P10, 48, Female)

“We are so united and the support that I get from them whenever I come across a challenge. I can walk to the principal’s office and ask a question about something I don’t understand and get support.” (P5, 33, Female)

The findings illustrate how the importance of close relationships in the workplace can positively influence teachers at work. The above excerpts revealed the importance of support for one another, as that gives meaning to them. They expressed that they need each other to enable them to face any challenges that arise. Forming good and supportive relationships appear to have improved support structures among teachers. This is supported by Chakraborty and Ganguly (2019) who described elements of a positive work environment as transparent and open communication, recognition, team spirit, and appreciation. Teachers also acknowledged the support they received from different stakeholders. Teachers went on to mention how resolving challenges has become manageable due to the support offered. In support of this, Samuel et al. (2014) proposed that relationships from an African perspective are defined as interconnectedness, interdependence, a

sense of solidarity, and belongingness. This social connectedness can be understood as the heart of care and support of African people (Stavrova and Luhmann, 2016). According to Wang et al. (2015), the strong ties developed by social interactions assist innovators in the search for inspiration, sponsorship, and support within the workplace.

4.3.4 Subtheme 4: Sense of fulfillment

In this study, the teachers expressed a sense of fulfillment through good relationships, their hard work, and learners' success in their education. Below are some of the participants' sentiments:

“In these relationships, I'm gaining a lot. It's rewarding when graduates return to the school to thank you for all you helped them with, and it reminds me to focus on why I am here. It makes me realize that I love being a teacher.” (P1, 47, Female)

“When I see them doing something which they were not able to do before through my guidance. For me, it's pure fulfillment” (P5, 33, Female)

One day when the learners are grown and working. I will be happy that I helped my kids. I feel excellent and that I've made it”. (P4, 53, Male)

“In my capacity, it brings a sense of fulfillment especially when somebody would appreciate what I may have contributed.” (P7, 53, Male)

The above findings expressed the importance of self-fulfillment. The teachers found it gratifying to see their learners perform well and become successful. The participants associated learner success at school level with learners' professional progression in the future. When learners succeeded, it positively affected the participants' performance in the classroom and also served as a reward to participants' for contributing to the learners' success. These experiences contributed

to the participants' sense of fulfillment. Keller et al. (2016) confirmed that motivated and enthusiastic teachers are vital for the provision of quality education and the promotion of their well-being. Mart (2013) agreed that passionate teachers are distinguished by their commitment to the achievement of their learners. Holley-Boen (2017) also believes that fulfilment, in contrast, seems less about how much you do, and more about how much you love what you do. In this study, participants expressed how much they felt appreciated by their learners and how important and fulfilling this was to them. Aelterman et al. (2007) confirmed that teacher well-being is a positive emotional state, which is the result of harmony between the sum of specific environmental factors on the one hand, and the personal needs and expectations of teachers on the other hand.

Besides fulfillment through the success of the learners, it is also noted in the findings that the relationships that participants have with their learners assisted them in terms of self-development or growth.

Teaching is something that I enjoy and like most so these relations help me in terms of self-growth and development.” (P2, 30, Male)

Wissing et al. (2020) opined that intrapersonal motives for experiencing meaning are linked to inner well-being, happiness, joy, a sense of competence, and own growth. Psychological well-being pertains to positive functioning at both the inter- and intra-individual levels, encompassing factors such as relatedness with others, self-referent attitudes, personal growth, and a sense of mastery (Burns, 2016). Wilson et al. (2019b) noted that those goal motivations which are key components of meaning-making had a robust interdependent focus embedded in existing relational ties.

4.3.5 Subtheme 5: Valued relationships

In this study, being valued was also expressed as a meaningful relationship with teachers. The gratitude and encouraging comments they received from learners and the community gave meaning and enhanced their work performance. Below are some of the participants' sentiments:

"It brings a sense of encouragement when somebody would appreciate what I may have contributed. I'm proud of this." (P7, 53, Male)

"It impacts your well-being psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. There's a gift that we must fill in that gap." (P4, 53, Female)

"It gives you courage and even makes you feel well. I'm going to go overdose on painkillers so that I can teach. Being that encouragement, I feel good about it." (P10, 48, Female)

If someone values my profession, it tells me that I can do better and improve and makes me go the extra mile." (P3, 46, Male)

The excerpts above illustrate how encouragement and affirmations enabled them to feel valued, motivated them to be more effective at teaching, and had a direct positive impact on their holistic well-being. Mastroianni and Storberg-Walker (2014) believed that when employees feel valued and respected through their work it enhances their well-being. The excerpts above appear to confirm that being valued promoted their psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being and encouraged them to go the extra mile in their job. Kardas et al. (2019) reiterated that meaning in life is positively related to psychological well-being. While Roos and Du Toit (2014) add that well-being and thriving in terms of wellness can be encouraged by building good relationships. Being valued and encouraging comments they received from learners and the community gave the

teachers meaning and enhanced their relationships and their work performance. Torrington et al. (2008) supported this by emphasising that employees' motivation can be enhanced by fulfilling their psychological needs, for example, forming good relationships, and being recognized for their achievements.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed the findings from this study in two main themes. The first theme reviewed the teacher's relational experiences with learners, parents, colleagues, and the community. The second theme illustrated the meaningful relationships within the school environment as experienced by teachers and how that contributed to their well-being. The teachers emphasized that their relationship with learners was the most important as they spend a lot of time with them and expressed that they are at work because of them. Collegial relationships were also emphasised as crucial as it facilitated a sense of belonging and connectedness among teachers. The second theme acknowledged that meaningful relationships at the workspace contribute to the holistic well-being of teachers.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter concludes the dissertation by providing an overview summary of the findings of the study. The chapter indicates the study limitations, and highlights the theoretical implications as well as implications and key contributions of the study. The chapter will conclude with future recommendations based on the key findings of the study.

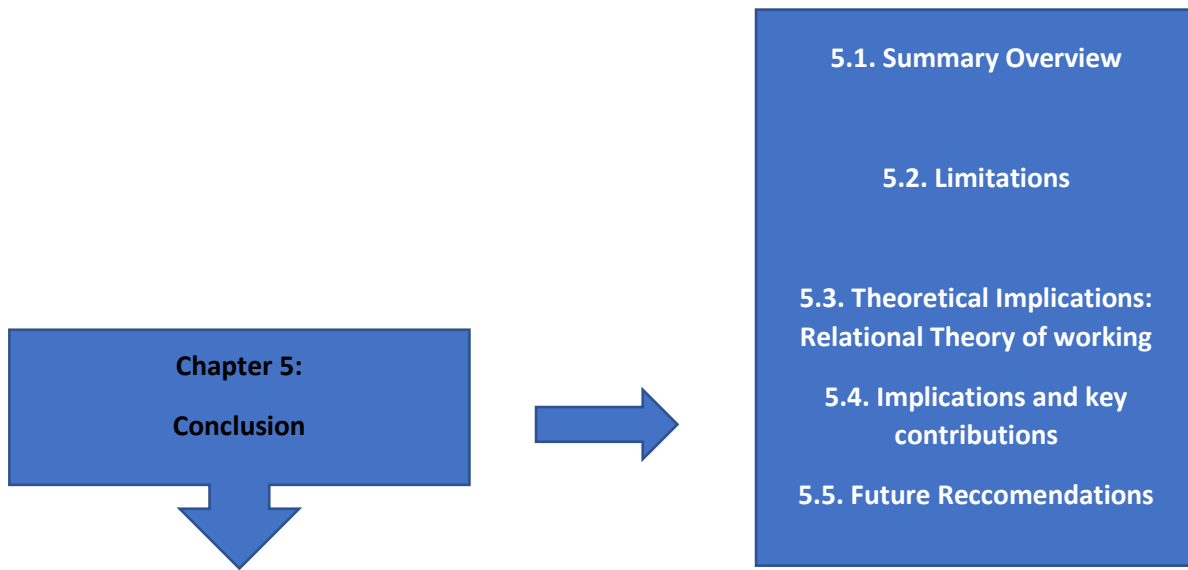


Figure 5: Outline of Chapter 5

5.1. Summary Overview

In Chapter 1 of this research report, the study's research questions were outlined. The first question, 'What are the relational experiences of teachers teaching at a rural primary school?' was answered in the first main theme. To provide a summary, the teachers identified the relationship with their learners as most important in comparison to their relationship with the learners' parents, colleagues, and the community. There seems to be a linkage between learner performance and teacher work satisfaction. The relational connections teachers experienced with their learners encouraged and motivated them to enjoy their work, and this positively contributed to their well-being. This motivation in turn enhanced learners' performance in class. The findings also revealed a lack of parental involvement, which resulted in teachers not having good relations with parents. The teachers reported feeling discouraged by the lack of relational communication with the parents.

However, collegial support and assistance appear to have also contributed to the well-being of teachers. Furthermore, the relationships between the teachers and higher management encouraged teachers to perform well at work. Gene (2017) agrees that when relationships in the workplace are characterized by cooperation, trust, and fairness, the reward center of the brain is activated. This study revealed that daily interactions and a conducive work environment with colleagues proved to be contributory factors in sustaining and building strong relationships in a school context. Gene (2017) went on to say that when colleagues have good relationships and believe the best in each other they inspire each other to perform better.

It is also noted in the findings that even though teachers experienced good relationships with colleagues, they sometimes experience conflict. Adomi and Anie (2005) state that within every human relationship where there is competition at work, conflict is always present. In the findings, teachers mentioned that these conflicts are normally healthy, as the disputes involve fighting for a

good cause, and so it ultimately enhances their work performance. Based on the findings, teachers appear to manage these conflicts well. According to Adu et al. (2015), in the past, management theorists used the term conflict avoidance. However, more recently, theorists have described how effective managers use conflict effectively for personal development, to address organizational problems, to increase critical vigilance and self-appraisal, and to further examine conflict values when making decisions. Since it is impossible to eliminate school conflicts, it is essential to reduce and manage their intensity, duration, and severity, so that the teaching and learning process is not harmed (Lourenço et al., 2020). The statements above by previous researchers seem to agree with the findings of this study that conflict played a positive role in collegial relationships. Conflict strengthened teachers' relationships and assisted in them working together to achieve common goals that benefited the learners and improved pedagogy. The lesson learned from this finding is that conflict arises when individuals are driving towards achieving the same goal, and this can be seen as an element of optimism in the school context. Conflict management is essential for the success of workmanship and motivation in the workplace. These experiences contribute to teachers' zeal to teach better, and to school management to promote and encourage interpersonal relationships in the workplace. From the findings, it can be concluded that good collegial relations contribute positively to the performance of teachers in a rural school. The support of senior management and peers is crucial to ensure a well-motivated teacher.

In the findings, the teachers described relationships with the community as crucial and that community's participation can assist to address challenges experienced by the school. The teachers described the relational experiences they have with members of the community, which include political leaders, church leaders, and municipality counsellors, as pleasant and helpful. The findings draw on the importance of reciprocal relational interaction with community members as

that which contributes to the normal functioning of the schools. Teachers also highlighted that being valued by community members motivated them to strive to do their best in their work. This kind of relationship with the community appeared to have enhanced the well-being of the teachers and learners. This theme highlights that collectively these relationships make teaching and learning more effective and fulfilling, which in turn uplifts the development of the communities. Community relationships with teachers play a pivotal role in the sustainability of the schools and improve learner academic performance. Thus, community-teacher relationships lead to collective holistic healthy well-being.

The second research question is, ‘what are the meaningful relationships that contributed to their well-being?’ This theme confirms that different relationships of importance can contribute differently to the well-being of teachers. The findings in the first sub-theme under this main theme revealed the importance of positive interpersonal relationships. These were described through support, trust, and interactional relationships as that which brings meaning, and in turn promotes a good working environment. As Martin (2013) noted, positive social connections can serve as a protective factor against stress and potential harm while also providing practical assistance with tasks, emotional support for daily challenges, companionship for shared activities, and contributing to social and emotional growth. In the findings, it is noted that teachers who experience good relationships easily locate their purpose, and this leads to positive outcomes for the school and those around it. The study also revealed that good supportive relationships contribute to teachers in rural schools finding purpose in life. The existence of purpose not only enabled them to find meaning, but also heightened their work performance, thereby contributing to their well-being. This is also expressed by McCallum and Price (2010) who purport that teachers need a strategy in place to assure their well-being, and in turn, their effectiveness in the classroom. Wissing et al

(2019) shared that human beings experience meaningfulness through purposeful relationships that contribute to their well-being.

The findings of this study also highlighted the importance of supportive relationships, especially for teachers living and working in rural areas. Teachers in rural areas are surrounded by a mirage of societal, environmental, and economic challenges which can demotivate them to perform to their level best. However, this study's findings reveal that through supportive relationships, teachers can deal with some of these challenges. Teachers in this study mentioned that the relational support they received from colleagues and communities provided meaning, enhanced personal growth, and provided a sense of connectedness and belonging. They seem to have developed a strong bond of relationships beyond work relations, as they were also able to share personal challenges of life. These findings are in agreement with Mohda et al (2016) who state that close relationships in the workplace can be a source of support among teachers and can positively influence their well-being.

The findings also revealed that commitment, passion, and motivation informed by good relationships are important to teachers teaching in the rural areas. Feeling appreciated and gratified results in job fulfillment. Teachers expressed that teacher-learner relationships and good learner performance provide them with satisfaction and contribute positively to their well-being. Roos and Du Toit (2014) are also of the opinion that good relationships are the key to fulfilling official roles and promoting mental health and well-being. It is also speculated that self-driven teachers aim to perform well beyond their circumstances (Roffey, 2011a). Torrington et al. (2008) also believe that employees' motivation can be enhanced by fulfilling their psychological needs, such as forming good relationships and being recognised for their achievements. Besides fulfillment

through improved learner performance, it is also noted in the findings that the learner-teacher relationship assists them in terms of self-development or growth.

Teachers in this study state that being valued by the learners and community was meaningful to them. Being valued, appeared to have encouraged and motivated the teachers to be more effective at teaching, and also promoted their well-being. Keller et al. (2016) supported this view, stating that being affirmed drives emotions of feeling valued. The study by Beehr (2014) confirmed that the workplace can be the focus of stress and mental health problems because of issues that include high emotional or cognitive demands, lack of opportunities, workload, or feeling undervalued. This supports the findings of this study that seems to confirm that being valued in the workplace promotes relational connection, and the psychological and emotional well-being of teachers, and prompts them to go the extra mile in their job.

5.2. Limitations

The finding of this study may aid in a better interpretation of teachers' relational experiences in rural primary schools within South Africa. Due to the qualitative nature of the study and the small sample size, the findings cannot be generalised, as it is not fully representative of all teachers in rural primary schools in South African schools. More studies need to be done with teachers in different provinces of South Africa to explore different contexts. The researcher could have been able to uncover extensive results using different data collection techniques. For example, a focus group might have encouraged teachers to engage with one another by agreeing, disagreeing, or sharing more details about one another's points of view. As a result, the description of teachers' relational experiences would have been deeper, more varied, and more nuanced. The focus group interview allows for these dynamics to take place, as it is mainly characterized by group interaction where the interviewer mostly occupies the role of a moderator (Willig, 2013). Interviewing

participants through online platforms could have affected the findings of this study. The online interview has some advantages, such as limiting travelling efforts or expenses, but it does not permit the interviewer access to participants' non-verbal cues and therefore the opportunity to respond to them accordingly (Jablonski, 2014). Furthermore, the interviewer may be limited in their ability to demonstrate some of their interpersonal skills (Jablonski, 2014), which may disadvantage the interviewer's ability to establish a rapport with the participant. However, in this study the online interviews appeared to make the participants feel more relaxed. A further disadvantage was that frequent breaks in connection and other technical difficulties occurred during telephonic interviews, further affecting the natural flow of conversation and the quality of the interviews. These technical failures were much less frequent with the Microsoft Teams interviews. Overall, using different or inconsistent interview formats might also have affected the study's results.

5.3. Theoretical Implications: Relational theory of Working

The theoretical viewpoints and propositions discussed in Chapter 2 of this research report were mostly confirmed by this study's findings. This study is embedded in Blustein's Relational Theory of Working, which considers the relationship between the working environment and the relativity of the people. Blustein (2011) argued for the importance of interaction with others and conceptualised working as a foremost relational act. He further emphasised that work is primarily relational (involving relationships). This is noted in the findings of this study when teachers described their relational experiences with learners, parents, colleagues, and their community in the school context. The teachers highlighted the importance of investing in, and nurturing their relationships with their learners, their parents, colleagues, and the community. Blustein (2011) viewed the importance of relationships at work as a source of providing satisfaction and a sense of

importance and belonging. This was observed in the findings through the supportive relationships and sense of fulfilment teachers had in their work performance. The success of learners and the good relationships with learners and others enhanced job satisfaction. Furthermore, the findings confirm that being valued and appreciated in their relationships in the workplace motivated them to work hard, which also resulted in job satisfaction.

In addition, Blustein further stated that the way individuals think and feel about early and current relationships influences how they deal with issues at work. This is relevant in the findings when the teachers expressed that the positive relationships they have with learners, colleagues, and the community) assisted them with resolving work challenges. This study's findings indicate that a strong relational bond in a work setting can help individuals overcome challenges that arise. Specifically, in the context of a rural primary school, where teachers face multiple obstacles, having such a bond can be particularly beneficial.

In his theory, Blustein also explained how work and relationships occur in the workplace. This is also reflected in the findings through teachers describing their relational experiences with learners, parents, colleagues, and the community. The findings of this study affirmed that the school context provided space for teachers to be able to form these relationships. This means that the school environment can be a breeding space for building positive interactional relationships. In addition, Blustein stated the importance of how/whether individuals find meaning in their work through their relationships with others. This was also evident in this study when teachers mentioned how collaborative interpersonal interaction, supportive relationships, finding purpose, job fulfilment, and valued relationships as what contributed to meaningful lives.

Blustein's theory supports the findings of this study in explaining and emphasising the value of investing in relationships in the workplace. It is important to note that teachers need to realise how the presence of positive relationships adds meaning to their lives and improves their work performance. Findings of this study seem to explain that the classroom is not the only focal point in the teacher's workplace, but identifying relationships with others and nurturing these relationships proved to be essential in a school set up.

5.4. Implications and Key contributions

This study has provided depth and detail to the relational well-being experiences of teachers in rural primary schools. The study presents a positive perspective of relational experiences and the importance of meaningful relationships that contribute to the well-being of teachers in the school context from what is commonly reported in the literature. The study highlights that positive interactional relationships are important to teachers, particularly those teaching in rural schools as it motivates, encourage, and brings meaning to the teachers' professional and personal lives. This is evident, as it has been observed within the school context that schools provide the opportunity for relationships and connections. A conducive environment paves the way to form relations that lead to the well-being of teachers regardless of the challenges of teaching in a rural primary school. The teachers get fulfilment and always strive to achieve the best in their work through positive relational interactions. There is a need for more research of this nature to address issues surrounding the dynamics of teacher relations in rural schools. This is important, especially as it assists teachers to cope with the challenges of working in rural schools. Wright et al. (2007) also supported the notion that a happy worker has a greater probability of being a productive worker. Greenaway et al. (2018) also stated that both social and professional relationships are vital as they offer support, interpersonal emotional regulation, companionship, motivation, and mentorship,

which improves one's social and emotional well-being. This is also revealed in the studies through relational experiences with learners, parents, colleagues, and the community that seem to have sustained the well-being of teachers in rural primary schools.

The study contributes towards understanding the importance of positive reciprocal relationships to primary school teachers teaching in rural areas. The lesson learned is, it is not only providing good resources that can enable teachers to perform better in their workplaces and improve their well-being, but providing a conducive environment that breeds positive relationships plays a crucial role in sustaining their career. Positive interactional relationships enhance teachers' performance and contribute to learners' success. Teachers thrive in an environment where they experience meaningful relationships, such as being valued, and where they can find purpose and sense of fulfilment. All these contribute to the teacher's personal growth and overall well-being. Thus, it is encouraged that such relationships are nurtured to retain teachers in rural areas. Positive reciprocal interactional relationships contribute towards sustaining the well-being of teachers in rural schools and the success of education in South Africa.

5.5. Future Recommendations

In the study's findings, it is recommended that more research should be conducted aiming at the cultivation of positive interactional relationships among teachers, learners, parents, and the community as an integral whole. This study will contribute towards increasing knowledge and closing the gap in research related to the relational well-being of teachers in the South African context, particularly in rural areas. Findings of this nature assist in informing policymakers on the importance of encouraging interactional relationships in the education sector, especially in rural primary school settings, and of introducing interventions that will assist future development of schools.

It is also recommended that teachers participate in team-building events which may encourage them to continue to interact and form meaningful relationships with their colleagues. This will allow teachers to connect on various levels and to understand and relate with each other. The school's management is encouraged to provide continuous support to the teachers with the aim of building positive relationships in schools. These attempts will bridge the gap between the management team and the teachers through an open and transparent relationship. Schools should encourage teachers to connect with their learners outside the classroom. This can be achieved through extramural activities, and will facilitate creating positive relationships. Schools can also encourage creating reciprocal interactions with teachers and parents through hosting social events, for example, fun day or concert day where they can engage and interact.

Researchers are also encouraged to take advantage of different methodologies, that is, quantitative methods, mixed methods, and other types of qualitative research designs in exploring related topics to ensure consistency in research outcomes across varying methods of investigation. It is also recommended that the same study be done in different research contexts with diverse populations.

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Appendices

Annexure A: Ethics Approval Letter



Faculty of Humanities
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotheo



15 November 2021

Dear Mrs SA Maseko

Project Title: Relational well-being experiences of rural primary school teachers in South Africa

Researcher: Mrs SA Maseko

Supervisor(s): Dr S Chigeza

Department: Psychology

Reference number: 28000367 (HUM032/0521)

Degree: Masters

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 15 November 2021. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project. Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen Harris'.

Prof Karen Harris

Chair: Research Ethics Committee Faculty of Humanities UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Annexure B: Permission Letter from Mpumalanga Department of Education



Ikhamanga Building, Government Boulevard, Riverside Park, Mpumalanga Province
Private Bag X11341, Mbombela, 1200.
Tel: 013 766 5552/5116, Toll Free Line: 0800 203 116

Litiko le Temfundvo, Umnyango we Fundo

Departement van Onderwys

Ndzawulo ya Dyondzo

Sasabona Maseko
Private Bag X20
Hatfield
0028
Email: sasabonamabs@gmail.com
Cell: 083 5111 887

RE: RELATIONAL WELL-BEING EXPERIENCES OF RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Your application to conduct research study was received and is therefore acknowledged. The title of your research project reads: "**Relational well-being experiences of rural primary school teachers in South Africa**". I trust that the aims and the objectives of the study will benefit the whole department especially the beneficiaries. Your request is approved subject to you observing the provisions of the departmental research policy which is available in the department website. You are requested to adhere to your university's research ethics as spelt out in your research ethics.

In terms of the research policy, data or any research activity can be conducted after school hours as per appointment with affected participants and COVID -19 regulations to be observed. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may consider implementing your findings if that will be in the best interest of the department. To this effect, your final approved research report (both soft and hard copy) should be submitted to the department so that your recommendations could be implemented. You may be required to prepare a presentation and present at the departments' annual research dialogue.

For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5124/5148 Or n.madhlaba@mpuedu.gov.za

The department wishes you well in this important project and pledges to give you the necessary support you may need.


MRS LH MOYANE
HEAD: EDUCATION

03 / 09 / 2021
DATE



Annexure C: Consent Form

Relational well-being experiences of rural primary school teachers in South Africa



{ETHICAL APPROVAL NUMBER} (If available)

WRITTEN CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (**participant name**), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any consequences or penalties.			
I understand that information collected during the study will not be linked to my identity and I give permission to the researchers of this study to access the information.			
I understand that this study has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance from Research Ethics Committee Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pretoria.			

I understand who will have access to personal information and how the information will be stored with a clear understanding that, I will not be linked to the information in any way.			
I give consent that data gathered may be used for dissertation, article publication, conference presentations and writing policy briefs.			
I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.			
I consent to being audio recorded.			

I consent to have my audio recordings be used in research outputs such as publication of articles, thesis and conferences as long as my identity is protected.			
I give permission to be quoted directly in the research publication whilst remaining anonymous.			
I have sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I agree to take part in the above study.			

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

Annexure D: Participant Information Sheet



TITLE OF THE STUDY

Relational well-being experiences of rural primary school teachers in South Africa

Hello, my name is Sasabona Maseko, I am currently a Master's student at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria. You are being invited to take part in my research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take some time to read the following information carefully, which will explain the details of this research project. Please feel free to ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore the relational well-being experiences of rural primary school teachers in South Africa. There is limited research linked to relational well-being in the workplace, particularly in teaching. I have decided to conduct a study on the relational well-being of teachers to explore how relationships are linked to the well-being of teachers in rural primary schools. The overall aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the relational well-being experiences and meaning attached to these relationships. An in-depth definition of relational well-being experiences will be provided when required.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

The inclusion criteria in this study will be;

- Teachers willing to participate,
- Teachers with teaching experience of five years and above from quintile 1-3 ordinary rural schools,
- Both males and females,
- Teachers who use English as a medium of instruction will be included.

Exclusion criteria will be the teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience and Heads of Departments (HOD).

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

You will be expected to participate in a telephonic interview with me. The duration of the interview will be scheduled to take 60 minutes per participant. This interview will be audio recorded with your consent. I will provide time after the interview should you have any follow up questions.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form through email. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason if you decide not to take part in the study without negative consequences or being penalised.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Anonymity will be ensured by assigning pseudo names/numbers to each participant, and that will be used in all research notes and documents. Reporting of findings will be anonymous, only the researchers of this study will have access to the information. Please note participant information will be kept confidential, except in cases where the researcher is legally obliged to report incidents such as abuse and suicide risk.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There may be direct benefit to you for participation in this study. However, I hope that information obtained from this study may provide you an opportunity to tell your story and share your experiences. This study will assist in finding interventions that may assist teachers in developing quality relationships that promote well-being in their work context.

WHAT ARE THE ANTICIPATED RISKS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The anticipated risks in the participation of this study will be minimum. As a participant you may experience fatigue through the duration of the interviews and the researcher will ensure that break sessions are taken in between. However, given that the subject matter is sensitive and personal, some participants may experience discomfort and distress.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THAT SOME FORM OF DISCOMFORT OCCURS AS A RESULT OF TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

The teachers who will be participants may encounter emotional discomfort and will be referred by the researcher to the counselling psychologist which covers the Ehlanzeni, Gert Sibande, and Nkangala districts, at a cost due to the researcher.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Participant information in hard copies of raw data will be locked in the cabinet and electronic data will be kept in a file that is password protected in the Department of Psychology. Interview transcripts and audio recordings will be password protected archived at the Department of Psychology for 15 years. Future use of the data will be subject to future Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

WHAT WILL THE RESEARCH DATA BE USED FOR?

The data collected from this study will be used for the researcher's dissertation, national and international conference presentations, policy briefs, and publications. Once the study is completed, results will be available for participants on request for further research in form of secondary data analysis.

WILL I BE PAID TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

No, there will be no reimbursement to participants of this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria. The ethical approval number is..... A copy of the approval letter can be provided to you on request.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

Once the study is completed, results will be available for participants on request through the researcher, Ms S Maseko.

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE CONCERN, COMPLAINT, OR ANYTHING I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE STUDY?

If you have questions about this study or you have experienced adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided below. If you have questions regarding the rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the researcher, please contact the supervisor, and contact details are below.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and in advance for participating in this study.

Researcher

Name Surname: Sasabona Maseko

Contact number: 0835111887

Email address: sasabonamabs@gmail.com

Supervisor

Name: Dr. S. Chigeza

Contact number: 012 420 4015

Email address: shingairai.chigeza@up.ac.za

Appendix E: Interview Schedule



Project title:

Relational well-being experiences of rural primary school teachers in South Africa

Semi structured individual in-depth interview questions

- Acknowledging the participation of the participants
 - May you please tell me a little about yourself?
1. Please tell me, what are your experiences of working at this school?
 2. How do you relate with students?
 3. How do you relate with peers?
 4. How do you relate with the community around this school?
 5. What are the most important relationships to you and why?
 6. What do these relationships mean to you?
 7. How do they enhance your well-being?

Signed on (date): _____

Participant: _____ Researcher: _____

Appendix F: Letter of Editing

Marianne Kapp Language Services – marsscaro@gmail.com

Cape Town
31 March 2023

To whom it may concern,

This letter confirms that the manuscript detailed below was edited for proper English language grammar, punctuation, spelling, and overall style by a qualified and highly experienced native English-speaking editor:

Manuscript title: **Relational well-being experiences of rural primary school
teachers in South Africa**

Author: **Sasabona Annah Millicent Maseko**

Neither the research content nor the author's intentions were altered in any way during the editing process. The editor makes no claim as to the accuracy of the research content or objectives of the author. The document above as edited is grammatically correct and ready for publication; however, the author has the ability to accept or reject the editor's suggestions and changes after the editing process is complete, and prior to submission to any journal or examining body.



Marianne Kapp
0824813300