

Teachers' Emotional and Occupational Well-being Amid National Lockdown

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Abstract

Teachers' well-being affects the quality of education. The pandemic-related national lockdown and social isolation in South Africa, lasting for two and a half years, harmed teachers and the education sector. Teachers' emotional and occupational well-being changed with online and rotational instruction. This was because they were expected to support students and parents and acquire essential competencies and skills for online technology-based teaching and learning. This paper discusses a study on secondary school teachers' struggles during school closures. Ten teachers from Gauteng, South Africa, were purposively recruited, five from each public and private school, using a qualitative research approach and exploratory case study design. The Teacher Well-being conceptual framework provided a theoretical framework for well-being. The findings illuminate the mental, physical, and social well-being issues of the 10 secondary school instructors, their transition to online teaching, and their intrinsic and extrinsic coping techniques, such as social media and faith. The study showed why school governing bodies should focus on coping methods to promote teachers' well-being. In Gauteng, South Africa, there is little research on teachers' well-being during school closures. More research is needed to address teachers' emotional and occupational well-being and discover professional development support.



Introduction

Teacher well-being is considered a major contributing factor for quality education, especially as teachers are responsible for educating learners in classroom spaces (Benevene et al., 2020; Spilt et al., 2011). Teachers fulfil an influential role in the lives of learners, and are considered “agents of change” to support learners (Dabrowski, 2020; Spilt et al., 2011). Similarly, Dabrowski (2020) asserts that teachers are responsible for learners’ holistic development, including their well-being and academic achievement.

Well-being is often seen as a complex and multifaceted concept. A complex concept, as prior studies have focused more on exploring its various dimensions and descriptions than on establishing clear, consistent definitions. Well-being is “the quality and state of a person’s life” (Linton, et al., 2016, p.1). The literature also explores its correlation with work engagement and burnout (Dodge et al., 2012; Nthebe et al., 2016), and it is occasionally utilized interchangeably with concepts such as health (Danna & Griffin, 1999, as cited by Wang et al., 2021) and quality of life (Dodge et al., 2012). The diverse interpretations and overlapping terminology have led to contradictory definitions and conceptualizations of well-being (Wang et al., 2021). The absence of standardization is exacerbated by the variability in how different fields and individuals conceptualize and assess well-being. The concept of well-being in this context is multifaceted, encompassing emotional, occupational, physical, social, and psychological health (Benevene et al., 2020; Cumming, 2017; Yin et al., 2016). It encompasses personal and professional fulfilment, happiness, and satisfaction derived from work and life experiences. Emotional well-being, for example, relates to a teacher's ability to self-regulate emotions, manage stress, and adapt to daily challenges, which are vital for resilience amid stressful circumstances (Charles, 2010; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Yin et al., 2016). Occupational well-being involves experiencing enjoyment and fulfilment in teaching, as well as the ability to balance workload and personal life, thereby reducing stress and preventing burnout (Cumming, 2017; Zacher & Schmitt, 2016).

The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus in 2020 (COVID-19) has been considered “one of the largest public health crises of our time” (Lades et al., 2020, p. 902). Governments worldwide, including South Africa, implemented measures such as lockdowns, self-isolation, and social distancing, which affected the lives of many individuals (Giandhari et al., 2021; Lades et al., 2020). During the school closures and the national lockdown period, teachers had to adapt and navigate a new way of teaching and educating learners using technology (Cece et al., 2022; Hascher et al., 2021). This new approach created significant uncertainty and stress, affecting some teachers’ emotional and occupational well-being. Unfortunately, not all teachers were equipped or trained to deliver classes online; neither were learners or parents equipped or prepared for remote learning and home schooling using technology and software (Cece et al., 2022; Hascher et al., 2021). In addition, most schools lacked adequate information and communication technology (ICT) resources to support distance learning (Cattan et al., 2021).

Teachers were initially overwhelmed, having to teach learners using new technology and software when they lacked adequate exposure to online training methods and software (Baker et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). Similarly, Besser et al. (2020) and Cachón-Zagalaz et al. (2020) highlighted how stress, anxiety and depression became more prevalent among teachers and were exacerbated due to social distancing, communication and connectivity issues experienced by learners, parents and school staff. Hascher et al. (2021) and Jakubowski and Sitko-Dominik (2021) further emphasized that teachers' occupational well-being diminished due to the expectation that they provide quality education under challenging conditions and the uncertainty experienced during the lockdown period. Consequently, the lockdown affected teachers socially,

psychologically and emotionally, as they experienced exhaustion, frustration, and isolation (Chan et al., 2021; Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021).

The challenges of the lockdown emphasized that education is not only a human right but also an “integral part of human society,” and that ensuring learners have access to quality education cannot be overlooked, regardless of the circumstances (Kathula, 2020, p. 31). Therefore, teachers must strive for a happy medium to manage their emotional and occupational well-being during extremely challenging periods by taking cognizance of their social, psychological and emotional well-being. The central role of schools is to develop teachers, nurture learners’ academic knowledge and abilities, and encourage teachers to thrive and aspire to lifelong learning (Hascher et al., 2021). Consequently, schools assume responsibility for contributing

The study was guided by the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) theory of Siegrist (2012) and the Well-Being (WB) framework of Viac and Fraser (2020) to create the conceptual framework, which is now referred to as the “Teachers’ Well-Being (TWB) conceptual framework,” presented in Figure 1 below. The ERI theory of Siegrist (2012) and the WB Framework of Viac and Fraser (2020) established that well-being is imperative for health and happiness, ensuring a focused approach to life and living. The TWB conceptual framework identifies various dimensions that must be addressed to enhance teachers’ mental, physical, and social well-being (Viac & Fraser, 2020). The ERI theory and WB Framework embody three central tenets, namely mental, physical, and social well-being, which are central to nurturing emotional and occupational well-being and necessary for teachers to excel in their roles (Siegrist, 2012; Viac & Fraser, 2020).

The framework provides a robust basis for understanding and conceptualizing teachers’ emotional and professional well-being during the COVID-19 lockdown. The ERI theory emphasizes the balance between the efforts teachers exert and the rewards they obtain, which is especially pertinent considering the increased workloads, insufficient online teaching training, and elevated stress levels teachers faced during the pandemic. This disparity may result in stress, burnout, and reduced occupational well-being, making the theory well-suited for examining the difficulties educators encounter during significant changes in their professional requirements.

The WB framework provides a comprehensive perspective on well-being by encompassing the mental, physical, and social elements essential for fostering emotional and occupational health. This study develops the Teachers’ Well-Being (TWB) conceptual framework by integrating multiple frameworks, elucidating the intricate relationships that affect teachers’ well-being, and guiding solutions to enhance job satisfaction, work-life balance, and resilience in crises. The choice of ERI and WB frameworks for a comprehensive examination of the complex aspects of teacher well-being amid significant disruption, yielding essential insights for effective teacher support.

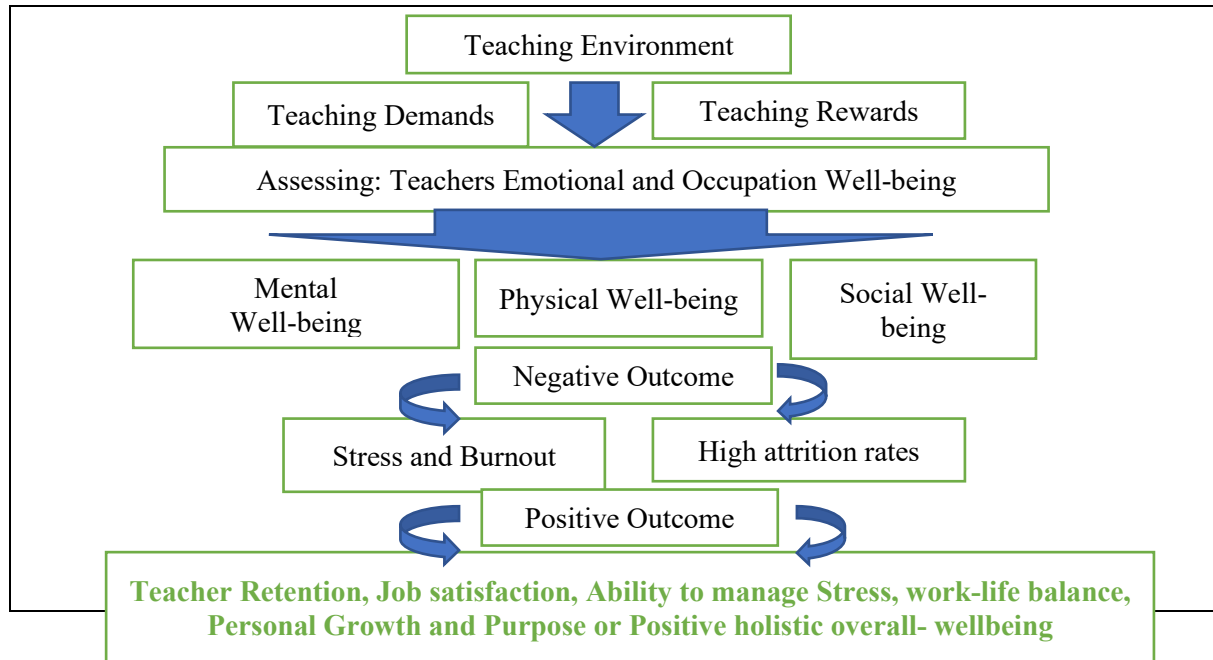


Figure 1: Teacher well-being (TWB) conceptual framework for teachers' emotional and occupational well-being.

The national lockdown resulting from the novel Coronavirus outbreak in 2019 (COVID-19) has been described as “one of the largest public health crises of our time” (Lades et al., 2020, p. 902). Governments worldwide, including South Africa, implemented measures such as lockdowns, self-isolation, and social distancing, which affected the lives of many individuals (Giandhari et al., 2021; Lades et al., 2020). During the National Lockdown, teachers experienced tremendous stress due to heavier workloads, inadequate online training, and changes in teaching methodologies (Baker et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). Similarly, Besser et al. (2020) and Cachón-Zagalaz et al. (2020) highlight that teachers experienced communication problems and connectivity issues, which led to abnormal stress, anxiety, and even depression. Chan (2021) and Jakubowski and Sitko-Dominik (2021) emphasize that teachers experienced a decline in occupational well-being due to high stress and uncertainty during the national lockdown, which subsequently affected their psychological and emotional well-being. Consequently, teachers, globally, experienced exhaustion, frustration, and isolation, which appeared to infiltrate their personal and professional lives (Allen et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2021; Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021).

Teachers play a pivotal role in the learners' lives. Therefore, the emotional and occupational well-being of teachers should be prioritized, as they are at the forefront of supporting learners. There is a dearth of research in South Africa about high school teachers' emotional and occupational well-being amidst the National lockdown, which is the impetus for this study.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the emotional and occupational well-being of teachers from two secondary schools in Gauteng, South Africa, amid the national lockdown. A qualitative research methodology was adopted to guide this study and to answer the question: How did the

school closures during the national lockdown period affect secondary school teachers' emotional and occupational well-being?

Tracy (2019) stated that qualitative research involves the researcher immersing themselves in the topic of investigation to generate deep insight and provide understanding about the phenomenon being explored. An exploratory case study research design was used to examine secondary school teachers' lived experiences of school closures during the lockdown period and their effects on their emotional and occupational well-being. Various measures were implemented to ensure that the research was conducted ethically and that the researcher adhered to all protocols (Pearson et al., 2015). Written permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee, the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria and the Gauteng Department of Education. In addition, written permission was obtained from principals and teachers of the two selected schools to conduct the study. All parties involved were informed of the purpose of the research and the procedures used to generate the data.

Selection of participants

For this study, purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, was used to select 10 secondary school teachers in Gauteng, South Africa, who teach various subjects from Grade 8 to Grade 12, speak English, and had to transition to online teaching amid school closures during the national lockdown period. In addition, both male and female participants were included in the study; no racial, ethnic or other specifications that could potentially be viewed as discriminatory were applied in the inclusion criteria. The data collection methods used included individual semi-structured interviews and collages. These methods generated in-depth information and highlighted themes relevant to the phenomenon under study (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2010).

Table 1: Demographic information table.

SCHOOLS	GENDER	AGE	ETHNICITY
A: Public School	4 Male Teachers 1 Female Teachers	30 – 50	4 Coloured 1 Black
B: Private School	3 Female Teachers 2 Male Teachers	25 – 50	3 White Females 1 Indian Female 1 White Male

Data collection techniques

Data collection involved individual semi-structured interviews and collages, which enabled the researcher to explore secondary school teachers' experiences during school closures and the effects on their emotional and occupational well-being. These methods assisted in gathering in-depth information and highlighted themes that explained how teachers coped during the national lockdown. The semi-structured interviews and collages used to collect data ensured rigour in eliciting data to strengthen and confirm the results, and facilitated interrogation of the empirical situation to ensure the study's validity. The techniques used to collect data are discussed below.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews created a space for dialogue between the researcher and participants, enabling the researcher to understand their perspectives. Participants were able to provide in-depth knowledge and elaborate on specific questions that otherwise could not be observed. The interviews, which lasted ± 30 -45 minutes each, were conducted in English and audio recorded on a password-protected electronic recording device. Five teachers from school A and five from school B participated in the interview process and consented to the semi-structured interviews being audio recorded. The interviews were recorded to capture verbal information and allowed participants to express themselves without the hindrance of note-taking, which could otherwise interrupt their thought process (Yin, 2014).

Procedure for collages

In the early 20th century, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque introduced collage as a technique for cubist modern art pioneers (Gerstenblatt, 2013). The term collage originates from the French word “collé”, —meaning glued (Gerstenblatt, 2013) and is considered a creative art-based approach to expressing oneself and making meaning (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2011). According to Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2011) and Gerstenblatt (2013), a collage fragments space, repurposes objects to contextualize multiple realities, and allows participants' voices to be seen and heard. The researcher requested the teachers to create a collage to express what teacher well-being meant to them before the interview process—utilizing collages to collect data provided a creative way for participants to freely share their perspectives on well-being graphically.

Data analysis

A qualitative approach, using ATLAS/TI and an automated software tool, was used to conduct a thematic analysis of the collected data. Thematic analysis is a method for “identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data” (Terry et al., 2017, p. 297). The collages were interpreted by looking at the graphics and in alignment with the interviews. Qualitative data analysis is an inductive process which provides meaning to research rather than searching for the truth (Terry et al., 2017). It is a “process of the description, classification and interconnection of phenomena with the researcher’s concepts” (Graue, 2015, p. 8).

This study relied on Braun and Clarke’s (2012) six phases of thematic analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of the data collected from participants. Firstly, becoming familiar with the data, making sure all recorded interviews were transcribed and read through repeatedly. Secondly, generating initial codes involves developing a list of topics from the data that inform the research questions. Thirdly, searching for themes which assisted with “development or construct patterns (themes, categories) across cases.” Fourthly, reviewing potential themes requires quality checking and refinement. Fifthly, defining and naming themes by refining the selected themes and analyzing each theme's data. Lastly, producing the report involved writing up the findings gathered from the data.

Findings

Several themes and subthemes emerged from the participants' data, each of which was described and discussed in detail in this chapter. The themes discovered were as follows: 1) Teachers' perspective on well-being, 2) Factors of well-being affected during the school closures, 3) Challenges teachers experienced during the school closures and 4) Coping strategies utilized during the school closures and national lockdown period. The themes and sub-themes are depicted in Figure 2 below.

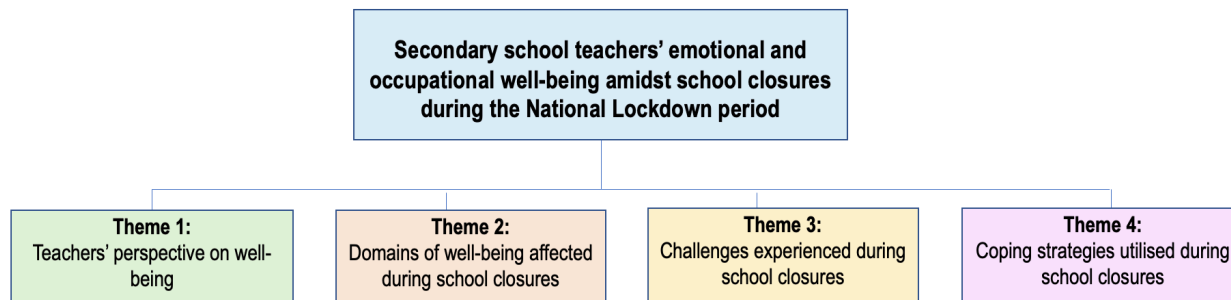


Figure 2: Graphical representation of themes.

Theme 1: Teachers' perspective on well-being

Teachers' perspective on well-being is multi-dimensional and not a one-size-fits-all approach. It is a person's overall state of being and health, encompassing all dimensions of well-being, including social, physical, emotional, psychological and occupational (WHO, 2022). This theme addresses secondary school teachers' perspectives on what well-being meant to them. During the interviews, each participant provided their views on well-being and created a collage to provide context to their lived experiences. It was evident that relationship-building with colleagues and learners was essential to the teaching profession and contributed to their job satisfaction and love for the profession. Based on the findings, it was profound that teachers' well-being is imperative to ensure quality education, job satisfaction, high motivation and productivity.

A common thread among participants was that well-being was not singular but holistic and incorporated emotional, physical, and psychological aspects.

I think a very big part of well-being for me comes from the kids themselves. From spending time with them, and interacting with them, I think it is a big part of why I love teaching every day is different, because the kids make it different. (PF9, 8). I think teachers' well-being is, being happy, being joyful. It's something you need to do and want to do. So, when I look at teachers' well-being, I think, you know, you need to love doing it, and if you don't love what you do, then your well-being will be affected. (P1M, 12-15).

Teacher-learner relationships are vital to a learner's success and development; however, so is the importance of teacher-colleague relationships, which contribute to job satisfaction and well-being (Bottani et al., 2022 Cumming, 2017). Collage 3.1 supports the view of many participants (P2, 4, 5, 9 & 10) who discussed the importance of building relationships with their colleagues in their interviews.



Figure 3: Collage on teachers' well-being.

Theme 2: Aspects of well-being affected during school closures

The work of Parker et al. (2012) and Ruggeri et al. (2020) supported the benefits of teachers developing a work-life balance for their well-being, leading to personal and professional success, less stress, and lower attrition rates. It was evident that the emotional, occupational, psychological, social, and physical well-being of teachers was a high priority to ensure they could adequately support students during the national lockdown. Emotional and occupational well-being involves being able to regulate feelings and emotions, and maintain a healthy social, psychological and physical lifestyle to manage stress precipitated by everyday life (Barry et al., 2017). If emotional well-being is affected, it can lead to depression, anxiety, and an inability to manage stress (Yin et al., 2016).

Teachers' well-being, shoo, that is a difficult question. Um, I think teachers' well-being is when the teacher is healthy in terms of physical and emotional health. It is about being financially strong and happy" (P4M.,7-10). "I guess; it's a difficult question, actually. Well-being refers to my state of mind, which refers to my emotional, mental, and physical state. In other words, how well I'm doing in those areas. (P10F, 8-10).

Teachers' well-being is important to quality education (Hascher et al., 2021; Turner & Theilking, 2019). Collage 3.2 provides Participant 9's interpretation that well-being provides a holistic overview, which includes physical health, being organized, building relationships, and ultimately being well in general. In addition, some participants found the question of teachers' well-being complex and struggled to provide answers initially.

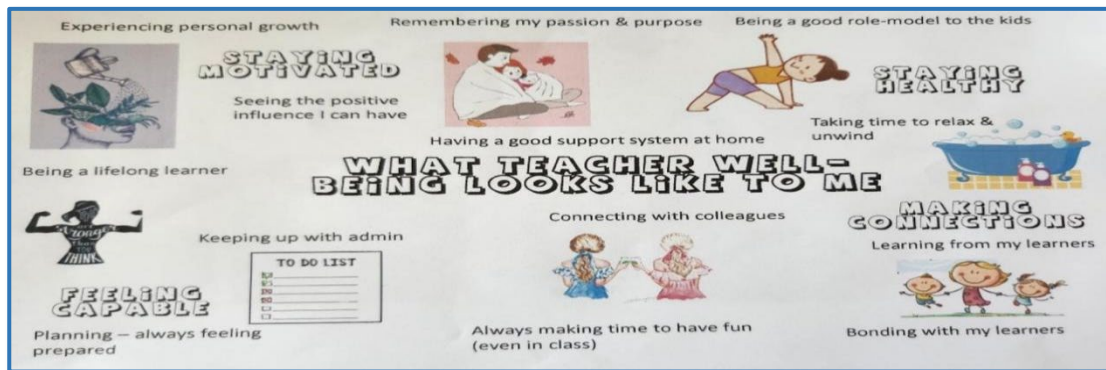


Figure 4: Collage on aspects of well-being affected during school closures.

Theme 3: Challenges experienced during school closures

In this context, challenges transitioning to online teaching refer to using technology to teach online during school closures, and not doing so effectively because many learners lacked access to the technology needed to access the shared online materials. According to Tadesse and Muluye (2020), school closures affected approximately 87% of learners and teachers, resulting in the loss of “1.8 trillion hours of in-person learning” (p. 160). Some teachers found it challenging to adapt to a blended learning approach since teaching virtually and providing emotional support to learners added another complex dimension during school closures. Similarly, the uncertainty about whether learners were focused during online teaching sessions frustrated teachers because they did not have their cameras on (Klapproth et al., 2020; Baker et al., 2021).

Participants 10, 5 and 9 concurred that “It was difficult; it was very challenging teaching online. We had to use computers and were dependent on technology a lot, and learners having access to technology, which was not always the case. So, that was a massive challenge. There had to be a lot more collaboration between you and the child; there had to be more involvement because I could not see their faces. So, it was challenging because I never knew a hundred percent if the child was actually learning.” (P10F., 22-27). Furthermore, almost two years after the school closures, Participant 2 mentioned that they are still trying to make up for the lost teaching time: “Honestly speaking, right now, we are running ‘helter skelter’ trying to catch up on lost time.” (P2M., 443-444)

Theme 4: Coping strategies utilized during school closures

Teachers indicated that they struggled to meet the academic demands placed on them during the national lockdown and therefore needed a plan to help them manage and cope. During the school closures, some teachers experienced high stress and anxiety and needed to find ways to cope with the personal and professional stressors they faced. Detailed plans must be developed to provide teachers with guidance on coping strategies to manage academic demands (Mari et al., 2021; Sokal et al., 2020). In this context, extrinsic and intrinsic coping strategies in college are important for individuals to adapt to changes in environment and circumstances during a crisis (Hanno et al., 2022). From the participants’ responses regarding extrinsic and intrinsic coping strategies, it was evident that they utilized various strategies, including faith, sticking to a routine, being adaptable, and planning and prioritizing what was important at a specific point in time. The results revealed that many teachers used social media platforms to help them cope and teach.

Many participants referred to the use of social media platforms as a means of communication, engagement, and a method of teaching, which was evident in the following quote:

I found that the kids were really open to communicating on social media. I think because they can relate to it, that was a positive for me because I would engage with kids that would not normally talk or want to share their issues face-to-face. So that was something good that I have experienced that I was able to engage with them. (P3F., 69-73). Participants 8 and 4 expressed how they managed to teach the learners using social media platforms and providing them with educational material using online platforms: We integrated the hybrid method, where if you did have access to Facebook or something, we uploaded work for the lower grades, so they could go onto Facebook and download It from a link, the work that they were supposed to do from home (P8F., 28-30).

The findings further represented that school closures during the national lockdown positively and negatively affected secondary school teachers' emotional, occupational, physical, psychological, and social well-being. Participants expressed fear of contracting or spreading the COVID-19 virus and infecting family members, especially those with comorbidities and admitted to feelings of guilt, helplessness, and not being physically present at school, left them stressed and anxious. Additionally, participants' job satisfaction was both positively and negatively affected; they developed new skills by learning to teach online; however, on the other hand, they found teaching online quite impersonal. Furthermore, upon transitioning back to school, participants 8 and 2 felt they did not have a safe space to be vulnerable, especially after a tough day. Lastly, on a physical level, some teachers became more health-conscious, while others retreated and became more sedentary and turned to vices like smoking.

The findings further indicated that the sudden transition to online teaching was difficult, as participants were not adequately trained to teach online. For instance, the participants expressed that "It was difficult; it was very challenging teaching online. We had to use computers, and we are dependent on technology a lot, and learners having access to technology was difficult."

Consequently, participants' ability to connect, engage, and communicate with their learners was adversely affected. In addition, teachers were frustrated because they were not always sure whether learners were engaged during online classes and found it challenging to interact with them. When schools closed during the national lockdown, and teachers had to shift to online teaching, technological devices and social media platforms were used to support the transition (Taimur et al., 2021). Participants listed the benefits of using social media communication platforms to stay connected to friends and loved ones, as well as to learners; however, it proved challenging because not all learners had access to technological devices and the internet. Furthermore, adopting intrinsic and extrinsic coping strategies helped secondary school teachers cope during school closures.

Discussion

The findings provided insight into secondary teachers' lived experiences and how their emotional and occupational well-being was affected during the school closures and national lockdown. Apart from being holistically well in every aspect of their lives, the participants strongly linked their conceptualization of well-being to their self-efficacy as teachers and having a profound love for teaching. They also opined that the ability to embrace lifelong learning and access to the resources required for a meaningful and innovative execution of their teaching contribute to their well-being,

which concurs with the findings of Kimmoons (2020). The participants reiterated the challenges they experienced due to the school closure and consequent social isolation, which had really affected their well-being. The unpreparedness for online teaching and learning due to the sudden social distancing regulations was a significant challenge, as teachers' levels of expertise and comfort with technology for teaching varied. Notably, boundaries appeared blurred, and work-life balance was compromised. Additionally, their anxiety over the health and well-being of their vulnerable learners had a knock-on effect on them as well. Another source of concern was the learners who lacked adequate access to the technology and other resources required for online learning.

The resulting learning gap was disturbing and was deemed to affect their emotional and occupational well-being. Nurturing emotional and occupational well-being is imperative for health and happiness, ensuring a focused approach to life and living, as encapsulated by the TWB conceptual framework (Siegrist, 2012; Viac & Fraser, 2020). For instance, the TWB framework emphasizes the multidimensional nature of well-being, encompassing social, physical, emotional, and occupational aspects. It posits that these dimensions are interconnected and influenced by work demands and contextual factors (Viac & Fraser, 2020). The findings, which point to teachers' struggles with increased workload, technological challenges, emotional distress, and blurred work-life boundaries, align with the TWB framework's assertion that heightened demands without adequate support can negatively impact multiple well-being dimensions. For example, teachers' reliance on faith and social media as coping strategies reflects efforts to bolster social and emotional well-being amid stressors, illustrating the multidimensional resilience described in the model. Also, the ERI theory (Siegrist, 2012) suggests that occupational stress arises from a perceived imbalance between the effort teachers invest and the rewards they receive. The study's findings of increased workload, insufficient training, and lack of institutional support can be interpreted through the lens of ERI as contributing to perceived effort-reward imbalance, leading to stress and burnout. Teachers who experience heightened effort in adapting to new teaching modalities, managing emotional labour, and feeling undervalued or unsupported likely experience strain, consistent with ERI's propositions. Existing literature, in conjunction with the findings, suggested that if teachers' emotional and occupational well-being is not managed, it will affect their learners' well-being. The extrinsic and intrinsic coping strategies identified by the participants lend themselves to their resilience. Religion, faith-based support, and spirituality played a prominent role in participants' ability to cope emotionally with social distancing and work-related challenges. An interesting finding was that the participants believed that in that crisis of lockdown and social distancing, adhering to the original daily schedules and routines as much as possible had a positive effect on their mindsets and was an important coping strategy that kept them focused. Furthermore, maintaining a presence and networking on social media platforms kept them connected with friends' families and their learners.

The study underscores the importance of access to technology and the need for continuous teacher training to ensure they are proficient in its use for online teaching. An important contribution is that the participants had the opportunity to engage in profound introspection and to evaluate their emotional and occupational well-being holistically. This information contributes to the gap in the literature on secondary school teachers' experience during the school closures and the effect it had on their emotional and occupational well-being, and was done unbiased.

Study Implications for Teacher Education in South Africa

The study's findings reveal issues commonly faced by educators throughout South Africa, particularly in under-resourced communities. The challenges of transitioning to online instruction, insufficient training, restricted access to technology, and mental distress are indicative of systemic problems within the nation's educational system. A significant number of educators, especially in underprivileged regions, lack dependable internet access, adequate gadgets, and continuous professional development opportunities, exacerbating their stress and affecting their occupational well-being. These conditions adversely affect the health and resilience of individual educators and jeopardize the overall quality of education. Enhancing teacher well-being requires comprehensive policy initiatives that prioritize sufficient resources, training, and mental health support, rather than relying solely on individual coping mechanisms. Augmented professional development initiatives, infrastructural improvements, and readily available psychosocial services are essential for enhancing teachers' confidence and emotional resilience. Acknowledging teacher well-being as a crucial component of educational quality corresponds with the overarching objective of cultivating a robust and efficient education system in South Africa.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the complex and multifaceted aspects of teacher well-being, even amid unprecedented interruptions such as the COVID-19 epidemic. The transition to remote teaching, insufficient preparation, and the digital divide significantly affected teachers' emotional and occupational well-being. Maintaining emotional and occupational balance is crucial, as teachers' well-being directly impacts learning outcomes and the overall quality of education. The TWB conceptual framework, grounded in ERI theory and the WB framework, adeptly encapsulates these issues and coping strategies. Without sufficient support, teachers are at risk of burnout, diminished job satisfaction, and compromised work-life balance. The research thus provides significant insights into the necessity of prioritizing teacher well-being in policy and practice, particularly during times of disruption and change.

Limitations of the study

The interpretation of the findings of this study should be acknowledged with some limitations. For instance, the sample size was limited to 10 teachers, intentionally selected from private and public schools. Although qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, the restricted sample limits the generalisability of the findings to the wider teaching population in South Africa. This is because teachers' experiences may differ substantially due to regional, socio-economic, and institutional factors that this study did not comprehensively capture. The study also utilized a qualitative, exploratory case study design, which, although detailed, unavoidably entails subjective interpretation. Thematic analysis was employed to discern patterns in the data; however, the findings are subject to the researchers' interpretations and potential biases. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, leading individuals to withhold or modify certain experiences or emotions. The study was conducted during a major global crisis, which may have temporarily affected teachers' views and coping strategies. Ultimately, while the study examines several coping mechanisms, it does not quantitatively assess their efficacy or longevity over time. Future studies may employ mixed-method approaches to assess the effects of targeted

interventions designed to enhance teacher well-being, or conduct longitudinal studies to understand the enduring effects of such disturbances on teacher well-being.

Recommendations

The study's findings informed the following recommendations:

1. Continuous and focused training programs must be established to improve teachers' competency in online and hybrid teaching technologies, ensuring they are adequately prepared for abrupt transitions in methods of instruction.
2. Schools and governing bodies must guarantee that students and teachers possess sufficient access to essential technical tools and connections to reduce the digital divide and its associated stress.
3. Educational authorities ought to implement comprehensive support systems that cater to teachers' mental, physical, and social well-being, encompassing counselling services, peer networking groups, and, where suitable, faith-based or spiritual assistance.
4. Schools must proactively manage teacher workloads, particularly during crises, to avert burnout and sustain distinct boundaries between professional and personal life. School Governing Bodies and education departments must prioritize teacher well-being in their policies, acknowledging its essential role in teacher retention, efficacy, and student results.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors certify that there are no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is available on the University of Pretoria Repository.

Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the Faculty of Educational Psychology Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria and the Gauteng Department of Education.

Bio

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Appendix

Interview Protocol on School Teachers' Emotional and Occupational Well-being

Dear Respondents,

This research is titled: **Secondary school teachers' emotional and occupational well-being amidst school closures during the national lockdown period**. The primary research question of this study is: How did the school closures during the national lockdown period affect secondary school teachers' emotional and occupational well-being in Gauteng, South Africa?

Please note that all the data collected will be treated with utmost confidentiality. The session will be recorded with an audio recorder to tape this session; this will allow us to engage with the information for research purposes only. Your identity and those of other respondents will not be revealed to anyone outside the research team. Pseudonyms will be used from data transcription to the reporting stage to conceal your identity. The data will be securely stored at the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Pretoria, South Africa. Participants will be taken through the consent form, the nature of the study, their rights and how privacy and confidentiality will be maintained. Thank you.

INDIVIDUAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Instruction: Kindly respond to the questions as possible.

Name:	Number
Gender:	
Age:	
Home language:	
How long have you been teaching?	
What grade do you teach?	

1. Please explain what teachers' well-being looks like to you, particularly emotional and occupational well-being?
2. During the Lockdown in 2020, what was your personal and professional experience as a teacher?

3. What challenges did you experience during the School Closures / National Lockdown / COVID-19 pandemic?
 4. As a teacher, what were the positive aspects, you experienced during the School Closures /National Lockdown / Covid-19 Pandemic?
 5. How has the School Closures / National Lockdown / COVID-19 pandemic affected your emotional well-being as a teacher?
 6. How has the School Closures / National Lockdown / COVID-19 pandemic affected your occupational well-being as a teacher?
 7. How has the School Closures / National Lockdown / COVID-19 pandemic affected your physical well-being as a teacher?
 8. How has the School Closures / National Lockdown / COVID-19 pandemic affected your psychological well-being as a teacher?
 9. How has the School Closures / National Lockdown / COVID-19 pandemic affected your social well-being as a teacher?
 10. What enabling factors helped you as a teacher to cope during the School Closures / National Lockdown / COVID-19 pandemic?
 11. What kind of support did you receive during the pandemic, and from whom?
 12. What could have been done differently to help your emotional well-being and occupational well-being as a teacher?
 13. In hindsight, now that the covid-19 pandemic is over the worst, what advice would you suggest to teachers/management to provide adequate support for teachers' well-being?
 14. Lastly, is there anything else you would like to add regarding the School Closures / National Lockdown / Covid-19 pandemic's effect on high school teachers' emotional and occupational well-being?
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