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**SOUTH AFRICAN TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATIONAL
CHALLENGES BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

By

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Supervisor: Professor Salomé Human-Vogel

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, **Jessica Millar (student number: 15235123)** declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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ETHICS STATEMENT

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

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June 2023

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore and describe South African teachers' experiences of the educational challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown regulations, and subsequent school closures caused one of the biggest disruptions to education around the world. Consequently, teachers faced various challenges and stressors that had the potential to impact their well-being and ability to teach and further affect education. This interpretivist, qualitative case study was informed by a conceptual framework comprised of Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time model and Pearlin's stress process model. News articles from March 2020 to March 2021 were collected from the Government Communication and Information System database and three South African teachers from two primary schools (one private school and one public school) were individually interviewed and asked to complete a general information form to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers. The general information form contained general questions and the Trait Well-Being Inventory to ascertain the possible impact of participants' subjective well-being on their experiences of the pandemic. The generated data was thematically analysed to identify, interpret, and understand patterns of meaningful information.

The findings of this study provided an understanding of South African teachers' experiences of school closures, online education, and the return to school during the pandemic. Teachers' experiences highlighted both negative and positive experiences during the pandemic, including the challenges teachers encountered, such as the disadvantages of online education, learner-specific stressors, the phased reopening of schools, COVID-19 infections and deaths, teacher-specific stressors, and the negative impact of the pandemic on their well-being. Moreover, teachers' positive experiences during the pandemic included the benefits of online education, and the enhanced external resources and internal strengths teachers used to cope. In addition, the findings of the study provided an understanding of teachers' need for psychological support, school support structures, and teacher training to aid their long-term well-being and resilience.

Keyterms: COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown, education, teachers, stressors, well-being, resilience

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DBE	Department of Basic Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PPCT model	Process-person-context-time model
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SASOP	South African Society of Psychiatrists
TWBI	Trait Well-Being Inventory

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction to the Study

The world has faced a global COVID-19 pandemic that has had far-reaching and deeply negative effects on all facets of society (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020). To mitigate the spread of the virus, many countries enforced lockdowns by confining people to their homes to reduce social interactions (United Nations [UN], 2020). As a result, schools were forced to close and transition to remote education (UN, 2020). Consequently, education systems around the world were severely disrupted affecting more than 90% of learners and at least 63 million teachers (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; UNESCO, 2020a). In many developing countries, much like South Africa, these lockdowns compounded existing educational inequalities by affecting the most vulnerable groups of already disadvantaged learners (UN, 2020). This is problematic, as prior to the pandemic South Africa was facing an education crisis and was described as one of the world's worst-performing education systems (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020). Thus, many South African learners are considered vulnerable as they experience various barriers to receiving a quality education (Donald et al., 2020).

Similarly, South African teachers can be considered vulnerable due to the adverse working conditions, work overload (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020) and enhanced teacher-specific stressors experienced in the profession (Mostert et al., 2021). Moreover, prior to the pandemic, one in four South African teachers reported experiencing extreme stress in their profession (OECD, 2018a). It is well known that high stress levels, adverse working conditions, and work overload increase an individual's vulnerability, negatively affect their well-being and resilience (Prilleltensky et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2017), and may contribute to burnout and enhanced attrition (Eloff & Swart, 2018).

The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and countrywide lockdowns compounded the typical challenges teachers experienced (UN, 2020), enhancing teachers' work-related stressors, work overload, and inconsistent and uncertain working conditions (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Mostert et al., 2021; UN, 2020). The new challenges brought about by the pandemic included the implementation of lockdown and school closures in South Africa (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020). School closures meant that teachers had to adapt rapidly to challenging and unfamiliar circumstances with minimal preparation and training (Mostert et al., 2021). While

remote online education became the favoured medium of education (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021), many South African teachers and learners were unable to engage in online education due to limited access to technological resources, as only 10% of South African households have internet connectivity (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020). Additionally, teachers experienced various challenges with the implications of learning losses (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020), social losses (Sayed & Sing, 2020), and returning to schools during the pandemic (Kim et al., 2021b).

The new challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic were expected to negatively affect teachers' well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Mostert et al., 2021; UN, 2020) and increase teachers', learners' and parents stress and anxiety (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2020b; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Research conducted over the initial months of the pandemic in Canada revealed that teachers maintained the perception that their stress exceeded their capacity to cope and that further progression of their stress would likely lead to burnout (Sokal et al., 2020). Furthermore, UNESCO (2020b) reported that the increase in teachers' stress and the additional challenges of the pandemic were predicted to further exacerbate teachers' burnout and attrition. Moreover, in South Africa, the DBE expressed concern regarding the vulnerability and shortage of teachers during the pandemic (Head, 2020). Apart from teachers choosing to leave the profession, approximately 2 283 South African teachers died during the first and second waves of the pandemic in 2020 because of the COVID-19 virus (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021).

Thus, it was evident that the COVID-19 pandemic would have various, far-reaching effects on education (UN, 2020). Combined with the typical stressors experienced in the profession, these new challenges would have a critical impact on teachers' well-being (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021) highlighting their potential vulnerability and need for support. In this research study, primary school South African teachers' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 to March 2021 and the potential impact of the pandemic on teachers' well-being were explored.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

In this research study, I aimed to provide a better understanding of how South African teachers were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and how to support South African teachers during times of crisis to ensure the long-term resilience and well-being of the teaching workforce. During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, a large amount of research was conducted regarding well-being and mental health; however, in comparison, very little research considered the impact of the pandemic on teachers (Dabrowski, 2020). Similarly, in the second year of the pandemic, Kim et al. (2021a) argue that within the available research that

addressed the impact of the pandemic on education, most of the studies focused on learners' experiences resulting in limited research regarding the impact on teachers. More specifically, there was limited research considering the impact of the pandemic on South African teachers and their well-being (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021). However, more recently, research regarding the impact of the pandemic on teachers is growing.

Within the limited research concerning the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers, it is evident that teacher-specific stressors, stress, anxiety (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021), burnout (Mostert et al., 2021; Sokal et al., 2020), and teacher attrition have increased (UNESCO, 2020a). The studies that addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers broadly focused on the uncertainty of school closures (UN, 2020), the rapid transition to remote online education (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021) and the benefits and challenges of remote online education (Gurung, 2021). Furthermore, these studies aimed to understand the experiences of teachers during the pandemic (Kim et al., 2021a, 2021b), the effects of the pandemic on teachers' stress, anxiety, burnout (Pressley, 2021; Pressley et al., 2021), work overload and coping strategies (MacIntyre et al., 2020) as well as the impact of the pandemic on teachers' quality of life (Lizana et al., 2021).

The research available regarding South African teachers has focused on the difficulties of implementing online education in disadvantaged communities (Van der Berg & Spaul, 2020), the impact of learning losses (Le Grange, 2021; Van der Berg & Spaul, 2020) and social losses (Dorn et al., 2021; Sayed & Sing, 2020), teachers' increased health risks of contracting the COVID-19 virus upon returning to schools (Le Grange, 2021), and the relationship between professional identity and the management of stress associated with the pandemic (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021). Few studies have addressed the impact of the pandemic on South African teachers' well-being; however, Mostert et al. (2021) sought to understand the impact of the pandemic on South African teachers' self-efficacy and anxiety, and Padmanabhanunni et al. (2022) sought to understand the relationship between South African teachers' perceived vulnerability, fear of COVID-19, and psychological distress.

While there is information available that could provide evidence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on South African teachers, there is a crucial need to understand the possible impact of the pandemic on teachers' stress and well-being. This research is crucial as it is well known that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, South African teachers experienced high levels of stress in the profession (OECD, 2018a) that had the potential to negatively affect their well-being (Naidoo et al., 2013). These high stress levels are associated with adverse working conditions, work overload (OECD, 2018b), and other challenges such as overcrowded

classrooms (Marais, 2016), poor student behaviour, classroom management (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020), and safety in schools (Hanaya et al., 2020).

These adverse working conditions, work overload, additional challenges, and high stress levels were expected to be compounded by the new challenges associated with the pandemic (UN, 2020). Additionally, among teachers, these stressors are associated with heightened levels of psychological distress, such as depression and anxiety (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2022) and can lead to teacher burnout (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Pressley, 2021), poor work performance (Shibiti, 2020) and teacher attrition (UNESCO, 2020a). Thus, it was crucial to undertake this research to promote teacher well-being and mitigate the effects of the enhanced teacher-specific stressors, work overload, adverse working conditions, stress, anxiety (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021), and burnout that teachers experienced during the pandemic (Mostert et al., 2021; Sokal et al., 2020). This knowledge could be beneficial for future crises that may affect the educational sector. Teacher-specific stressors, work overload, and adverse working conditions can be considered as educational challenges because they can have a direct impact on teachers' stress and well-being which in turn can impact their ability to teach well. Thus, in the context of this study, teachers' stress and well-being will be explored and considered as an educational challenge to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences of the pandemic.

Moreover, within the growing research regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers, most studies have taken place in other countries (mostly developed countries) that present a different context to South Africa and whose teachers do not face the same challenges as most South African teachers. Therefore, it was crucial to undertake this research in the South African context as research studies conducted in other contexts may not be transferable and may contain little relevance to South African teachers (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). The need to undertake contextually relevant research was further emphasised by the prediction that the pandemic's impact on education was expected to be far worse in developing countries than in developed countries (UN, 2020), which turned out to be true.

In addition, it was urgent to understand these challenges from the experiences and perspectives of teachers, as this exploration could provide an understanding of the individual and contextual differences in how South African teachers experience and cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. By exploring how teachers coped and their well-being during the pandemic, potential challenges that could be mitigated and resources that could provide support to teachers in similar contexts during times of future crises could be identified. The

identification of these resources could enhance an understanding of how to support teachers to ensure the long-term resilience and well-being of the teaching workforce. It is vital to understand teachers' resilience and well-being, as these are essential to maintain continuous quality education for all learners (Eloff & Swart, 2018) and especially for learners who are vulnerable (UN, 2020), much like South African learners.

Lastly, as an educational psychologist in training, I was motivated to understand these challenges, as I believed they would have a significant effect on education and change the future role of educational psychologists in supporting school systems. I felt further motivated to study teachers' well-being, as I was a teacher in 2020 and during this time, I noted my own and my colleagues' increased stress levels. Moreover, I believe education can benefit from fully supporting teachers' well-being to better equip teachers with the personal strength and environmental resources to support themselves and their learners.

Thus, in this research study, I attempted to address the gaps in the available literature as I sought to understand the impact of the pandemic on South African teachers during the initial stages of the pandemic – throughout various countrywide lockdown levels, including the transition to remote, online education, and teachers' experiences of returning to schools. Consequently, my study focused on the timeline of March 2020 to March 2021. Specifically, I sought to understand the challenges South African teachers faced during this time, the impact of these challenges on their experiences of stress and well-being, and their ability to cope with these challenges. Through this understanding I hoped to explore how the resilience of South African educators could be supported.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory case study was to explore and describe South African teachers' experiences of the educational challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, I sought to understand the stressors teachers experienced during the pandemic and teachers' experiences of school closures, remote education, and the return to school during the pandemic. In addition, I explored the impact of these challenges on South African teachers' experiences of stress and well-being, teachers' abilities to cope, and the role educational psychologists can provide in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers to support their resilience.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and Pearlin's stress process model (Pearlin, 1989) guided this study. These two theories were

selected as they could be well integrated and offer critical and holistic insight towards a deeper understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on South African teachers' well-being. The PPCT model probed the understandings of the proximal processes, personal characteristics, and the whole system that simultaneously influenced and interacted with the development of the teachers over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The stress process model aided in the understanding of the multifaceted primary, secondary, chronic, and anticipatory stressors South African teachers experienced during the pandemic and their impact on teachers' resources and well-being (Pearlin, 1989). Additionally, the stress process model offered insight into the effectiveness of social resources in protecting an individual's well-being against stressors (Pearlin, 1989), which may promote an understanding of the social resources that educational psychologists could provide to support teachers' well-being. In Chapter Two, I discuss the PPCT model, the stress process model, and the application of these two theories to my study as an integrated conceptual framework in more detail.

1.4.1 Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time model

The PPCT model was developed to understand the transactional process of interactions in a person's life that influence their development over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner suggests that there are four interacting dimensions that are crucial to understand human development (Donald et al., 2020; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). These include proximal processes, personal characteristics, context or the various systems in a person's life, and time (Donald et al., 2020; Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). In the context of this study, the PPCT model was used to identify and understand the multisystemic risk and protective factors that are present in a teacher's life. Specifically, these multisystemic risk and protective factors could be understood in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 to March 2021 and their influence over teachers' development, their ability to cope with stress, their well-being and resilience may be observed.

1.4.1.1 Proximal processes

Throughout an individual's life course, human development takes place through enduring proximal processes between an individual and the people, objects, and symbols within their immediate environment (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020). Proximal processes are the long-lasting forms of reciprocal interactions between an individual and their environment over time and can be detrimental or supportive to their development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). In the context of this study, proximal processes refer to the social relationships or social interactions teachers have with their learners, colleagues, family members or friends.

Bronfenbrenner proposed that proximal processes can produce positive effects in an individual's development by either promoting competence or by mitigating disruptive outcomes (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020). However, brief, infrequent, or erratic exposure to proximal processes could be linked to developmentally disruptive outcomes (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020), such as increased stress, psychological distress, poor mental health, and well-being. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner suggested that proximal processes are less effective if they occur in unstable or unpredictable environments over time (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019), much like the disrupted social relationships or interactions many people experienced during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic initially reduced or drastically altered the proximal processes (or social interactions) individuals typically engaged in (Long et al., 2021; Răducu & Stănculescu, 2022). A lack of social contact or support can have a negative influence over teachers' job satisfaction and work performance (Toropova, 2020) as well as affect their ability to cope with adversity and the influence on their well-being (Ungar & Theron, 2020). Thus, the effects of the pandemic on proximal processes could have minimised their positive effects on teachers' development and could be linked to more disruptive outcomes (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020), such as increased psychological distress, much like depression or anxiety (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2022), poor work performance (Shibiti, 2020), burnout or teacher attrition (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Pressley, 2021; UNESCO, 2020a). Furthermore, the effects of the pandemic on proximal processes could have impacted teachers' experiences and management of stress, their well-being and resilience by diminishing their access to social resources and undermining their ability to cope (Pearlin, 1989).

Applying Bronfenbrenner's theory of proximal processes to this research study allowed me to consider the impact of complex, reciprocal social relationships and interactions, or a lack thereof, between a teacher and other people in their immediate environment (such as learners, colleagues, family members or friends) on a teacher's development and well-being during the pandemic. This allowed me to consider the influence of the pandemic on teachers' social relationships, how this could have impacted teachers' well-being, as well as the role that social relationships played in their ability to cope with the pandemic. While trying to understand proximal processes, Bronfenbrenner proposed that it is vital to consider the impact that a teacher's personal characteristics and contextual characteristics have on their proximal interactions over an extended period of time (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Thus, Bronfenbrenner highlighted the importance of personal characteristics, context, and time in an individual's development.

1.4.1.2 Personal characteristics

Proximal processes are influenced by each individual's personal characteristics, which refer to the biopsychosocial characteristics or more specifically an individual's demand, resource, and force characteristics (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Applying Bronfenbrenner's theory of personal characteristics to this research study allowed me to consider the influence of teachers' demand characteristics (such as gender, race, and age), resource characteristics (such as skills, knowledge, abilities, experiences, and social and physical resources), and force characteristics (such as personality, temperament, motivation, and persistence) on their ability to cope with their experiences of stress and the enhanced challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is well known that an individual's personal characteristics, such as their age, experience, skills, knowledge, abilities, social and physical resources, as well as personality influence their job satisfaction and job performance (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2021). Additionally, personal characteristics can influence an individual's well-being as these characteristics affect how people cope with various challenges and stressors (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2021). According to Naidoo et al. (2013) and Soetan and Oyetayo (2019), individuals may perceive the same stressor in different ways due to differences in personal characteristics. Thus, each individual teacher would have a different experience and perception of the COVID-19 pandemic based on their experience of the challenges faced during the pandemic and their ability to cope with these challenges.

Previous studies have shown that younger teachers with less experience report increased stress and higher rates of burnout in comparison to older teachers with more experience (Răducu & Stănculescu, 2022). This could be influenced by teachers with more experience having enhanced opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and resources to effectively cope with teacher-specific stressors and limit burnout. However, during the pandemic, even teachers with more professional experience reported increased stress and higher rates of burnout as they were typically less familiar than younger teachers with the technology required to implement remote online education (Răducu & Stănculescu, 2022).

However, even younger teachers who were familiar with the use of technology in the classroom were expected to transition rapidly to remote online education with minimal preparation, professional skills, knowledge, training (Mostert et al., 2021) and experience. This rapid transition enhanced the challenges many teachers experienced in their work environment regardless of their age, experience, or skill set and possibly increased teachers'

workload, experiences of stress, and reduced their well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021; Pressley et al., 2021). Thus, it is possible that the pandemic affected teachers of all ages with various years of professional experience, skills, knowledge, and abilities.

A crucial factor that enhances an individual's ability to cope with challenges and adversity is access to physical and social resources (Ungar & Theron, 2020), which form part of the resource characteristics in Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model. Moreover, Coetzee and Schreuder (2021) emphasise the important role personal and contextual resources play in the protection of an individual's career and their well-being against career challenges. This emphasises the enhanced challenges many teachers faced during the pandemic, as due to countrywide lockdowns, many teachers had reduced access to their social and physical resources that typically helped them cope with stress or adversity (Sayed & Sing, 2020). Thus, teachers may have experienced enhanced challenges and stressors with reduced access to social and physical resources to support their ability to cope and their well-being.

An additional personal characteristic that impacts job satisfaction, job performance, ability to cope and well-being is an individual's personality and individual traits (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2021). Individuals with high levels of neuroticism may experience increased negative emotions, whereas individuals with high levels of extraversion may experience increased positive emotions (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2021). Similarly, Soetan and Oyetayo (2019) reported that people with more typical 'Type A' personalities (people who are typically more competitive, busy, rushed, aggressive and self-confident) respond worse to stress and work interruptions than people with more typical 'Type B' personalities (people who are calmer, slower, and more secure). Additionally, personality traits such as optimism, conscientiousness, self-efficacy, openness to experience, agreeableness, sense of coherence, and active behavioural and cognitive coping techniques influence an individual's perception and experience of positive emotions and enhance their well-being (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2021). Thus, the pandemic may have had a worse impact on individuals with more typical 'Type A' personalities, high levels of neuroticism, and less coping techniques.

1.4.1.3 Context and time

Context explains the contextual and systemic influences in an individual's life that impact their development (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). The individual is placed at the centre of five interrelated systems, which include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (Donald et al., 2020; Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). In the context of this study, the microsystem comprises the teacher's proximal relations, such as the

learners, colleagues, partner, family, or friends present in their life, whereas the mesosystem highlights the interactions between these proximal relations (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Koller et al., 2016). In this study, the microsystem included teachers' perceptions and experiences of the pandemic and their ability to cope with the demands of the pandemic within the school setting, while highlighting the proximal processes teachers typically engage with that may impact their development.

The exosystem emphasises the influence of the broader community, and in this study refers to the community within which the school, its teachers and learners are situated as well as the education system and availability of resources within this community. The macrosystem examines the impact of broader societal values, beliefs, and culture on the development of the teacher (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These broader beliefs could have been perpetuated and possibly understood through the analysis of news articles regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and teachers between March 2020 to March 2021. Lastly, the chronosystem, which also refers to the fourth dimension of the PPCT model, observes the influence of time on each of these systems as well as the teacher's development and well-being throughout the pandemic (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Donald et al., 2020; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Applying the concepts of context and time allowed me to consider the influence of these systems on a teacher's development and ability to cope during the pandemic.

1.4.2 Pearlin's stress process model

Pearlin's stress process model highlights the need to appreciate the impact of a person's life course on their present circumstances (Aneshensel, 2015). This model adopts a sociological approach towards understanding the construct of stressors (Aldwin & Brustrom, 1997) and their interconnected effect on people's resources and mental health (Pearlin, 1989). Stressors are viewed as threatening life events that harm a person's mental health by undermining their ability to cope and diminishing their resources that promote well-being (Pearlin, 1989).

1.4.2.1 Types of stressors

Pearlin proposed that stressors may cause stress proliferation as they are interdependent and emerge from one another (Aneshensel, 2015). He further proposed four categories of stressors that may overlap and vary. These include primary and secondary stressors, major life events and chronic stressors, and anticipatory stressors. In the context of this study, the COVID-19 pandemic may be viewed as a *primary stressor*, as it was the original threatening event that created a chain of secondary stressors that could be as harmful or more harmful than the original event (Aneshensel, 2015). *Secondary stressors* may refer to any stressors

teachers experienced because of the pandemic and the implications it had on education. The pandemic may also be viewed as a *chronic stressor*, as it was a continuous threat with a gradual onset (Aneshensel, 2015). The pandemic further presented many *anticipatory stressors* due to the concern of the possibility of threatening events or circumstances occurring, such as possibly contracting the virus.

1.4.2.2 The process of mediation and moderation

Pearlin sought to explain how stressors exert effects on mental health by examining their impact on personal and social resources (Aneshensel, 2015). Thus, Pearlin proposed a process of mediation and moderation that highlights the interconnection of stressors and personal and social resources (Aneshensel, 2015). *Mediation* refers to the process in which stressors negatively affect mental health and if they erode available resources that would be beneficial in promoting resilience (Aneshensel, 2015). *Moderation* refers to the process in which available resources lessen the effects of various stressors and promote resilience in the individual (Aneshensel, 2015). This process of mediation and moderation further seeks to explain the differences in people's mental health as stressors experienced and available resources will differ across contexts (Aneshensel, 2015). In the context of this study, this process aided my understanding of the interconnected roles of stressors and resources in harming or promoting teachers' well-being.

1.4.2.3 Stressors' social structural components and across the life course

Pearlin (1989) further proposed that contextual stressors are affected by structural influences that affect the stressors to which people are exposed (Aneshensel, 2015). These include *systems of stratification* (such as socioeconomic status, gender, or race) or demand characteristics in the PPCT model, *social institutions* (such as level of education, occupation, or income) or resource characteristics in the PPCT model, and *interpersonal relationships* or proximal processes in the PPCT model (Aneshensel, 2015; Pearlin, 1989). Moreover, Pearlin integrated a life course perspective into his model to assist in understanding the evolution of stressors over time and their impact on a person's life (Aneshensel, 2015). Several key features of the life course are highlighted as critical to the stress process; these include agency, linked lives, social structural influences, transitions, and cohorts (Aneshensel, 2015). As Pearlin highlighted the importance of the life course in understanding stressors, it was vital to consider South African teachers' experiences in basic education before the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of the pandemic on their stress and well-being.

1.5 Research Questions

1.5.1 Primary question

What is the possible impact, if any, of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of South African teachers?

1.5.2 Secondary questions

1. What educational challenges did South African teachers experience as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did these educational challenges impact South African teachers' well-being?
3. What was the role of educational psychologists in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers?

1.6 Working Assumptions

I conducted this research study based on the following working assumptions.

- The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted global education and generated unprecedented educational challenges requiring teachers, parents, and learners to adapt rapidly to change (UN, 2020; UNESCO, 2020b).
- Everyone has a different capacity to adapt to change; thus, people experienced these challenges of the pandemic differently (Novotny et al., 2020).
- These new challenges compounded existing educational challenges and created adverse teaching and learning conditions (UN, 2020).
- An individual's work environment has an impact on their mental health (Ryan et al., 2017) and an individual's mental health has an impact on their ability to work (Eloff & Swart, 2018).
- Teachers play an important and caring role in learners' lives and can influence learners' mental health and academic performance (Eloff & Swart, 2018).

1.7 Concept Clarification

In this section I clarify the concepts that are central to my research study.

1.7.1 COVID-19

COVID-19 is a highly contagious, novel coronavirus that is spread by human transmission (WHO, 2020). It is known to cause a range of symptoms that vary in severity across individuals, ranging from common cold symptoms to more severe symptoms that require

hospitalisation (DC Health, 2020). Due to the rapid nature in which the virus is transmitted, governments around the world enforced countrywide lockdowns to minimise social interactions and mitigate the spread of the virus (UN, 2020).

1.7.2 Pandemic

A pandemic is the outbreak of an infectious, contagious disease that has minimal population immunity and is spread across many countries via transmission of the virus causing a significant percentage of the population to be infected (Morens et al., 2009).

1.7.3 Lockdown

Many countries around the world implemented various levels of lockdown restrictions to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus by regulating the movement of people and restricting non-essential workers from leaving their homes unnecessarily (Greyling et al., 2020). Lockdown restriction levels enforced various travel restrictions and the implementation of COVID-19 protocols, including social distancing, wearing masks, and sanitising (Greyling et al., 2020). The implementation of lockdowns impacted entire communities' well-being, increasing stress levels and symptoms of depression as well as generating economic uncertainty (Burns, 2020). Although lockdowns minimised the physical spread of the virus, they created additional challenges such as increased job loss, financial concern, lack of freedom, and isolation as well as increased instances of abuse, neglect, domestic violence, and food insecurity (May et al., 2020; Sayed & Sing, 2020). Thus, in many instances, lockdown restrictions significantly affected people's psychological distress and negatively affected their well-being (Greyling et al., 2020; Novotny et al., 2020).

1.7.4 Well-being

Well-being is a complex concept that includes physical, emotional, and mental health as well as resilience (Banerjee et al., 2016). In the context of this study, well-being is viewed as a balanced state between a person's physical, psychological and social strengths and resources as well as a person's stressors (Dodge et al., 2012). A person's well-being is expected to fluctuate over time as their resources and stressors interact (Dodge et al., 2012).

1.7.5 Stress

In the context of this study and according to Pearlin (1989), stress is viewed as threatening life events that undermine a person's ability to cope and diminish their personal and social resources that promote their well-being and harm their mental health. These threatening life

events or stressors can produce a psychological or physical response (Ryan et al., 2017) and are viewed as interdependent and emerging from one another (Aneshensel, 2015).

1.7.6 Resilience

There are many definitions of resilience (Herrman et al., 2011) but for the purpose of this study, the following definition is applied. Resilience is a dynamic process in which one achieves a context-specific, positive outcome after experiencing significant hardship (Ungar & Theron, 2020). Resilience is dependent on a balance between multisystemic protective strengths and resources that promote well-being and risk factors or adversities in a person's life that can hinder their well-being (Donald et al., 2020; Ungar & Theron, 2020).

1.7.7 Teachers' experiences

In the context of this study, teachers' experiences refer to South African teachers' general experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic including the educational challenges teachers faced and the potential impact of these challenges on their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being, stress, ability to cope, and resilience. Furthermore, in the context of this study teachers' experiences refer to the positive experiences (such as enhanced support and the advantages of online education) that South African teachers encountered during the pandemic.

1.7.8 Educational challenges

In the context of this study, educational challenges include the challenges teachers experienced during the pandemic that affected the education sector. Additionally, in the context of this study, educational challenges will require an exploration into teachers' stress and well-being which has the potential to impact their ability to teach which is further related to educational challenges.

1.8 Paradigmatic Perspectives

In this section I briefly discuss and highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the epistemological and methodological approach that was used to guide this study. A more comprehensive discussion of these paradigmatic perspectives will follow in Chapter Three.

1.8.1 Epistemology of the study

I selected an interpretivist epistemological paradigm to guide my research process. Interpretivist researchers aim to enhance the understanding of a context-specific phenomenon by focusing on people's subjective experiences, interactions, and their construction of

meaning (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Interpretivists emphasise social interactions as the basis of meaning-making and knowledge production (O'Donoghue, 2007). Thereby they propose that knowledge and truth are subjectively based on peoples' experiences, perceptions (Ryan, 2018), interactions with others and their meaning-making of these experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Thus, interpretivists adopt a relativist ontology (Ryan, 2018) that assumes there are multiple realities and explanations for phenomena, as reality is socially and subjectively constructed (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Due to the belief of a social construction of reality, interpretivist researchers propose that truth and knowledge are situated in various cultural and historical contexts (Ryan, 2018) as complex human issues can only be understood within their contexts (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b).

Thus, I used interpretivism to guide this study as I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges teachers experienced and the wider social construction of meanings surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Interpretivism is well suited to guide this study as the primary focus was to explore South African teachers' experiences, perceptions and meaning-making of the educational challenges brought about by the pandemic, the impact of these experiences on teachers' well-being, and the potential role of educational psychologists in addressing the impact of the pandemic on teachers within teachers' specific contexts and social settings. The interpretivist paradigm is advantageous as it allowed me to gain rich insights and in-depth understandings of South African teachers' context-specific experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b; Saunders et al., 2016). The exploration of teachers' perceptions and feelings (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020) generated rich, authentic data, promoting a deeper understanding of the phenomena (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b) that is more inclusive as it accommodates multiple truths (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

However, the interpretivist paradigm also has various disadvantages, such as potential bias (Given, 2008; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b), as the researcher's beliefs and values play a critical role in the research process and can impact how data is collected, interpreted, and analysed (Ryan, 2018). This could potentially impact the credibility of the research results (Saunders et al., 2016). Given (2008) proposes that researchers can manage potential bias by acknowledging their own assumptions and values, searching for contradictory data, and being open to alternative data interpretations. A further disadvantage of interpretivist studies is that the findings often cannot be generalised to broader society (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). However, as this study did not aim to generate generalisable findings, this did not present a challenge and although these findings are not generalisable, they may be transferable to similar contexts (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Nonetheless, the transferability of the findings of this study must be determined by the reader.

1.8.2 Methodological approach

I selected a qualitative methodological approach to guide this study. Qualitative researchers argue that general, universal findings are not possible in studies related to complex human issues (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Thus, qualitative researchers aim to deeply understand specific experiences and social meaning by relying on linguistics to extract descriptive data through observations (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Observations of people's language, interactions, and feelings should occur in their natural social setting, as each setting is different and will yield unique results (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). A qualitative methodology is typically associated with interpretivism as these in-depth reports are necessary for interpretivists to understand the phenomenon of their study (Saunders et al., 2016; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Therefore, a qualitative approach enabled me to explore the research questions of my study through the collaborative generation of descriptive data that was subjective to each participant's experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, a qualitative approach enabled me to explore South African teachers' language, actions, feelings, and experiences to understand their challenges, experience of stress, well-being, and perceptions of what role educational psychologists played in addressing the impact of the pandemic on teachers.

A qualitative methodological approach is advantageous as it provided a guide in which teachers' complex experiences within different social contexts could be richly described (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b; Rahman, 2017). Moreover, as participants controlled their narratives, further clarity on meaning-making and an understanding of teachers' unique experiences was achieved (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). However, qualitative research also presents various disadvantages, such as being time consuming, as data generation and interpretation can be complex and elusive (Rahman, 2017). To combat this challenge, I implemented strict delineations, such as limited interviews with a small number of participants and time limits were imposed on the thematic analysis of news articles (March 2020 to March 2021).

1.9 Brief Overview of the Research Methodology

In the following section I provide a brief overview of the research methodology of my study, including the research design, selection of research sites and participants, data generation and documentation techniques, data sources and the data analysis techniques I used. I briefly discuss each aspect of the research methodology highlighting the advantages and disadvantages as more detailed explanations will be provided in Chapter Three.

1.9.1 Research design

In this research study, I aimed to conduct a single, exploratory case study. A case study is an empirical investigation and in-depth analysis of a contemporary, complex phenomenon within its natural context, bounded by space and time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). Case study researchers use multiple sources of data generation, such as interviews, observations, or other documents to enhance data triangulation and acquire an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon while remaining flexible to new insights emerging from the data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). I used a single, exploratory case study as I sought to richly describe, explore, understand, and analyse the contemporary phenomenon of primary school South African teachers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic within its natural context (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). Thus, an exploratory case study aligned with the objectives of this study to gain an in-depth understanding of the educational challenges South African teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of the pandemic on teachers' experiences of stress and their well-being, and the role educational psychologists provided to support teachers.

A case study approach was advantageous as it generated an in-depth analysis of the case with rich insights and empirical descriptions of the study in its real-life context (Given, 2008; Saunders et al., 2016). It also created an insider's point of view and may produce ideas for future research studies. Thus, a case study approach complemented the interpretivist and qualitative approaches I used in this research. Nonetheless, the use of a case study design also presented certain disadvantages. As a case study phenomenon usually concerns complex issues, researchers can lose the focus of their study (Heale & Twycross, 2018). To avoid this issue, I carefully considered and placed appropriate boundaries on my case to ensure my study remained focused (Heale & Twycross, 2018).

1.9.2 Selection of research sites and participants

I made use of purposive sampling to select the research sites and participating teachers of this study. Purposive sampling is typically used in qualitative research and proposes selecting research sites and participants that are rich with information that will aid in answering the research questions of the study (Schreier, 2018). I purposefully selected two primary schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng that represented diversity in terms of finances, available resources, and geographic location.

From these two research sites, I purposefully selected eight participants based on the following criteria to effectively represent the phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c) and provide rich information (Schreier, 2018).

- Participants must be selected from two schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng.
- Participants must be selected based on their personal characteristics to represent diversity in the sample, such as their age, race, gender, teaching grades and phases, as well as the number of years they have experience teaching.
- Participants must have experience teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 to March 2021.
- Participants must be able to communicate in conversational English.
- Participants must be able to participate in online interviews after school hours.
- Participants must be willing to participate and provide written informed consent.
- Participants must not have lost a loved one due to the COVID-19 virus.

Purposive sampling presents many advantages as participants are selected based on predetermined criteria to achieve a specific research objective, the phenomenon being studied can be explored and described deeply as well as represented accurately (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). In addition thereto, purposive sampling has a clear sampling strategy and thus increased the rigour of my study (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). However, purposive sampling also presents certain disadvantages as purposive sampling is a non-random selection process and the subjectivity and biases of the researcher may pose a challenge when participants are selected (Etikan et al., 2016). Thus, I made use of reflective field notes to track my decision making and monitor any biases.

1.9.3 Data generation and documentation process

To gain an in-depth understanding of my research topic, I used multiple data generation techniques (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). These techniques included collecting South African news articles from March 2020 to March 2021, gathering participants' answers to the Trait Well-Being Inventory (TWBI) (Dalbert, 1992), conducting semi-structured interviews with the participating teachers of the study, and recording field notes throughout the research process.

1.9.3.1 Phase one: News articles

In this research study, I gathered documentary data in the form of news articles collected by the South African Council for Educators (SACE) from the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) database. I requested permission from SACE to read and use the

news articles collected throughout the pandemic. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that the researcher describes clear inclusion or exclusion criteria when using secondary data. These criteria should be influenced by the purpose the researcher would like to achieve in analysing the secondary data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I selected the relevant news articles based on the following criteria.

- Articles will be selected if they are based in the South African context.
- Articles will be selected if they are published between March 2020 to March 2021 or reflect on the pandemic between March 2020 to March 2021.
- Articles will be selected if they relate to the experiences and perceptions of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Articles will be selected if they relate to the educational challenges teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic or the impact of these challenges on teachers' stress and well-being.

1.9.3.2 Phase two: semi-structured interviews

Following the collection of news articles, I searched for two research sites (schools) that were willing to participate in my study. I achieved this by communicating with the principals of each school, via email, to invite the school to participate in my study, discuss my study, and gain permission to work with the teachers in their school. When I received confirmation from the government schools that they were willing to participate in my study, I applied for consent to conduct research at this school from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). Thereafter, once I received permission from the GDE, I communicated with the teachers at the research sites, via an email invitation, to take part in my study. Teachers who expressed interest in my study were provided with further information about my research and the informed consent letter to participate in the study.

Teachers who signed the informed consent letter were asked to complete the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992) and were invited to participate in an individual, online interview, via Zoom, if they met the purposive sampling criteria. The semi-structured interviews would take place after school hours for approximately one hour at the participants' availability. With the participants' permission, I made use of audio recordings to transcribe the interviews verbatim for documentation and data analysis purposes (Flick, 2018b). I asked the participants open-ended questions related to the primary and secondary research questions of this study and I probed for further clarification of participants' answers (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). Participants were given pseudonyms and I recorded field notes in the form of a research journal.

1.9.4 Data sources

The data generation process was expected to yield the following data sources: news articles, the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992) responses, participants' semi-structured interviews and field notes.

1.9.4.1 News articles

News articles are official documents that report current events and are considered secondary data that contain a wealth of information (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c; Saunders et al., 2016). News articles between March 2020 and March 2021 were used in this study to reconstruct older events of the COVID-19 pandemic and to gain a rich understanding of communities' beliefs and perceptions during this time (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). Thus, news articles were expected to provide a holistic understanding of the educational challenges South African teachers experienced and the impact of these challenges on teachers' stress or well-being.

In this study, the use of news articles was advantageous as they were an unobtrusive means of generating data and were time and cost effective as the articles that were collected were free. They could also generate unforeseen discoveries and provide contextual data (Saunders et al., 2016) as well as comparative data that could be compared with the participants' interviews to promote an in-depth understanding of my research questions (Roulston & Choi, 2018; Saunders et al., 2016). However, the use of news articles also presents certain disadvantages (Saunders et al., 2016). As news articles may be inauthentic or misrepresent an objective truth or a representative sample, it was crucial to remain cautious of the articles collected and analysed (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c; Rapley & Rees, 2018). Thus, to strengthen the credibility of the news articles that were used in this study, they were contextualised, triangulated, and collected from a reliable database (Rapley & Rees, 2018).

1.9.4.2 Trait Well-Being Inventory

A Google Form was used to ask participants to complete the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992). The TWBI was used to measure participants' subjective well-being and understand how participants' well-being might impact their responses and participation in the study (Dalbert, 1992). In this study, the use of an online form was advantageous as participants could complete the form at a convenient time and place that suited them. In addition, the questions were presented in a user-friendly manner and did not require much time from the participants to answer. However, the use of an online form presents certain disadvantages as participants must have a level of technical skills, access to the internet, and a device to answer the form (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, potential participants without technical skills, access to the internet, or a device

would be unable to answer the online form which could produce potential bias in the selection process. However, collaborating online was the most effective way to ensure the participants of the study and the researcher remained safe from infection.

1.9.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

In qualitative research, data generation methods typically involve face-to-face interaction with the study participants, such as through interviewing the participants (Given, 2008). In a semi-structured interview, the researcher asks the participants open-ended questions related to the research questions of the study in order to generate data (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). Semi-structured interviews provide valuable information as the participants have direct experience with the phenomenon and can offer a meaningful understanding of the topic (Flick, 2018b). Thus, through these interviews, the educational challenges South African teachers experienced during the pandemic, the effects of the pandemic on teachers' experiences of stress and their well-being, and the supportive role educational psychologists provided could be explored deeply.

The use of online interviews was advantageous as they followed COVID-19 protocols. In addition, they were cost and time effective, they provided flexibility to fit into participants' schedules, and participants could take part in the interview where they felt comfortable in a nonthreatening environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, the verbatim transcription of the interviews was beneficial as it enhanced the credibility of my study and allowed an in-depth analysis and coding of data which can be replicated by others (Saunders et al., 2016). However, specific challenges may arise during online interviews as technical difficulties can limit the effectiveness of the interview (Jones & Abdelfattah, 2020). In this study, connection difficulties and time limited online meetings were the technological challenges experienced. Interviews can be time consuming and if implemented poorly, opportunities to obtain valuable data may be lost (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). Thus, Flick (2018b) suggests that the researcher must be willing to listen and learn from their participants, while Nieuwenhuis (2016c) suggests the researcher remains attentive to explore emerging information.

1.9.4.4 Field notes

I used field notes in this research study to document various notes, observations, beliefs, perceptions, and reflections throughout the research process. Field notes included recording the research context, the participants' verbal and nonverbal behaviour as well as the researcher's thoughts, insights, impressions and feelings (Maharaj, 2016). The use of field notes was beneficial as field notes are considered an essential component of rigorous

qualitative research to enhance data generation and provide rich context for data analysis (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

1.10 Data analysis

I made use of reflexive thematic analysis with an inductive approach to analyse and interpret the data generated in this research study (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To analyse the data, Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) six-phase guide was followed. These six-phases include: first, becoming familiar with the data and writing familiarisation notes; second, creating initial codes systematically; third, looking for initial themes from the coded data; fourth, developing and reviewing the themes; fifth, refining, defining, and naming clear themes; and last, writing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the flexibility of thematic analysis can increase the richness and complexity of the data generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, the use of thematic analysis also presents certain challenges, such as the amount of time it takes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, due to its flexibility, there are many ways to conduct a thematic analysis, creating confusion and poor data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This was avoided as Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide to conducting a thematic analysis was followed and its application to my study will be described in more detail in Chapter Three.

1.11 Ethical Considerations

I followed the ethical guidelines imposed by the University of Pretoria and the Department of Education and applied for ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Education Ethics Committee and from the GDE Research Committee. In addition, for each research site, I obtained written, informed, and voluntary consent from the school principals and participants before the research began (Murray, 2018). Principals and participants received important information about the purpose of the study, the methods that would be used, any potential risks, and the expected outcomes of the study (Bull, 2018). The research participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any point (Murray, 2018). They would be protected from harm as they would not be deceived (Flick, 2018a) and their identities and the data collected would remain anonymous and be treated with care (Maree, 2016). The raw data obtained during this study has been kept secure on a password-protected laptop and only the researcher and supervisor have had access to this information. To further ensure the research participants' identities remained anonymous, I made use of pseudonyms when writing up the results and no possible personal identifiers have been included.

I remained aware of participants' well-being throughout the interview process; however, it was expected that the interviews would not address any sensitive topics (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). Nonetheless, I did not choose a participant who lost someone due to COVID-19 as this might have caused sensitivity with the focus of the study; thus, it was included in the purposive selection criteria. However, if a participant became emotionally triggered by discussing COVID-19, I would assist them with debriefing and stabilisation and refer them to SADAG for further assistance if they felt they required it. Lastly, I treated the research process with integrity, objectivity, and responsibility to report trustworthy findings (Saunders et al., 2016).

1.12 Quality Criteria: Trustworthiness of the Study

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is of utmost importance (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). Five criteria have been proposed that should be considered by qualitative researchers to attain a trustworthy study. These criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a) and authenticity (James, 2008).

Credibility refers to the methodological processes that are used for the researcher's interpretations of the participants' expressions to represent the participants' meanings accurately and effectively (Jensen, 2008b). To enhance the credibility of my study, I used purposive sampling to select appropriate participants that met the criteria required to represent the phenomenon being studied (Jensen, 2008b). Furthermore, the credibility of my study was enhanced through the use of triangulation, as individual semi-structured interviews aimed to encourage participants to provide open-ended, truthful, and complete answers (Jensen, 2008b) that could be triangulated with the findings from news articles and the available literature (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b).

Transferability refers to the generalisation of the study's findings to other settings (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a); however, this was not the aim of this study as the primary focus was to understand the context-specific phenomenon. The transferability of this study was enhanced through the detailed description of the research sites, participants and the research design that was used (Jensen, 2008d). It is, therefore, the readers' decision as to what extent the findings may be transferred to similar contexts (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a).

Dependability refers to the consistency of the study and is demonstrated through the implementation of the research design and the operational detail of gathering the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). Dependability was enhanced through the detailed description of the research methods, data generation and data analysis that has been provided in this study. Moreover, I used a reflective journal, in which I noted my decisions during the research

process, including the data generation and analysis process (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). This created a research infrastructure in which a replication of the case study could be conducted with similar results (Jensen, 2008c).

Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the researcher to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants and the meaning the participants give to their experiences (Jensen, 2008a). Confirmability is based on the research purpose and is not altered due to researcher bias (Jensen, 2008a). Confirmability was enhanced through clarification during the individual interviews to ensure I understood participants and through the use of the reflective journal, in which I recorded various field notes, observations, beliefs and perceptions to increase my awareness of my own potential bias and remain objective in rooting the findings in the participants' experiences (Maxwell, 2018).

Authenticity refers to the societal impact of the research on the members of the community and culture being researched (James, 2008). Authenticity aims to generate fair, worthwhile, and meaningful research (James, 2008) that represents the participants' experiences and perceptions fairly and accurately. The authenticity of this study was enhanced through the fair generation and documentation of data (James, 2008).

1.13 Outline of Chapters

Chapter One: Introduction and general overview

Chapter One served as a broad overview of the study. In this chapter I introduced the study, including relevant background information and my rationale for undertaking this research. I outlined the purpose and conceptual framework of my study, presented the primary and secondary research questions, stated the working assumptions, and defined the central concepts of this study. I introduced the paradigmatic perspectives and the research methodological choices I made to conduct this study. Lastly, I presented the ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter Two: Background and conceptual framework of the study

Chapter Two serves as a review of the existing literature that relates to the primary focus of this study. I discuss the relevant background information of the study, specifically focusing on the state of basic education in South Africa prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact the pandemic has had on education and teachers' well-being and the importance of supporting teachers' well-being. Furthermore, I present the conceptual

framework of this study, emphasising Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, Pearlin's stress process model, and the two theories as an integrated conceptual framework.

Chapter Three: Research methodology

Chapter Three serves as a detailed explanation of the research process. I explain the selected paradigmatic perspectives, research methodological approach, data generation and documentation process, data sources, and the data analysis used to interpret the findings of this research study. I discuss the ethical considerations I used to guide my study and the trustworthiness of my study.

Chapter Four: Results and discussion of findings

Chapter Four serves as a presentation of the results and discussion of the findings of the study. In this chapter I present the themes and subthemes identified during the thematic analysis of the news articles and interviews and the participants' responses to the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992). I present these results in the order of the secondary research questions of the study and interpret the results against the backdrop of the literature and conceptual framework considered in Chapter Two. Lastly, I present the key findings of the study.

Chapter Five: Summary, recommendations and conclusion

Chapter Five serves as a summary of the main findings of the study and addresses the primary research question and secondary research questions. I discuss the potential contributions and limitations of the study and highlight the recommendations for future research and practice. Lastly, I present the final conclusion of my research study.

1.14 Summary

In this chapter I provided a broad overview of the study. I introduced my research topic of focusing on the experiences of South African teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 and March 2021. I provided a rationale for the study, motivated my interest in this topic and formulated primary and secondary research questions. I stated the working assumptions of this study, explained the central concepts, and briefly explained the paradigmatic perspectives of the study and the research design I used. In addition, I presented the ethical guidelines I followed and the trustworthiness of the study. In the following chapter I will explore and review the existing literature related to this field of study. I explore the state of basic education in South Africa prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact this pandemic has had on education and teachers' well-being. In

addition, the conceptual framework of this study is discussed, focusing on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model and Pearlin's stress process model. This chapter forms the backdrop against which the results of this study were interpreted.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO THE STUDY

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter One I provided an introduction and general overview of the study, describing the rationale and purpose of the study. I explained the conceptual framework that was used to guide the study and the primary and secondary research questions. I clarified the working assumptions and key concepts and introduced the paradigmatic perspectives and research methodology of the study. Lastly, I discussed the quality criteria and ethical guidelines that I took into consideration throughout this research process.

In this chapter, I discuss an overview of the challenges present in basic education in South Africa. This overview contextualises the challenges South African teachers experienced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to understand the impact of the pandemic systemically and temporally. As the challenges South African teachers experienced prior to and during the pandemic are expected to act as chronic stressors, this overview further contextualises the potential impact these challenges have on teachers' well-being. This chapter continues with a discussion of the existing literature regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent challenges education and teachers have faced as a result and the potential impact of the pandemic on teachers' well-being. This discussion emphasises the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and teachers' well-being and the need for effective measures that support teachers' well-being and the resiliency of South African education. Following a review of the existing literature, I present the integrated conceptual framework that was used to guide my research study. This conceptual framework includes an integration of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model and Pearlin's stress process model.

2.2 Background to the Study

2.2.1 South Africa's disparate education system

It is vital to understand the challenges that beset basic education in South Africa as these challenges present the unique conditions in which the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic manifested (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020). Thus, through the exploration of teachers' work environments prior to the pandemic, an understanding of the potential impact of the pandemic on South African education and teachers may be achieved. Before the COVID-19 pandemic,

the South African education system was facing a crisis (Maarman & Lamont-Mbawuli, 2017), and was frequently described as underachieving and one of the worst-performing education systems in the world (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020). The performance of South Africa's education system is strongly associated with the structural and racial socioeconomic inequalities present in the country which are largely generational (Hall, 2020) and can often be traced back to the inequalities of apartheid (Legotlo, 2014).

Spaull (2013) and van Dyk and White (2019) argue that these socioeconomic inequalities and the historical education system of the country have perpetuated the development of a disparate bimodal school system. One of these school systems is typically for more wealthy learners and is located across schools in the upper quintile rankings (accommodating approximately 25% of learners) (Ramrathan, 2017; Spaull, 2013; Wolfhunter, 2011). It is considered that learners attending these schools receive a superior education as they typically perform better in national and international assessments in comparison to lower quintile ranking schools in South Africa (Spaull, 2013; van Dyk & White, 2019). The second type of school system in South Africa is typically for poorer learners and is located across schools in the lower quintile rankings (accommodating approximately 75% of learners) (Ramrathan, 2017; Spaull, 2013; Wolfhunter, 2011). It is considered that learners attending these schools receive an inferior quality education as they typically perform poorly in national and international assessments (Spaull, 2013; van Dyk & White, 2019; Wolfhunter, 2011).

Lower quintile ranking schools are typically characterised by overcrowding (Marais, 2016; van Dyk & White, 2019), an increased learner-to-educator and learner-to-classroom ratio (Legotlo, 2014), the medium of instruction taking place in a language learners cannot fully understand (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020), enhanced dropout, grade repetition, teacher absenteeism, and underperformance (Spaull, 2013). It is typical for these schools to experience administrative inefficiency, minimal funding, unsafe schooling facilities, a lack of resources, and parental support (Wolfhunter, 2014) as well as decreased teacher motivation and minimal access to learning supplies (Legotlo, 2014). Additionally, these classrooms may be led by underqualified teachers (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020) or teachers who may have the required qualifications but teach a subject for which they are not qualified (Ramrathan, 2017).

Thus, the disparate school system influences the quality of education learners receive (Donald et al., 2020; Maarman & Lamont-Mbawuli, 2017). Learners attending lower quintile ranking schools often experience various educational barriers (Donald et al., 2020; Maarman & Lamont-Mbawuli, 2017) that limit their access to quality education and affect their academic performance (Legotlo, 2014; Spaull, 2013; Wolfhunter, 2011). Due to these challenges,

learners are reported to lack commitment, accountability, and motivation, leading to further unsatisfactory academic performance, diminished self-confidence, and subsequent school dropout (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Maarman & Lamont-Mbawuli, 2017). Thus, in South Africa, many learners can be considered vulnerable due to these various inequalities and challenges (Ramrathan, 2017).

2.2.2 The challenges facing teachers in basic education in South Africa

Similarly, South African teachers can be considered vulnerable due to the challenges experienced in the profession, the high stress levels reported by teachers as well as the enhanced rate of attrition (OECD, 2018a). In South Africa, one in four teachers report experiencing major stress in their profession and that their most prevalent source of stress is being held accountable for learners' academic performance (OECD, 2018a). This source of stress is understandable as approximately 75% of South African learners perform well below national and international age-expected benchmarks and thus, do not perform satisfactorily (Ramrathan, 2017; Spaull, 2013; Wolfhunter, 2011). Moreover, South Africa's dropout rate among learners is alarming as approximately 60% of Grade one learners drop out of school before completing Grade 12 (Weybright et al., 2018). Weybright et al. (2018) further report that of the learners that remain in school, only 40% will successfully complete matric.

According to Greenberg et al. (2016), teaching is considered one of the most stressful occupations to work in. In South Africa, many teachers report feeling further stress due to the low standards of education in the country (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020), combined with being held accountable for learners' academic performance (OECD, 2018a). Due to the low standards of education in the country, learners' poor academic performance is more concerning as curriculum pass rates only require learners to achieve 30% to progress to the following grade (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Msweli, 2022). Consequently, this lowered pass rate often results in many learners acquiring learning deficits in primary school that are carried forward throughout their school career (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020). This lower standard of education and poor learner performance is further evidenced in international assessments (Spaull, 2013), such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, conducted in 2016), which found that many Grade four South African learners lack the most basic reading literacy skills (Howie et al., 2017).

It is evident that the disparate school system in South Africa generates work environments for teachers that differ vastly from one another as each context generates unique challenges that impact teachers' stressors and well-being differently. Thus, many South African teachers experience various challenges in the field of education that have the potential to affect their

stress and well-being (Naidoo et al., 2013). Further work-related challenges South African teachers experience that may influence their stress and well-being include work overload, time pressures (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; OECD, 2018b), and overcrowded classrooms (Marais, 2016).

Work overload refers to excessive job demands (Naidoo et al., 2013) that can hinder an employee's ability to achieve a valued goal (Sandmeier et al., 2022). It is influenced by time and work pressures as well as the employee's perception of the availability of their resources to cope with their job demands (Sandmeier et al., 2022). Work overload is most strongly associated with emotional exhaustion which is one of the defining features of burnout (Sandmeier et al., 2022) and it can have a detrimental impact on teachers' work-life balance (OECD, 2018b).

Bowen (2016) reported that the South African teachers that took part in her study believed their family life and social activities were compromised as teaching consumed most of their time. She further reported that due to work overload, the quality of teaching they provided was compromised which increased their feelings of being overwhelmed and stressed (Bowen, 2016). These teachers reported that their work overload and lack of work-life balance would be two of the reasons that would make them leave the profession in the future (Bowen, 2016). Naidoo et al. (2013) reported that work overload is enhanced by multitasking which distracts from teachers' core task of educating. Moreover, multiple work roles and managerial positions, excessive administrative work, marking, lesson preparation, teaching, additional duties due to absent teachers (OECD, 2018b) and overcrowded classes (Marais, 2016) further increase teachers' work overload.

Overcrowded classrooms present a significant challenge in South Africa as the maximum recommended learner-to-educator ratio is 40:1; however, some classrooms have as many as 130 learners to one teacher (Marais, 2016). Consequently, teachers working in overcrowded classrooms typically experience a heavier workload as they have less time to teach during lessons and are required to work more after-school hours to assess learners' work (Marais, 2016). Overcrowded classrooms reduce teachers' time to pay individual attention to learners' educational needs, manage their classroom and time as well as their learners' behaviour (Marais, 2016). These classrooms increase learners' inattention, contributing to unproductive learning environments that negatively affect learners' academic performance (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Maarman & Lamont-Mbawuli, 2017; Marais, 2016), and further increase teachers' stress (OECD, 2018a). Additionally, overcrowding increases instances of violence

in the classroom as well as generates unhygienic environments that increase the spread of contagious infections (Marais, 2016).

South African teachers further reported that student behaviour and classroom management is a further challenge and source of stress in their profession (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Maarman & Lamont-Mbawuli, 2017; OECD, 2018b). Teachers indicated that a major cause of psychological strain is disruptive student behaviour, such as being verba

lly abused or intimidated by learners (OECD, 2018b) which is often made worse by overcrowded classrooms as these classes become increasingly difficult for teachers to discipline (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Maarman & Lamont-Mbawuli, 2017; Marais, 2016). Furthermore, as some learners may feel a lack of accountability for their education, disruptive and disrespectful classroom behaviour is common in lower quintile ranking schools and can include violence (Hanaya et al., 2020) with dangerous weapons, theft, vandalism, and substance abuse (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Hanaya et al., 2020). However, many teachers also reported that interactions with learners typically enhance their job satisfaction (Toropova, 2020).

For many South African teachers, safety in schools is an ongoing concern as many lower quintile ranking schools experience excessive violence that directly affects learners' educational outcomes and teachers' stress (Hanaya et al., 2020; Mouton et al., 2012). The highest rates of school violence are reported to occur in the classroom which require teachers to intervene and thereby disrupts the teaching process (Hanaya et al., 2020). Acts of violence affect learners' concentration and academic performance, learners' and teachers' feeling of safety and increases teachers' desires to leave the profession (Hanaya et al., 2020; Mouton et al., 2012).

In addition, Naidoo et al. (2013) state that ineffective organisational support, difficult relationships with colleagues, job remuneration, and job insecurity were further reported as challenges teachers experienced in the profession that increases their stress. The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) report (OECD, 2018b) shared that teachers emphasised that their ability to adequately respond to the needs of the evolving education system is an additional source of stress in the profession. In South Africa, this could refer to the curriculum challenges many teachers have experienced, such as curriculum changes, content overload which further increases teachers' workload, and inadequate resources to effectively implement the curriculum (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Mouton et al., 2012).

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic could be viewed as a challenge and stressor that has tested teachers' abilities to adequately respond to the needs of the evolving education system.

Thus, it is evident that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many South African teachers were facing adverse working conditions, increased challenges, and high stress levels (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; OECD, 2018b) that were expected to be compounded by the pandemic and could have a significant influence on teachers' stress and well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; UN, 2020).

2.2.3 The educational challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown restrictions caused one of the most significant disruptions to education and as a result, the world faced unprecedented challenges to ensure global quality education (Greyling et al., 2020; UN, 2020). These challenges affected all levels of education and were predicted to increase teachers' adverse working conditions and stressors and negatively affect their well-being, anxiety, and burnout (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Pressley, 2021; UN, 2020).

2.2.3.1 School closures and remote education

Lockdowns constituted a major source of stress for teachers (UN, 2020) as the uncertainty of school closures generated unpredictable and sudden transitions within the education system. The first sudden transition within education was the cessation of in-person schooling and the changeover to remote education to maintain educational continuity throughout lockdowns (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020). A favourable approach to remote education included online education (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The migration to online education was relatively easy for teachers and learners in more affluent, higher quintile ranking schools (Le Grange, 2021), although they still experienced plenty of difficulties (Sayed & Sing, 2020).

Teachers who were able to engage in online education experienced new educational challenges (UNESCO, 2020a; UN, 2020) that enhanced their already heavy and complicated workloads which had affected teachers' anxiety and burnout prior to the pandemic (Pressley, 2021). One of the challenges presented by online education was the rapid transition expected of teachers to adapt to unfamiliar teaching roles and circumstances with minimal preparation, professional development, training, and resources (Mostert et al., 2021). Thus, the implementation and use of online education required teachers to learn new technology and instructional approaches, develop lesson plans that met these requirements, and encourage their learners to engage in virtual lessons effectively (Pressley et al., 2021). MacIntyre et al.

(2020) suggested that the transition to remote education had the potential to affect teachers' abilities to cope during the pandemic, while the DBE (2020b) reported that the instant change in the manner in which teaching, learning, and assessments were conducted affected many learners', parents', and teachers' stress and anxiety.

According to Gurung (2021), some teachers reported feeling as though online education was more difficult than in-person, classroom teaching and reported experiencing difficulties with internet connectivity and loss of electricity, limited time to prepare lesson content, reaching learners in remote areas, motivating learners online, keeping track of learners' progress, providing feedback, and monitoring online participation. Similarly, Pressley et al. (2021) emphasised that many teachers reported increased concern regarding the high rates of learner absenteeism during periods of online education. Further challenges teachers reported were working from home as many teachers experienced difficulties establishing a healthy work-life balance as boundaries between personal and professional roles became blurred (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Thus, many teachers experienced an increased number of working hours in 2020 and 2021 which had the potential to affect their stress (Gicheva, 2021). In addition, the implementation of online education was challenging due to the lack of infrastructure, resources, and training, and inadequate implementation of the curriculum (UNESCO, 2020b; UN, 2020).

Nonetheless, online education also presented certain advantages such as the removal of the typical day-to-day stressors of managing learners in the classroom (Dabrowski, 2020). Moreover, some teachers reported new, additional training to implement online education and the opportunity to apply new teaching tools in a more impactful manner due to the diversity of online education platforms and resources (Gurung, 2021). In addition, under the right circumstances, working from home allowed teaching and learning hours to become adaptable due to the increased flexibility of time that online education offered (Gurung, 2021). Furthermore, Son (2022) emphasised that online education is more cost effective as it minimises the expense of traveling to work and allows learners to work at their own pace and review lesson recordings multiple times to learn content. However, online education did not present a solution to the cessation of schooling for many learners or teachers as engaging in online education was not a possibility for all learners in South Africa.

2.2.3.2 Disparity in learners' access to remote online education

In many developing countries the utilisation of online education drastically changed the world of work for many teachers and further enhanced existing socioeconomic disparities

(Padmanabhanunni et al., 2022). For the lower quintile ranking schools and disadvantaged communities in South Africa, online education presented a new challenge for engaging with quality education (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020). As many South African households do not have access to basic infrastructure (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020), access to the internet and technology required to engage in online education is limited to households that can afford these luxuries (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020). Consequently, the South African DBE implemented various strategies to support disadvantaged learners that were unable to access online education. These strategies included adjusting the academic calendar, TV or radio curriculum support programmes, and teachers preparing workbooks for learners to take home during the lockdown period (DBE, 2020a). However, these strategies were largely ineffectual in adequately delivering the curriculum and supporting all learners' needs (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020), and added to teachers' heavy workload and experiences of stress during the pandemic.

2.2.3.3 Learning losses and social losses

Over time, school closures resulted in some teachers experiencing inadequate remuneration, job insecurity, and difficulties traveling to work (UNESCO, 2020a; UN, 2020). The extension of school closures and online education impeded many learners' access to quality education resulting in missed school days, an extended cessation in schooling, and insurmountable learning losses (Le Grange, 2021; Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020). UNICEF (2022) estimated that a Grade three child who lost one year of schooling during the pandemic could, in the long-term without urgent and relevant mitigation, lose up to three years' worth of learning. In South Africa, some learners lost up to 57% of school days in the first 10 weeks of the initial COVID-19 lockdown (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020), while the DBE (2021a) reported that between 50% and 75% of a typical year's worth of learning was lost in 2020.

Thus, the cessation in schooling was predicted to widen learning gaps, enhance additional learning losses in subsequent school years (Crawford et al., 2021), affect learners' academic performance (Chandra, 2020), increase learners' grade repetition (UN, 2020) and result in an increase in learners dropping out of school (DBE, 2021a). The United Nations (2020) estimated that 23.8 million learners were expected to drop out of school in 2021 because of the compounded challenges of the pandemic and a lack of adequate support during school closures. In addition, these learning losses in South Africa were predicted to further exacerbate the overall inequality experienced in education (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020).

For many learners and teachers, the implementation of school closures resulted in more losses than those experienced academically (Sayed & Sing, 2020). Due to extended periods of social isolation, many learners and teachers lost the opportunity to socialise, develop and sustain relationships, and supported by others (Sayed & Sing, 2020). Moreover, because of the COVID-19 virus, many learners and teachers' social losses extended to the death of family members and friends (Dorn et al., 2021). In addition, the loss of safety during the pandemic was evident. Many teachers reported concerns regarding the possibility of some learners experiencing increased abuse and exposure to violence in the home due to the extended periods of lockdown (Sayed & Sing, 2020).

Furthermore, these losses extended to learners' inaccessibility to various school support services (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020), such as social support structures or school-feeding programmes (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020). For example, in South Africa, it is estimated that school-feeding programmes provide a meal every day to approximately nine million learners (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020) who, without this meal, often go hungry. Thus, many learners went without this meal during the pandemic due to lockdown restrictions. Consequently, many teachers reported significant concerns regarding the impact of the pandemic on their learners' well-being as they were unable to contact or communicate with their learners during lockdown (Jones & Kessler, 2020).

The learning and social losses experienced throughout the pandemic had the potential to impact teachers and learners' well-being. As previously discussed, most teachers in South Africa reported that their most prevalent source of stress is being held accountable for learners' academic performance (OECD, 2018a). Thus, the learning losses generated by the COVID-19 pandemic were predicted to negatively affect teachers' stress, anxiety, and well-being presently and in the upcoming years. Furthermore, it is well known that social resources play a vital role in aiding people's resilience and ability to cope during adversity (Ungar & Theron, 2020). Thus, the lack of social support and increased challenges experienced during lockdown were expected to negatively affect both teachers' and learners' coping and well-being. In addition, the extended social isolation during the pandemic might increase teachers' job dissatisfaction as many teachers reported interactions with learners and colleagues as a contributor towards their job satisfaction (Toropova, 2020).

2.2.3.4 Returning to school during the COVID-19 pandemic

A second transition in education that many teachers experienced difficulties with was returning to schools when severe lockdown restrictions were lifted (Kim et al., 2021b). Many educators

expressed anxiety regarding the practical concerns of returning to school, such as how the classroom environment should be adapted to keep learners and teachers safe, teachers' roles in keeping learners' safe, and the lack of resources to support learning in these new conditions (Kim et al., 2021b).

Upon returning to schools in South Africa, not all schools were able to implement the strict hygiene measures implemented by the DBE to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Sayed et al., 2021). Thus, in many lower quintile ranking schools and disadvantaged communities, teachers experienced increased health risks of contracting the virus upon returning to schools (Le Grange, 2021). This was due to insufficient access to water and sanitation facilities (Le Grange, 2021) and limited facilities to promote social distancing in already overcrowded classrooms (Reddy et al., 2020; Sayed & Sing, 2020). Consequently, the DBE urged schools to only reopen if they could ensure the safety of their learners and teachers which resulted in some impoverished schools remaining closed with limited access to quality remote education (Sayed et al., 2021).

Furthermore, upon returning to schools, teacher shortages presented an additional educational challenge. The thousands of educators that passed away because of the COVID-19 virus (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021) and the teachers choosing to leave the profession (Pressley et al., 2021) led to increased teacher shortages during the pandemic. Thus, amid already severe teacher shortages in South Africa (Mlambo & Adetiba, 2020), many teachers left the profession largely due to increased educator burnout (Pressley et al., 2021) and concerns for their safety (Bill et al., 2022). Pressley (2021) argued that teachers' stress and burnout might be impacted by enhanced anxiety regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, such as contracting the virus or losing a loved one to the virus, new and unfamiliar teaching and learning practices, lack of communication with learners, parents or caregivers and a lack of administrative and organisational support.

Thus, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic generated various, new challenges for education that exacerbated the already existing educational inequalities many teachers and learners face (UN, 2020). It is further evident that in addition to the stress of the pandemic itself, teachers faced further challenges that had the potential to increase their stress (UNESCO, 2020a) and affect their well-being (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2022).

2.3 The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Teachers and the Importance of Supporting Teachers' Well-being

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching was often listed as one of the most stressful professions to work in (MacIntyre et al., 2020). However, with the advent of the pandemic and its challenges the severity and sources of teachers' stressors were predicted to increase (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Stress is a highly personalised experience that differs across contexts and across teachers' personal features that can impact their perceptions and experiences of stress (Naidoo et al., 2013). Some of these individual features include aspects such as age, gender, ethnicity, personality characteristics, individual traits, and inherent cultural beliefs (Aftab & Khatoon, 2012). As an example, Răducu and Stănculescu (2022) reported that teachers with less experience have the highest rates of stress and burnout in comparison to older teachers with more experience. Thus, the experience of stress is highly personal as not all teachers have the same contextual stressors or resources, personal characteristics, perceptions or experiences of stress, or coping techniques to deal with stressors (Naidoo et al., 2013).

The severity of work-related stress depends on the demands of the job, the individual's perspective of these demands and their ability to cope with these demands (Naidoo et al., 2013). Naidoo et al. (2013) described three main consequences of work-related stress, namely, physiological, behavioural, and psychological consequences. Physiological consequences of stress include those that affect teachers' physical well-being, such as headaches, high blood pressure, and gastrointestinal issues (Naidoo et al., 2013; Răducu & Stănculescu, 2022). Behavioural consequences of stress include those that affect teachers' behaviours and habits (Naidoo et al., 2013), such as absenteeism (Răducu & Stănculescu, 2022). Lastly, psychological consequences of stress include those that affect teachers' psychological well-being, such as tension or nervousness which can affect concentration and work performance, emotional or mood instability which can affect the way in which teachers work with learners, and psychological distress, burnout (Naidoo et al., 2013), and job dissatisfaction (Răducu & Stănculescu, 2022).

According to Padmanabhanunni et al. (2022), the work-related stressors teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to increase teachers' psychological distress, including depression and anxiety, and negatively impact their well-being. This corresponds with the experiences teachers reported during the pandemic which include increased stress, work overload, poor physical and mental health, low quality of life (Lizana et al., 2021) as well as enhanced adverse working conditions (UN, 2020). These challenges can have a negative impact on teachers' work performance, resilience, and well-

being, increase burnout and attrition (Prilleltensky et al., 2016) and lower job satisfaction and job commitment (OECD, 2018b). Work-related stress further influences teachers' attitudes resulting in increased work-related depression, sick leave, and teacher absenteeism (Naidoo et al., 2013).

In its own right, teachers' well-being is important to protect and support, however, healthy teachers are also better placed to effectively support and assist learners and to ensure the sustainability of the teaching profession (Allen et al., 2020). It is well known that teachers' well-being impacts their work performance, ability to create a productive learning environment, engagement with learners, and the imparting of quality education (Eloff & Swart, 2018; Shibiti, 2020). Moreover, teachers' well-being is a crucial contributor to job satisfaction, enhanced productivity, learners' well-being, and academic achievement as well as heightened school well-being overall (Pressley et al., 2021). The challenges, adverse working conditions, and increased teacher stress have the potential to affect a teacher's ability to effectively support learners and impart quality education (Eloff & Swart, 2018), as teachers have a noticeable impact on the lives of their learners (Pressley et al., 2021). Thus, it is clear that a teacher experiencing the enhanced stress and psychological distress many teachers reported during the pandemic might have had a negative impact on learners' performance, motivation, and development at that time (Kim et al., 2021a; Pressley, 2021).

In comparison to other social professions, teachers often rate their well-being relatively low and cite stress and their overall well-being as some of the key reasons they would choose to leave or stay in the profession (Pressley et al., 2021). Thus, seeking to understand and support teachers' well-being is of critical importance in maintaining the continuity of quality education (Eloff & Swart, 2018), especially in a pandemic, where teachers' well-being is potentially under increased strain (Kim et al., 2021a) and where many learners may further rely on the support of their teachers (UN, 2020). In attempting to combat teachers' stress, Pressley et al. (2021) stated the importance of well-being interventions. Successful well-being interventions for teachers aim to champion their resilience by enhancing mastery, autonomy, emotional regulation, coping techniques, access to community resources and relationships as well as assisting in the professional development of educators (Pressley et al., 2021).

It is clear that it is crucial to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the potentially vulnerable group of South African teachers as teachers should be protected and supported as an invaluable component of the education process who play a crucial role in enabling learners to reach their full potential (Eloff & Swart, 2018). Through researching the challenges South African teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and seeking

to understand the impact of these challenges on teachers' well-being, it may be possible to develop relevant interventions or support strategies that promote teachers' resilience and well-being. In this way, the teaching profession can be supported, the continuity of education during crises can be ensured, and vulnerable learners' development can be ongoing while championing the resilience of South African teachers and the South African education system.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

In this section, I explain Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and Pearlin's stress process model (Pearlin, 1989). Following this, I present an integration of these two theories that were used to inform the conceptual framework of my study.

2.4.1 Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model

In his PPCT model, Urie Bronfenbrenner proposed that human development is the product of various interactions between an individual and their social contexts over time (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Thus, the PPCT model is a multidimensional and contextual model that considers various levels of interacting systems (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). The PPCT model can be used to understand and explore the development of systems and the development of individuals within these systems (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). These systems are viewed as continuously and reciprocally influential, as change in one system affects and is affected by other systems (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). This model seeks to understand the transactional process of interactions in an individual's life and holistic environment that influence their development and growth over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

In this model, Bronfenbrenner suggests that there are four interacting dimensions that are crucial to consider in an individual's context to understand human development (Donald et al., 2020; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). These four dimensions simultaneously influence development and include proximal processes, personal characteristics, context (or systems), and time, thus, the PPCT model (Donald et al., 2020; Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). The PPCT model can be used to identify and understand the multisystemic risk factors present in an individual's life and these risk factors' connection and influence over the individual's development (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Similarly, the multisystemic protective factors, resources, and processes that can enable and promote resilience in an individual's life can be identified and understood (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Thus, the PPCT model considers how all levels of an individual's context can hinder or promote their development (Swart & Pettipher, 2019).

In the context of this study, the PPCT model was used to identify and understand the multisystemic risk factors (such as the educational challenges or teacher-specific stressors South African teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic) and the multisystemic protective factors, resources, or processes (such as teachers' personal strengths or environmental support structures, much like family support) that were present in the teachers' lives. Specifically, the study wanted to understand the role of these multisystemic factors during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 to March 2021 and to note if their influence over the teachers' development, ability to cope with stress, well-being and resilience could be observed.

2.4.1.1 Proximal processes

Within the PPCT model, proximal processes are believed to be the driving forces of human development and refer to the enduring forms of interactions between an individual and their environment over time (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019; Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). These proximal processes involve complex relationships and interactions within a person's immediate environment that are reciprocated between the individual and another person, object, or symbol (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). In the context of this study, proximal processes refer to the social relationships or social interactions teachers have with their learners, colleagues, family members, or friends.

Proximal processes can be detrimental or supportive to a teacher's development but cannot produce effective development on their own (Swart & Pettipher, 2019; Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Effective proximal processes become more complex if they occur regularly over a long period of time, however, the effectiveness of proximal processes is diminished if they occur in unstable or unpredictable environments over time (such as living in poverty or during a global pandemic) (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Bronfenbrenner proposed that proximal processes can produce positive effects in a person's development by either promoting competence or by mitigating disruptive outcomes (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020). However, brief, infrequent, or erratic exposure to proximal processes could be linked to developmentally disruptive outcomes (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020), such as increased stress, psychological distress, poor mental health, and well-being.

In the context of this study, proximal processes refer to the complex, reciprocal interactions between a teacher and other people in their immediate environment, such as learners, colleagues, family members, or friends during the COVID-19 pandemic. An important consideration in the context of this study is the impact that the pandemic had on social

relationships and interactions as it initially reduced or drastically altered the proximal processes in which individuals typically engaged (Long et al., 2021; Răducu & Stănculescu, 2022). In addition, the unstable or unpredictable environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to affect teachers' proximal processes (or social relationships).

It is well known that a lack of social contact or social support can have a negative influence over teachers' job satisfaction and work performance (Toropova, 2020) as well as affect their ability to cope with adversity and influence their well-being (Ungar & Theron, 2020). Therefore, the pandemic could have rendered these proximal processes brief, infrequent, or erratic and produced disruptive outcomes in teachers' lives, such as reducing their ability to cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on proximal processes could have minimised their positive effects on teachers' development and could be linked to more disruptive outcomes (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020), such as increased psychological distress, much like depression or anxiety (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2022), poor work performance (Shibiti, 2020), burnout, or teacher attrition (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Pressley, 2021; UNESCO, 2020a).

While trying to understand proximal processes, Bronfenbrenner proposed that it is vital to consider the impact that a teacher's personal characteristics (such as their individual traits or personality) and contextual characteristics (such as teaching remotely or in-person during the COVID-19 pandemic) had on their proximal interactions over an extended period of time (from March 2020 to March 2021) (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Thus, Bronfenbrenner highlighted the importance of personal characteristics, context, and time in an individual's development.

2.4.1.2 Personal characteristics

Personal characteristics refer to the biopsychosocial characteristics of each individual (including oneself) within the microsystem that influence the power and direction of their proximal processes and development (Swart & Pettipher, 2019; Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Personal characteristics can enhance positive development and act as protective resources against potential risk factors (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). However, the development of these personal characteristics that promote positive development depends on the availability of options in an individual's environment at a certain point in time (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Each individual's personal characteristics can enhance or inhibit engagement between the individual and significant others, other people, objects, or symbols, thereby influencing their proximal processes (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Bronfenbrenner further suggested that

personal characteristics can also occur in the macrosystem within which an individual is situated and include the system of beliefs, social class, and ethnic group of one's wider context (Swart & Pettipher, 2019).

Bronfenbrenner identified three main types of personal characteristics; these include demand, resource, and force characteristics (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019; Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Demand characteristics can influence a person's initial interactions, as these characteristics can either invite or discourage reactions from their social environment based on the immediate expectations or assumptions they generate (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). These immediate reactions can promote or hinder the development of the individual's psychological processes (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Examples of demand characteristics include gender, age, race, and appearance (Swart & Pettipher, 2019).

According to Rosa and Tudge (2013) and Swart and Pettipher (2016), resource characteristics refer to biopsychosocial liabilities and assets that influence a person's ability to engage effectively with their proximal processes. Liabilities can include genetic determinants, such as genetic defects, physical impairments, and brain injuries (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Developmental assets include an individual's skills, knowledge, abilities, and experiences; in addition, resource characteristics can include social and physical resources, such as one's family, housing, food, health care, and educational opportunities (Swart & Pettipher, 2019).

Force characteristics are dispositions that can mobilise and enhance proximal processes or limit and prevent them (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Force characteristics include various dispositions, such as temperament, responsiveness, curiosity, motivation, and persistence (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Alternatively, force characteristics can include disruptive dispositions, such as inattention, insecurity, aggression, unresponsiveness, and impulsiveness (Swart & Pettipher, 2019).

In the context of this study, personal characteristics refer to the influence of one's demand characteristics (such as gender, age, and race), resource characteristics (such as skills, knowledge, abilities, and experiences, and social and physical resources), and force characteristics (such as personality, temperament, motivation, and persistence) on an individual's ability to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is well known that an individual's personal characteristics influence their job satisfaction, job performance, and well-being, as these personal characteristics affect how people cope with various challenges and stressors (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2021). Moreover, an individual's personal characteristics may influence their perception of stressors, leading to the same stressor perceived differently by

separate individuals based on their personal characteristics (Naidoo et al., 2013; Soetan & Oyetayo, 2019). Thus, each individual teacher would have a different experience and perception of the COVID-19 pandemic based on their experiences and perceptions of the challenges of the pandemic and their ability to cope with these challenges. When considering the impact of the pandemic on teachers, the inclusion of personal characteristics allowed me to consider how teachers' individual traits influenced their experience of the pandemic and how they coped with it.

2.4.1.3 Context and time

Context (or systems) explains the direct and indirect contextual and systemic influences in a person's life that impact their development (Swart & Pettipher, 2019; Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). These contexts occur at many different levels and include the individual, who is placed at the centre of five interrelated systems that directly or indirectly influence and interact with the individual as well as other systems (Koller et al., 2016). These five interrelated systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Donald et al., 2020; Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019).

The microsystem concerns the individual's proximal relations and pattern of activities or roles, such as interactions with their partner, family, and friends that shape their development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Donald et al., 2020; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). The microsystem is the immediate environment in which an individual engages in proximal processes and should serve as a protective factor in their life, encouraging feelings of belonging, support, and love (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). However, the microsystem can be a risk factor and threaten a person's well-being and development (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). In the context of this study, the microsystem refers to the teachers' perceptions and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and their ability to cope with the demands of the pandemic within the school setting. The microsystem also refers to the proximal processes teachers typically engage in, such as social relationships and interactions with their learners, colleagues, family, and friends.

The mesosystem highlights the interactions between these proximal relations and refers to the relationships between an individual's various microsystems at a specific point in the individual's life (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Each microsystem interacts with and modifies one another; for example a person's family interactions might affect their work group interactions and vice versa (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). In the context of this study, the mesosystem refers to the interactions between teachers and learners, colleagues, or other proximal relations within the teachers' various microsystems, such as their home and work.

The exosystem refers to the environments in which an individual is not directly involved but that can influence or be influenced by the microsystem or the individual themselves (Donald et al., 2020; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). The exosystem includes the broader community, such as an individual's access to resources, health services, education system, media, and a parent's or partner's place of work (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). For example, poor health services can impact various microsystems, such as one's family, work, and community (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). In the context of this study, the exosystem refers to the community within which the school, its teachers, and learners are situated, the availability of resources within this community, and the education system and education services present.

The macrosystem examines the impact of broader societal values, beliefs, culture, expectations, and attitudes as well as economic structures of a particular society on all other systems at a particular point in time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Donald et al., 2020; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). This is the most distal system in the PPCT model that has an environmental influence over the individual and the interactions the individual has in all other systems (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Examples of values and beliefs that could impact the individual and their proximal processes include democracy, equality, freedom, discrimination, or social justice (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). In the context of this study, the macrosystem refers to the influence of the broader societal values, beliefs, and culture within which the teacher is situated and how these influences might impact their development and well-being throughout the pandemic. These broader beliefs may be perpetuated and possibly understood through the analysis of news articles regarding the impact of the pandemic on education and teachers between March 2020 to March 2021. In this research study, it was expected that these broader societal values, beliefs, and culture would vary among participants and research sites.

Lastly, the chronosystem which also refers to the fourth dimension of the PPCT model observes the influence of time on each of these systems, the interactions of these systems, and the individual's development during the historical period through which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Donald et al., 2020; Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Time has three levels and these include microtime, mesotime and macrotime (Donald et al., 2020; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Microtime refers to the continuity or discontinuity of an activity or interaction (a proximal process); mesotime refers to the consistency of activities or interactions across broader time intervals (such as in a week or month); and macrotime refers to an individual's development from one age to the next and changing events or expectations that occur across generations at a larger societal level (Donald et al., 2020; Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). In the context of this study, the chronosystem refers to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being between March 2020 to March

2021, the interactions of all these systems together, and the impact of the historical background of teaching in South Africa on teachers' current development, coping skills, and well-being.

2.4.2 Pearlin's stress process model

Much like the PPCT model, Pearlin's stress process model highlights the need to appreciate the impact of a person's holistic social and cultural context or life course and their past experiences on their present circumstances (Aneshensel, 2015). This model adopts a sociological and explanatory approach towards understanding the construct of stressors (Aldwin & Brustrom, 1997) and their interconnected effect on people's resources and mental health (Pearlin, 1989).

2.4.2.1 Types of stressors

Stressors are viewed as the experience of threatening events or circumstances that undermine a person's ability to cope, diminish personal and social resources that promote well-being, and harm their mental health or attainment of desired means (Aneshensel, 2015; Pearlin, 1989). In the context of this study, according to Pearlin's stress process model, the COVID-19 pandemic can be viewed as a stressor, as it is a threatening life event that has the potential to harm a person's mental health by reducing their personal and social resources and diminishing their ability to cope and their well-being. The impact the pandemic has had on mental health is significant (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021), generating increased experiences of stress, anxiety, depression (Tian et al., 2021), and loneliness (Greyling et al., 2020).

In addition, the implementation of lockdown restrictions presented many difficulties (Greyling et al., 2020), especially in the field of education for teachers and learners (UN, 2020). Lockdowns led to increased periods of isolation which reduced teachers' access to social resources and diminished their ability to cope (Long et al., 2021), as drawing on social relationships or resources is one of the key supportive factors many people rely on to cope with adversity (Ungar & Theron, 2020).

An important concept in this model is that of stress proliferation that implies that stressors are interdependent and emerging from one another as well as generated, in part, by other elements of an individual's system (Aneshensel, 2015). Thus, different categories of stressors may overlap and vary due to the *duration* of the stressor, the *severity* of the undesired change of the stressor, and *level* of society from which the stressor emerges (Aneshensel, 2015;

Pearlin, 1989). These categories include primary and secondary stressors, major life events and chronic stressors, and anticipatory stressors (Aneshensel, 2015).

A *primary stressor* is the original threatening event that creates a chain of *secondary stressors* that can be as harmful or more harmful than the original event (Aneshensel, 2015). Primary and secondary stressors may occur simultaneously or consecutively and can affect an individual's other life roles as well as spread from one individual to another (Aneshensel, 2015). A *major life event* has a clear timeframe with an unexpected onset and an extraordinary impact on the individual, whereas a *chronic stressor* is a continuous threat with a gradual onset and an ambiguous ending (Aneshensel, 2015). In addition, *anticipatory stressors* refer to the possibility of threatening events or circumstances occurring (Aneshensel, 2015). Pearlin highlighted that the multiplicity of other social roles (such as work or family roles) creates a structural basis for stress proliferation (Aneshensel, 2015).

In this study, Pearlin's stress process model proposes that the COVID-19 pandemic can be considered a *primary stressor* that generated a chain of *secondary stressors* that were as harmful or more harmful than the pandemic itself. These secondary stressors included fear of the virus itself (Pressley, 2021), educational disruptions and challenges, such as school closures which exacerbated educational inequalities (UN, 2020), and enhanced teachers' stress (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). In addition, these secondary stressors included enhanced teacher-specific work-related stressors and work overload such as the rapid transition to remote online education, and adverse working conditions such as the lack of resources to implement remote education (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021), and increased financial concern (May et al., 2020).

Furthermore, in the context of this study, as the *duration* of the COVID-19 pandemic extended over a two-year period, the pandemic can also be considered as a *chronic stressor* as it was a continuous threatening event with an ambiguous ending. The *severity* of the undesired changes the pandemic generated depended on the teachers' personal characteristics, perception of the pandemic, resources, and strengths, and their context. Additionally, in the context of this study, the *level* of society from which the pandemic emerged was considered as the macrosystem as many of the challenges presented by the pandemic affected the functioning of whole societies and impacted their values and beliefs. Thus, the primary and secondary stressors also emerged within and affected every other system, including the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem. Lastly, the pandemic presented many *anticipatory stressors* due to the concern of the possibility of threatening events or circumstances

occurring, such as concern regarding contracting the COVID-19 virus or losing a loved one to the virus (Pressley, 2021), or concern regarding job loss (Greyling et al., 2020).

2.4.2.2 The process of mediation and moderation

Pearlin sought to explain how stressors exert their effects on mental health by examining their impact on personal and social resources, specifically self-esteem, mastery, social support, and coping (Aneshensel, 2015). Consequently, Pearlin proposed a process of mediation and moderation (Aneshensel, 2015). *Mediation* refers to the process in which stressors negatively affect mental health, for example, if they erode available resources that are beneficial in promoting resilience (Aneshensel, 2015). On the contrary, *moderation* refers to the process in which available personal and social resources lessen the effects of various stressors and promote resilience in the individual (Aneshensel, 2015). The processes of mediation and moderation highlight the interconnection of stressors and personal and social resources and seek to explain the conditions under which some individual's mental health is affected more adversely than others when exposed to similar stressors (Aneshensel, 2015).

The processes of mediation and moderation connect with the concept of proximal processes and personal characteristics of the PPCT model as resources are made up of personal and social protective factors which can include proximal relationships as well as demand, resource, and force characteristics. Proximal processes and personal characteristics are influential in the processes of mediation and moderation by either promoting moderation of stressors or resulting in mediation of resources. Proximal processes and personal characteristics can enhance positive development and act as protective resources against potential risk factors or stressors (Swart & Pettipher, 2019), thereby referring to moderation. However, proximal processes and personal characteristics which act as protective resources can also be negatively affected by stressors, thereby referring to mediation.

2.4.2.3 The social structural components of stressors

Pearlin (1989) suggested that the differential impact of stressors on mental health results from contextual variances as stressors experienced and available resources differ across contexts. Thus, Pearlin explored the social structural origins of differential exposure to stressors, emphasising that these structures influence people's exposure to stressors (Aneshensel, 2015). Pearlin outlined three main structural components, namely, systems of stratification, social institutions, and interpersonal relationships (Aneshensel, 2015; Pearlin, 1989). *Systems of stratification* are components that divide society, such as socioeconomic status, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and age (Aneshensel, 2015; Pearlin, 1989). These can be linked to

Bronfenbrenner's demand characteristics in the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). *Social institutions* refer to the components that describe status or roles, such as level of education, occupation, and income (Aneshensel, 2015; Pearlin, 1989). These aspects of social institutions are continuously linked to the experience of advantage, control, power, and status for some and disadvantage, marginalisation, and unequal opportunity for others (Aneshensel, 2015). These can be linked to Bronfenbrenner's resource characteristics in the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). *Interpersonal relationships* refer to the relationships an individual experiences throughout their life (Aneshensel, 2015). These can be linked to Bronfenbrenner's proximal processes in the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

2.4.2.4 Stressors across the life course

Pearlin argued that an individual's full spectrum of stressors, including their past stressors, must be identified and explored to understand their true vulnerability or resilience (Aneshensel, 2015). Thus, Pearlin integrated a life course perspective to assist in understanding the evolution of stressors over time and their impact on an individual's life (Aneshensel, 2015). Several key features of the life course were highlighted as critical to the stress process, these include *agency* connected to mastery, *linked lives* connected to a person's social roles and interpersonal relationships (or proximal processes), and *social structural influences* connected to the social structural origins of differential exposure to stressors (or demand or resource characteristics) (Aneshensel, 2015).

Furthermore, *transitions* and *cohorts* were additional key features of the life course that impact the stress process (Aneshensel, 2015). *Transitions*, in the stress process model, refer to the disruptive or untimely changes in an individual's roles and statuses that negatively affect their development (Aneshensel, 2015), much like the disruptive or untimely changes produced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Pearlin argued that as transitions occur throughout a person's life, the quality and nature of these transitions might accumulate over their life course and cause stress proliferation (Aneshensel, 2015). In this study, this could refer to the challenges many South African teachers experienced in basic education prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Cohorts*, in the stress process model, refer to macro-level socioeconomic influences within a particular historical era that can create specific experiences (Aneshensel, 2015). In this study, this could refer to the countrywide lockdown implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic and the far-reaching detrimental effects these lockdowns had on all facets of society and the socioeconomic development of the South African economy (May et al., 2020).

2.4.3 Integration into a conceptual framework

The integration of the PPCT model and the stress process model offers the consideration of a variety of possibilities and influences that may impact teachers' stressors, well-being, mental health, resilience, and development (Aneshensel, 2015; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). The consideration of multiple realities and truths is especially important in a developing and multicultural context, much like South Africa, where each individual's experiences can differ drastically from one another (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Figure 2.1 illustrates the integration of the PPCT model and the stress process model.

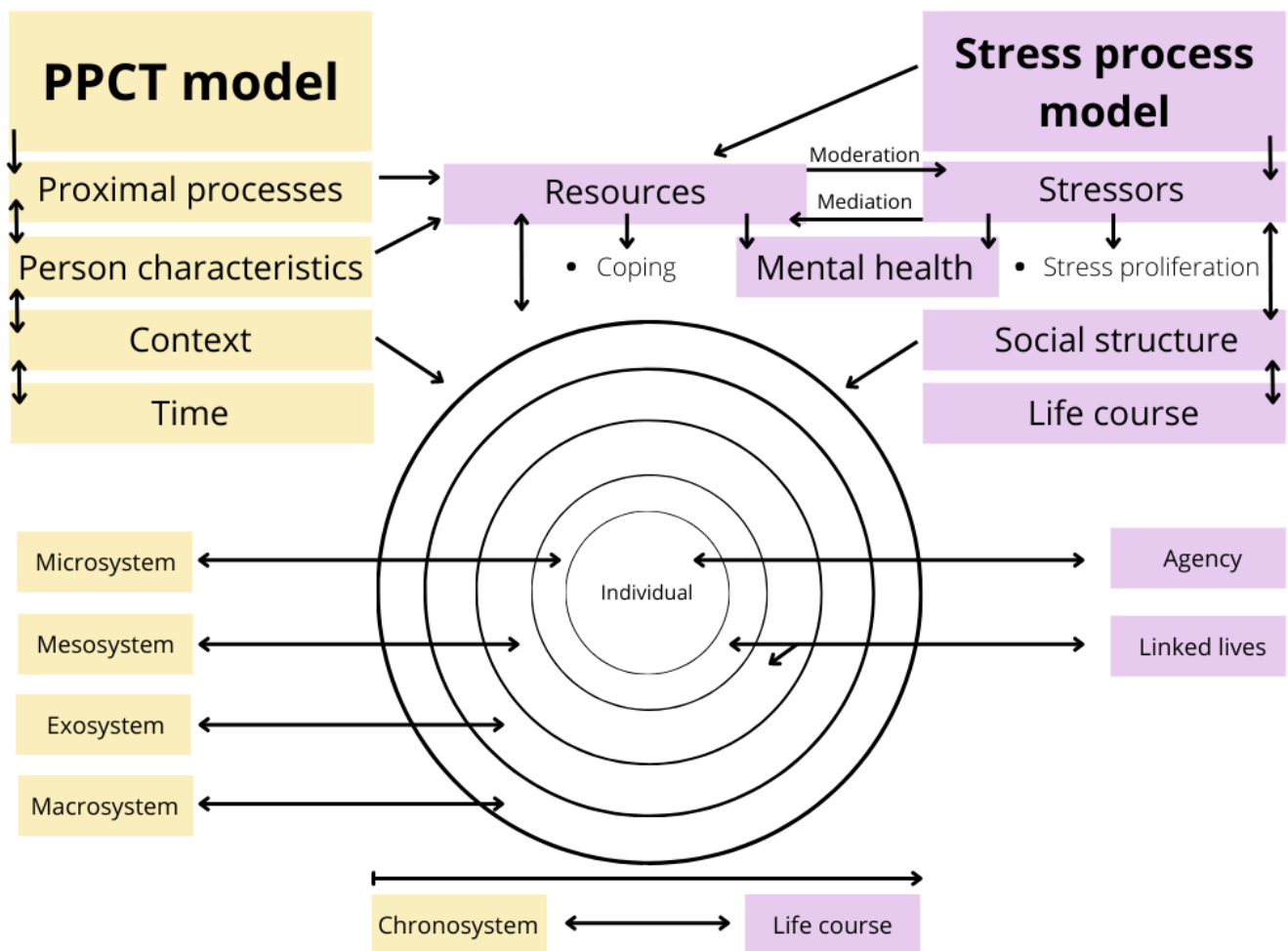


Figure 2.1

Integration of the PPCT model and the stress process model

For my conceptual framework, I related Bronfenbrenner's proximal processes and personal characteristics to Pearlin's resources as proximal processes and personal characteristics can form or influence resources in a teacher's life and mitigate or enhance various stressors they experience. Pearlin's resources are thereby linked to the stressors a teacher experiences

through the process of moderation or mediation which can either promote coping and have a positive impact on their mental health or promote stress proliferation and have a negative impact on their mental health. These stressors include primary, secondary, chronic, and anticipatory stressors which were evident in the challenges or stressors reported in news articles and by participants in the individual interviews.

Furthermore, I related Pearlin's concept of social structural influences of stressors to the personal characteristics and proximal processes of the teacher through linking the social structural influences of stressors to the individual teacher (person characteristics), micro- and mesosystem (proximal processes). Thus, I related Bronfenbrenner's concept of context and multiple systems (including the individual, micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem) to Pearlin's social structural influences as the teachers' resources and stressors are influenced by both their context and social structural influences and thus play a role in their mental health, well-being and development over time.

Lastly, I related Bronfenbrenner's concept of time and the chronosystem to Pearlin's use of a life course perspective in the stress process model. Furthermore, the concept of agency (in the life course perspective) was linked to the individual and the concept of linked lives (in the life course perspective) was linked to the microsystem and the mesosystem. In this study, the transition teachers faced was the COVID-19 pandemic and disruptive or untimely changes in teachers' roles and statuses that negatively affected their development and well-being. Moreover, as transitions occur throughout teachers' lives and cause stress proliferation (Aneshensel, 2015), South African teachers' experiences in basic education prior to the COVID-19 pandemic were explored. In addition, in this study, cohorts refer to the influence of the lockdown at the macro-level that created specific experiences that could have detrimental effects on society (Aneshensel, 2015).

My conceptual framework proposes that proximal processes, personal characteristics, resources, stressors, context, structural systems, the life course, and time play crucial roles in a person's ability to cope with stressors, mental health, well-being, and overall development. The PPCT model was used to probe understandings of the proximal processes, personal characteristics, and the whole system that simultaneously influenced and interacted with the development of the teachers (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In addition, the PPCT model was used to probe understandings of the impact of the proximal processes and personal characteristics on teachers' resources and ability to cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The stress process model aided the understanding of stressors, stress proliferation, specifically the multifaceted and interconnected primary, secondary,

chronic, and anticipatory stressors South African teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and their impact on teachers' resources, mental health, and well-being (Pearlin, 1989). The stress process model offered insight into the effectiveness of social resources in protecting teachers' well-being against stressors (Pearlin, 1989). This could enhance an understanding of the social resources educational psychologists can provide to teachers to support their well-being.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter I explored the existing literature regarding the challenges that beset basic education in South Africa to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system and teachers in the South African context. I discussed the COVID-19 pandemic and the various educational challenges brought about by the pandemic, the impact of these challenges and the pandemic on teachers' well-being, and the importance of supporting teachers' well-being. Lastly, I presented and discussed the theories that informed the conceptual framework that was used to guide this study and the application of this framework to my study. In the following chapter, I discuss the research methodology I implemented in this study, elaborating on the interpretivist epistemology, qualitative methodological approach, the single, exploratory case study design, and purposive sampling I used to select research sites and participants in my research study. Following this, I explain the data generation and documentation process that I implemented, the data sources this process yielded and the data analysis I implemented. This chapter continues with a discussion regarding the ethical considerations and quality criteria of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two I discussed the existing literature on the challenges present in South African basic education, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent challenges education and teachers have faced as a result, and the impact of the pandemic on teachers' well-being. Following a review of the existing literature relevant to the focus of this study, I presented the conceptual framework that was used to guide this study. Thus, I presented the background information required for interpreting the participating teachers' perceptions of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their well-being between March 2020 and March 2021.

In this chapter, I discuss the paradigmatic perspectives, research methodology, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness of the study that I first proposed in Chapter One. I elaborate on the paradigmatic perspectives I selected, with reference to the epistemological perspective of interpretivism and methodological paradigm of qualitative research. Following this, I discuss the research methodology and research strategies of the study, specifically the research design; selection of research sites and participants; data generation and documentation process; data sources; and the data analysis process. Furthermore, I describe the ethical considerations and quality criteria I considered while conducting this study. Table 3.1 presents a summary of the research methodology that was used in this research study.

Table 3.1

A visual representation of the research methodology

Paradigmatic perspectives	
Epistemological paradigm	Interpretivist epistemology
Methodological paradigm	Qualitative research
Research design: A single, exploratory case study	
In this research study, I sought to richly describe, explore, understand, and analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent educational challenges on South African teachers' well-being between March 2020 and March 2021. This included the analysis of news articles from March 2020 to March 2021 and interviews with South African teachers.	

Data generation and documentation process
News articles were collected and analysed. The purposive sampling of two research sites and three participants generated data in the form of general information forms, TWBI (Dalbert, 1992), and online interviews that were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Reflections and observations were recorded as field notes in the form of a research journal.
Data analysis: News articles and interviews
Reflexive thematic analysis with an inductive approach following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) six-phase steps were used: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Familiarisation with the data. 2. Creating initial codes. 3. Searching for themes. 4. Developing and reviewing the themes. 5. Defining and naming themes. 6. Writing the final report.

3.2 Paradigmatic Perspectives

3.2.1 Epistemological paradigm: Interpretivism

To guide my research study, I selected an interpretivist epistemological paradigm. Interpretivists seek to study the in-depth meanings people create (Given, 2008; Saunders et al., 2016) and emphasise social interaction as the basis of meaning-making and knowledge production (O'Donoghue, 2007), proposing that knowledge and truth are subjective (Ryan, 2018). Interpretivists propose that complex human issues can only be understood within their contexts (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b), as different people with different cultural and circumstantial influences at different times create unique meanings and experience different social realities (Saunders et al., 2016). Subsequently, interpretivists adopt a relativist ontology (Ryan, 2018) and assume there are multiple realities and explanations for phenomena (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Interpretivists gain rich insights that focus on narratives, stories, and interpretations (Saunders et al., 2016). Thus, interpretivists highlight the importance of language, culture, and history in shaping peoples' experiences and meaning-making (Saunders et al., 2016).

I selected an interpretivist epistemology to guide this study as I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the participating teachers' experiences, perspectives, interactions, and meaning-making of the impact of the pandemic and subsequent educational challenges from March 2020 to March 2021 on their well-being. Furthermore, this study was context-specific as it was bound by location (South Africa) and time (March 2020 to March 2021), and it reflects a particular set of circumstances (the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-

being) that was explored. Through the thematic analysis of context-specific news articles pertaining to educational challenges South African teachers experienced, I sought to understand the socially constructed meaning that was created regarding the COVID-19 pandemic (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Similarly, through the process of interviewing South African teachers, their voices, subjective experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making could be explored within their specific context (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b).

3.2.2 Qualitative methodological approach

To guide my research study, I selected a qualitative methodological approach. According to Given (2008), qualitative approaches are used to explore phenomena and to understand people's thoughts, feelings, and meaning-making. Qualitative researchers aim to gain an in-depth understanding of specific, subjective experiences and socially constructed meaning (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b; Saunders et al., 2016; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Participants are typically selected using non-random selection methods based on the individual's perceived value of contributing towards gaining a better understanding of the research topic (Saunders et al., 2016; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Qualitative researchers typically generate data through a process of empathic understanding of participants' experiences (Thanh & Thanh, 2015) and rely on linguistics to extract descriptive data to acquire a deeper understanding (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Thus, interviews and observations of participants' language, interactions, and feelings are emphasised (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b).

I selected a qualitative methodological approach to explore the research questions of my study through the collaborative generation of in-depth, descriptive data. This data was subjective to each participants' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the pandemic on their well-being. Moreover, the value of a qualitative approach was evident as I could obtain an in-depth understanding of the unique, contextual challenges South African teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of these challenges on teachers' experiences of stress, their resources and well-being, and their perceptions of what role educational psychologists played in addressing the impact of the pandemic on teachers.

3.3 Research Methodology

3.3.1 Research design: Exploratory case study

According to Hofstee (2018), in research it is beneficial to use a case study design when aiming to acquire detailed knowledge of a particular phenomenon. Thus, for the purpose of my research, I selected a single, exploratory case study to richly describe, explore, and understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on one primary school South African teachers'

well-being between March 2020 and March 2021. A case study research design involves the empirical investigation and in-depth analysis of a contemporary phenomenon or case, within a real-life, natural context over time (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Mills et al., 2010; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c; Saunders et al., 2016).

Within case study research, the researcher must clearly seek to provide an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018) as well as identify the case and its boundaries to remain focused on the research questions of the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). Thus, the case is bounded by certain parameters, such as the specific place, time, activity, and definition of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). My case was bounded by place (Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa), time (March 2020 to March 2021), and activity (teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic). Furthermore, within case study research, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that the researcher identifies the intent of the study and selects the type of case study to focus the research procedures. The intent of this case study was to understand or explore the educational challenges South African teachers experienced during the pandemic, the effects of the pandemic on teachers' experiences of stress and their well-being, and the role educational psychologists could play. Thus, this research study was an exploratory case study (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c).

3.3.2 Selection of research sites and participants

In this research study, I made use of purposive sampling to select the research sites and participants. I purposefully selected two primary schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng as my research sites. One research site was a private school located in Johannesburg North. This school typically provides education for learners from more affluent households and communities and represents teachers who may have had a more privileged experience of working during the pandemic. Thus, the typical educator and learner at this school would have had access to online learning opportunities throughout the pandemic. To represent diversity in my research sites, the second research site I selected was a government, upper quintile ranked (fifth quintile) school located in Johannesburg West. Although this school is an upper quintile ranked school, it still represents diversity in my choice of research sites as it typically provides education for learners from more disadvantaged households and communities in comparison to the first research site. Thus, the typical learner at this school did not have access to or had limited access to online learning opportunities throughout the pandemic.

Originally, I sought to interview eight teachers in my research study, however, when I first contacted the teachers at the two research sites, 13 teachers were interested in taking part in my research. At the time, I decided that this was too many teachers to interview in terms of

the time and length constraints of the mini-dissertation. Thus, I developed the general information form with the use of Google Forms with the intention to purposefully select eight participants that met the sampling criteria (mentioned in Chapter One) for the semi-structured interviews. However, out of the 13 teachers that indicated they were interested in participating in my study, only seven teachers signed the informed consent agreement and answered the general information questions. Out of those teachers, six teachers met the purposive sampling criteria and were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview process. Of these six teachers, three teachers withdrew from the study and only three teachers wished to participate willingly in the interview process, which led to a limited research sample. The information of the seven teachers that provided informed consent and completed the general information form as well as the three teachers that participated in the interviews is presented in Table 3.2. The teachers that participated in the interviews differed in terms of their age, gender, context, teaching phase, and the number of years they had been teaching.

Table 3.2

Participants' information

Pseudonym	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Andrea	Ben	Christine	Debbie	Ella	Fiona	Gienna
Purposive sampling criteria	Met	Met	Met	Not met	Met	Met	Met
Interview participant	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Declined invitation	Declined invitation	Declined invitation
Age	61	25	31	36	35	33	33
Race	White	White	White	White	White	White	White
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Research site*	2	1	1	1	2	2	2
Grades taught	4 and 5	7, 8, 9 and 10	4, 5 and 6	4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9	5	3	R
Teaching phase**	IP	SP and FET	IP	IP and SP	IP	FP	FP
Number of years teaching	20 years	2 years	5 years	3 years	12 years	10 years	8 years

Note *Research site 1 is the private school and research site 2 is the government school.

**FP = foundation phase (Grade R–3), IP = intermediate phase (Grade 4–6), SP = senior phase (Grade 7–9), FET = further education and training phase (Grade 10–12)

Due to the willingness of participants to take part in my study, my research sample was limited in terms of racial diversity as all three of my participants were White. Teachers of colour indicated interest in my study, however, they did not provide informed consent to take part. Thus, my limited research sample may present bias in the findings of my study as the reported experiences and perceptions of South African teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic may represent a limited point of view. However, the purpose of my research study was not to produce generalisable findings and the data gathered from my participants is still valuable to understand the impact of the pandemic on teachers.

3.4 Data Generation and Documentation Process

In this study I used multiple data generation techniques to gain an in-depth understanding of my topic and enhance the rigour of my study (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). These techniques included collecting documentary data in the form of South African news articles, gathering participants' answers to a brief general information form and the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992), conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants of the study and recording field notes throughout the research process.

3.4.1 Phase one: News articles

In this research study, I gathered documentary data in the form of news articles that were collected from the GCIS database by the SACE. I requested permission from SACE to use the news articles they had collected throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and once I received permission, I read through the news articles and applied the selection criteria mentioned in Chapter One. The process of selecting news articles for the study took place during the initial stages of data analysis which took place over the course of a month. Furthermore, I included two additional articles I had read during the COVID-19 pandemic that provided valuable information or insights into my research topic. The articles that were selected for this study were stored in a Google Drive folder for data management and analysis purposes¹.

3.4.2 Phase two: Semi-structured interviews

Following this, I communicated with the principals of each school via email to invite the school to participate in my study, discuss my study, and gain permission to work with the teachers in their school. Once I had received confirmation from the second research site, a government school, that the school would be willing to participate in my study, I applied for consent to conduct research at this school with the GDE. Following the permission granted from the GDE

¹ A screenshot of the news articles stored on a password protected Google Drive can be found in Appendix A.

and school principals through an informed consent letter², I asked the principals to share an electronic invitation via email with the teachers at their school to participate in my study³. Subsequently, I contacted the teachers who indicated they were interested in participating in my study via email and provided information about my research and the informed consent letter⁴ to participate in the study.

Due to the number of teachers who initially indicated they were interested in participating in my study (13 teachers) and the constraints of this mini-dissertation, I was unable to interview all 13 teachers. Thus, I compiled a brief general information form⁵ for the participating teachers to complete online with the use of Google Forms to purposefully select the participants that met the sampling criteria. In addition, I used the form to ask the participants to complete the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992). After I received the participants' signed informed consent letters, I emailed the participants a link to complete the general information form questions and the TWBI. The participants that signed the informed consent letters took between one day and five weeks to complete the general information form and TWBI. For data documentation and analysis purposes, participants' answers to the general information form and TWBI were downloaded from Google Forms as an Excel spreadsheet⁶. Following this, the participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms for anonymity purposes.

Based on the participants' responses, I invited each teacher that met the purposive sampling criteria to participate in an interview. The semi-structured interviews⁷ took place online over Zoom, after school hours, for approximately one hour. With the participants' permission, I made use of audio recordings to transcribe the interviews verbatim⁸ for documentation and data analysis purposes (Flick, 2018b). The use of audio recordings allowed me to be present during the interview process and engage meaningfully with the participants of the study. For ethical reasons, these recordings were deleted immediately after the interviews were transcribed (Flick, 2018b). In addition, according to Given (2008), the generation of qualitative data often includes interviews and recorded observations in the form of field notes which can enhance the strength of a qualitative study. In this study, I recorded field notes⁹ in the form of

² A copy of the principal's informed consent letter can be found in Appendix B.

³ A copy of the research invitation can be found in Appendix C.

⁴ A copy of the teachers' informed consent letter can be found in Appendix D.

⁵ A copy of the general information form questions and TWBI can be found in Appendix E.

⁶ A screenshot of the participant's answers to the general information form and TWBI stored on a password protected Google Drive can be found in Appendix F.

⁷ A copy of the semi-structured interview schedule can be found in Appendix G.

⁸ A screenshot of the interview transcripts stored on a password protected Google Drive can be found in Appendix H.

⁹ A screenshot of the research journal stored on a password protected Google Drive can be found in Appendix I.

a research journal before and during the semi-structured interviews and throughout the data analysis process.

3.5 Data Sources

The data generation and documentation process yielded the following data sources: news articles, general information form and the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992), semi-structured interviews with the participating teachers and field notes.

3.5.1 News articles

One hundred and ninety-six news articles from the GCIS database were collected and analysed from the following newspapers: Times Live, Cape Times, Daily Dispatch, Sowetan, The Mercury, Daily Sun, Cape Argus, Business Day, Pretoria News, Financial Mail, The Herald, The Star, The Citizen, Mail & Guardian, The Witness, Weekend Argus, SABC 2 Morning Live, Sunday Times, Sunday Tribune, Weekend Post, Daily News, IOL, Financial Mail, Saturday Star, The Sunday Independent, Times Live, and Dispatch Live. Furthermore, an additional two news articles from News24 published in September and November 2021 were collected and analysed as they reflected on the pandemic from March 2020 to March 2021.

3.5.2 Online general information form and Trait Well-Being Inventory

The general information form was used to ensure the teachers selected to participate in the interviews met the purposive sampling criteria of the study. The form consisted of 15 questions, excluding the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992). The TWBI was used to measure the participants' subjective well-being in the form of two scales, namely, the General Life Satisfaction Scale and Mood Level Scale (Dalbert, 1992). The TWBI consists of 13 items, seven items for the General Life Satisfaction Scale and six items for the Mood Level Scale. Participants were required to rate each item using a Likert-type rating scale based on how satisfied they felt in their life (measuring their cognitive well-being) and how they felt in general (measuring their affective well-being) with reference to the participants' present, past, and future perspectives (Dalbert, 1992). Each item presents a statement and requires the participant to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement with the use of the 6-point rating scale. For example, in the General Life Satisfaction Scale, participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statement, "My life could hardly be happier than it is", and for the Mood Level Scale participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with, "I usually feel quite cheerful".

Participants' answers were converted to a score out of 6, based on their rating of each item, to determine the participants' scale score for the General Life Satisfaction Scale and Mood Level Scale. Items rated 'strongly agree' were scored 6, 'agree' scored 5, 'slightly agree' scored 4, 'slightly disagree' scored 3, 'disagree' scored 2, and 'strongly disagree' scored 1 (Dalbert, 1992). Participants' scale scores were determined by calculating the aggregate score across the items for the General Life Satisfaction Scale and Mood Level Scale for each participating teacher. Participants average scale scores were used as high scale values indicate a strong construct (Dalbert, 1992).

3.5.3 Semi-structured interviews

I purposefully selected three teachers to interview from differently resourced schools and communities to enhance my understanding of South African teachers' experiences. This was a crucial criterion to follow as according to the working assumptions of my research study, my conceptual framework, and my interpretivist approach, each participating teacher would have different experiences of the pandemic and impacts of the pandemic on their well-being. During these semi-structured interviews, I asked the participants questions to generate data and learn about their experiences, beliefs, and well-being during the pandemic (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). In addition, I probed the participants for clarification throughout the interviews to gain a rich understanding of their responses (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). Approximately 11 questions were asked in relation to the participants' experiences of teaching before and during the pandemic, the challenges they experienced and the impact of these challenges on their experiences of stress and their well-being, the resources and internal strengths they used to help them cope, and their perceived role of educational psychologists in times of crisis. Table 3.3 provides further information regarding each participant's interview length and the number of pages that were transcribed from the audio recording of each interview.

Table 3.3

Semi-structured interview participants' information

Participant	1	2	3
	Andrea	Ben	Christine
Date completed general information form and TWBI	24 March 2022	25 March 2022	29 April 2022
Length of the interview	1 hour 1 minute	1 hour	41 minutes
Number of pages transcribed	19 pages	15 pages	11 pages

3.5.4 Field notes

While the data collected from my field notes were not included and integrated into the findings of Chapter Four, my field notes influenced the trajectory of my research study. I used field notes to conduct an initial content analysis on the available news articles which influenced the topic I chose to research. Additionally, my field notes influenced the inclusion of teachers' positive experiences during the pandemic and teachers' resilience as I reflected that most of the articles I was analysing were focusing on more of the challenges of the pandemic, whereas representing teachers' positive experiences and ability to cope was equally important in highlighting the resilience of South African teachers and the South African education system.

Field notes were also used to describe the participants' school context and responses to the general information form and TWBI prior to the semi-structured interviews and to document observations of the participants and their responses during the interviews. Moreover, I documented my personal ideas and reflections throughout the data analysis process. Field notes encourage the use of critical reflection which assists researchers to reflect more deeply on their assumptions, values, beliefs, and ideas as these impact their actions throughout the research process (Maharaj, 2016). Maxwell (2018) further emphasises the importance of reflective writing and analysis in research as it increases the researcher's awareness of their subjectivity or biases and the consequences of these on their study.

3.6 Data Analysis: News Articles and Participant Interviews

I used reflexive thematic analysis with an inductive approach to analyse and interpret the data generated in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis with an inductive approach is a method for data analysis and interpretation whereby the data set is read and important patterns related to the research topic are identified, analysed, coded, and organised into significant themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). In this approach, the researcher's subjectivity and reflexive engagement with the data and interpretation of the data is highlighted as an analytic resource (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Researchers that use this approach are encouraged to report their findings with reference to the theoretical assumptions that informed their analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

During thematic analysis, identifying themes and their connections occurs at two levels; *semantic themes* identify the explicit surface meaning of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2021). *Latent themes* identify more complex, interpretive meanings of the data, examining implicit concepts, ideas, and assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Thus, the analysis of the news articles and semi-structured interviews enhanced my understanding of the explicit

educational challenges South African teachers experienced and the teachers' implicit meanings, ideas, and beliefs regarding the pandemic, stressors during this time, the impact on their well-being, and their desired support. Furthermore, the connections between these concepts were understood by viewing how these challenges, stressors, and resources overlapped and interacted with one another and influenced the teachers' development and well-being. To analyse the data, Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) six-phase guide was followed. This guide is a recursive analytic process in which the phases blend together. The guide is described in detail in Table 3.4 (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Table 3.4

Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) six-phase guide of reflexive, inductive thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the phase
1. Familiarisation with the data	Becoming familiar with the data by actively reading the data and searching for meanings and patterns. It is recommended to take notes and write ideas for future coding purposes.
2. Creating initial codes	Producing the initial codes from the data through organising data into meaningful groups. This is conducted systematically by working through the entire data set to identify interesting information that may form repeated patterns or themes.
3. Searching for themes	Re-focusing the analysis at the broader level of searching for and generating subthemes and themes. This includes analysing and organising different codes into possible subthemes and overarching themes and collecting all the relevant coded data extracts.
4. Developing and reviewing the themes	Step one: reviewing the coded data extracts by reading the extracts for each theme and considering if they form a coherent pattern. If the themes <i>do not</i> form a coherent pattern, consider if the theme or the data extracts within the theme are appropriate and either create a new theme, find a theme for the data extracts, or discard the theme. If the themes <i>do</i> form a coherent pattern, then step two is followed. Step two: reviewing the themes in relation to the entire data set and considering if they form an accurate representation of the data.
5. Defining and naming themes	Organising the data extracts for each theme into a consistent account, identifying what each theme entails and what aspect of the data each theme presents in relation to the research questions.
6. Writing the final report	Conducting the final analysis and write up of the report in a coherent, concise, and interesting manner that presents the information the data portrays within and across themes.

3.6.1 Phase one: Familiarisation with the data

News articles: In this phase, I familiarised myself with the available news articles by reading through the news articles collected by SACE from the GCIS database. During this process, I started selecting relevant articles from March 2020 to March 2021 that met the inclusion criteria mentioned in Chapter One. During this selection process and as I was reading through the articles, I began to note initial ideas in the form of field notes. Once I selected these articles, I stored them in a Google Drive folder and further developed my initial ideas as I carefully read through the selected articles for future coding purposes. This initial analysis of the news articles influenced the interview questions I formulated as this analysis highlighted relevant areas of research that I sought to understand further in the semi-structured interviews.

Interviews: In this phase, I familiarised myself with the data generated from the participants by reflecting on their answers to the general information form and TWBI (Dalbert, 1992) before each individual interview. In addition, I familiarised myself with the data generated during the individual interviews as I took field notes during the interviews and noted initial meaningful ideas. I further familiarised myself with the data generated during the interviews during the transcription process, in which I read and re-read through the documented interviews carefully as I began to identify initial ideas for future coding purposes. After I had transcribed the interviews, I converted the documents into a PDF and stored them in a Google Drive folder.

3.6.2 Phase two: Creating initial data codes

News articles: In this phase, I re-read all the selected news articles stored in the Google Drive folder and highlighted meaningful information. Subsequently, I created initial codes by attaching a comment with a code to each highlighted section of information in each selected news article. Figure 3.1 provides an example of creating a code by highlighting a section of information from a news article stored in the Google Drive folder.

SA children losing half their learning time, survey shows

Carol Paton
Editor at Large

Most schoolchildren in SA will lose half their learning time this year and richer children will lose less than poorer ones, a survey has found.

The National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey, carried out by 30 researchers across six universities, also found that the return to school did not lead to an increase in infection rates, with

suburban schools did so and reached attendance of 50% for all grades; schools servicing the poorest 80% of the population had rates of attendance for other grades of 15% to 20%. Wealthy children were thus twice as likely to attend school when their grade was “closed” than in no-fee schools.

Monitoring by the department of basic education of 611 schools showed that 95% of schools in the sample reported zero confirmed cases of Covid-

of the virus, one might expect to see some schools with large numbers of infections,” the survey says.

The findings support the approach of keeping schools open and dealing with cases as they arise.

The survey included a paper on the early childhood development sector, which has been devastated by the lockdown. There has been a huge decline in attendance at early childhood development centres, which are

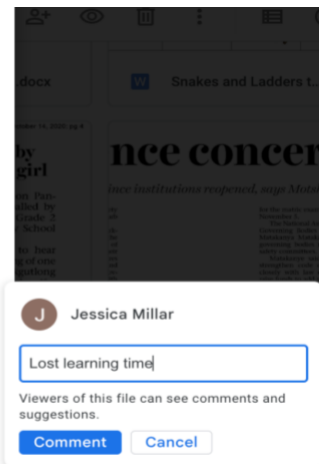


Figure 3.1

Creating initial codes in the news articles

Figure 3.2 provides an example of creating multiple codes within an article and identifying what code correlates with each highlighted section of the news article.

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SA children losing half their learning time, survey shows

Carol Paton
Editor at Large

Most schoolchildren in SA will lose half their learning time this year and richer children will lose less than poorer ones, a survey has found.

The National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey, carried out by 30 researchers across six universities, also found that the return to school did not lead to an increase in infection rates, with less than 2% of schools reporting more than two Covid-19 cases, despite the fears of parents and teachers.

While grade 12 and grade 7 pupils, for whom school opened earlier, lost 17% of school days, children in grades 1 to 5 and 8 to 10, who had the least time at school, lost about 40% of school days. As the ratio of teaching time to school is 1:2, researchers say that 50% of teaching time has been lost for most grades.

However, schools were able to apply to education authorities to open additional grades under the lockdown. Many wealthier

suburban schools did so and reached attendance of 50% for all grades; schools servicing the poorest 80% of the population had rates of attendance for other grades of 15% to 20%. Wealthy children were thus twice as likely to attend school when their grade was “closed” than in no-fee schools.

Monitoring by the department of basic education of 611 schools showed that 95% of schools in the sample reported zero confirmed cases of Covid-19 among pupils, while almost 90% of schools reported zero cases among teachers.

There were 17 schools that reported a single case of Covid-19 among pupils, and 35 schools that reported a single case among teachers.

Only three schools reported more than two pupil cases, and eight schools reported more than two teacher cases.

“The encouraging thing about these statistics is that there does not appear to be any schools with mass spread of the coronavirus. If schools were significantly contributing to the spread

of the virus, one might expect to see some schools with large numbers of infections,” the survey says.

The findings support the approach of keeping schools open and dealing with cases as they arise.

The survey included a paper on the early childhood development sector, which has been devastated by the lockdown. There has been a huge decline in attendance at early childhood development centres, which are mostly privately owned and funded by fees paid by parents with some receiving a minimal amount of support from the state. While 47% of children under seven attended pre-school or crèche in 2018, in July and August that figure dropped to 13%.

The reasons for the dramatic decline include the inability of centres to afford the necessary health and safety measures needed to be implemented due to the loss of income by parents, who are taking care of children within their households.

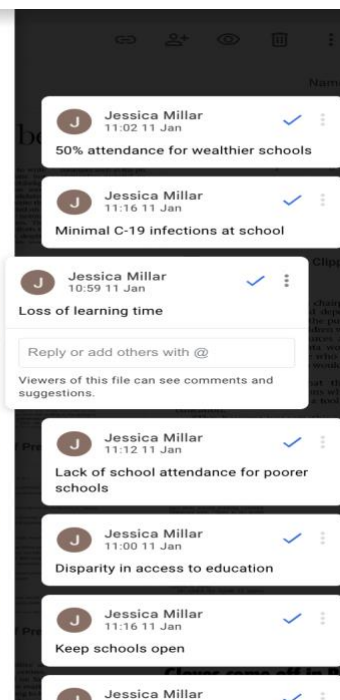


Figure 3.2

Coding the news articles on Google Drive

In Figure 3.2, the selected code, ‘Loss of learning time’, corresponds with the darker yellow highlighted section of the first sentence in the article, “Most schoolchildren in SA will lose half

their learning time this year ...”. During this process, I made use of an Excel document¹⁰ to record and organise my data and data extracts that demonstrated each code. This included recording the article’s title, date the article was published, codes, data extracts and any additional notes (see Figure 3.3).

Title	Date	Codes	Extract
SA children losing half their learning time, survey shows	01-Oct-20	Loss of learning time	Most schoolchildren in SA will lose half their learning time this year ...

Figure 3.3

Example of recording data from the analysed news articles¹¹

Interviews: In this phase, I re-read all the transcribed interviews in the Google Drive folder and highlighted interesting and meaningful information. Subsequently, I created initial codes by attaching a comment with a code to each highlighted section of information in the transcribed interviews, as I did with the news articles. Figure 3.4 provides an example of creating multiple codes within an interview transcription.

11 B: So obviously I didn't have a lot of experience before that. I was just a locum teacher at
 12 [schools name]. Even before that it was the experience during the university practical's that
 13 we had. And I think the thing I enjoyed the most was the actual interactions with the kids. It
 14 was quite frustrating not necessarily having that immediate interaction feedback, I guess,
 15 when COVID hit. I enjoyed the interactions, it was a lot easier to kind of gauge whether the
 16 kids were following what I was saying whether they understood things, even if they didn't
 17 verbally indicate whether they understood or not. Two general statements; it was more fun
 18 and easier, I guess.

19 JM: So easier to track if they understood what you were teaching them in the classroom, and
 20 it was easier to stop and intervene if you saw someone wasn't understanding?

21 B: Yeah, correct.

22

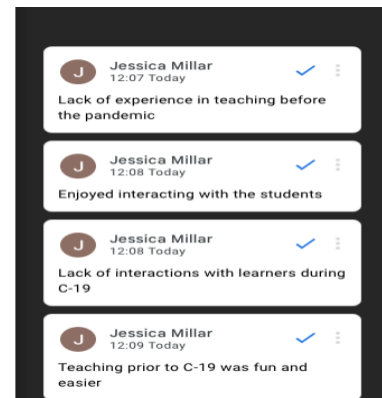


Figure 3.4

Coding the transcribed interviews

During this process, I made use of the same Excel document to record and organise my data and data extracts that demonstrated each code. This included recording the participants’

¹⁰ A screenshot of the Excel document stored on a password protected Google Drive folder can be found in Appendix J.

¹¹ In this example, the heading ‘Title’ refers to the title of the news article, the heading ‘Date’ refers to the date the news article was published, the heading ‘Codes’ refers to the codes that were generated for each extract, and the heading ‘Extract’ refers to the verbatim extract obtained from the news article.

pseudonym, date of interview, codes, data extracts from the interview (including the line number of the extract) and any additional notes (see Figure 3.5).

Title	Date	Codes	Extract
Ben	28-May-22	Lack of experience in teaching before the pandemic	11 So obviously I didn't have a lot of experience before that. I was just a locum teacher at 12 [schools name].

Figure 3.5

Example of recording data from the analysed transcribed interviews¹²

During this phase, I coded as many patterns or themes as possible in the news articles and analysed interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, I retained important information that contradicted the dominant themes in the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to prevent any potential bias in the study (Given, 2008).

3.6.3 Phase three: Searching for subthemes and themes

In this phase, I searched for subthemes and themes by organising my codes from the news articles and transcribed interviews into potential themes. During this process, I made use of an Excel filter that allowed my codes to be organised into alphabetical order which assisted my identification of repeated patterns across the data set and the development of potential themes. During this process, I integrated all the data extracts relevant to each possible theme I identified. Figure 3.6 provides an example of searching for themes across the data set through the alphabetical categorisation of codes.

¹² In this example, the heading 'Title' refers to the participant's pseudonym, the heading 'Date' refers to the date the participant's interview took place, the heading 'Codes' refers to the codes that were generated for each extract, and the heading 'Extract' refers to the verbatim extract obtained from the interview.

Title	Date	Codes
Back-to-school questions	05-Jan-21	Access to vaccinations
Budget hit by substitute teachers	02-Sep-20	Additional work
Experts divided over extra 5% marks	26-Nov-20	Additional work
Committed teachers upholding a tough profession in SA	08-Oct-20	Additional work for teachers
Gauteng gives matric finals the green light	02-Nov-20	Additional work for teachers
Over 8,000 pupils dropped out of (primary) school during pandemic in EC	01-Dec-20	Additional work for teachers
Schools hit by shortage of teachers	04-Sep-20	Additional work for teachers
Must at-risk teachers really now go back despite terror of virus?	20-Sep-20	Additional work for teachers
Over 8,000 pupils dropped out of (primary) school during pandemic in EC	01-Dec-20	Adjusting student's marks to help them pass

Codes

Sort
 A-Z Ascending Z-A Descending

By colour: None

Filter
 By colour: None

Choose One

Q Search

- (Select All)
- Access to vaccinations
- Additional work
- Additional work for teachers
- Adjusting student's marks to help
- Advantages of teaching online
- Assessment difficulties due to C
- Black teacher is treated different

Clear Filter

Figure 3.6

Example of searching for themes through the alphabetical categorisation of codes

Figure 3.7 provides an example of developing initial themes based on the codes and extracts of the data entry.

Extract	Theme
Ignoring lockdown regulations is the main culprit in Covid-19 outbreaks at schools in Burgersdorp and Western Cape Teachers Forum, a Facebook page dedicated to the province's teachers, told a harrowing tale of the As with every life, the life of a teacher must be protected at all costs.	Phased reopening of schools - COVID-19 infections - Failing to protect teachers from
Last month, the department made a concession that most of the teachers should return to school, but many of Educators are there to teach, but cannot in the environment where they will be risking their lives.	Phased reopening of schools - COVID-19 infections - Failing to protect teachers from

Figure 3.7

Developing initial themes¹³

3.6.4 Phase four: Developing and reviewing the themes

In this phase, I began reviewing the initial themes I identified in the news articles and interviews. To assist my review of the themes, I made use of an Excel filter that allowed me to select and group all data entries with the same theme and organise all the themes into alphabetical order. Figure 3.8 provides an example of reviewing the initial themes through the use of the Excel filter.

¹³ The heading 'Theme' refers to the initial themes that were created during the process of searching for themes. The theme is written first, followed by the subtheme or a description regarding the content of the data extract. For example, 'Phased reopening of schools - COVID-19 infections - Failing to protect teachers from COVID-19 infections', the theme is 'Phased reopening of schools', the subtheme is 'COVID-19 infections' and 'Failing to protect teachers from COVID-19 infections' provides a description of the data extract.

Theme	Theme
Challenging working conditions - Need for professional development	<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <p>Sort</p> <p>A-Z Ascending Z-A Descending</p> <p>By colour: None</p> <p>Filter</p> <p>By colour: None</p> <p>Choose One</p> <p>Q Search</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Challenging working conditions - teachers treated poorly - parents <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Challenging working conditions - Teachers treated poorly - principal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Challenging working conditions - Teachers treated poorly - racism <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Challenging working conditions - unsafe environment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Challenging working conditions - Violence at school - dangerous weapon <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Challenging working conditions- Overloaded curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> COVID-19 infections <input type="checkbox"/> COVID-19 infections - Failing to protect teachers from COVID-19 infection: <p style="text-align: right;">Clear Filter</p> </div>
Challenging working conditions - Need for professional development	
Challenging working conditions - Need for professional development	
Challenging working conditions - Teachers treated poorly - racism	
Challenging working conditions - Teachers treated poorly - principal	
Challenging working conditions - Teachers treated poorly	
Challenging working conditions - Teachers treated poorly - parents	

Figure 3.8

Example of reviewing the initial themes through the use of the Excel filter

First, I reviewed all the coded data extracts by reading the extracts for each initial theme and considered if they formed a coherent pattern. If the themes did not form a coherent pattern, I considered if the theme or the data extracts within the theme were appropriate (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on my findings, I reconsidered my theme by either creating a new theme, finding a theme for the data extracts that did not fit into the already existing theme, or discarding the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, the initial themes were reviewed and refined into final themes. Second, I reviewed all the final themes in relation to the entire data set and considered if they formed an accurate representation of the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that at the end of this phase the researcher should have a coherent understanding of what their different themes are, how they relate to one another, and the story they tell about the data. To aid my coherent understanding of my data I created a thematic outline¹⁴ that included the descriptions used within each theme and subtheme and the frequency of these descriptions throughout the theme and subtheme.

3.6.5 Phase five: Defining and naming themes

In this phase, I refined the final themes that I identified in earlier phases and then defined them according to the data set overall in relation to the research questions of the study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), during this phase it is important to consider each theme on its own, to ensure it is not too diverse or complex, and in relation to one another to ensure there is not too much overlap. Thus, during this phase, I clearly identified each theme by describing

¹⁴ A copy of the thematic outline can be found in Appendix K.

what was of interest about each theme and why, and if each theme contained any subthemes. During this review, I categorised the themes according to the secondary research questions of the study they addressed. Figure 3.9 provides an example of this categorisation.

Theme	Research question addressed
Challenges teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic	Teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school system
Challenges teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic	Teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school system
Impact of COVID on teachers' well-being - emotionally and mentally exhausting	Teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their individual well-being
Impact of COVID on teachers' well-being - traumatic	Teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their individual well-being
Role of educational psychologist - early intervention	Teachers' perceptions of the role of educational psychologists as a social resource during the COVID-19 pandemic
Role of educational psychologist - early intervention	Teachers' perceptions of the role of educational psychologists as a social resource during the COVID-19 pandemic

Figure 3.9

Categorising final themes into the research questions addressed¹⁵

In Figure 3.9, the theme, 'Challenges teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic', provides insight into 'Teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school system' and addresses the research question, '*What educational challenges do South African teachers experience as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?*' The theme, 'Impact of COVID on teachers' well-being - emotionally and mentally exhausting', provides insight into 'Teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their individual well-being' and addresses the research question, '*How do these challenges impact South African teachers' well-being?*' Finally, the theme, 'Role of educational psychologists - early intervention', provides insight into 'Teachers' perceptions of the role of educational psychologists as a social resource during the COVID-19 pandemic' and addresses the research question '*What is the role of educational psychologists in addressing the impact of COVID-19 on teachers?*'

Lastly, I developed clear names for each theme. I conducted this phase of the analysis in the same Excel document while using the thematic outline developed in phase four. Table 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 provide the finalised names for each theme and subtheme, the inclusion criteria used and the number of times each theme or subtheme was mentioned.

¹⁵ The heading 'Research question addressed' refers to the research question into which the theme provides further insight and understanding.

Table 3.5

Outline of the themes and subthemes regarding teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school system

Theme 1: Experiences of online education (n=110)¹⁶	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to teachers' experiences of using technology, online education platforms and resources during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Subtheme 1.1: Challenges of online education (n=92)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to teachers' negative experiences of using online education during the pandemic.
Subtheme 1.2: Benefits of online education (n=18)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to teachers' positive experiences of using online education during the pandemic.
Theme 2: Learner-specific stressors (n=106)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the challenges teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic that were specifically related to their learners.
Subtheme 2.1: Disparity in learners' access to education during the COVID-19 pandemic (n=26)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the challenges teachers experienced regarding the widespread disparity in learners' access to remote online education. The data in this subtheme related to the differences in advantaged and disadvantaged learners' access to and experience of education during the pandemic.
Subtheme 2.2: Concern for learners' academic development (n=47)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the challenges teachers experienced regarding concern for their learners' academic development, such as lost learning time, learners falling behind in the curriculum and feeling accountable for learners' performance.

¹⁶ The number in brackets represents the frequency of the theme or subtheme.

Subtheme 2.3: Concern for learners' well-being (n=33)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the challenges teachers experienced regarding concern for their learners' well-being, such as learners' increased stress and anxiety and trying to help learners who were struggling to cope.
Theme 3: The phased reopening of schools (n=144)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the challenges teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred as a result of the phased reopening of schools.
Subtheme 3.1: Enforcing COVID-19 protocols (n=30)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the challenges teachers experienced enforcing various COVID-19 rules and protocols when schools reopened during the pandemic.
Subtheme 3.2: COVID-19 infections (n=87)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the challenges teachers experienced due to COVID-19 infections during the pandemic, including teachers contracting the virus, passing away from COVID-19 infections, failing to be protected from infection, comorbidity leave and teacher shortages.
Theme 4: Teacher-specific stressors (n=130)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the challenges teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic that were specifically related to themselves.
Subtheme 4.1: Enhanced workload (n=50)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the challenges teachers experienced during the pandemic that increased their workload or the number of hours they were working.
Subtheme 4.2: Past teacher-specific stressors (n=80)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the various teacher-specific stressors South African teachers typically experienced in the profession before the COVID-19 pandemic that continued throughout the pandemic, potentially enhanced by the challenges the pandemic presented, or were potentially worsened by the pandemic itself. The data in this theme related to the challenging working conditions many teachers in South Africa face, such as overcrowded classrooms, poor infrastructure, and inadequate resources.

These themes and subthemes provide insight into teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school system between March 2020 to March 2021 in South Africa. Four themes were identified in relation to teachers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these themes and subthemes represent various challenges teachers in South Africa experienced during the pandemic that occurred as a result of the changes in the education system. Thus, these themes are crucial as they explored the secondary research question, *'What educational challenges do South African teachers experience as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?'* The information relating to this research question is rich with data as it contains 490 data entries.

Table 3.6 presents the themes and subthemes regarding teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their individual well-being between March 2020 to March 2021 in South Africa.

Table 3.6

Outline of the themes and subthemes regarding teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their individual well-being

Theme 5: Negative influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being (n=74)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the negative influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being, including the impact of the pandemic on teachers' physical, emotional, and mental health.
Theme 6: Positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being (n=117)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the positive influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being, including access to more resources, and developing more personal strengths, building resilience, and coping.
Subtheme 6.1: Increased resources (n=63)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the increased resources teachers had access to during the COVID-19 pandemic that enhanced their ability to cope during the pandemic.
Subtheme 6.2: Increased personal strengths (n=54)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to the increased personal strengths teachers developed or used to cope during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two themes were identified in relation to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being. These themes are crucial as they explored the secondary research question, 'How did these educational challenges impact South African teachers' well-being?' The information relating to this research question is rich with data as it contains 191 data entries.

Table 3.7 presents the theme regarding South African teachers' perceptions of the role of educational psychologists as a social resource during the COVID-19 pandemic and in times of crises.

Table 3.7

Outline of the themes and subthemes regarding teachers' perceptions of the role of educational psychologists as a social resource during the COVID-19 pandemic

Theme 7: Teachers' need for psychological support, school support structures and teacher training (n=37)	
Inclusion criteria	All data relating to South African teachers' need for psychological support, teacher training and enhanced school support structures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This theme is crucial as it explored the secondary research question relating to, '*What is the role of educational psychologists in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers?*' This theme contains 37 data entries. Although this theme has fewer data entries, it still provides important information to understand the secondary research question in this study. Furthermore, information regarding the role of educational psychologists in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers was mostly generated during the interview process as it was not often reported in news articles.

3.6.6 Phase six: Writing the final report

In this phase, I conducted the final analysis of the data and wrote a detailed analysis of each theme and the themes overall in the form of a written report presented in Chapter Four. Braun and Clarke (2006) indicate that the final report must provide enough evidence of the themes within the data by reporting extracts that capture the point the researcher is demonstrating and the story the data tells.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

In this research study, I considered the following ethical concerns, as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018): permission to conduct the study; gaining informed consent and voluntary participation; maintaining the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of the participants; and treating the participants with respect and protecting them from harm. To maintain an ethical standard of behaviour and gain permission to conduct my research, I followed the ethical guidelines imposed by the University of Pretoria and the Department of Education. Furthermore, I applied for and gained ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Education Ethics Committee and the GDE Research Committee. To gain access to the research sites and participants, I gained permission from the principals through a written informed consent letter and a detailed discussion of the purpose and process of my research.

Before I began to generate data in this research study I had to gain informed and voluntary consent from the research participants and obtained signed informed consent letters from the participants that were willing to take part in my study (Murray, 2018). This included providing the participants with important information about the purpose of the study, the methods that would be used, any potential risks, and the expected outcomes of the study (Bull, 2018). Furthermore, participants were informed of their voluntary participation in the study and were given the option to withdraw from the study at any point (Murray, 2018). This information was provided in detail in the informed consent letters as well as in an email and verbally before each individual interview. Prior to each interview, I requested the participant's consent for the interview to be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. After transcribing, the recordings were deleted immediately to maintain the participants' anonymity.

I further protected the participants' anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy by treating all information obtained during this study as confidential and keeping the participants' identities and the data they generated anonymous (Maree, 2016). The raw data obtained during this research study was kept secure on a password-protected laptop and only the researcher and supervisor had access to this information. To further ensure the participants' identities and contributions remained anonymous, I made use of pseudonyms within the write up of results and no possible personal identifiers were included in these findings. Thus, only I, as the researcher, was able to identify the participants.

To ensure the research participants were treated with respect, I strived to conduct myself in an ethical manner, especially during the data generation process (Flick, 2018a). As the data generation process involved close work with the participants it was crucial to consider the participants' contextual and cultural values, norms, and behaviours to ensure each participant

was respected (Flick, 2018a). I aimed to treat participants with respect by protecting the participants from harm and not deceiving the participants (Flick, 2018a). This included maintaining open and honest conversation with the participants throughout the research process. To further protect the participants from harm, I remained aware of the participants' well-being throughout the interview process; however, the interviews did not address any sensitive topics (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). To further respect the participants and the research site and minimise disruptions, I arranged to meet participants online, after school hours, at the most convenient time for the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Lastly, to report trustworthy findings, I treated the research process with integrity, objectivity, and responsibility (Saunders et al., 2016). I aimed to act openly and honestly to promote the generation, analysis, and reporting of accurate results (Saunders et al., 2016). This included reporting my findings fully, including instances of contradiction, and not falsifying any findings (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.8 Quality Criteria: Trustworthiness of the Study

In this study, the trustworthiness was attained by focusing on the following five criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a) and authenticity (James, 2008). To enhance the *credibility* of my study, I consulted appropriate documents relevant to the field of research of this study to gain an understanding of the background information prior to generating data. In addition, news articles were collected from a reliable database to enhance the credibility of the articles used and analysed. Moreover, I used purposive sampling to select appropriate participants (Jensen, 2008b) and multiple data generation techniques to increase triangulation (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Lastly, the use of reflexive field notes allowed me to reflect on potential bias and enhance my insights about the study (Maxwell, 2018).

The *transferability* of this study was enhanced through the detailed description of the research questions, the purposive sampling selection criteria used for selecting research sites and participants, the inclusion criteria used for selecting news articles and the research design (Jensen, 2008d). However, it is the readers' decision as to what extent the findings may be transferred to similar contexts (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a).

Dependability was enhanced through descriptions of my research process by documenting the research topic, research site and participant selection, news article selection, data generation, documentation, analysis, and interpretation and the findings of the study. Additionally, I enhanced the dependability of this study through using reflective field notes in

which my decisions during the research process were noted (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). Lastly, the dependability of this study was enhanced by the storage of the collected and analysed news articles, participants' general information form and TWBI (Dalbert, 1992) responses and the verbatim transcriptions of participant interviews.

Confirmability was enhanced through the use of clarification in the interviews and the use of reflective field notes, in which I recorded various notes, observations, beliefs and perceptions to increase my awareness of my own potential bias and remain objective in rooting the findings in the participants' experiences (Maxwell, 2018). Furthermore, I enhanced the confirmability of this research study by documenting my decision-making processes during the study through the reflections in my field notes.

The *authenticity* of this study was enhanced through the fair generation and documentation of data (James, 2008) and through accurately accounting for the views of all research participants including contradictory contributions and raising awareness of the research issues brought up in this study (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.9 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the paradigmatic perspectives, research methodology, ethical considerations, and quality criteria that guided this study. I justified my choices of interpretivism as an epistemological perspective and qualitative research as the methodological paradigm of the study. I explained the research design, selection of research sites and participant, the data generation and documentation process, data sources, and steps involved in the data analysis. Furthermore, I elaborated on the ethical considerations of the study and the criteria that I considered to ensure the quality of this study was maintained. In Chapter Four, I discuss the themes that I identified in the data during the data analysis process and participants' responses to the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992). Moreover, I draw comparisons between these themes and the existing literature presented in Chapter Two and present the key findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three I discussed the paradigmatic perspectives of the study and elaborated on the interpretivist epistemological perspective and qualitative methodological paradigm. I explained the research methodology and research strategies I employed with specific reference to the research design, data generation and documentation, data sources and the data analysis process. Lastly, I described the ethical considerations and quality criteria I considered while conducting this study.

In this chapter, I discuss the results of the study with specific reference to the participants' responses to the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992) and the seven themes identified in the data analysis: 1) Experiences of online education, 2) Learner-specific stressors, 3) The phased reopening of schools, 4) Teacher-specific stressors, 5) Negative influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being, 6) Positive influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being, and 7) Teachers' need for psychological support, school support structures and teacher training and 11 subthemes identified in the data analysis: 1) Challenges of online education, 2) Benefits of online education, 3) Disparity in learners' access to education during the COVID-19 pandemic, 4) Concern for learners' academic development, 5) Concern for learners' well-being, 6) Enforcing COVID-19 protocols, 7) COVID-19 infections, 8) Enhanced workload, 9) Past teacher-specific stressors, 10) Increased resources, and 11) Increased personal strengths.

I present the findings of the study through drawing contrasts and comparisons between these themes and the existing literature discussed in Chapter Two and the conceptual framework that was used to guide this study. Specifically, I refer to Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model to consider the proximal processes, personal characteristics, and the whole system that simultaneously influenced the teachers' well-being, resources, and ability to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In addition, I refer to Pearlin's stress process model to consider stress proliferation during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of stressors and resources on teachers' mental health and well-being (Pearlin, 1989). Moreover, I present a summary of the key findings of the thematic data analysis.

4.2 Findings of the Study

In the next section, the themes and subthemes I identified in the thematic data analysis of the news articles and participant interviews are discussed in relation to the secondary research questions of the study. The findings of the study are supported by relevant quotes¹⁷ from the data sources and discussed in relation to the available literature and the conceptual framework of the study. The participants in this study focused on experiences that were important to them, thus stress and poor well-being were an important factor to consider as they have the potential to impact on their ability to teach well, which is further related to educational challenges. Additionally, the participants' responses to the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992) are reported and discussed.

4.3 Secondary Research Question Addressed: What Educational Challenges Did South African Teachers Experience As a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic?

The themes in this section relate to teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school system. Thereby they provide insight into the impact of the pandemic and its associated stressors on teachers' personal processes and linked lives within the microsystem and mesosystems as well as potential stress proliferation (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Pearlin, 1989).

4.3.1 Theme 1: Experiences of using online education

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of lockdown in South Africa confined many people to their homes and resulted in the sudden closure of schools.

On 23 March 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that South Africa was to enter a 21-day lockdown, ... office buildings were rendered useless, schools were closed, a ban was placed on outdoor events and the majority of South Africans were confined inside the walls of their homes, under strict instructions to leave home only when necessary and abide by strict social distancing protocols. (NA: Hako, 2021)¹⁸

¹⁷ Extracts are quoted verbatim to enhance the authenticity of the data. However, some extracts are edited minimally to ensure the meaning of data was preserved.

¹⁸ In brackets, 'NA' indicates the quote was obtained from a news article. The following information provides the name of the author (for articles that were not collected from the GCIS database) or the name of the article (for articles collected from the GCIS database), followed by the year the article was published.

Some schools in South Africa transitioned to remote online education to ensure the continuity of schooling throughout the extended lockdown and school closures (Mostert et al., 2021). Teachers and learners who were able to access remote online education reported various experiences, including different challenges and benefits of using online education (UNESCO, 2020a; UN, 2020).

4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Challenges of using online education

Due to the sudden implementation of school closures, the transition to remote online education was challenging for many teachers as they were required to adapt rapidly to online teaching with minimal or no training and experience (Mostert et al., 2021; Pressley et al., 2021). The following challenges were reported in news articles from September 2020–November 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic and closure of schools during the national lockdown brought about an urgent need to incorporate the use of technology into the traditional classroom setting. (NA: Bright teachers made Microsoft Fellows, 2020).

While many teachers tried to adapt to online education, the reality is that this wasn't the core competency of many schools... This made for challenging times. (NA: Impaq sees huge move to homeschooling, 2020).

Teachers have had to move from a space in which they have years of experience to the unknown and challenging world of online, remote, correspondence and social distanced teaching. The instructional methods in an online learning environment differ from the face-to-face classroom that most teachers use. The online ways of supporting learning and attending to different learning styles require skills that teachers from traditional classrooms don't have. (NA: Now is time to redesign the art of teaching, 2020).

Christine shared her experience of the rapid transition to remote online education. She emphasised her lack of knowledge or training to implement online education and the increased workload required to prepare for online education.

[At the beginning of the pandemic] I remember [the school] giving us an email saying, you know, "We're going to have to continue the education for the learner [sic]". So you have to spend this [term] break doing online courses. So we were inundated with like courses online that we had to do. So we didn't even really get that five or ten day

[term] break, we straightaway had to make sure we were equipped and we knew how to work Teams. Most of us didn't even know what Teams was. You know, I didn't even know how to work it, I had to learn that app first, had to learn how to, you know, do everything on the computer. [Which was a] change from, I used to just write on the board and talk to the learners, we would discuss, but now [!] had to create PowerPoints. It was crazy. So the preparation to start online was a lot, we even had to load all the children on Teams. It was many hours, I was working very late, even in the holiday. (P: Christine, L39-48).¹⁹

Ben indicated that he was frustrated by online education, however, he had a different experience of the transition to remote online education as he was hired in March 2020 just before the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were implemented in South Africa.

[Teaching online] was a little bit frustrating, I guess, because you have almost an expectation and then expectations aren't met when you have to look at a blank screen. So you want to [teach] with the same energy that you would have in person but you can't. (P: Ben, L44-47). I think there was about half a month or a month that lockdown was still proceeding, I guess, before I actually had to start teaching and [my colleague] and the other teachers, they were quite supportive. ... So they eased me into it. I ended up just helping with creating presentations rather than actually doing the lessons. So it started off quite, quite easy compared to what I'm sure other teachers had to go through. (P: Ben, L52-58).

On the contrary, Andrea reported that her transition to remote online education was difficult due to low learner attendance as some of her learners were unable to afford online education. Similarly, Pressley et al. (2021) emphasised that many teachers reported increased concern regarding the high rates of learner absenteeism during online education.

We found with our usage, or if 10% of the children use Google Classroom, that was a lot. (P: Andrea, L204-205). If we went online and the [learners] linked in we'd maybe get five out of a class of 35 to teach. Then you can't teach them because they get too

¹⁹In brackets, the letter 'P' indicates the quote was obtained from a participant in the study. The name following this represents the participant that provided the quote. The letter 'L' followed by a number or number range correlates with the line number in the participant's interview transcript. For example, (P: Christine, L36-37) indicates the quote is from Christine and can be found in the interview transcript from lines 36 to 37.

far ahead. (P: Andrea, L256-257). And some of [the learners] just couldn't afford [online education]. (P: Andrea, L284-285).

As the pandemic progressed and schools remained closed, frequently reported challenges of remote online education that enhanced teachers' stress were in relation to their learners (Gurung, 2020; Pressley et al., 2021). Ben and Christine highlighted that learners' online engagement was low and that it was difficult to enhance the learners' participation.

[The learners' online engagement] verbally, it was mind numbing, it felt like you're pulling teeth, but I think it's it's [sic] about five [out of a class of 25 learners]. Five kids are normally pretty verbal, up to eight normally are interactive on the chat. But other than that, it's not very interactive or engaging. (P: Ben, L172-176). But being a new teacher, it was quite difficult in making sure that the kids were engaged during the lesson. So just trying to find a balance of how much I'm going to be speaking versus how much the kids actually end up interacting with me. Because it was quite difficult actually getting the kids to, like speak out if they didn't want to. (P: Ben, L62-65).

I mean, I think we were teaching subjects per grade. So that means not classes, you're teaching 50 or 60 learners in one class almost. So in order to make you so you know [sic], you ask a question, you'll be like, "Can anybody answer the question?" And there'll be like silence. And then you have to you have to [sic] go and ask them, and sometimes you ask them, and they don't respond. So you're not sure are they either having difficulties with connection [sic]? (P: Christine, L75-80).

Each participant further reported the enhanced distractibility at home was problematic for learners as it often led to incomplete work and concern for learners' performance.

Some of [the learners] if their parents weren't at home, they just thought no, they'd rather watch TV than learn in the [online] lesson. (P: Andrea, L273-274).

I think the kids had way too many distractions [at home]. And them not actually being able to whether it's manage time or manage impulses, or even just, if they don't want to do something, they don't have a lot of reason to actually do what we expect them or want them to do. (P: Ben, L134-137).

There was [sic] also a lot of distractions at home, and [I] understand parents were busy, we can't expect them to be, you know, helping out all the time. And so there

was a lot of [learners] falling behind and not doing their work. And there was almost this expectation that it's just okay, you know, because obviously COVID, we have to understand it's difficult. But the problem is that the curriculum is not being completed. So, you know, then whose fault is it? So that was a stress. (P: Christine, L64-69).

Teachers' concern regarding their learners' online engagement and performance was further reported in news articles.

At the beginning of the pandemic when the country went into lockdown, we did classes over Zoom and sent home [work]. This was very difficult with younger children as it can be hard to keep them engaged over a computer screen. (NA: Williams, 2021).

Ben reported that the lack of learners' online engagement made it challenging to monitor his learners' understanding of concepts. He indicated that during school closures monitoring his learners' behaviour and understanding online was his leading cause of stress.

At home, when it was full lockdown, I think [my leading cause of stress] was probably trying to monitor the kids without actually having those physical cues. (P: Ben, L96-98). [I was concerned about] learner performance, as well as just being able to reactively try and deal with [learners not understanding the curriculum online]. (P: Ben, L115). It was quite frustrating not being able to actually look at visual cues or auditory cues, or not being able to basically manage what the kids are doing behind the scenes while I'm actually doing the lessons. (P: Ben, L59-61).

Further challenges teachers experienced with using online education included difficulties adapting to online education and using technology (Pressley et al., 2021) as well as inadequate resources or knowledge to work with technology (UNESCO, 2020a; UN, 2020). These challenges were reported in news articles at the time.

I found it challenging as I have been a teacher since 2003 and adapting to online teaching was a completely different concept. (NA: Williams, 2021).

Teachers had to brush up on online teaching skills and use some technology for the first time. (NA: Impaq sees huge move to homeschooling, 2020).

Even before the pandemic there were challenges with the use of technology in public schools that included inadequate infrastructure, poor internet connectivity and lack of digitally competent teachers. There's also the fact that the teacher workforce is largely ageing and technophobic. (NA: Now is time to redesign the art of teaching, 2020).

Mostert et al. (2021) further highlighted the difficulties teachers experienced trying to adapt to unfamiliar teaching roles and circumstances. These challenges, including technological difficulties, were also shared by the participants. Andrea expressed that she believed online education was more difficult for older teachers due to a lack of technical understanding.

I think from a point of view that [younger teachers are] up-to-date with technology. So for them to do a quick, online lesson, no problem. Whereas with the older teachers, 'Oh my word, what am I going to do?', and it takes us three hours. (P: Andrea, L200-202).

Christine indicated that one of her biggest challenges using online education was marking learners' work online and ensuring learners had completed their work.

So one of my main challenges was also marking [work online], I found that so, so hard. Because I couldn't control how much work the learners were doing. And then to be able to [mark] it, [the learners] had to upload a file onto Teams, and we went through many different ways of [uploading work]. First, so uploading a file on Teams, and then we realised [the learners] were deleting each other's work. And then we found, okay, we can use the assignment tabs. So then that was a little bit easier. But it was difficult because [the learners] would upload their work upside down. And we would have to, like we can't see, you can't move [the image] around. So you have to like look upside down to mark the work. [The images were] unclear. So that was the biggest challenge for me, actually marking and just making sure that we're [getting through] their work. (P: Christine, L55-63).

Ben also highlighted the challenge of marking learners' work online.

[The learners] tend to just take pictures and upload picture, picture, picture [of their work] which makes also [sic] the teaching side a little bit difficult with marking and things like that. (P: Ben, L159-160).

Moreover, Ben emphasised that the learners struggled to work online and use the technology required. He explained that the learners could have benefitted from training to use online education effectively.

I think a lot of the kids and the teachers and just, I don't know, there was some things that we tried to implement [such as OneNote] that the kids don't necessarily know how to do, and the teachers might not have had training, or just practising doing it effectively. (P: Ben, L144-145). I think it would have been [beneficial] if somehow, we could have done a training for the kids to [show them how work online] ... (P: Ben, L161-162). So I think [the learners] weren't equipped beforehand, and they weren't necessarily equipped during [the pandemic]. To kind of make life easier for both [teachers and learners]. (P: Ben, L168-169).

There was further mention of concern regarding learners' online assessments, cheating and parent's completing learners' work for them. Christine shared her insights on this challenge.

On the other hand, there were parents that were very involved in their children's schooling. So they were almost doing the work for them. So when we had like assessments or quizzes or whatever, we found that learners that would usually do not great are getting 100%. And that was just because either they were cheating, or because you know, parents were helping them do all the work. So that was also not a real or true reflection of the [learners] capabilities. (P: Christine, L70-74).

4.3.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Benefits of using online education

Despite the challenges teachers experienced with online education, many benefits were also reported in news articles from September 2020–January 2021. These benefits included connecting teachers and learners in some way during the pandemic. However, many teachers and learners in South Africa did not have access to online education and had minimal contact throughout the extended school closures (Jones & Kessler, 2020). In addition, some teachers reported having access to technological tools to enhance online education.

Through completing online courses, educators are able to connect with other educators in their communities, learning from each other. (NA: Bright teachers made Microsoft Fellows, 2020).

This technology will allow [schools] to connect learners and teachers at any place and time (NA: New online teaching programme, 2020).

With online learning, our sophisticated learning analytics tools provide all teachers and support staff with real-time data on the behavioural and academic activities of our students. This allows them to identify issues as they come up, and proactively intervene to get the students back on track. (NA: Rewriting the education textbook, 2020).

Some of the benefits reported by participants include enhanced teacher training and the ease, flexibility, and comfort of online teaching at home. Gurung (2021) also reported the advantage of additional training to promote online education, the opportunity to apply new teaching tools and resources, and increased flexibility as teaching and learning hours became adaptable with the use of online education. Ben and Christine reported enhanced teacher training as a benefit of the use of online education during the pandemic.

[The school was] quite good at advertising the training programs for different things. [Microsoft] Teams at the time had quite a few training programs. (P: Ben, L324-325).

I think one of the main positive things was the fact that we were given access with [school's name], we were given access to a lot of training. So, online, they were giving us Microsoft Teams training, we could do so much, they were giving us weekly training on how to do this, we learnt so much on how to use PowerPoint effectively. And Teams. I mean, Teams is very convenient. (P: Christine, L310-314).

Ben emphasised the ease of teaching from home as a benefit of online education.

From an environment [sic] point of view, I quite enjoyed not having to get up half an hour earlier to get to school. And that little bit extra sleep I do think helped. I think it was also nice, not having to worry about who's around and things like that. You're in the comfort of your own home. (P: Ben, L78-80).

While Andrea highlighted the flexibility learners and their families had with online education as they could choose when to complete schoolwork, she also emphasised the advantage of using the recorded online lessons to support learners who did not have access to online education when they returned to school.

We actually preferred a prepared narrated [online] lesson where the children could just access that within their own time. (P: Andrea, L282-283). So what we would do is post narrated lessons online rather than link in so that [the learners] could see us

because then those, those lessons could actually be used when the children [who could not work online returned to school]. (P: Andrea, L257-259).

Christine indicated that online education made it easier to have meetings and communicate with parents due to the flexibility it offered.

Teams is very convenient, I mean, that we're meeting here, now on Zoom. So those, those sorts of things are more convenient. I also found that sometimes to meet with a parent is a lot easier, because they might be busy, but they can just pop on the phone for a quick meeting with you. So yeah, that's definitely the [benefit of] technology and learning how to use it and to our advantage. (P: Christine, L314-318).

Andrea further explained that after some time she felt comfortable using online education.

Yeah, so and I just [compiled] all these quizzes [for the children], which I felt were fun. They were easy. I enjoyed compiling them. ... And parents were asking us, 'Why are you not using Microsoft Teams?' ... And I'm thinking 'No, Google Classrooms is just fine for me, I feel confident, and I can work on that kind of platform.' (P: Andrea, L207-211).

Table 4.1 provides a summary of the key findings of Theme 1.

Table 4.1

Key findings of Theme 1: Experiences of using online education

<p>1. Teachers experienced difficulties with using online education, such as the <i>rapid transition</i> to online education, the <i>enhanced workload</i> to implement and use online education as well as their <i>learners' access</i> to online education and <i>learners' online engagement and performance</i>.</p>
<p>2. However, teachers also experienced the benefits of using online education, such as <i>connecting</i> with others during the pandemic, <i>enhanced teacher training</i> as well as the <i>ease, flexibility, and comfort</i> of teaching online.</p>

4.3.2 Theme 2: Learner-specific stressors

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued and lockdown restrictions were extended, many people worried about the impact of school closures on learners. The disparity in learners' access to remote online education and the impact of the pandemic on learners' academic development

(Le Grange, 2021; Van der Berg & Spaul, 2020) and well-being were concerns and stressors for teachers (Sayed & Sing, 2020).

4.3.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Disparity in learners' access to remote online education

Throughout the pandemic, there were many schools and learners across South Africa that were unable to engage in remote online education. As many learners in South Africa come from disadvantaged backgrounds, they do not have access to the necessary resources, such as devices, data, or internet to engage in online education and as a result they did not have access to effective education (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2022; Van der Berg & Spaul, 2020). These challenges were reported in news articles from September 2020–December 2020.

Very poor access to computers and unstable home internet connections have meant that online learning has not been possible for most schools. (NA: A testing time, 2020).

The challenge is that if you are poor you cannot have education right now. ... A lot of the time is spent at home and teachers use online teaching. If you don't have a gadget, how will you get online teaching? (NA: Dedicated Limpopo teacher rewarded S10 000, 2020).

Under-resourced schools will, unfortunately, suffer because of the new demands made by modern teaching methods, with the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' constantly widening. (NA: There will always be a need for physical schooling, 2020).

There is uneven access to digital tools across the country. (NA: Now is time to redesign the art of teaching, 2020).

Pupils needed to be supported, especially in disadvantaged areas. Sadly, many pupils receive little or no support at home while others are supported in every conceivable way. (NA: Progressed pupils must close the gap, 2020).

We have heard about concerns and opinions regarding the data challenge and lack of equipment related to the switch to online learning during the lockdown. (NA: Important role of literacy teachers in our post-COVID-19 learning, 2020).

Andrea shared her experience of the disparity in learners' access to education who came from different financial backgrounds.

What we found teaching, we have a huge disparity with the haves and the have-nots, we have quite wealthy parents, who expect a lot from the teachers and almost expected overnight to get a personal tutor for the child. And then some incredibly disadvantaged families who don't even have money for data. So they don't have email addresses, they couldn't get the lessons. (P: Andrea, L20-24). But it was very, very difficult for many of the disadvantaged [learners] that I worried about because their parents were sort of struggling, and then the parental input was very low. So they just fell further and further and further behind with their studies. (P: Andrea, L30-33).

As Andrea emphasised, this meant that during the pandemic, most poorer learners fell further behind in their schoolwork than wealthier learners who had access to remote online education and other educational resources. This was further reported in news articles.

Most school children in [South Africa] will lose half their learning time this year and richer children will lose less than poorer ones ... [As lockdown restrictions eased and certain grades were allowed to return to school,] schools were able to apply to education authorities to open additional grades under the lockdown. Many wealthier suburban schools did so and reached attendance of 50% for all grades; schools servicing the poorest 80% of the population had rates of attendance for other grades of 15% to 20%. Wealthy children were thus twice as likely to attend school when their grade was closed than in no fee schools. (NA: SA children losing half their learning time, survey shows, 2020).

Disadvantaged learners' inaccessibility to remote online education affected many teachers' stress and well-being (Jones & Kessler, 2020). This was reported in news articles and participant interviews.

WhatsApp became the mode of teaching for most of us. Of course, 'Miss, I don't have Wi-Fi or data' was a reality that added to our stress, because at the end of the day, the work had to be done. (NA: Teaching matrices during COVID-19 was a case of 'do or die', 2020).

In addition, Andrea shared the impact of learners' inaccessibility to online education on her emotional well-being.

Oh, my, [I had] a very heavy heart [knowing some of my learners could not work online], the emotional toll and also wondering how are we going to get [the learners] back up to speed, but we did have support from the department because I think our school is in a fairly affluent area, even though we have a lot of disadvantaged children, but I think the disadvantaged schools really, really struggled. (P: Andrea, L289-292).

4.3.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Concern for learners' academic development

As a result of school closures and learners' inequitable access to education, many teachers indicated concern regarding the impact of the pandemic on learners' academic development. Teachers reported concern regarding the amount of lost learning time, learners falling further behind in the curriculum, gaps in the learners' knowledge and learners' poor academic performance as well as the increased learner dropout rate in news articles from September 2020–November 2021 (Le Grange, 2021; UN, 2020; Van der Berg & Spaul, 2020).

Grade 1-3 teachers will tell you foundation phase pupils know little or nothing of the work done in the first quarter [of the year]. In the schools of the poor, work done in the first quarter will have to be repeated. Teachers will not be able to complete the curriculum, leaving many gaps in children's education. (NA: Education heading for catastrophe, 2020).

Christine reported that the gaps in learners' knowledge were identified during examinations when learners' academic performance dropped.

So there was an interruption in terms of the normal way of schooling. So eventually, we were just doing projects. And I remember one time, we just did projects. So naturally, all the marks are very high. And then when we did start introducing examinations, again, the learners' marks were dropping. So from last year [2020], and this year [2021], the marks dropped. Because we did continue our education. So it wasn't like we stopped, we were still teaching. But the books were incomplete when they came back [to school]. So I had to help them catch up because the books were empty. And they [sic], when they started to write their papers, that's when we started seeing gaps [in their knowledge]. (P: Christine, L180-188).

Concern regarding the impact of the pandemic on learners' academic performance during the pandemic was also reported in news articles.

The department sent a circular to all schools, giving them permission to increase marks by up to 5% in up to three subjects to help pupils proceed to the next grade in grades 4 to 9. (NA: Progressed pupils must close the gap, 2020).

The circular said it was in a bid to prevent a high number of pupils from repeating the grade next year. (NA: Over 8,000 pupils dropped out of school during pandemic in EC, 2020).

Education expert and Dean of the Humanities faculty at Wits University, Ruksana Osman, said the 5% became significant if it meant a failing pupil was progressed. 'The gaps for such a pupil, especially in maths and reading, will be important to remediate,' she said. She added that remediation was necessary to prevent the gap from persisting in later years. Osman said it was important to remember that the current pass mark was already 30% for some subjects. (NA: Progressed pupils must close the gap, 2020).

The pressure of trials on both the teachers and pupils was worrisome, with concerns about the devastating consequences for those who might not make it through. (NA: Pupils readiness for trial exams questioned, 2020).

Andrea shared similar concerns regarding learners' academic performance, describing how the structuring of assessments were changed to help learners pass.

So, that's why now we actually have to structure our assessments. It has to be 50% low order questions, then 30%, middle order questions, 20% higher order questions, so that at least once the children get through those low order questions, they can get the pass mark, which is not really the way it's supposed to be done. But the children often start off strong and start petering off. (P: Andrea, L 391-394).

A further concern for many teachers during the pandemic was the number of learners that were dropping out of school countrywide. The DBE (2021a) reported that between 50% and 75% of learning time was lost in 2020 which was expected to result in an increase in learners dropping out of school.

Nationally, about 300,000 primary school pupils quit schooling. (NA: Over 8,000 pupils dropped out of primary school during pandemic in EC, 2020).

At least 75,000 grade 7 and 12 pupils are projected to drop out of school this year [2020]. (NA: Let's stop losing SA's very future, 2020).

4.3.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Concern for learners' well-being

Apart from the impact of the pandemic and school closures on learners' academic development, many teachers reported concern regarding the impact on learners' well-being in news articles from October 2020–November 2021 (Jones & Kessler, 2020).

Also important is that schools are not only locations for learning; they also offer social protection, and support learner well-being. (NA: A testing time, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic is harming the health, social and [mental] well-being of children worldwide. ... Children, especially, were faced with a wave of changes, such as a loss of social contact, unpredictable school closures, lack of sports or extracurricular activities and, for many students, a general loss of safety and access to learning resources. ... Children are missing out on socialisation, which is an important part of [their] development. (NA: Hako, 2021).

Andrea indicated that her leading cause of stress during the pandemic was keeping her learners motivated and promoting their academic growth and development.

I think for me personally, [the leading cause of stress] was keeping all the children that I was responsible for, and that's 123, sort of together and moving in the same direction and keeping them going. And even when they came back to school, and they were one day on, one day off, it was very, very difficult to motivate them to make the most of the one day that they were at school. So just motivating them and making the wheels turn was very tiring and stressful, because they as children naturally sort of pulled away. They didn't want to come forward and engage. Because I think they found it very, very stressful. (P: Andrea, L365-371).

Andrea further indicated that she believes her learners were struggling to cope due to the pandemic, which affected her stress as she was concerned about their well-being.

And the [Department of Education doesn't] realise that little children are still struggling. (P: Andrea, L324-325). But what we'd found with children and lack of routine is that they'd get tearful, so they would burst into tears, or they would not be able to concentrate, or they wouldn't be able to finish their topic, or they'd start making unnecessary mistakes [in tests]. Also in an assessment, what would happen to them is they would start off very, very strongly. (P: Andrea, L 388-391). But the children often start off strong and start petering off. And by the time you get to the last section of the assessment, they're writing nonsense, because they're absolutely exhausted, they're overwhelmed, they haven't prepared properly. And then you also start with stomach aches. So [the learners' stress] would come out in a very physical way. (P: Andrea, L 395-398).

Ben further indicated his concern for his learners' well-being, explaining that one of his stressors was his concern about whether his learners were coping during the pandemic.

I think, like I said earlier, that the one of my stressors was not being able to know if the kids were coping or not. (P: Ben, L349-250).

Furthermore, Christine reported her concern regarding learners' well-being during the pandemic. She emphasised that she was concerned about the learners missed opportunities to socialise as they were kept at home for longer than other learners. Sayed and Sing (2020), further reported the challenges learners and teachers experienced due to the extended periods of social isolation as they lost the opportunity to socialise, develop and sustain relationships, and be supported by others.

I've seen parents who have kept their children at home because they're afraid and in turn, have almost put, I'll call it a 'COVID phobia' on children [sic]. Where they are so afraid. Now, even with the mask break, they won't take the masks off. They're so afraid, and that is obviously you know, phobias are often learnt. So you know, then they're also very socially withdrawn. They're very quiet. They don't speak much, even now that they start returning to school now. But the ones I feel the ones that were kept home the longest are the ones that are struggling the most socially. (P: Christine, L288-296).

In addition, concerns regarding learners' well-being were raised regarding the countrywide closure of school-feeding programmes during the extended lockdown periods (Van der Berg & Spaul, 2020).

Civil rights organisations have expressed concern that almost 2 million pupils are still not receiving food as part of the school nutrition programme. (NA: Concerns over school-feeding schemes and shortcomings, 2020).

Only about 25% of learners living with [survey responders] received a daily meal regardless of grades or school attendance ... Which means school closures also contributed to child hunger. (NA: A testing time, 2020).

While Andrea highlighted that due to parental job losses, many parents joined their school-feeding programme during the pandemic. She further expressed her concern for learners' well-being as she suggested stressed parents might not have noticed their children's anxiety, as they were struggling themselves.

And I think some parents, because their own anxiety was so high. We had a lot [of parents], unfortunately, they lost their jobs [during the pandemic], and now are actually on a feeding scheme that the school provides. So they actually get two sandwiches and fruit and that kind of thing and parcels. Because their own anxiety was so high, they didn't even notice the children's anxiety. And it was often the teachers who noticed this extremely high anxiety and in a way are powerless because you're so busy with the lesson and you have to do deliver the curriculum, that you're almost powerless. (P: Andrea, L409-416).

However, there were also reports of learners adjusting and coping during the pandemic.

The [learners] were nervous and quite emotional in the beginning but... this has all now become part of their lives. ... Andrea makes sure that [the learners] are constantly having discussions as a class about how to protect everyone. ... Parents need to help their kids not be scared ... 'I think it is important that children are made aware of the situation and are kept up-to-date/spoken to about it every now and then - to reinforce the idea that COVID is here, and although we want everybody to be as safe as possible, there are instances where it may be scary (like losing a family/friend) but not making them fearful about enjoying their childhood,' she says. (NA: Hako, 2021).

Table 4.2 provides a summary of the key findings of Theme 2.

Table 4.2

Key findings of Theme 2: Learner-specific stressors

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| <p>3. Teachers reported concerns regarding their learners throughout the pandemic. These included <i>disadvantaged learners' access to online education</i>, the <i>loss of learning time</i> and the impact of the pandemic on <i>learners' academic development</i> and <i>well-being</i> as many learners struggled to cope.</p> |
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4.3.3 Theme 3: The phased reopening of schools

Initially, the lockdown period was meant to be implemented for three weeks in South Africa. However, the national state of disaster with various lockdown regulation levels was continually extended and only lifted two years later in April 2022 (South African Government, 2023). Andrea indicated that she did not believe the COVID-19 lockdown regulations would last for as long as they had.

When COVID happened, I think everybody was really thinking it would just be a six-month thing, and not quite stretch as far as it did. (P: Andrea, L19-20).

The extended period of lockdown and school closures had a far-reaching impact on education as reported in news articles from September 2020 to November 2021. Consequently, many teachers lost their jobs (UNESCO, 2020a; UN, 2020) the longer schools remained closed.

NAISA said while they understood the urgency and need to save the lives of their pupils and staff, they also needed to consider the impact a delay in reopening independent schools could have on keeping teachers employed. (NA: A delay in reopening of schools may well be on the cards, 2021).

From recent research (completed this week [2020]) it appears that an estimated 100 000 [early childhood development] teachers will have lost their jobs. (NA: Court route to secure better state support, 2020).

We do not want to see one more teacher retrenched due to school closures. (NA: Chances slim that private schools can reopen earlier than public schools, 2021).

Furthermore, the extended period of lockdown implemented in the country had an extensive impact on the education system and resulted in increased concern regarding the amount of learning time schools had lost.

Professor Kobus Maree, from the University of Pretoria's Department of Educational Psychology, said the influence of the pandemic on teaching and learning had been huge. (NA: Progressed pupils must close the gap, 2020).

Education stakeholders have raised concerns about an overloaded curriculum, continuing uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and shortages of teachers and infrastructure as some of the challenges in the new academic year. (NA: COVID-19 pressures still dog education sector, 2021).

A survey has found 50% of teaching time has been lost for most grades. (NA: SA children losing half their learning time, survey shows, 2020).

As lockdown levels eased and schools began reopening in June 2020, the concern regarding lost learning time continued as schools followed a phased reopening approach with the use of rotational timetables and hybrid learning to cooperate with social distancing regulations. These regulations limited the number of learners that were allowed to return to school at any given time to mitigate the spread of the virus. Thus, only some grades were allowed to return to school.

While grade 12 and grade 7 pupils, for whom school opened earlier, lost 17% of school days, children in grades 1 to 5 and 8 to 10, who had the least time at school, lost about 40% of school days. (NA: SA children losing half their learning time, survey shows, 2020).

However, given rotational timetabling to ensure social distancing, [the amount of lost learning time is] probably an underestimate. (NA: A testing time, 2020).

The department hides behind the fact that schools are rotating classes. That is not an excuse as some schools are huge and two grades consume the entire staff and class complement, leaving other grades without classes or teachers. (NA: Schools hit by shortage of teachers, 2020).

The phased reopening of schools was opposed by some people who were concerned about the possibility of increased COVID-19 infections at schools.

By June, a phased reopening [of schools] was introduced... The move was heavily opposed by some, both publicly and legally. (NA: A testing time, 2020).

The National Teachers Union said they did not believe that it was in the best interests of the children for schools to reopen. (NA: Education minister briefs nation on plans to reopen schools, 2021).

Despite attendance being relatively high, 72% of [parents] reported being very worried about learners returning to school. (NA: A testing time, 2020).

Mary kept on teaching with ... a fear that was ever-present about her own health and safety as the children came back under the phased-in return to schools. (NA: Committed teachers upholding a tough profession in SA, 2020).

ACDP MP Marie Sukers said they had received complaints that parents were pressured and threatened to get their children back to school despite there being an option not to do so. "Parents are extremely anxious to get their children to school. There needs to be communication made to prove that parents cannot be forced." (NA: Over 75000 school dropouts expected, 2020).

Moreover, as a result of lockdown restrictions some teachers and learners were unable to return to school during the phased reopening of schools.

[Limpopo] had about 400 gateway subject teachers, mostly from Zimbabwe, that could not enter the province due to cross-border travel restrictions ... [Teachers] who are not yet back are deemed to be on unpaid leave. The department has stopped their salaries and substituted them. (NA: Zim teachers working in Limpopo 'locked outside SA' due to restrictions, 2020).

[Learners] have been unable to return to their school in North West because the hostel is closed. (NA: Farmworkers children forgotten, 2020).

4.3.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Enforcing COVID-19 protocols

News articles from October 2020–November 2021 indicated that upon returning to school a new challenge teachers faced was implementing the COVID-19 protocols (Kim et al., 2021b). These protocols included social distancing, wearing masks, sanitising and screening and recording learners' symptoms.

It was even harder teaching now. You had to pay attention to all the COVID-19 rules, watching every child's move to keep them safe. Take their temperatures three times a day [and] keep them apart. (NA: Committed teachers upholding a tough profession in SA, 2020).

It was difficult in the beginning when it was all still new and we had to wear masks during the school day. I had to remind the children every so often. (NA: Williams, 2021).

Ben and Christine highlighted the challenges they experienced with enforcing the new COVID-19 protocols when they returned to school.

[At school, a challenge with the learners is] not putting masks on, and then having to shout at them for doing that. It's energy you could be putting elsewhere. It also kind of dampens the effectiveness of shouting at kids for other things, if that makes sense. I think that's probably what I found most stressful about the pandemic at least. Yeah. Besides from the stressors for normal teaching. (P: Ben, L104-107).

And then if I can speak to one, one thing that is more of a challenge right now, that is the screening. And even though most of COVID-19 has sort of settled, we have to now get to work at 07:00 in the morning. Whereas previously our work hours were 07:30 or 07:45 you know, it's even as bad as we had to be there at 06:45 to scan the children. And some of us work from 06:45 to 16:00. And that is really like a long day of work. And I just feel like that's something that was never thought about, you know, it wasn't in contracts or anything like that. But it kind of makes us feel overworked. (P: Christine, L83-89). So basically, it started with scanning [temperatures] and spraying hands and spraying feet [with sanitiser]. Then eventually, they said we don't need to spray feet anymore. We can just sanitise hands and scan temperatures. But now we also scanning temperatures and [sanitising] hands. And when they get to

class, we will record their temperatures on a software. Yeah, so it hasn't stopped for the past two years, we're still doing it. (P: Christine, L93-97).

Ben further highlighted the challenges he experienced with enforcing social distancing protocols in the classroom and how this affected his ability to effectively engage with learners and monitor their understanding and progress.

We were asked not to walk around to the kids or actually get too close and look at their books and things like that. So it was hard from that point of view. Also, we had to mainly focus on individual activities, and they weren't necessarily allowed to let them work together because of social distancing. (P: Ben, L215-218).

These challenges were also emphasised in news articles.

Then there were the things you could not do. Like hug a child or sit next to them to solve a mathematics problem or give them a high five when they finally grasped a concept. You could not even share your food with a hungry child who had left their lunch box at home. (NA: Committed teachers upholding a tough profession in SA, 2020).

4.3.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: COVID-19 infections

One of the challenges teachers that returned to work during the phased reopening of schools faced was the risk of COVID-19 infections and the fear of possibly transmitting the virus to their families (Pressley, 2021). In the general information form completed by seven participating teachers, three teachers reported being infected with COVID-19 virus. News articles from September 2020–November 2021 reported the risks and challenges associated with COVID-19 infections.

Western Cape Teachers Forum, a Facebook page dedicated to the province's teachers, told a harrowing tale of the rapid rate at which educators were contracting the virus. (NA: Parents fear return to school, 2021).

We [teachers] are scared that when we return to our families, we will be spreading the virus. (NA: Natural remedies key for markers, 2021).

For teachers with comorbidities, COVID-19 infections were particularly concerning. Initially, during stricter lockdown levels with higher infection rates teachers with comorbidities were granted comorbidity leave until it was safer to return to schools.

More than 22,000 teachers ... were granted permission to work from home because of comorbidities ... (NA: Must at-risk teachers really now go back despite terror of virus?, 2020).

The Department of Basic Education says provinces have begun processing replacements for the more than 20 000 teachers with comorbidities who [were granted leave to] work from home. (NA: Budget hit by substitute teachers, 2020).

As the pandemic progressed teachers experienced difficulties with being adequately protected from COVID-19 infections (Le Grange, 2021). Throughout news articles, it was reported that teachers were failing to be protected from the virus due to a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) provided by the government at the time, staff shortages, space constraints, and delayed access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

[Schools] only partially reopened in June, despite teacher unions concerns about the timing and lack of adequate protection for teachers and learners. (NA: Education mum on glaring failures at schools, 2021).

One of the biggest primary schools in Durban is fearful of COVID-19 infections due to the shortage of PPE and thermometers, and screeners staying away from work. (NA: Primary school at high risk of COVID-19 outbreak due to PPE shortage and lack of proper protocols, 2020).

Education unions and experts have warned that a lack of state-funded COVID-19 resources at schools will both exacerbate the pandemic and cause 2021 attendance and admissions to drop. (NA: Now is time to redesign the art of teaching, 2020).

The school attempted to raise concerns about the safety of learners, teachers and elderly carers, about the impracticalities of reopening due to staff shortages (at one stage only one cleaning staff member was available to sanitise the entire school), and about space constraints in the face of regulations requiring physical distancing (NA: Respect the critical role teachers and principals play, and stop treating them as commodities, 2020).

What is particularly concerning [about the start of the school year in 2021] is that the department has not provided teachers with protective equipment such as masks, saying they should make use of what was supplied to them in June [2020, 6 months prior]. (NA: Protect our teachers at all costs, 2021).

The vaccination roll-out outlined by the government has essential workers, including teachers, in the second phase of inoculations, but that is unlikely to happen before the second term [in 2021]. (NA: Back-to-school questions, 2021).

Teachers' concerns regarding effective protection from the COVID-19 virus were further voiced by teachers who were granted comorbidity leave when they were asked to return to schools to assist learners and alleviate the difficulties schools and teachers were experiencing due to teacher shortages.

More than 22,000 teachers who were granted permission to work from home because of comorbidities were set to return to school on Monday as the country moved to alert level 1. (NA: Must at-risk teachers really now go back despite terror of virus? 2020).

Teachers with comorbidities voice concerns as the department [of education] wants them back at work. They said they were worried that they might contract COVID-19 as the department did not put in place extra measures to protect them. (NA: Teachers fret over safety, 2020).

Despite many teachers' concerns, it was reported that often, schools were not sites of infection (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020) and that teachers were not at a higher risk of contracting the virus compared to other employees who had returned to work.

The evidence so far confirms that children are not super-spreaders, that schools are not often the original sites of infection and that infection rates among teachers were not significantly higher than among other workers of a similar age. (NA: A testing time, 2020).

Monitoring by the Department of Basic Education of 611 schools showed that 95% of schools in the sample reported zero confirmed cases of COVID-19 among pupils, while almost 90% of schools reported zero cases among teachers. (NA: SA children losing half their learning time, survey shows, 2020).

The Department of Basic Education said it has seen a significant decline in COVID-19 cases at schools and hardly any schools have been closed [due to infections] and reopened recently. (NA: Big decline in COVID-19 cases at schools, 2020).

However, teachers were still at risk of contracting the virus and throughout the pandemic many teachers lost their lives due to COVID-19 infections (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021).

[In the winter of 2020], incidents of teachers and children suffering and dying due to COVID-19 were on the rise. There was a grave concern about its contagious nature and how this would spread to the broader community, especially to learners with aged carers. (NA: More support for under principal Neumann, 2020).

About 2000 educators have succumbed to COVID-19 since the outbreak of the pandemic. (NA: Parents fear return to school, 2021).

The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) said that the number of teachers dying of COVID-19 was an indication that there was a huge number of teachers at risk. (NA: Unions concerned about teacher deaths, 2020).

Table 4.3 provides a summary of the key findings of Theme 3.

Table 4.3

Key findings of Theme 3: Phased reopening of schools

4. Teachers experienced challenges with the extended lockdown and the phased reopening of schools as lockdowns threatened their jobs and rotational timetables and hybrid learning approaches resulted in additional lost learning time.
5. Teachers reported difficulties enforcing the COVID-19 protocols upon returning to schools, and concern regarding COVID-19 infections and a lack of adequate protection from infections. However, schools were often not sites of infection.
6. Nonetheless, teachers were still at risk of contracting the virus and many teachers lost their lives due to COVID-19 infections.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Teacher-specific stressors

In addition to the learner-specific stressors and difficulties teachers experienced with the phased reopening of schools, there were teacher-specific stressors (enhanced workload and past stressors) that enhanced the challenges teachers experienced during the pandemic.

4.3.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Enhanced workload

In news articles from September 2020–September 2021, many teachers indicated that a challenge they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic was their enhanced workload which was already heavy prior to the pandemic. A large contributor to teachers' enhanced workload was the severity of teacher shortages during the pandemic. Teacher shortages were heightened by the number of COVID-19 infections, teachers on comorbidity leave and teachers that passed away from the virus.

[The shortage of teachers] is also putting additional pressure on teachers who are already pressurised with fears [and] anxieties and are already working extra time over weekends to help matriculants. (NA: Unions, DA concerned over shortage of teachers as pupils return, 2020).

A Naptosa member [outlined] the pressure teachers were facing because of having to carry the workload of teachers on comorbidity leave. (NA: Must at-risk teachers really now go back despite terror of virus? 2020).

At the moment, every teacher is assisting where they can. The department has said it has no money for substitute teachers [to replace teachers on comorbidity leave]. (NA: Schools hit by shortage of teachers, 2020).

Several Durban schools crippled by COVID-19 are still without much needed substitute teachers despite the return of all grades to class about two weeks ago. This has led to a severe shortage of teachers as many have been booked off because of underlying health conditions. It was revealed recently that about 6000 teachers might not return to class because of comorbidities that place them in danger should they contract COVID-19. (NA: Schools hit by shortage of teachers, 2020).

The Department of Basic Education says it is concerned whether there will be enough teachers in classrooms when schools reopen next year [2021] as a number of

educators have succumbed to COVID-19. (NA: Teachers' deaths cause concern, 2020).

By official count, about 2,000 teachers have died because of COVID ... So, four years of training and for 2,000 teachers that means these deaths count as 8,000 years of teacher training lost in one year because of the pandemic. (NA: Reopening schools now will cost lives, 2021).

Teachers' enhanced workload led to longer working hours, limited work-life balance, increased pressure in their work environment and stress and exhaustion (Pressley et al., 2021).

[Teachers] are overstretched and that is why we are seeing instances where some teachers are starting to put in sick notes. (NA: Schools hit by shortage of teachers, 2020).

Some teachers indicated that their enhanced workload was influenced by the transition to and use of online education, working from home (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Pressley et al., 2021), and meeting parental demands.

The lockdown blurred lines between work and home, making people work an average of an extra working day while dealing with the additional stresses and uncertainties of the lockdown. (NA: Hako, 2021).

Ben and Christine further addressed the issue of increased work due to the transition to and use of online education.

The [amount of] hours definitely increased because of the workload as well. The amount of work I did outside of school just to [prepare] for the next week, or the next day was a lot higher. Like [PowerPoint] presentations and things. (P: Ben, L257-259). I think we were meant to send messages [online] directly to the kids being like, "Hey, how's it going?" type of thing, just to check up on them. ... So there were little additional admin tasks and responsibilities that we had to do. (P: Ben, 248-251).

I know initially when it was COVID I was working very, very late because I couldn't draw [a] line between [working and relaxing] you know, because we were sitting [working] at home so definitely the [work-life] boundaries were blurred there. (P: Christine, L127-129).

Christine further explained that her workload increased due to online education as parents were able to contact her throughout the day and night requesting support for their children.

I get messages on Teams still from parents late at night because they have access to me. (P: Christine, L123-124). Before my [subject's] exam, I know that night I'm going to get millions of messages about the exam and what [the learners] need to study. I even get phone calls. (P: Christine, 131-132).

News articles reported that teachers' enhanced workload was impacted by preparing for schools to reopen, increased admin, implementing COVID-19 procedures at schools, and engaging in remedial work with learners to address gaps in their knowledge.

Mary was working hard from home doing remote teaching and was involved in weeks of preparation to make the school safe for the return of the children. (NA: Committed teachers upholding a tough profession in SA, 2020).

Before the pandemic, my main worries were educating my class and making sure that I ticked all the boxes at the end of the year. Now, we have been given more admin work to complete to deal with COVID-19 and isolation, etc. Each day there is something new added to our plates and we are supposed to just do it, and this without an increase in over two years. (NA: Williams, 2021).

Christine indicated that her leading cause of stress during the pandemic was related to all the additional rules and roles she was expected to fulfil due to the pandemic and the implementation of COVID-19 procedures.

I think [my leading cause of stress] was just all the extra rules. In terms of management for us, all the new rules and expectations and roles that were not previously on the contract we signed. ... But now there was this new [expectation] that we had to do over and above what we were already doing. So I think that and definitely, I wouldn't say the virus in itself, because that's, I mean, it comes with its own its own [sic] stresses. But it's not that. It's just all the extra admin. (P: Christine, L146-154).

Ben and Christine explained that the gaps in learners' knowledge increased their workload, as these gaps had to be addressed when learners returned to school.

In general, the backlogs are quite bad though from COVID. (P: Ben, L432-433).

Because we did continue our education. So it wasn't like we stopped, we were still teaching. But the books were incomplete when they came back [to school]. So I had to help them catch up. Because the books were empty. (P: Christine, L184-186).

The enhanced workload as a result of addressing the gaps in learners' knowledge was also reported in news articles.

To prepare for the exams Lesufi said extra lessons had been conducted by teachers to ensure that all pupils had completed the syllabus and revision work. (NA: Gauteng gives matric finals the green light, 2020).

4.3.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Past teacher-specific stressors

In addition to the difficulties teachers experienced with COVID-19 infections and enhanced workload, past teacher-specific stressors were present throughout the pandemic. In this study, past teacher-specific stressors include the various stressors South African teachers typically experienced before the COVID-19 pandemic that continued throughout the pandemic and potentially enhanced the challenges the pandemic presented or were potentially worsened by the pandemic itself. These teacher-specific stressors largely relate to the challenging working conditions in which South African teachers function. South African teachers' challenging working conditions are characterised by poor infrastructure (Wolfhunter, 2011), overcrowded classrooms (Marais, 2016), inadequate resources (Wolfhunter, 2011), school violence (Hanaya et al., 2020), low pay, vandalism, and burglary (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020).

These challenges as well as the poor treatment of teachers and a need for professional development and support were reported in news articles from September 2020–September 2021 and participant interviews. Andrea shared her experiences of poor infrastructure at the school at which she works and the impact of these challenges on her learners.

Before COVID, we had challenges in that our school roof was giving up. So we had to move up onto the top field, and we were in mobile classrooms. So that was already very unsettling for the children because the thing is I teach Grade four, so they're 10 years old. That uncertainty and that change had affected them. (P: Andrea, L10-14).

So it was very challenging to calm the children down to meet their needs already with a significant change having happened. (P: Andrea, L18).

South African teachers' challenging working conditions were further emphasised in news articles.

The South African education system [is] characterised by crumbling infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms and relatively poor educational outcomes, is perpetuating inequality and as a result, failing too many of its children, with the poor hardest-hit. (NA: How to fix broken schools, 2020).

Teachers are the victims of poor resources, inadequate facilities and overcrowded classrooms, resulting in low morale. Many schools are sites of strife, conflict and physical danger for both pupils and teachers. The schools at which violence has been reported are in underprivileged communities where unemployment, crime, gangsterism, drug dealing, and abuse are rife. (NA: Education heading for catastrophe, 2020).

We are acutely aware of the many other challenges that make it difficult for our teachers to do their work and we are working tirelessly to resolve problems in our schools with regard to infrastructure, sanitation, water, electricity, proper and safe classrooms, as well as access to adequate learning material. (NA: Ramaphosa praises teachers at Sadtu's 30th celebration, 2020).

Teachers were faced with a number of challenges including low payment, unsafe working conditions, lack of adequate support and some having succumbed [to the COVID-19 virus]. (NA: World Teachers Day hails selfless educators, 2020).

The report found 70% of the teachers in the country were not happy with their salary. (NA: A quarter of SA teachers are stressed, 2020).

The lot of a teacher in South Africa is not an enviable one. In many, if not most cases, they teach in schools which are either falling down, or have no resources for pupils. In some schools they have to worry about gang warfare spilling over into the playground (if there is one). They teach classes whose numbers far exceed what is optimum for effective teaching, and they do it alone. (NA: Our viewpoint good news for teachers, 2020).

Furthermore, acts of vandalism and burglary are common occurrences in South African schools (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020). However, the extended periods of lockdown enhanced the rate at which these occurrences took place throughout the country.

Last year, the Gauteng Department of Education lost more than R121 million due to acts of vandalism in about 262 schools. Criminals target the technology ... such as laptops and tablets. Others ... steal food meant for feeding our children. By May 2020 as we entered the second month of the national lockdown the number of schools either looted, burnt or vandalised increased by almost 100 more schools than the total reported in the entire 2019, with 336 Gauteng schools affected. (NA: Communities can help bring an end to school vandalism, 2020).

A further factor that contributes towards teachers' challenging working conditions are the way they are treated by parents. Christine indicated that being treated poorly by parents is challenging and affects her well-being.

I think the one thing that impacts my well-being as a teacher is, I'll be honest, is the parents. There's almost a little bit of a lack of respect for teachers in general. (P: Christine, L232-234). You know, some parents are lovely, but there are really, some nasty parents. [I] get some nasty emails and, and those really do, even though no matter how resilient you are, they do hurt your feelings. I mean, there was even one time I was crying. (P: Christine, L241-243).

Table 4.4 provides a summary of the key findings of Theme 4.

Table 4.4

Key findings of Theme 4: Teacher-specific stressors

<p>7. Teachers' already heavy workloads were enhanced during the pandemic by teacher shortages, transitioning to and using online education, working from home, meeting parental demands, preparing for schools to reopen, increased admin, implementing COVID-19 procedures at schools, and engaging in remedial work with learners to address gaps in their knowledge. This led to longer working hours, limited work-life balance, increased pressure in the work environment and stress and exhaustion.</p>
<p>8. Teachers' challenging and often adverse working conditions present prior to the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced teachers' stressors during the pandemic.</p>

Due to the stressors teachers typically experience and the additional stressors generated by the pandemic, the impact of these challenges on teachers' well-being and the need for psychological support and professional development for teachers was voiced by all three participants and will be addressed in further detail in Themes 5, 6 and 7.

4.4 Secondary Research Question Addressed: How Did These Educational Challenges Impact South African Teachers' Well-being?

The themes in this section relate to teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their individual well-being. Thus, this theme provides insight into the impact of the pandemic and its associated stressors on teachers' well-being and ability to cope. It also discusses the potential mediation of stressors on teachers' resources and personal characteristics and the potential moderation of teachers' resources and personal characteristics on stressors (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Pearlin, 1989).

4.4.1 Trait Well-Being Inventory

Participants' subjective well-being was measured using the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992). Participants' scale scores for the General Life Satisfaction Scale and Mood Level Scale are presented in Figure 4.1. Scale scores range from 1 to 6 with higher scores indicating a strong construct or agreement with the items presented in the instrument. Thus, scale means were calculated and used.

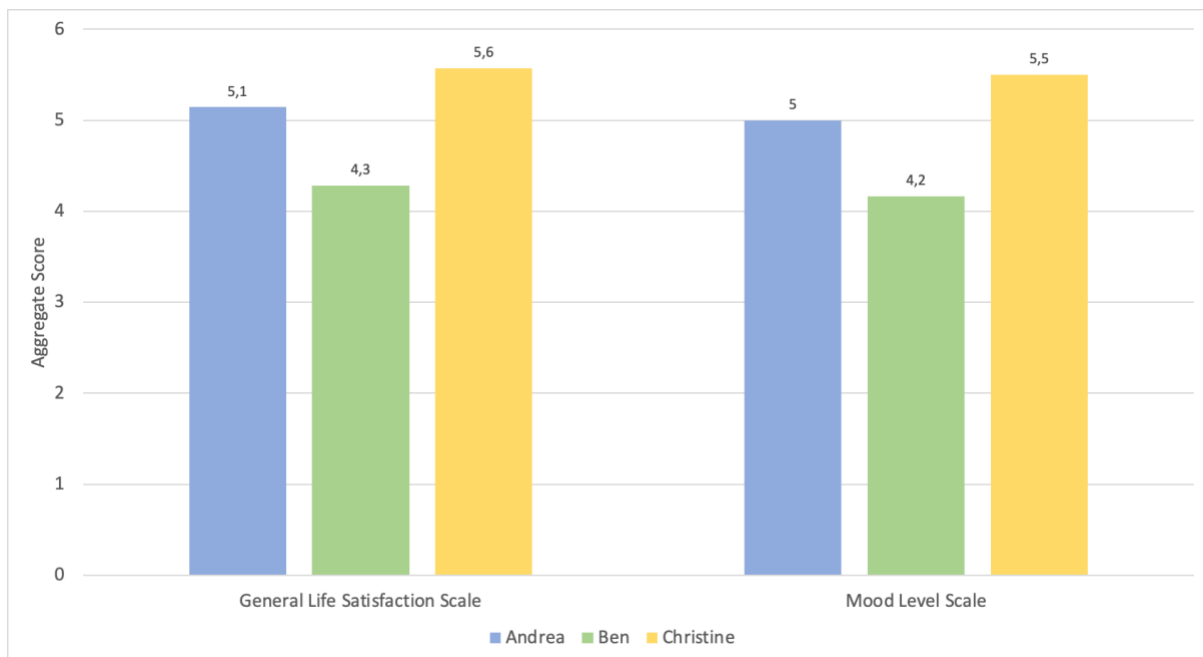


Figure 4.1

Participants' Trait Well-Being Inventory scale scores (n = 3)

Based on the participants' answers it is evident that their scores fall within the higher range on the 6-point scale. Thus, Andrea and Christine appear to experience a higher level of general life satisfaction and a more positive mood in comparison to Ben, who experiences a moderate level of general life satisfaction and more neutral to positive moods. This indicates that the participant's subjective well-being falls within a higher range which could influence their experience and perspective of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.4.2 Theme 5: Negative influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being

Along with the challenges South African teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 and March 2021, the pandemic also influenced many teachers' well-being increasing psychological distress, anxiety, and burnout (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Pressley, 2021; UN, 2020). The negative influence of the pandemic on teachers' well-being was reported in news articles from October 2020–November 2021. The implementation of lockdown restrictions during the pandemic significantly contributed towards people's feeling of uncertainty and psychological distress.

The stress, anxiety, isolation, fear and uncertainty surrounding the lockdown became significant contributors to psychological distress, and mental healthcare became especially important. ... Lifeline South Africa recorded over 4 000 calls a day the weeks following the announcement of the hard lockdown, which is the number of calls they would usually receive in a week. Meanwhile, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group more than doubled their calls. (NA: Hako, 2021).

Christine shared her experience of the beginning of the pandemic and the implementation of lockdown, highlighting that the uncertainty made her feel scared.

So in the beginning, I remember it was very abrupt, [schools] had to close and it was quite scary, obviously because you know, people didn't know what was going on. (P: Christine, L36-37).

Greyling et al. (2020) and Novotny et al. (2020) emphasised the substantial challenges lockdown restrictions generated and the influence these restrictions had over people's well-being. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being was reported frequently throughout news articles and during participant interviews. Teachers reported feeling increased stress, nervousness, and anxiety and emotionally and mentally drained. Some teachers indicated that they felt tired and despondent and that they struggled to remain

positive and cope with the challenges they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, some teachers reported that these challenges influenced their home life, as they had lost loved ones due to the virus or they felt impatient in their personal relationships. Andrea shared the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on her well-being, emphasising that it was draining and difficult to cope.

I know that [COVID is] actually draining me. And then I lose patience at home. (P: Andrea, L357-385). Because COVID, in a way, was almost like a monster taking bites of you. And those bites were from different directions, and [it was important to] just not let it consume you. (P: Andrea, L432-433). I think I became very tired, and almost despondent sometimes, because of the unrealistic expectations. So I think I really had to struggle to keep it in perspective, and struggled to remain positive. (P: Andrea, L450-452).

Ben shared that he did not believe the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on his well-being, however, he indicated that the pandemic influenced his stress due to the increased workload he experienced.

I don't know, I don't necessarily think [COVID impacted my well-being]. Not significantly. (P: Ben, L235). Yes [COVID impacted my stress], I think when COVID hit, the other teachers had said that there were a lot of things that they didn't necessarily have to do beforehand, like presentations and things like that. When we did have to try and create support structures for the kids, one of the things that we put in place was to create like presentations for every single week. Even though the kids didn't necessarily use it, it was quite a lot more admin, and just work that had to be put in place. (P: Ben, L241-245).

Christine shared that she believed she coped with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, although it affected her stress.

I think I'm pretty resilient. So for me, you know, even though, I mean, I can see that it obviously made me a little bit more stressed. And I've had to do a lot more [work], I am very adaptable. And I, I do have outlets, like, you know, going to the gym, and, you know, ways of managing stress. So I think for me, I came out okay. (P: Christine, L191-194). With regards to mental health, I wasn't depressed or anything like that. (P: Christine, L268).

Pressley (2021) argued that the new demands teachers experienced during the pandemic added to their already heavy workloads and enhanced their experiences of anxiety and burnout. Similar accounts were reported in news articles.

The whole [COVID-19 pandemic] was emotionally and mentally exhausting. It did not help hearing people say that teachers were at home doing nothing and therefore should not be paid. (NA: Committed teachers upholding a tough profession in SA, 2020).

Thinking about how something like a pandemic may affect the children, one thinks about their academic, social, emotional progress, the curriculum that needs to be taught, the weaker academic child who cannot afford to miss teaching time and the admin that all still needs to be completed, add a pandemic to that mix, panic and stress become the main emotion (NA: Williams, 2021).

Ann [a Grade 2 teacher] says that ‘teacher burnout’ is a real thing she’s experienced during this pandemic. (NA: Williams, 2021).

The teacher wrote that the exhaustion levels of teachers currently at school is leading to many feeling ill. Hence teacher absenteeism is on the rise. (NA: Must at-risk teachers really now go back despite terror of virus? 2020).

Further stressors that affected many peoples’ well-being throughout the pandemic were the rise in COVID-19 infections and deaths across the country. Many teachers experienced increased stress and anxiety regarding the possibility of being infected with the virus and passing the virus onto their families (Pressley, 2021).

As the rate of deaths escalated [around the country], so did anxiety about infection, death, isolation, disrupted care, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, job losses and fear of recession. ... Dr Porter said a variety of factors were at play in contributing to additional fear and anxiety [during the pandemic], such as: fear of being infected and infecting others, fear of death or loss of loved ones, job losses or change in financial situations, fear of loss of connection or isolation [and the] unknown duration of the pandemic. (NA: Hako, 2021).

In news articles and participant interviews, teachers reported that combined with the challenges of the pandemic, a further impact on their well-being was the inaccessibility of typical resources that promoted their ability to cope and resilience. These resources included reduced salaries and reduced access to their learners, family, friends, colleagues, and spaces for physical exercise due to lockdown restrictions and COVID-19 protocols.

The principal wanted to tell Mary directly that her already modest pay was about to be slashed. Parents were not paying fees during the lockdown. As a teacher appointed by the school governing body, this meant the school had no choice but to cut salaries. Cut by 40%. After the conversation, it hit me (Mary) [that] financially I was in trouble. I cried for a couple of hours. (NA: Committed teachers upholding a tough profession in SA, 2020).

Andrea indicated that resources to speak to counsellors were made available by the DBE, however, these resources were not made available to the teachers in her school as her principal did not believe they were necessary.

And I think there was online resources for [teachers] to speak to counsellors if they needed to but our principal tends to think we [sic] rough and tough, and we must just work hard, and we don't need emotional support. So those resources weren't made available to us. (P: Andrea, L299-301).

Ben indicated that the inaccessibility of his learners enhanced his frustration during the pandemic.

[Before the pandemic] I think the thing I enjoyed the most was the actual interactions with the kids. It was quite frustrating not necessarily having that immediate interaction feedback, I guess, when COVID hit. (P: Ben, L13-15).

Christine indicated that the inaccessibility of her colleagues and friends impacted her emotional well-being, while the closure of gyms and restriction of access to outdoor places impacted her physical well-being.

Emotional well-being, I could say, as I said, with not seeing my colleagues, or teacher friends for a while, in lockdown, you know, working at [home] almost feels like you're working alone. And then also, when we came back, there were really strict rules. We

were not allowed to go and chat to one another in the classes or anything like that. So I think there, my emotions were impacted a little bit. (P: Christine, L264-268).

I'm a very active person. I like to go to the gym and be active. And there was a period of time where they closed the gyms, they didn't allow anybody to go outdoors. And I think then I did struggle a little bit because then my outlet was no longer there. (P: Christine, L254-258). So for me during the hard lockdown, that's when my physical well-being was, I think, impacted. (P: Christine, L260-261).

Further evidence of the impact of the pandemic on teacher's functioning and in some instances their well-being was the increased rate of teacher attrition (Pressley et al., 2021). Enhanced teacher attrition was addressed in both news articles and in participant's interviews.

Teachers who experienced stress at work largely reported that they intended to exit teaching in the next five years. ... The situation was so dire that many teachers wanted to leave the profession. (NA: A quarter of SA s teachers are stressed, 2020).

Christine also highlighted the increased attrition in the teaching profession due to stress.

I know there are teachers who, you know, who were very, very stressed and ended up leaving, because they just couldn't manage anymore. (P: Christine, L195-196).

In participant interviews, teachers briefly mentioned that a loss of autonomy during the pandemic had the potential to affect their stress, especially for teachers who were less flexible regarding the challenges and changes of the pandemic. In Pearlin's stress process model, mastery and autonomy are emphasised as important factors in the life course that mitigate stressors (Pearlin, 1989). Moreover, Pressley (2021) reported the importance of promoting autonomy to moderate stressors and champion resilience.

Table 4.5 provides a summary of the key findings of Theme 5.

Table 4.5

Key findings of Theme 5: Negative influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being

<p>9. Teachers reported feeling increased stress, nervousness and anxiety and emotionally and mentally drained, tired, and despondent. They indicated they struggled to remain positive and cope and that the challenges of the pandemic influenced their home life. However, some teachers indicated that they coped with the pandemic but still experienced increased stress.</p>
<p>10. Teachers indicated their well-being was influenced by lockdowns, COVID-19 infections and deaths and the inaccessibility of typical resources that promoted their well-being, ability to cope and resilience. Consequently, some teachers left the profession as they could not cope with the stressors of the pandemic.</p>

4.4.3 Theme 6: Positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being

4.4.3.1 Subtheme 6.1: Increased resources

While some teachers reported the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their well-being, they also highlighted the increase in resources they had access to during the pandemic that supported their well-being. In this study, each participant emphasised the important role that the support of colleagues, family, and friends and their hobbies played in facilitating their well-being.

At school, we have a very unified team [of teachers], I'm very, very fortunate ... and we all have very good communication within us. (P: Andrea, L48-49). [The teaching team] are very sensible, very grounded, very not prone to panic. Sort of, would think carefully and think things through, which was a huge resource. (P: Andrea, L57-59). I think [during COVID] we became more reliant on one another over time but we've always had the understanding that if we have any difficulties, we can speak to each other in confidence. (P: Andrea, L83-84).

So I know, we wanted to try use OneNote and things like that. And I hadn't used OneNote until I ended up going to school, and trying to do it physically. And having another teacher showed me how to use it. (P: Ben, L146-148).

Yeah, I think definitely my colleagues at work [were a resource during the pandemic]. We kind of were in it together, and we understood each other. So I remember in the beginning, when they were not letting us go to each other's classes, that was very difficult for us, because teachers naturally collaborate. And so I think once they started allowing us to, like interact a little bit more, that's when we started leaning on each other. And you know, even now, today, [if] we are having a bad day, we'll just have like a group and we'll chat about the bad times. (P: Christine, L204-209).

My fiancé being involved in education ... but being in the same field, oh, it's just so nice. So he had very similar problems at a different level to, to [sic] what we were experiencing. (P: Andrea, L108-110). I had teacher friends at different schools that were very open about their own struggles. (P: Andrea, L471).

So I think I did end up communicating a lot more over social media with like, well not social media, but just like communicating with family and friends, I guess. So just keeping in contact with people also just helped alleviate stress. (P: Ben, L284-286).

My family was also very supportive. (P: Christine, L210).

You realise that you are a person and you have a private life, and you have lots of other things going on. (P: Andrea, L432-435).

I guess [I had] additional free time because I wasn't being active. I did things like, you know, watch Netflix, play PlayStation. (P: Ben, L286-288).

Just keeping active and thinking positively, and just doing stuff. I like to do a lot of [things] like crafts and diamond arts and watch TV. So those are the sorts of things that I switch off with. (P: Christine, L210-212).

Additional resources teachers reported that supported their well-being were support from the Department of Education (DBE, 2020a), enhanced teacher training (Gurung, 2021), access to technology, and psychological support. Andrea shared her experience of the support she received from the DBE.

The [DBE] had like a workbook for [the learners] and every child got one free of charge. So during COVID, they were able to refer to that, which was hugely helpful. (P: Andrea, L27-28). The [DBE] actually gave us a structure of how to catch up [lost

learning time]. So we got a lot of support from the Gauteng education department of how to do things in a certain way. So that the education department did support the teachers, but from a, how can I say, a practical aspect, not from the emotional side. (P: Andrea, L294-297).

Ben highlighted the increased access to teacher training and technology as a resource.

Teams at the time had quite a few training programmes. (P: Ben, L325). There has definitely been a boom in the available, like technological support structures or just strategies, I guess, like OneNote, or Microsoft Teams, or I guess even Zoom, being able to do things online with kids is quite a good improvement and the amount of resources available, I think it's a lot easier to find material or content. (P: Ben, L399-402).

Enhanced teacher training opportunities and access to psychological support were further highlighted in news articles from September 2020–January 2021.

A new project aims to educate teachers on how to better relate to pupils in the classroom and foster a better teaching environment, as well as uplift youth from disadvantaged communities. (NA: Helping teachers relate to their pupils, 2020).

We need to support each other in the months ahead. Staff can also seek the services of our Employee Health and Wellness Programme ... for counselling support and assistance. (NA: World Teachers Day hails selfless educators, 2020).

Gade said psychological services had been provided for teachers and pupils (NA: Ignoring rules caused COVID outbreak at Burgersdorp school, 2020).

Moreover, in news articles, support from teachers' communities, learners' parents, resources to protect teachers from COVID-19 infections (such as access to PPE), and improved working conditions were mentioned as increased resources to which some teachers had access.

4.4.3.2 Subtheme 6.2: Increased personal strengths

In addition to the increased resources teachers reported during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers also reported personal strengths they developed or used to cope with the challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. These strengths included flexibility, adaptability, optimism, gratitude, perseverance, prioritising, asking others for help, empathy, and

compassion for others as well as maintaining a work-life balance. Andrea emphasised the personal strengths she experienced during the pandemic.

So I think in myself, I learnt that this is just a challenge and it's not a problem. And we just go in and we do our best. (P: Andrea, L93-94). I think [it's important to have] the ability to take incoming things one at a time. And if something's coming in, just to put it on the side and say, I'll deal with it as soon as I can. (P: Andrea, L427-428). You realise that you are a person and you have a private life, and you have lots of other things going on. And actually just to contain all of this as a job. (P: Andrea, L432-435).

I think I've become much more aware of children that struggle, or become much more aware of the diversity and the real struggles that a great amount of the people in our population, in our country have. And I've become more responsive, more empathetic, more sympathetic. I think I give the children a second chance. (P: Andrea, L485-488). So I think, from an emotional point of view, I've learnt a lot more. (P: Andrea, L500).

I think that my skills I'm not so afraid of technology as I was before, and just to know that there's so many people that will help me. So I think it's taught me to reach out. (P: Andrea, L500-502).

[The pandemic] makes you flexible, it makes you adaptable, it makes you prioritise things, it makes you see things from a different perspective. I think COVID, if we had rose coloured glasses on, it took those off. And you really see things from a very ... raw perspective. So I think, to see the amount of suffering was a huge eye-opener, and you have to overcome that. And there is so much goodness that came out of that, the support, the linking in, being aware of other people's struggles, being kinder towards children, being kinder towards colleagues. (P: Andrea, L511-517). It taught me a lot of things I think that I might never have been exposed to in the normal way. (P: Andrea, L518-519).

Ben's implicit positive attitude or positive thinking was emphasised as a personal strength through the answers he shared regarding his experience of the pandemic.

I think also, with that being one of the first jobs that I had, I didn't have anything to, kind of compare it to. So I just kind of assumed that this is what I have to deal with. So whether it was a positive attitude, or just being naive. But yeah, I think I didn't

really need to complain about it at the time. And also, yeah, just being grateful that I got a job during COVID and not being let go. Is quite a big plus, having an income and things like that. I think I was quite lucky. (P: Ben, L335-340).

Christine emphasised the personal strengths she experienced during the pandemic.

I am very adaptable. (P: Christine, L192-193). My personality is quite resilient. And so I think I adapted and [tried] to find outlets so that I could cope with the stress and also just learn to shut off. Sometimes, you just have to shut off and not take the work home with you. And know that you can do it tomorrow. So yeah, it's about coping strategies, at the end of the day. (P: Christine, L196-200). And yeah, just as I said, just keeping active and thinking positively and just doing stuff [helped me cope]. (P: Christine, L210-211). Well, I know that one thing is I work well under pressure. (P: Christine, L223). So I think, yeah, that and just being determined to, you know, overcome any challenges. So I like challenges, I like overcoming them. (P: Christine, L225-226).

Throughout news articles from September 2020–November 2021 and participant interviews, teachers' resilience was often highlighted and teachers were praised for their resilience throughout the pandemic.

The president said it had been equally difficult for teachers. Despite the risk posed by the virus and resource challenges inside our schools, the majority of our teachers heeded the call to return to school. They put in the extra hours to get our pupils over the finish line, making the most of the resources they had to ensure learning continued. (NA: Ramaphosa's best wishes, 2020).

Ramaphosa said he appreciated that some teachers may have been understandably and justifiably reluctant to return to school but their passion for education triumphed over fear and anxiety. (NA: Ramaphosa praises teachers at SADTU's 30th celebration, 2020).

Furthermore, in news articles and participant interviews, the experience to cope with challenges, problem solving, self-confidence, being kinder to oneself, and remaining calm were all strengths that were mentioned that supported teachers' well-being throughout the pandemic.

Table 4.6 provides a summary of the key findings of Theme 6.

Table 4.6

Key findings of Theme 6: Positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' well-being

11. Teachers reported increased external resources and increased personal strengths they developed or used during the pandemic that supported their well-being.
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The influence of the pandemic on teachers' well-being provided further insight into teachers' perceptions of the potential role educational psychologists could fulfil within the school system as a social resource during times of crises. This includes both mitigating the negative influences of the pandemic on teachers' well-being and enhancing the positive outcomes of adversity that help build a person's resilience. Teachers' perceptions of the role of educational psychologists as a social resource is explored further in Theme 7.

4.5 Secondary Research Question Addressed: What Was the Role of Educational Psychologists in Addressing the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Teachers?

The theme in this section relates to teachers' perceptions of the role of educational psychologists as a social resource during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thereby it provides insight into the potential role educational psychologists could provide in moderating teachers' stressors, promoting their agency and ability to cope and championing their mental health, well-being, and resilience (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Pearlin, 1989).

4.5.1 Theme 7: Teachers' need for psychological support, school support structures and teacher training

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the additional stressors many people experienced had the potential to negatively affect people's well-being and enhance their psychological distress.

As the world grapples with one of the most baffling [pandemics], we are going to see a phenomenal rise in mental illnesses due to isolation, poverty, starvation, severe job losses, homelessness, and salary cuts. (NA: Dangers of mental illness, 2020).

This is why, according to SASOP [South African Society of Psychiatrists], mental health is the biggest threat of 2021 - and we all need to learn the correct tools and mechanisms for coping and re-centering ourselves. (NA: Hako, 2021).

As a result, news articles from September 2020–November 2021 highlighted that many teachers reported an enhanced need for psychological support to help learn and implement the tools and coping mechanisms required to effectively cope with the pandemic.

[A parliamentary question was sent to the Minister of the Department of Education inquiring] whether her department had employed the services of psychologists to assist teachers and pupils facing anxieties at being forced to return to school despite fears of the virus. The minister said the provincial departments have historically employed psychologists and social workers to support pupils and teachers. However, there are severe shortages due to the expected impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of learners and educators, and the limited psychosocial support capacity within the sector. (NA: Department to provide psychosocial support to returning pupils, 2020).

Andrea expressed that at her school, the psychological support offered for teachers in the form of a wellness committee was well intentioned but did not address the more concerning issues that were affecting teachers' well-being. She further emphasised that the support from the DBE was more practical than emotional support and highlighted the need for an educational psychologist to support the teachers at her school.

So at school, they had a wellness committee, and they would try their best to look after the teachers wellness, but it actually wasn't addressing the issues. It was like buying a chocolate for the person and saying, I hope you have a happy day. (P: Andrea, L454-456). So I had some issues with the thinking on the wellness committee that although it was well intentioned, it wasn't actually serving the purpose of looking after wellness, but I don't know if I didn't have an unrealistic expectation. And I expected them to be more sort of meet do meaningful things. (P: Andrea, L460-463).

So that the education department did support the teachers, but from a, how can I say, a practical aspect, not from the emotional side. (P: Andrea, L296-297). And I would really like to see a counsellor, educational counsellor come in, just to deal with the teachers. (P: Andrea, L138-139).

Ben indicated that at his school, while there was access to psychological support for teachers it was not used effectively due to the conflicting roles of the counsellor. Thus, he indicated that he believes access to an educational psychologist would have been more beneficial.

So I think at least at [school's name], we technically do have a qualified counsellor. But I think that it shouldn't be the principal, it should be someone that is a little bit more qualified, somebody who continuously practices in that field of work ... So I think at least our school would have benefitted a lot more if there was an educational psychologist. (P: Ben, L370-375).

Christine indicated that there was a lack of psychological support for teachers at her school.

I'll be honest, I don't think we were given support structures. There was no counsellor or anything that we could go speak to. We didn't have anything like that. ... So they didn't offer us much. I mean, they will say you can come speak to us. But there is no one that specifically we could go speak to. So no, nothing that they offered us. (P: Christine, L215-219).

This highlighted the role educational psychologists could have fulfilled in the school system during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, when the participants were questioned about the role educational psychologists could provide in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers and learners, the participants had the following insights regarding a more permanent school support structure. Andrea explained that she believed educational psychologists could support teachers' and learners' well-being and that she had previously experienced the benefits of educational psychology for learners.

The role of the educational psychologist, I think, to come in as an outsider, and just to listen to what the teachers' complaints are, and just to redirect, their thinking would be absolutely fantastic. (P: Andrea, L152-154). I think an educational psychologist will understand what the teacher is going through, but from a sort of analytical point of view, but with empathy, and be able to pinpoint where that teacher's overreacting or hasn't got enough strength, or just put things in a different, sort of more level perspective. So I think educational psychologists for children and for teachers are absolutely fantastic. (P: Andrea, L119-123).

I think the psychologist could come in and be the support system and teach the [learners'] study skills and how not to be overwhelmed. Because some children

actually just sit there in a daze, they have got so much coming at them all the time that they just switch off. So to teach that child, how to not switch off and how to just process things, sort of life skills, from a psychological perspective that could be planted now before they become teenagers. Once they open to listening to you. And thinking about what you said and incorporating that into their lives, I think early intervention is really the trigger. (P: Andrea, L169-175). So I think it would be quite important for the teacher to teach, and the educational psychologist to deal with the more complex, sort of more advanced, sort of core things of actually learning and how do you learn when you've got all this disruption, and what you do to yourself to calm yourself down. (P: Andrea, L177-180). [Developing] resilience and skills. (P: Andrea, L184).

I also have personal experience [with] educational psychologists, who've dealt at our school with children, and they have turned those children's lives around, if the parent is prepared to acknowledge a problem and go for counselling, those children benefit, they start singing again, they start being happy, even if they go to counselling at school. They come in, and the little burdens off the shoulders. (P: Andrea, L156-160).

Ben emphasised that he believes educational psychologists could play a more permanent role in schools.

So I think educational psychologists might have a more important, permanent role in schools, maybe they can be employed in schools as a support structure, not just as somebody to go for counselling, but they can be more active in the active roles in the school. (P: Ben, L391-393). But if they're actively involved in the kids' day-to-day activities, then I think it would be beneficial. (P: Ben, L395-396).

Christine indicated that she believes educational psychologists could identify learners' gaps, assess learners' cognitive and scholastic abilities and support learners' emotionally, especially as some learners are still struggling to cope after the lockdowns. She further emphasised the impact of the pandemic on younger learners' skill development and the role educational psychologists could play in early identification of learning disorders.

So [educational psychologists] could definitely find out what kinds of gaps there are in [the learners'] cognitive learning and the education, and as well as the fact some of the learners other than academic performance that they are struggling with, they're struggling emotionally. (P: Christine, L286-288). I know that the teachers in the Early

Childhood Development (ECD) Centre are saying they are struggling the most, because a lot of the ECD programmes were interrupted with COVID. So, and there's a lot of programmes in the ECD training that are quite important for the learners when they go to the foundation phase. So some of the [children] are not able to do the fine motor skills, they are struggling to write. For instance, I have children now in Grade four, who we've only just picked up [has] dyslexia. Because it was missed. It was missed in his younger years, because of COVID. So hopefully educational psychologists could help us pick up problems earlier. (P: Christine, L297-307).

Furthermore, during the pandemic, teachers emphasised the importance of resilience training as well as training to help them understand how to support their learners and teach learners appropriate coping mechanisms as their learners' well-being was also affected during the pandemic. Ben shared his insights into this training.

Maybe training can be put in place to actually try and get teachers to also understand the basic cues [to know if learners are coping or not]. Maybe you can train teachers to also kind of look at signs or just give them the tools to try and help their kids out. (P: Ben, L343-346). Yeah, I also think resilience training is important. Maybe also resilience training for the teachers themselves. One of my stressors [during the pandemic] was not being able to know if the kids were coping or not. Educational psychologists teaching us how to pick up those cues would maybe relieve that stress for us, even though it's indirectly [supporting teachers]. (P: Ben, L348-351).

During the pandemic, the need for teacher training to assist learners emotionally was further emphasised in news articles in November 2020.

Calls have mounted for government to equip teachers to identify depression and implement suicide prevention for pupils. By giving teachers practical advice and tools on how to identify and talk about teen depression and suicide, they can help save the lives of many students. (NA: Call to tackle teen suicides, 2020).

Table 4.7 provides a summary of the key findings of Theme 7.

Table 4.7

Key findings of Theme 7: Teachers' need for psychological support, school support structures and teacher training

12. Teachers' perceptions of the role educational psychologists could fulfil within the school system included a **need for psychological support, permanent school support structures**, such as supporting teachers' and learners' well-being, identifying learners' gaps, assessing learners' cognitive and scholastic abilities, supporting learners' emotionally, and early identification of learning disorders and **enhanced teacher training**, such as resilience training.

4.6 Summary

A summary of the key findings across all seven themes in the data analysis of this research study conveys the following information.

1. Teachers experienced **difficulties with using online education**, such as the *rapid transition* to online education, the *enhanced workload* to implement and use online education and their *learners' access* to online education and *learners' online engagement and performance*.
2. However, teachers also experienced the **benefits of using online education**, such as *connecting* with others during the pandemic, *enhanced teacher training* and the *ease, flexibility, and comfort* of teaching online.
3. Teachers reported **concerns regarding their learners** throughout the pandemic. These included *disadvantaged learners' access to online education*, the *loss of learning time* and the impact of the pandemic on *learners' academic development* and *well-being* as many learners struggled to cope.
4. Teachers experienced challenges with the extended lockdown and the **phased reopening of schools** as lockdowns threatened their jobs, and rotational timetables and hybrid learning approaches resulted in additional lost learning time.
5. Teachers reported **difficulties enforcing the COVID-19 protocols** upon returning to schools. They had **concerns regarding COVID-19 infections** and a lack of adequate protection from infections. However, schools were often not sites of infection.
6. Nonetheless, teachers were still **at risk of contracting the virus** and many teachers lost their lives due to COVID-19 infections.
7. Teachers' already **heavy workloads were increased** during the pandemic by teacher shortages, transitioning to and using online education, working from home, meeting parental demands, preparing for schools to reopen, increased admin, implementing

COVID-19 procedures at schools, and engaging in remedial work with learners to address gaps in their knowledge. This led to longer working hours, limited work-life balance, increased pressure in the work environment and increased experiences of stress and exhaustion.

8. Teachers' **challenging and often adverse working conditions** present prior to the COVID-19 pandemic increased teachers' stressors during the pandemic.
9. Teachers reported feeling increased **stress, nervousness and anxiety, and emotionally and mentally drained, tired, and despondent**. They indicated they struggled to remain positive and cope and that the challenges of the pandemic influenced their home life. However, some teachers indicated that they coped with the pandemic but still experienced increased stress.
10. Teachers indicated their well-being was influenced by lockdowns, COVID-19 infections and deaths and the **inaccessibility of typical resources** that promoted their well-being, ability to cope and resilience. Consequently, some teachers left the profession as they could not cope with the stressors of the pandemic.
11. Teachers reported **increased external resources and increased personal strengths** they developed or used during the pandemic that supported their well-being.
12. Teachers' perceptions of the role educational psychologists could fulfil within the school system included a **need for psychological support, permanent school support structures**, such as supporting teachers' and learners' well-being, identifying learners' gaps, assessing learners' cognitive and scholastic abilities, supporting learners' emotionally, and early identification of learning disorders and **enhanced teacher training**, such as resilience training.

In this chapter, I discussed the findings of the study with specific reference to the participants' responses to the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992) and the seven themes and 11 subthemes I identified in the thematic data analysis in relation to the research questions of the study. In Chapter Five, I present the main findings and conclusions of my research study. Furthermore, I discuss the contributions and limitations of my study and recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four, I discussed the participants' responses to the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992) and the themes and subthemes I identified in the thematic data analysis of the study. The findings of the study were supported by relevant quotes and discussed in relation to the available literature and the conceptual framework of the study. Moreover, I presented a summary of the key findings of the study.

In this chapter, I present the main findings and conclusions of my study with specific reference to the research questions proposed in Chapter One. I discuss the potential contributions and limitations of my research as well as recommendations for future research and practice.

5.2 Main Findings of the Study

To answer the primary research question of this study, it is crucial to first consider the secondary research questions. In the following section, I will organise the key findings of the study according to the secondary research questions that they address.

5.2.1 Secondary research question I

During the thematic analysis it became evident that Themes 1–4 addressed the secondary research question, '*What educational challenges do South African teachers experience as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?*' The key findings that emerged for these themes include the following.

1. Teachers experienced **difficulties with using online education**, such as the *rapid transition* to online education, the *enhanced workload* to implement and use online education, their *learners' access* to online education and *learners' online engagement and performance*.
2. However, teachers also experienced **benefits when using online education**, such as *connecting* with others during the pandemic, *enhanced teacher training*, and the *ease, flexibility, and comfort* of teaching online.
3. Teachers reported **concerns regarding their learners** throughout the pandemic. These included *disadvantaged learners' access to online education*, the *loss of learning time* and

the impact of the pandemic on *learners' academic development* and *well-being* as many learners struggled to cope.

4. Teachers experienced challenges with the extended lockdown and the **phased reopening of schools** as lockdowns threatened their jobs, and rotational timetables and hybrid learning approaches resulted in additional lost learning time.
5. Teachers reported **difficulties enforcing the COVID-19 protocols** upon returning to schools as well as **concern regarding COVID-19 infections** and a lack of adequate protection from infections. However, schools were often not sites of infection.
6. Nonetheless, teachers were still **at risk of contracting the virus** and many teachers lost their lives due to COVID-19 infections.
7. Teachers' already **heavy workloads were enhanced** during the pandemic by teacher shortages, the transition to and use of online education, working from home, meeting parental demands, preparing for schools to reopen, increased admin, implementing COVID-19 procedures at schools, and engaging in remedial work with learners to address gaps in their knowledge. This led to longer working hours, limited work-life balance, increased pressure in the work environment and increased experiences of stress and exhaustion.
8. Teachers' **challenging and often adverse working conditions** present prior to the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced teachers' stressors during the pandemic.

These findings not only address the challenges teachers experienced during the pandemic but also provide insight into teachers' general experiences during this time. Themes 1–4 highlight both the challenges and positive experiences teachers encountered throughout the pandemic, including their experiences of lockdown and the closing of schools, implementing remote, online education, and the return to schools as lockdown regulations were lifted. From March 2020 to March 2021 teachers experienced various challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic; these included the transition to and use of online education, learner-specific stressors, the phased reopening of schools and teacher-specific stressors.

The rapid transition to online education was challenging for teachers as they reported having minimal or no training and/or previous experience of working online. Moreover, teachers and learners struggled to use the technology required for online education and experienced difficulties accessing online education due to financial constraints and inadequate resources. Teachers further reported experiencing difficulties with marking learners' work online and implementing online assessments as they suspected some learners were cheating. In addition, the implementation and use of online education was challenging for teachers as it

enhanced their already heavy workload, increased their frustrations as online teaching required new and different teaching methods and amplified their concern for their learners.

Teachers reported concerns regarding their learners working online as learners' online engagement was low, their work was incomplete, it was difficult to monitor their understanding online, and teachers suspected that learners' distractibility was enhanced at home, especially if they were unsupervised. Consequently, teachers reported that they were increasingly concerned regarding their learners' attainment of knowledge and academic performance online. However, teachers also reported positive experiences with the use of online education as they emphasised various advantages. Teachers indicated that online education afforded them the opportunity to connect with others (learners, parents, and colleagues) during the pandemic and enhanced their opportunities to engage in teacher training on implementing and using online education. Furthermore, teachers explained that the ease, flexibility, and comfort of teaching online was beneficial during the pandemic.

In addition to the online education challenges teachers experienced, teachers also reported challenges with learner-specific stressors throughout the pandemic. These learner-specific stressors included the impact of the pandemic on disadvantaged learners, learners' academic development, and learners' well-being. Some teachers explained they felt increased stress and concern regarding the many disadvantaged learners in South Africa who were unable to access online education throughout the pandemic and the consequences of this lost learning time and lack of effective education on disadvantaged learners' development. Consequently, some teachers were worried about the many disadvantaged learners that fell further behind in the curriculum, in comparison to wealthier learners who could access online education.

The amount of lost learning time during the pandemic was a further challenge teachers experienced and as a result, many teachers were concerned about their learners' academic development. The lost learning time led to many learners falling further behind in the curriculum and as they developed gaps in their knowledge their academic performance declined and over time, school dropout rates increased. In addition, many teachers were perturbed by the potential impact of the pandemic on learners' well-being and motivation. Teachers were concerned about their learners' well-being as many learners struggled to cope during the pandemic due to increased social isolation, loss of social protection and social services typically offered at schools and increased parental anxiety and job loss.

Furthermore, the extension of lockdown in South Africa was challenging for many teachers as the longer lockdown continued the more threatened teachers' jobs became. However, as

lockdown restrictions eased and schools were allowed to reopen, teachers also experienced challenges with the phased reopening of schools due to the difficulties of implementing rotational timetables and hybrid learning approaches and enforcing new COVID-19 procedures. Moreover, returning to schools presented the challenge of increased risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus.

The implementation of rotational timetables and hybrid learning approaches further impacted the amount of lost learning time learners experienced and placed additional pressures on teachers. Enforcing COVID-19 procedures at schools added to teachers' heavy workloads and affected their ability to effectively engage with learners and monitor their understanding and progress. Furthermore, the phased reopening of schools enhanced teachers' concern regarding increased COVID-19 infections, the fear of possibly transmitting the virus to their families, adequate protection from infections as some schools lacked effective personal protective equipment, experienced staff shortages and space constraints and delayed access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Despite many teachers' concerns, it was reported that often schools were not sites of infection and that teachers were not at a higher risk of contracting the virus in comparison to other employees who returned to work during this time. However, teachers were still at risk of contracting the virus and throughout the pandemic many teachers lost their lives due to COVID-19 infections.

During the phased reopening of schools, some teachers were granted comorbidity leave until it was safer to return to school. During this time, teachers that remained at schools were expected to take on their colleagues' workload due to teacher shortages which often meant teachers' already heavy workloads were enhanced. This increased pressure in many teachers' working environments, led to longer working hours, enhanced their experiences of stress, and exhaustion and reduced their work-life balance. In addition, teachers' workloads were influenced by online education and working from home, meeting parental demands, preparing for schools to reopen, increased admin, implementing COVID-19 procedures at schools, and engaging in remedial work with learners.

During the pandemic, teachers were further challenged by the adverse working conditions in which they were expected to teach. These conditions included poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, school violence, low pay, vandalism and burglary and being treated poorly by parents. These were present prior to the pandemic but continued to create challenges for teachers during the pandemic, thereby enhancing teachers' stressors.

5.2.2 Secondary research question II

During the thematic analysis it became evident that Themes 5 and 6 addressed the secondary research question, '*How did these educational challenges impact South African teachers' well-being?*' The key findings that emerged for these themes included the following.

9. Teachers reported feeling increased **stress, nervousness, anxiety, being emotionally and mentally drained, tired, and despondent**. They indicated they struggled to remain positive and cope and that the challenges of the pandemic influenced their home life. However, some teachers indicated that they coped with the pandemic but still experienced increased stress.
10. Teachers indicated their well-being was influenced by lockdowns, COVID-19 infections and deaths, and the **inaccessibility of typical resources** that promoted their well-being, ability to cope and resilience. Consequently, some teachers left the profession as they could not cope with the stressors of the pandemic.
11. Teachers reported **increased external resources and increased personal strengths** they developed or used during the pandemic that supported their well-being.

These findings address teachers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic that highlight both the negative impact of the pandemic on their well-being and the positive outcomes of the pandemic on their well-being. Teachers reported that their well-being was negatively influenced by the implementation of lockdown restrictions during the pandemic which contributed towards their feelings of uncertainty and psychological distress. Moreover, teachers emphasised that their well-being was negatively influenced by the increase in COVID-19 infections and COVID-19 related deaths as these difficulties contributed towards feelings of fear and anxiety, especially regarding the possibility of passing the virus onto family members. Some teachers indicated that their well-being was negatively affected by the inaccessibility of resources that typically promoted their well-being, ability to cope and resilience due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These inaccessible resources included reduced salaries and access to learners, family, friends, colleagues, and spaces for physical exercise during lockdowns. Some teachers reported that because of the typical stressors associated with the teaching profession, combined with the challenges of the pandemic and the negative impact on their well-being, they struggled to cope and left the profession.

While the various challenges and stressors of the pandemic had the potential to negatively affect teachers' well-being, teachers also experienced an increase in external resources and internal strengths that promoted their well-being, ability to cope and resilience during the pandemic. These resources included support from others (such as colleagues, family

members, friends, the DBE, the school's community, and learners' parents), teachers' engagement with hobbies, access to enhanced teacher training, technology, psychological support, resources to protect themselves from COVID-19 infections (such as access to PPEs), and improved working conditions. Teachers' strengths included enhanced resilience, flexibility, adaptability, optimism, gratitude, perseverance, prioritising, asking others for help, empathy and compassion for others, maintaining a work-life balance, experience to cope with challenges, problem solving, self-confidence, being kinder to oneself and remaining calm.

5.2.3 Secondary research question III

During the thematic analysis it became clear that Theme 7 addressed the secondary research question, *'What is the role of educational psychologists in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers?'* The key findings that emerged for this theme included the following.

12. Teachers' perceptions of the role educational psychologists could fulfil within the school system included a **need for psychological support** and **permanent school support structures**, such as supporting teachers' and learners' well-being, identifying learners' gaps, assessing learners' cognitive and scholastic abilities, supporting learners' emotionally, early identification of learning disorders and **enhanced teacher training**, such as resilience training.

These findings address teachers' perceptions of the role educational psychologists could fulfil within the school system to enhance teachers' support in times of crises and in general. Teachers' perceptions of the role educational psychologists could fulfil within the school system included enhanced psychological support for teachers. Many teachers reported an enhanced need for psychological support during the pandemic to help learn and implement the tools and coping mechanisms required to effectively cope during times of crises. Thus, teachers emphasised the important role educational psychologists could play in both mitigating the negative influences of the pandemic (or future crises) on teachers' well-being and enhancing the positive outcomes of experiencing adversity that help build a person's resilience. Some teachers emphasised the role of educational psychologists as a permanent school support structure. Teachers indicated that this school support structure could provide support for teachers' and learners' well-being, identify learners' gaps, assess their cognitive and scholastic abilities, support learners' emotionally, and assist in the early identification of learning disorders. Teachers indicated that this increased support for learners could alleviate some of their experiences of stress and concern for their learners' academic development and well-being during times of crises. Teachers further emphasised the need for teacher training

and the role educational psychologists could fulfil in providing training, such as resilience training and training teachers to understand how to support their learners and teach their learners appropriate tools and coping mechanisms to support their own well-being.

5.2.4 Primary research question

'What is the possible impact, if any, of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of South African teachers?'

Pearlin (1989) argues that challenges or stressors have the potential to affect people's well-being, while resources and personal strengths have the potential to moderate stressors and enhance people's ability to cope. While it is evident that teachers experienced various challenges or stressors during the pandemic that compounded the typical stressors experienced in the profession, teachers also reported access to resources and personal strengths that promoted their ability to cope. These challenges included lockdown and the closure of schools, transition to remote online education, disparity in learners' access to online education, the impact of the pandemic on learners, returning to schools during the pandemic and enforcing COVID-19 protocols, the risk of COVID-19 infections and COVID-19 related deaths, teacher shortages, and the enhanced workload and past stressors present in the profession before the pandemic. These resources included support from colleagues, family, friends, the DBE, the school's community and learners' parents, engagement with hobbies, access to enhanced teacher training, technology, psychological support, resources to protect themselves from COVID-19 infections (such as access to PPE), and improved working conditions. The personal strengths included enhanced resilience, flexibility, adaptability, optimism, gratitude, perseverance, prioritising, asking others for help, empathy and compassion for others, maintaining a work-life balance, experience to cope with challenges, problem solving, self-confidence, being kinder to oneself, and remaining calm.

Teachers reported experiencing increased stressors and that at times they struggled to cope with the challenges of the pandemic; however, they also reported that they managed to cope during the pandemic and rated their subjective well-being on the higher end of the TWBI (Dalbert, 1992). It is clear that the primary and secondary stressors teachers experienced that were generated by the pandemic reduced or mediated teachers' access to the typical resources used to moderate stressors and promote well-being. However, it is also evident that the resources and strengths teachers had access to during the pandemic moderated the stressors they experienced and enhanced their ability to cope. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to cause psychological distress and affect teachers' well-being, however, the teachers in this study were able to moderate these stressors and champion their resilience

with access to external resources and use of internal strengths. Perhaps in a different context with more challenges or stressors and less access to external resources and internal strengths teachers would have reported different experiences and perspectives and may not have coped with the stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers in this study emphasised their need for psychological support, permanent school support structures in the form of educational psychologists, and enhanced teacher training to promote their well-being and champion their resilience.

5.3 Potential Contributions of the Study

A theoretical contribution offered by this study includes insight into the experiences and perspectives of three teachers in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic contributing towards an understanding of South African teachers' stressors, well-being, and resilience during times of crises. Moreover, this study contributes towards the available research in the South African context, which is somewhat limited in comparison to first-world countries.

A practical contribution offered by this study includes a starting point to guide future research studies in this area of research as well as guidance regarding the practice of educational psychologists within the school system and where their areas of expertise may be required to support the resilience of teachers and the education system.

A methodological contribution offered by this study is the use of the two theories that informed the conceptual framework, namely, Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and Pearlin's stress process model (Pearlin, 1989). The conceptual framework of the study provided the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' development and functioning within the various systems in which they developed during the pandemic and the impact of stressors, resources, and strengths within these systems on their resilience and well-being, as well as teachers' abilities to moderate these stressors. This in-depth understanding complemented the interpretive and qualitative approach as well as the exploratory case study design of the study as these methodological choices all require researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of their topic. Furthermore, as the data was collected from numerous data sources over an extended period during the pandemic (news articles from March 2020–March 2021 and participant interviews reflecting on this time in 2022), the findings further provide an in-depth understanding of the primary and secondary research questions of the study. Thus, a similar combination of the conceptual framework and methodological approaches could be used in other qualitative studies to produce an in-depth understanding of the research topic.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study include the difficulty in accessing participants for the interview process. Initially, due to the time constraints and limitations of the mini-dissertation, too many participants showed interest in taking part in the study and after implementing the general information form to select participants for the interview process, too few participants wanted to take part in the study. Thus, the findings of the study cannot be generalised to a wider population. However, this was not the purpose of the study and the insights gained from the participants still offer a meaningful understanding of my research topic. Moreover, the use of Google Forms for the general information form and TWBI (Dalbert, 1992) generated more data from a new source than originally planned. In addition, participants' answers to the Google Form permitted an in-depth analysis and offered further insight into the participants' well-being and ability to cope during the pandemic. While this study cannot be generalised to a wider population, it could provide valuable insight into other contexts at the readers' discretion. These contexts include situations in which access to online education is limited by technology or situations in which teachers and learners engage in online schooling without effective training or resources and the quality of education in these contexts.

A further limitation of the study concerns the use of online sampling and online data generation techniques to select the research sites and participants of the study. Only schools and teachers with access to the internet, devices, and email accounts were able to participate in the study due to the online techniques used. Thus, lower quintile ranking schools and teachers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were not able to participate in this study. This further impacts the generalisability of the study; however, it also presents the opportunity for future research to include lower quintile ranking schools and teachers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Furthermore, a limitation of the online data generation techniques used was the technical difficulties experienced over Zoom, such as connection difficulties and the limited time of the online session as group meetings are limited to 40 minutes. To mitigate this challenge, interviews were paused and a new session was started to continue the interview process; however, this affected the flow of conversation.

5.5 Recommendations

5.5.1 Recommendations for future research

While the pandemic has mostly come to an end, the findings of this study highlighted gaps in the available literature with regard to online education and the need to support teachers' well-being. Thus, the recommendations for future research could include the following.

- The competencies required to engage in effective online education for both teachers and learners.
- The skills required for the future of teacher training in both online education and technological aspects as well as resiliency training to promote teachers' own well-being and ability to cope.
- Exploring South African teachers' resilience and the contributors towards their resilience could produce meaningful insights into supporting teachers in future crises, mitigating their stressors, and promoting the resilience of the overall workforce and education system.

5.5.2 Recommendations for practice

As the results from this study highlighted teachers' need for support in crises, the following recommendations for practice could include the following.

- Enhancing teachers' access to psychological support to promote well-being and resilience as well as reduce teacher burnout throughout the school year (Pressley, 2021).
- In applying Theron's (2018) pathways to resilience to this research study, it would be essential to promote resilience by recognising, understanding, and fostering teachers' strengths and potential for well-being and acknowledging and trying to mitigate the challenges or stressors teachers experience.
- In applying Theron's (2018) pathways to resilience to this research study, it would be essential to promote resilience by encouraging the development of resources and strengths that teachers identify as beneficial to support their ability to cope, such as connections with family, friends, and learners, access to teacher training as well as promoting the development of personal characteristics, such as flexibility, problem solving, and optimism.
- In applying Theron's (2018) pathways to resilience to this research study, it would be essential to promote resilience by enhancing teachers' access to these resources.
- Providing teachers with effective support within the school environment to reduce their stressors (DBE, 2021b; Pressley, 2021), such as ensuring that learners' well-being and academic development is supported.
- Providing teachers with resiliency training to develop practical skills, tools, and coping mechanisms to support their well-being and resilience as well as empower themselves and others with this knowledge (DBE, 2021b).

5.6 Final Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to explore South African teachers' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their well-being from March 2020 to March 2021. Although this research study was limited in its sample, it provides meaningful insight into the stressors teachers experienced during the pandemic, the impact of the pandemic on teachers' well-being as well as the role educational psychologists can provide in times of crises. The findings were similar to those provided in the available literature and highlighted that while there were many stressors that impacted teachers' well-being during the pandemic, there were also factors, such as external resources and internal strengths, that promoted teachers' abilities to cope and championed their resilience during the pandemic. Moreover, it emphasised the crucial need for educational psychologists within the school system and the roles that could be fulfilled in these systems in general and especially in times of crises. While the findings provide valuable insights, further research in South Africa could enhance our understanding of the competencies and skills required for the future of teacher training to provide effective online education and the resources and strengths required for promoting, fostering, and championing teachers' well-being and resilience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: News articles

The news articles that were analysed in this study are stored on a password-protected Google Drive folder. (See a screenshot of the news articles stored on the Drive).

News articles stored on the Drive:



Appendix B: Principals' informed consent letters



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

LETTER OF PERMISSION

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

South African teachers' experiences of educational challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

NAME OF RESEARCHER:

Jessica Millar

NAME OF SUPERVISOR:

Professor S. Human-Vogel

CONTACT DETAILS OF RESEARCHER:

jessymillar@gmail.com

0790395410

Dear Mr. / Mrs.

1. INTRODUCTION

I would like to invite your school to participate in a research study I am conducting as part of a mini dissertation for the partial fulfillment of a MA Educational Psychology degree from the University of Pretoria. The information in this document is provided to help you in understanding what my research study entails, what constitutes as participation, and what is expected, as well as to assist you in deciding whether your staff and institution would be interested in participating. Should you have any questions, which are not fully explained in this document, you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor. Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary.

2. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The aim of this study is to explore and describe the educational challenges South African teachers experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, I wish to learn more about the impact of these challenges on teachers' stress levels and well-being, as well as the role educational psychologists can provide in addressing the possible impact of the current pandemic on teachers.

3. EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES AND EXPECTATIONS FROM PARTICIPATION

For the purpose of this study, four teachers from your school will be invited for an interview. One teacher from each of the following phases is required: foundation, intermediate, senior, and further education and training. After school hours, each participant will take part in an individual interview online, such as with Zoom or telephonically, depending on the participant's access to technology and data. Interviews will be approximately one hour in length. Questions around the educational challenges teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 to March 2021, as well as the impact of these challenges and the pandemic on teachers' stress levels and well-being and the role teachers believe

educational psychologists can provide to address the impact of these challenges, will be discussed. In addition, I will interview eight teachers in total from two different schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng, to compare my findings. A copy of the outcome and findings of this research study may be obtained from the researcher once the study has been finalised, should you wish to review it.

4. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED

There are no foreseen risks associated with this study. The only possible risk and discomfort involved are acknowledging the emotional trigger of discussing COVID-19 and the experiences of individuals during this difficult time. Thus, should any participant feel that they have been traumatically affected by COVID-19 (i.e., the loss of a loved one), we recommend he/she does not take part in this study. The principal, however, will not be involved in the selection of participants, but will be required to provide possible screening of teachers who are eligible to partake.

5. POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY

Although participants may not benefit directly from this study, participation might offer participants' a sense of relief and safe space to discuss the educational challenges experienced as well as the impact these challenges have had on individual well-being. Moreover, the results of this study will help improve our understanding of the response required to ensure long-term resilience and well-being of the South African teaching workforce, which is essential to maintain continuous quality education for all learners.

6. COMPENSATION

Neither your school nor the participants of this study will be compensated through any means. Moreover, no personal costs are involved to take part in this study.

7. RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary and participants can freely choose to participate or remove themselves from participation at any point in the

research process without stating a reason or fearing consequences from withdrawing.

8. ETHICS APPROVAL

The proposed research study has been submitted to the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee, University of Pretoria, and written approval has been granted by the committee. Furthermore, the study has been structured in accordance with the ethical guidelines set out by the Department of Basic Education, Johannesburg.

9. INFORMATION

Should you have any questions concerning this study, please contact:

Researcher: Jessica Millar

Cell: 079 0395410

Email address: jessymillar@gmail.com

10. CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained during the course of this study will be regarded as confidential. Raw data obtained will be kept secure on a password-protected laptop. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to this information. Moreover, each participant's identity will be kept anonymous by using a pseudonym within the write up of results. No possible identifiers will be used to ensure anonymity. Only the researcher will be able to identify participants. Results in the final write up will be published or presented in such a manner that all participants remain unidentifiable. In addition, hard copies of all data records will be kept in a locked facility at The Department of Educational Psychology at The University of Pretoria.

11. PERMISSION FOR SCHOOL TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

- I confirm that the person requesting my permission for my school to take part in this study has fully informed me about the nature and process of the proposed

study, any possible risks or discomforts that may arise, as well as the benefits of the study.

- I have also received, read and understood the above-written information about the study.
- I have had adequate time to ask questions, raise concerns, and I have no objections to my school (staff) participating in this study.
- I am aware that the information obtained in this study, including personal details of teachers, will be anonymously processed and presented in the final results.
- I understand that participants will not be penalised in any way should they wish to discontinue the study and have the right to withdraw at any time.
- I am providing permission for my school to participate willingly and acknowledge that participation is completely voluntary.
- I have received a signed copy of this letter of agreement.

12. SECONDARY DATA CLAUSE

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

Principal's name (Please print)

Principal's signature

Signed at

Date

Researcher's name (Please print)

Researcher's signature

Signed at

Date

Appendix C: Research Invitation

Dear [School's name],

My name is Jessica Millar and I am a Master's student studying Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria in the faculty of Education.

As part of my degree, I am conducting research on South African teachers' experiences of the educational challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am writing to inquire if [school's name] would be willing to invite the teachers at your school to participate in my study? Participation is completely voluntary and only recommended if participants feel comfortable discussing their experiences. For the purpose of this study, four teachers from your school will be invited for an interview. One teacher from each of the following phases is required: foundation, intermediate, senior, and further education and training.

According to the Gauteng Department of Education's research restrictions, interviews will aim to take place from the second week of February 2022. After school hours, participants will be invited to take part in an online individual interview in which they will be asked questions about the educational challenges they experienced during the pandemic and the impact of these challenges on their stress and well-being.

There is no direct harm or risk in participating in this study. However, as vulnerability may be heightened due to the pandemic, there is a slight chance that some questions may elicit emotional responses in some respondents. In the unlikely event of such cases, telephone numbers for toll-free counsellors will be provided, as indicated below:

- Lifeline toll-free helpline (operating 24/7) - 0861 322 322
- SADAG Mental Health toll-free helpline (operating daily from 8am-8pm) - 011 234 4837

Complete anonymity and confidentiality will be guaranteed throughout the study. No identifying information regarding participants or the school at which they work, such as names or identity numbers, will be utilised. Additionally, pseudonyms will be used to report results to ensure anonymity and no IP addresses will be recorded (in the case of online interviews). All data will be stored on a password-protected laptop accessible only by me as

the researcher and my supervisor. It will take approximately one hour to complete the interview.

The data collected for this study will be used for the completion of my dissertation as part of my Master's degree in Educational Psychology, supervised by Professor S. Human-Vogel. Additionally, the data may be used and published in scientific articles and/or book chapters.

This study (EDU055/21) was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria, Education Campus, Aldoel Building, Room 3-63, contact details edu.ethicsadmin@up.ac.za. Written approval has been granted for this study by this committee.

The University of Pretoria will also request respondents' permission to use the data that will be obtained from this study (confidentially and anonymously) for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on any future research studies.

I would be most grateful if your school would be willing to circulate the invitation to participate in my study with the teachers at your school as this would make a significant contribution to my research and studies. Furthermore, this would contribute towards our understanding of the challenges South African teachers face, the impact of these challenges on teachers' stress and well-being, as well as the role educational psychologists can provide in addressing the possible impact of the current pandemic on teachers.

Research invitation for potential participants:

Request to participate in a study of teachers' well-being and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you taught in any of the following phases: foundation, intermediate, senior, or further education and training, during March 2019 - March 2020 of the COVID-19 pandemic and understand English, then you could take part in essential research!

Jessica Millar is a Master's student in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria and she is investigating South African teachers' experiences of the educational challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jessica would like to interview South African teachers, one-on-one, after school hours to find out more about your personal experience of the educational challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the impact of these challenges on your stress and well-being. Interviews will take place online or telephonically and will be approximately one hour in length. All responses will be treated anonymously and confidentially. According to the Gauteng Department of Education's research restrictions, interviews will aim to take place from the second week of February 2022.

Please contact Jessica Millar, using the following information, if you would like to take part in the research and if you would like to contribute to the holistic understanding of the challenges South African teachers face and how we can support teachers' well-being more effectively.

Jessica Millar

079 039 5410

jessymillar@gmail.com

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jessica.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my research supervisor,
Professor Salomé Human-Vogel.

Kind regards

Jessica Millar

079 039 5410

jessymillar@gmail.com

And

Professor S. Human-Vogel

salome.human-vogel@up.ac.za

Appendix D: Teachers' informed consent letters



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

South African teachers' experiences of educational challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

NAME OF RESEARCHER:

Jessica Millar

NAME OF SUPERVISOR:

Professor S. Human-Vogel

CONTACT DETAILS OF RESEARCHER:

jessymillar@gmail.com

0790395410

Dear Mr. / Mrs.

1. INTRODUCTION

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting as part of a mini dissertation for the partial fulfillment of a MA Educational Psychology degree from the University of Pretoria. The information in this document is provided to help you in understanding what my research study entails, what constitutes as participation, and what is expected from the participants. Before you agree to take part in this study, you should fully understand what is involved. Should you have any questions, which are not fully explained in this document, you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor. Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary.

2. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The aim of this study is to explore and describe the educational challenges South African teachers experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, I wish to learn more about the impact of these challenges on teachers' stress levels and well-being, as well as the role educational psychologists can provide in addressing the possible impact of the current pandemic on teachers.

3. EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES AND WHAT WILL BE EXPECTED FROM PARTICIPANTS

For the purpose of this study, four teachers from your school will be invited for an interview. One teacher from each of the following phases is required: foundation, intermediate, senior, and further education and training. After school hours, each participant will take part in an individual interview online, such as with Zoom or telephonically, depending on the participant's access to technology and data. Interviews will be approximately one hour in length. Questions around the educational challenges teachers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 to March 2021, as well as the impact of these challenges and the pandemic on teachers' stress levels and well-being and the role teachers believe educational psychologists can provide to address the impact of these challenges, will

be discussed. In addition, I will interview eight teachers in total from two different schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng, to compare my findings. A copy of the outcome and findings of this research study may be obtained from the researcher once the study has been finalised, should you wish to review it.

4. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED

There are no foreseen risks associated with this study. The only possible risk and discomfort involved are acknowledging the emotional trigger of discussing COVID-19 and the experiences of individuals during this difficult time. Thus, should any participant feel that they have been traumatically affected by COVID-19 (i.e., the loss of a loved one), we recommend he/she does not take part in this study.

5. POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY

Although participants may not benefit directly from this study, participation might offer a sense of relief and safe space to discuss the educational challenges experienced as well as the impact these challenges have had on individual well-being. Moreover, the results of this study will help improve our understanding of the response required to ensure long-term resilience and well-being of the South African teaching workforce, which is essential to maintain continuous quality education for all learners.

6. COMPENSATION

Neither your school nor the participants of this study will be compensated through any means. Moreover, no personal costs are involved to take part in this study.

7. YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary and participants can freely choose to participate or remove themselves from participation at any point in the research process without stating a reason or fearing consequences from withdrawing.

8. ETHICS APPROVAL

The proposed research study has been submitted to the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee, University of Pretoria, and written approval has been granted by the committee. Furthermore, the study has been structured in accordance with the ethical guidelines set out by the Department of Basic Education, Johannesburg.

9. INFORMATION

Should you have any questions concerning this study, please contact:

Researcher: Jessica Millar

Cell: 079 0395410

Email address: jessymillar@gmail.com

10. CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained during the course of this study will be regarded as confidential. Raw data obtained will be kept secure on a password-protected laptop. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to this information. Moreover, each participant's identity will be kept anonymous by using a pseudonym within the write up of results. No possible identifiers will be used to ensure anonymity. Only the researcher will be able to identify participants. Results in the final write up will be published or presented in such a manner that all participants remain unidentifiable. In addition, hard copies of all data records will be kept in a locked facility at The Department of Educational Psychology at The University of Pretoria.

11. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

- I confirm that the person requesting my consent to take part in this study has fully informed me about the nature and process of the proposed study, any possible risks or discomforts that may arise, as well as the benefits of the study.

- I have also received, read and understood the above-written information about the study.
- I have had adequate time to ask questions, raise concerns, and I have no objections to participate in this study.
- I am aware that the information obtained in this study, including personal details of teachers, will be anonymously processed and presented in the final results.
- I understand that I will not be penalised in any way should I wish to discontinue the study and have the right to withdraw at any time.
- I am participating willingly and acknowledge that participation is completely voluntary.
- I have received a signed copy of this letter of agreement.

12. SECONDARY DATA CLAUSE

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

Participant's name (Please print)

Participant's signature

Signed at

Date

Researcher's name (Please print)

Researcher's signature

Signed at

Date

Appendix E: General information form and TWBI questions

General Information Form

Thank you for choosing to participate in my research study which will help me to complete my degree at the University of Pretoria, as well as contribute towards our understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers. I appreciate your valuable time and contributions.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the educational challenges South African teachers experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 and March 2021. By doing so I wish to learn more about the impact of these challenges on teachers' stress, well-being, and resilience, as well as the role educational psychologists can provide in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers.

Please take note that your information will be kept confidential and anonymous. I will be using pseudonyms for each participant in this study, so I will be the only person that knows the information you choose to share with me and it will not be linked to you in any way. Please remember you do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Kindly take the time to answer the following general information questions which will be used to collect important information for the study, as well as to guide the selection of participants to take part in the semi-structured interviews to follow.

jessymillar@gmail.com [Switch accounts](#)



* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email address

Next

Clear form

General questions

Name and surname *

Your answer _____

What grade did you teach during the pandemic from March 2020 - March 2021? *

- Grade R
- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Grade 4
- Grade 5
- Grade 6
- Grade 7
- Grade 8
- Grade 9
- Grade 10
- Grade 11
- Grade 12

Back

Next

Clear form

Well-being scale

Trait Well-being Inventory: General Well-being Scale (Dalbert, 1992).

Please complete the following General Well-being Scale. In the following questions, please consider how you feel in general and how satisfied you are with your life. Read each statement carefully and decide to what extent you personally agree or disagree with it. Select the option that corresponds with your opinion. Make sure you select an option for every statement.

My life could hardly be happier than it is.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I usually feel quite cheerful.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I believe that much of what I hope for will be fulfilled.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

When I think back on my life so far, I have achieved much of what I aspire to do.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I consider myself a happy person.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I am satisfied with my life.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I think that time will bring some more interesting and pleasant experiences.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I am not as cheerful as most people.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I am satisfied with my situation.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I'm not often really elated.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I generally look at the sunny side of life.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

When I look back on my life so far, I am satisfied.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I usually feel as though I'm bubbling over with joy.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

If you have answered strongly agree or agree for statements, "I am not as cheerful as most people" and "I'm not often really elated", please elaborate in the space provided below.

Your answer

If you have answered strongly disagree or disagree for the remainder of the statements please elaborate in the space provided below.

Your answer

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

[Clear form](#)

Personal information questions

Please note the following questions are optional and do not have to be answered if you feel uncomfortable answering any of them.

How old are you?

Your answer _____

How many years have you been teaching in total?

Your answer _____

Have you been infected with the COVID-19 virus?

- Yes
 No

Have you lost someone to the COVID-19 virus (i.e. a family member or a close friend)?

- Yes
 No

Kindly select your experience of teaching during the pandemic between March 2020 - September 2020 (Start of the hard lockdown - Term 3).

- Mostly online (at least 80% of the time).
 Mostly in-person (at least 80% of the time).
 Mostly blended teaching - both online and in person (at least 80% of the time).
 Mostly unable to teach students remotely or in-person during this period.

Please indicate your experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 - September 2020 (Start of the hard lockdown - Term 3)?

- 1 2 3 4
- I struggled to get through it I mostly coped very well

Kindly select your experience of teaching during the pandemic between October 2020 - March 2021 (Term 4 - Term 1 of the following year).

- Mostly online (at least 80% of the time).
- Mostly in-person (at least 80% of the time).
- Mostly blended teaching - both online and in person (at least 80% of the time).
- Mostly unable to teach students remotely or in-person during this period.

Please indicate your experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic between October 2020 - March 2021 (Term 4 - Term 1 of the following year)?

1 2 3 4

I struggled to get through it I mostly coped very well

Would you say that your well-being was affected negatively during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very much so

Please indicate the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on your physical health.

1 2 3 4 5

No impact Significant impact

Please indicate the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on your emotional health (i.e. emotional identification, emotional regulation, etc).

1 2 3 4 5

No impact Significant impact

Please indicate the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on your mental health (i.e. decision-making, stress management, social health, etc.).

1 2 3 4 5

No impact Significant impact

Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 - March 2021?

Your answer _____

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

[Clear form](#)

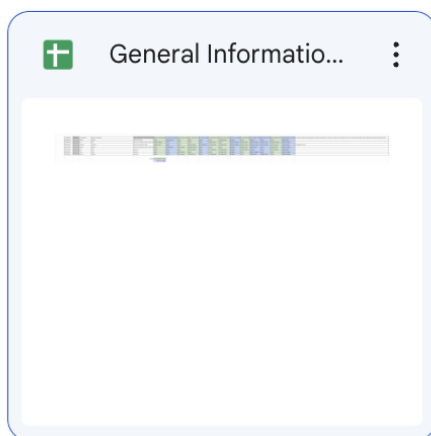
Appendix F: Participants' answers to the general information form and TWBI

Participants' answers to the general information form and TWBI are stored on a password-protected Google Drive folder. (See a screenshot of the participants' answers stored on the Drive).

Participants' general information form and TWBI answers stored on the Drive:

... > Data Storage > General information for... ▾

Files



Appendix G: Interview schedule

Thank you once again for choosing to participate in my research study which will help me complete my degree at the University of Pretoria, as well as contribute towards our understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers. I appreciate your valuable time and contributions.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the educational challenges South African teachers experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 and March 2021. By doing so I wish to learn more about the impact of these challenges on teachers' stress, well-being, and resilience, as well as the role educational psychologists can provide in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers.

Please take note that your information will be kept confidential and anonymous. I will be using pseudonyms for each participant in this study, so I will be the only person that knows the information you choose to share with me and it will not be linked to you in any way.

This semi-structured interview will be guided by a set of open-ended questions and at times I may ask follow-up questions to ensure I understand everything you tell me. Please remember you do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. Before we begin, I would like to ask for your permission for this interview to be recorded for documentation and transaction purposes.

Firstly, I would like to ask if there is anything you would like to comment on from the initial form that you completed or if you have any questions relating to that form? Do you have any other questions before we begin?

Part A

Let's start by talking about your work experience, please could you give me some background information regarding your teaching experience in the South African context.

Prompting questions

1. What do you experience as the leading cause of stress in your profession prior to the pandemic?

2. What are the typical challenges you experienced in teaching prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How do these challenges impact your stress or well-being?
4. What do you believe supports your well-being and resilience throughout these challenges? / What helps you to cope with work stress?
5. Do you have a support system that you rely on during challenging times?
 - a. Please elaborate.

Part B

Tell me what it was like for you to teach during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prompting questions

1. What did you experience as the leading cause of stress in your profession during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What educational challenges did you experience as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How did your experience of teaching differ from the start of hard lockdown in March 2020 to the end of Term 3 September 2020 to your experience of teaching from October 2020, (Term 4), to March 2021, (Term 1) of the following year?
 - a. What challenges or stressors did you experience during these different periods?
 - b. How did these challenges impact your well-being?
 - c. What resources or support structures did you make use of during this period?
 - i. Internal strengths, hobbies, other activities?
 - ii. Family or friends?
 - iii. Place of employment, colleagues, or additional school-based services?
4. What role do you think educational psychologists can provide in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers or education?
5. Were there any resources or support structures that you did not have access to during the pandemic that could have helped you cope?
6. Have you experienced any positive changes or outcomes in education since the COVID-19 pandemic?

Conclusion

Thank you for your time today, do you have any questions for me or is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Appendix H: Interview transcripts

The interview transcripts that were analysed in this study are stored on a password-protected Google Drive folder. (See a screenshot of the interview transcripts stored on the Drive).

Interview transcripts stored on the Drive:

... > Data Storage > Interviews ▾

Files



The screenshot shows three PDF files in a Google Drive interface. The first file, 'Participant 1 Trans...', contains an interview transcript with a table header and numbered text. The second file, 'Participant 2 Trans...', contains a similar transcript with a table header and numbered text. The third file, 'Participant 3 Trans...', contains a transcript with a table header and numbered text. Each file is represented by a thumbnail showing the first few lines of the document.

Appendix I: Research journal

The research journal containing the field notes written throughout this study is stored on a password-protected Google Drive folder. (See a screenshot of the research journal stored on the Drive).

Research journal stored on the Drive:

... > Data Storage > Research Journal ▾

Files



Appendix J: Data analysis (Excel spreadsheet)

The data analysis Excel spreadsheet is stored on a password-protected Google Drive folder. (See a screenshot of the data analysis stored on the Drive).

Data analysis stored on the Drive:

... > Data Storage > Thematic analysis ▾

Files



Appendix K: Thematic outline

Research topic addressed: Teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school system.

Theme: Experiences of online education (n=110)	
Subtheme: Disadvantages (n=92)	Subtheme: Advantages (n=18)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of learner engagement/attendance (13) • Learners not submitting their work (3) • Learners are more distracted at home (4) • Managing learners' behaviour online (5) • Learners' background noise (1) • Online assessment difficulties (1) • Learners not completing the curriculum (1) • Learners' cheating (2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parents do learners work (2) • Concern for learners' performance (1) • Difficult to establish relationships with learners/lack of connection with learners (1) • No immediate interaction/feedback, difficult to monitor learners' comprehension, like in person (6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Less enjoyable and more difficult (1) • Learners falling behind (4) • Gaps in learners' knowledge (3) • Learners lacked knowledge to work online (1) • Technology issues (8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Marking difficulties (2) • Enhanced workload - preparation for online learning, increased admin (8) • Changed job role and responsibilities (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Different strategies required (6) • Limited training and experience (4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need for professional development and resources (4) • Demanding parents (3) • Limited work-life balance for teachers (2) • Teachers struggling to transition (2) • Lack of colleague support or interaction (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced teacher training and professional development (5) • Fun, easy, enjoyed compiling, comfortable, can make learning easier (3) • Flexible – learners can complete their lessons when it is suitable (1) • Able to connect with learners (1) • Helps learners catch up missed lessons/work (1) • Enhanced learner engagement (with smaller classes) (1) • Manage learners' performance (more analytic tools) (1) • Teaching from home (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Don't have to travel. • Easier to meet (1) with parents (1) • More technology, educational resources, job opportunities for online education (1)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online exams (2) • Reduced teacher autonomy (1) • Splitting attention evenly to those in class and at home (1) • Returning to in person teaching was easier (1) 		
Theme: Learner-specific stressors (n=106)		
Subtheme: Disparity in learners' access to education (n=26)	Subtheme: Concern for learners' academic development (n=47)	Subtheme: Concern for learners' well-being (n=33)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to technology and internet to support online learning. • Poorer learners receive less support. • Poorer schools had less attendance. • Wealthier schools had more attendance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor academic performance/ gaps in learners' knowledge (12) • Dropping out of school (13) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Encourage learners to return to school (1) • Progressed to the next grade, marks altered (5) • Remedial work required to address gaps in knowledge (3) • Loss of communication with learners (2) • Classroom management was fine (1) • Revised term plans are unrealistic (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious. • Learners struggling to cope. • Poor concentration. • Parents can't afford school fees. • Parents' lost jobs/anxious. • Difficult to motivate learners. • Children are coping better than we think. • Parents played an important role in reassuring children. • Recommendations for helping children during COVID. • Managing learners' behaviour (2). • School-feeding programmes.
Theme: Phased reopening of schools (n=144)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School closures (6) • Loss of learning time (5) • Teachers unable to return to school, Unpaid leave (3) • Prolonged lockdowns (1) • Learner attendance better than expected (2) • Impact of COVID on ECD (1) • Impact of COVID on education (1) • Learners unable to return to school (1) • Easier when children started returning to school to monitor their understanding (1) • Poor attendance (1) • Lack of technology resources (1) 		
Subtheme: Enforcing COVID-19 protocols (n=30)	Subtheme: COVID-19 infections (n=87)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social distancing (6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 infections (1) 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearing masks (5) • Sanitising (5) • Symptom checking (5) • Children adjusted to COVID-19 protocols (5) • Symptom recording (admin) (4) • Rotational timetables (3) • Lockdown (2) • Ease of restrictions made teaching easier (1) • Poor infrastructure, unable to implement protocols (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Schools closed due to noncompliance (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher shortages: Teachers died from COVID-19 infections (32) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comorbidity leave (7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers' personal information leaked (2) • Failing to protect teachers from COVID-19 infections (13) • Lack of PPE (10) • Inaccessible vaccines (2) • Staff shortages (1) • Overcrowded classes (1) • Stress of the virus and infection (8) • Returning to school did not increase COVID-19 infections - not super spreader sites (7) • Returning to school, debate to keep schools open (4) • Job loss - retrenched (4) • Deaths affected well-being (1) • Matrics allowed to write if sick (1)
<p>Theme: Teacher-specific stressors (n=130)</p>	
<p>Enhanced workload (n=50)</p>	<p>Past teacher-specific stressors (n=80)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased admin (8) • Demanding parents (8) • Gaps in learner's knowledge (7) • Comorbidity leave/absent teachers – fulfilling their roles (no money for substitute teachers) (5) • Preparation for online learning/working online (discussed above) (4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limited work-life balance for teachers (discussed above) (2) ○ Online education – increased admin, use of technology • Increased hours (3) • Increased checks from GDE (2) • Pressure from principal (2) • Facilitating/teaching other subjects (2) • Preparation for learners returning to school (1) • Lost teaching time (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging working conditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Poor infrastructure and unsafe environment (32) ○ School violence (with dangerous weapons) (17) ○ Schools burgled/vandalised (8) ○ Overcrowded classes (6) ○ Teacher attrition (6) ○ Inadequate resources (5) ○ Teachers treated poorly (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ By parents (2) ▪ By principal (1) ○ Overloaded curriculum (2) ○ Challenges with colleagues (1) ○ Low pay (1) • Need for professional development (3) • Increased stress (1) • Lack of support (1)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring learners' progress (1) 	
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Research topic addressed: Teachers' experiences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their individual well-being.

Theme: Negative influence on teachers' well-being (challenge) (n=74)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress and anxiety (20) • Unable to access resources to promote coping/resilience. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Poor salary (9) ○ Colleagues (5) ○ Exercise (3) ○ Friends (3) ○ Removal of teachers' autonomy (2) ○ Teacher training/learning to use technology (1) ○ Interactions with learners (1) • Contributes to teacher attrition (9) • Uncertainty (3) • Teachers treated poorly (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By parents ○ By colleagues - co-teaching • Lack of experience (3) • Emotionally and mentally exhausting (2) • Fear (2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fear of being infected and infecting others ○ Fear of death or loss of loved ones ○ Job losses or change in financial situations ○ Fear of loss of connection or isolation ○ Unknown duration of the pandemic • Burnout (2) • Drained, impatient, affecting home life (1) • Loss of loved ones due to COVID-19 virus (1) • Nervous (1) • Tired, despondent, struggled to stay positive (1) • Traumatic (1) • Not let COVID consume you (1) • Panic (1) • Concern for learners (1) • Frustrated (1) • Struggled to cope (1)

Theme: Positive influence (n=117)	
Subtheme: Increased resources (n=63)	Subtheme: Increased personal strengths (n=54)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Colleagues (18) ○ DBE support (11) ○ Family (3) ○ Friends (2) ○ Community (2) ○ Learners' parents (1) • Enhanced teacher training and professional development (6) • Connecting with others (friends, family, teachers) (5) • Psychological support (5) • Resources to protect teachers from COVID-19 (5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Access to PPE and COVID-19 protocols • Hobbies (3) • Improving teachers' working conditions (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Access to water and bathroom facilities • Enhanced technology (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To support online education ○ To meet with parents online easily • Mentor (1) • More adaptive education system (1) • More educational resources available (1) • More job opportunities for online education (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built resilience (13) • Flexibility/adaptable (9) • Enhanced experience to cope (7) • Optimistic (7) • Enhanced experience with technology (3) • Problem solving (3) • Coped (2) • Enhanced awareness/new perspective (2) • Empathy (2) • Belief in self (2) • Manage priorities (2) • Learning to ask for help (2) • Maintaining work-life boundaries (2) • Perseverance (2) • Enhanced self-awareness (1) • Grateful (1) • Kinder to self (1) • Learnt coping skills (1) • Making time for yourself (1) • Hobbies and having a private life outside of work (1) • Remaining calm (1)

Research topic addressed: Teachers' perceptions of the role of educational psychologists as a social resource during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theme: Teachers' need for psychological support, teacher training and school support structures (n=37)

- Need for psychological support (19)
 - Psychological support
 - Increase in mental health challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Emotional well-being
- Need for school support structures (12)
 - Assessment and intervention
 - Learners: Cognitive, academic, psychosocial, and emotional
 - Teachers and learners: COVID-19 anxiety
 - Learners: Learning difficulties
 - Learners: Study skills and self-regulation
 - Teachers and learners: Resilience building
- Need for teacher training and knowledge development (5)
 - Identifying and supporting learners who are struggling
 - Resilience training
 - Challenge implementing psychology in different cultures (1)