



# **TEACHING STRATEGIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS**

By

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in Education in Teacher Development Studies

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## DECLARATION

This dissertation has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Education in the Postgraduate Programme of the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Shivona Mathura, Student number 210504612, declare that:

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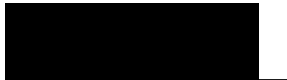
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## **PREFACE**

The research study described in this dissertation was carried out with five Foundation Phase teachers at five public schools in the PMB circuit of the uMgungundlovu District. The interviews commenced in August 2022 and concluded in September 2022, under the supervision of Dr J. Naidoo of the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

This study represents original work completed by the author and has not been submitted in any form for any diploma or degree to any other tertiary institution. Where the author has made use of the work of other authors, this has been duly acknowledged in the text.



29 November 2023

Shivona Mathura

As the candidate's supervisor I agree/do not agree to the submission of this dissertation.



29 November 2023

Dr Jaqueline Naidoo

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

COVID-19 – Coronavirus disease 2019
WHO – World Health Organisation
SARS – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
ACS – American Community School
ECD – Early Childhood Development
PPE – Personal Protective Equipment
COP – Community of Practice
VOI – Variant of interest
VOC – Variant of concern
DBE – Department of Basic Education
SOPs – Standard Operating Procedures
NPIs – Non-pharmaceutical Interventions
NICD – National Institute for Communicable Diseases
KZN – KwaZulu-Natal
SMT – School Management Team
GET – General Education and Training
FET – Further Education and Training
TEFL – Teaching English as a Foreign Language
PTD – Primary Teacher’s Diploma
ABET – Adult Basic Education and Training

## **ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruptions to the education sector and the world at large. This study aimed to explore the teaching strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it focused on the experiences, challenges, and opportunities of Foundation Phase teachers during this period. This study was guided by the conceptual frameworks of Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory and Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching. The study was located within the interpretive paradigm and adopted a qualitative research approach. The study used a case study design, with data collection methods including semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artefacts. Five Foundation Phase teachers from five primary schools participated in this study.

The findings of the study suggest that teachers used WhatsApp groups, online platforms and work packs to distribute information to learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. They displayed adaptability and exhibited their resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they collaborated as teams and conquered their academic challenges by implementing creativity and perseverance. Their challenges included inaccessibility, smaller class sizes (which posed as an opportunity) and balancing academics and emotions. This corresponds with Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory which suggests that learning occurs in a particular situation, but knowledge gained can be transferred to any context. Teachers faced the challenge of distance during the COVID-19 pandemic, as mentioned in Hargreaves (2001), but they overcame these challenges while making sure that learners were the central focus of their efforts to continuous teaching and learning.

The findings can be used to assist teachers and future researchers who are searching for teaching strategies that can be employed in situations where teachers and learners cannot attend schools physically. Additionally, it is recommended that the Department of Education assists under-resourced schools with technological advancements to ensure that teachers and learners are better equipped should they be faced with a similar situation to that of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key words: COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown, Foundation Phase, teaching strategies, blended learning

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## **CHAPTER ONE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study sought to uncover the teaching strategies used by Foundation Phase educators during the lockdown period as a result of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). In addition, it endeavoured to understand the challenges and opportunities experienced by these teachers and their emotional journey during this difficult time. According to Sarode (2018), teaching strategies are the different methods teachers use to convey information to their students. The most common strategies used prior to COVID-19 were the use of chalkboards and textbooks, which were more teacher-centred methods of instruction (Herrington et al., 2000; Makeleni & Sethusha, 2014). Teacher challenges and opportunities arose as a result of the shift in teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, which were technologically advanced and enhanced digital divides that currently exist (Iivari et al., 2020). Due to the uncertainty and rapid change in the education sector, teacher emotions were impacted. Hargreaves (2001) mentions five emotional geographies of teaching, which include, sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political. These emotional parameters governed teachers' responses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 impacted people and institutions around the world. Bentata (2020) contends that the COVID-19 pandemic began unexpectedly December 2019 in Wuhan, China and rapidly spread to countries and continents worldwide. Teachers, parents and learners had to tread unprecedented waters during the COVID-19 pandemic, with online teaching and learning being one of many hurdles for the education sector. Teachers had the difficult task of adapting their teaching strategies to cater for the changes in education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as not being able to attend school during the lockdown period and having to minimise class sizes after the lockdown (König et al., 2020). According to Al Lily et al. (2020), distance education was portrayed as the only alternate teaching strategy applicable to the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Distance education surpasses the barriers of geographical locations and face-to-face interaction as communication is carried out electronically. Many countries implemented school closures as a method of curbing the spread of COVID-19 (Bao et al., 2020). Distance

education posed a challenge for many countries as they were not prepared for the sudden transformation in education (Bentata, 2020; Churiyah et al., 2020; Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020).

This chapter provides a synopsis of the study and commences with an outline of the purpose and rationale of the study. Next, the research objectives and key research questions that guided the study are listed. Thereafter, a brief overview of the conceptual frameworks that underlie the study, which are Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated learning theory and Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional geographies of teaching. This is followed by a discussion of the research methodology procedures used in the study and ethical considerations to which the study adhered. The chapter concludes with an overview of the chapters in this dissertation. The following chapter focuses on the literature analysed during this study and research surrounding teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The South African government and many governments around the world, imposed lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Schools were, therefore, urged to utilise alternate methods of communicating with parents and learners while continuing with teaching and learning. Schools had to implement flexible modes of teaching, such as contact lessons, distance, blended, or online learning, which were in accordance with their socioeconomic contexts. The teaching strategies that were used determined the delivery of lessons, which were also based on the schools' resources and that of their learners. According to Al Lily et al. (2020), distance education was portrayed as the only alternate teaching strategy in reaction to COVID-19. Distance education surpasses the barriers of geographical locations and face-to-face interaction as communication is carried out electronically. The purpose of this study was to examine the teaching strategies that were utilised by Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this study aimed to explore the challenges and opportunities experienced by Foundation Phase teachers in the shift from face-to-face instruction to remote or online teaching.

As a Foundation Phase teacher, the research enabled I to explore the teaching methods that were

used during the COVID-19 pandemic. These could be instrumental in improving not only my teaching strategies, but the teaching strategies of other Foundation Phase teachers. Undertaking research on this topic may be useful for teachers in the future, considering that there may be other pandemics or global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and there is a need to explore methods of teaching learners during such times of crisis. The strategies used by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic could benefit the education sector in future, should the schooling system ever encounter another pandemic of this magnitude.

### **1.3 Background information**

The study was conducted in Pietermaritzburg, which is based in the uMgungundlovu district, in KwaZulu-Natal. The teachers selected to participate in the study were based in schools in Pietermaritzburg. Schools from urban and semi-rural areas were selected to provide a holistic view of the effects of the pandemic on education and teaching strategies in different localities in Pietermaritzburg. In addition, high learner enrolment and low learner enrolment schools were included in the study. Teachers from various quintile schools were also included to ensure a range of different socioeconomic statuses of schools and pupils within the school were represented. According to the Department of Education (2004, p. 8) school quintiles are based on the economic status of a school and learners, and range from quintile one, the least wealthy, to quintile five, more affluent schools and students. Quintile one to three schools are no-fee paying schools, with the majority of their funding being provided by government due to the socioeconomic conditions of the community and the poverty levels of learners attending the school (Department of Education, 2004).

The study focused on how South African schools dealt with the challenges and changes in the Foundation Phase during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was based on experiences of Foundation Phase educators, who shared their teaching strategies used during the COVID-19 pandemic, more especially the lockdown period, when teachers and learners were unable to attend school. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the dynamics of the traditional face-to-face interaction between Foundation Phase teachers and parents, which involved classroom visits and parent evenings (Grobler, 2022). Schools in South Africa were closed due the lockdown that began in March 2020, with schools being able to resume on a rotational basis in June 2020,

which greatly impacted all teaching and learning (Ardington et al., 2021). Schools either worked on learners attending classes bi-weekly or on alternate days in order to accommodate the social distancing restrictions put in place by the South African government at the time. The staggered resumption of schooling allowed Foundation Phase learners to return to school between July and August 2020, which meant major learning losses and alternative teaching strategies which needed to be implemented by teachers to combat these losses (Ardington et al., 2021).

#### **1.4 Rationale**

The rationale of a study is usually a statement of how I became interested in this particular topic and why this research is worth carrying out (Vithal & Jansen, 2012). According to Dong et al. (2020), there is limited research that focuses on teaching younger learners, who fall under the Foundation Phase category, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This accounts for the gap in research and the need for this study. Avgerinou and Moros (2020) conducted a study in Athens, Greece, which revealed that learners from Grades 9-12 were exposed to online learning platforms, but younger learners were not as their learning is very practical. Similarly, Rasmitadila et al. (2020) conducted a study in Indonesia and highlighted that Foundation Phase learners', prior to COVID-19, were assessed based on their mental, physical and emotional aspects. These are some of the areas of teaching most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted face-to-face teaching and learning in South Africa as well as globally. According to Donitsa-Schmidt and Ramot (2020, p. 3), "teachers also realised that such an unusual period requires different measures, amongst them a much more personalized and agile approach". Teachers had to adapt suddenly to changes in their teaching approaches that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. This entailed finding alternate methods of facilitating the process of learning (Gyimah, 2020). Schools were forced to implement distance or remote learning (A Lily et al., 2020; Avgerinou & Moros, 2020; Benata, 2020; Bubb & Jones, 2020; Churiyah et al., 2020; Eyimaya & Irmak, 2020; Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020; Joshi et al., 2020; Kaden, 2020) as a result of the school closures caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Many schools and teachers encountered challenges during the rapid shift from face-to-face instructional methods to online teaching and learning. These challenges included teachers' lack of skills, resistance to change, lack of resources or technical infrastructure to carry



out online learning, as well as many learners in the Foundation Phase being unable to access online learning systems independently (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020; Gyimah, 2020; Joshi et al., 2020). One of the challenges in developing countries, such as South Africa, is the socioeconomic dynamics that hamper some students from accessing online learning (Gustafsson & Deliwe, 2020). These challenges were exacerbated during the lockdown. The research aimed to identify strategies that were used by Foundation Phase teachers to overcome the challenges faced while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a teacher in the Foundation Phase, I changed their teaching strategies as a result of the COVID- 19 pandemic. Teachers at the school in which I teach were instructed to move to WhatsApp communication with parents and use the same platform to disseminate work for learners during the school closures. The difficulty was recording lessons that were short enough to be sent via this application, while managing to introduce important concepts to learners effectively. Many parents did not have the data to access other online systems such as ZOOM or Microsoft Teams. The age group of learners whom I taught were 6-7 year olds, which posed a great challenge for parents and teachers as many learners could not access online learning systems without assistance from their parents or guardians. At this age, learners are still in the process of learning to read and write, which posed an additional challenge. Even if learners accessed the learning material distributed to them, they could not interpret what was required of them in each task without the support from their parents or guardians.

The study was significant in the development of teaching and learning, as the teaching strategies revealed by participants can be implemented in classrooms long after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have past. With the technological development and South African schools wanting to introduce Coding and Robotics into the curriculum, online teaching platforms seem to be the future of our education system. Teachers will also benefit from these advancements, as professional development will need to be put into place to facilitate the implementation process. Teachers have already been exposed to the possibilities of working with online communities and collaboration on these virtual platforms.

The objectives of this study were to:

- Examine teaching strategies adopted by Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- Explore the challenges and opportunities experienced by Foundation Phase teachers in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

## **1.5 Research methodology**

This research adopted a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing text based, visual or audio data to understand the opinions and experiences of the participants (Bhandari, 2020). Cohen et al. (2018, p. 288) contend that qualitative data consists of multiple realities, dependent on interpretations of participants, as data is “context-related, context-dependent and context-rich”. This study aimed to understand the experiences of Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 lockdown and the strategies they employed during this time. Teachers’ contexts and experiences were taken into account during the research process and, therefore, a qualitative research approach was most appropriate for this study.

A case study research design was employed in this study. This research was categorised as a single intrinsic case study. An intrinsic case study is identified by its uniqueness and interest to I (Crowe et al., 2011). The case focused on Foundation Phase teachers in the uMgungundlovu district during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason for this was that there is a gap in research relating to Foundation Phase teachers’ teaching during the pandemic (Dong et al., 2020). The study was of personal interest to I, who is a Foundation Phase teacher, as it falls within their

field of practice.

Purposive sampling was used in this study. This research study focused on Foundation Phase teachers, which served as a criterion for the selection of participants. Accordingly, six Foundation Phase teachers were initially selected as participants for the study. Teachers were selected based on a minimum of two years teaching experience in the Foundation Phase. This ensure they had the experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the teachers selected were experienced teachers who had a number of years' worth of knowledge to share during the interview process. These teachers were able to provide in-depth data based on their experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data generation methods that were adopted in this study were semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artefacts. These methods were selected to give the reader an in-depth understanding of the teaching strategies Foundation Phase teachers used during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their experiences and challenges during this period. Case studies usually require more than one data generation tool to enhance the depth and evidence sources of the study (Cohen et al., 2018). Data triangulation increases the validity of a study by using multiple sources of data generation (Crowe et al., 2011). An inductive and deductive approach to data analysis was used in the study as data was gathered from telephonic semi-structured interviews, collages and artefacts. Themes and commonalities were later identified, once the initial analysis of data was completed, based on the two research questions that guided this study.

Signed consent from the participants is required when a researcher uses audio or video recording devices during interviews and participants should be made aware of this during the interview process (Vanclay et al., 2013). Participants in the research study were respected and their views were represented fairly. In the case of this study, I applied for Ethical approval from University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee and permission to conduct this study at the selected schools from the KZN Department of Education. Next, emails were sent to the school principals of the six schools to request teachers to participate in the research study. I then contacted the teachers to explain the purpose of the study and to request their permission to participate in the study. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time. Once teachers and principals had

been briefed on the study, participants were contacted telephonically for the interviews and via WhatsApp or email to explain the data generation methods. Pseudonyms were used in place of participants' names, and the names of the schools at which they teach.

## **1.6 A brief outline of the conceptual frameworks**

This research study adopted the conceptual frameworks of Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory, as well as Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning should not be confined to a classroom, but rather it is an experience that can occur in multiple settings. This is fitting for the research considering the restrictions that teachers encountered while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers no longer had their classroom setting during the hard lockdown period, but learning still occurred, nonetheless. Hargreaves (2001) lists five emotional geographies of teaching: sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political. These were the emotional dimensions of teachers impacted while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic as their familiar settings and methods had to be altered during this time. These emotional geographies were used to analyse both research questions in the research study.

## **1.7 Structure of the dissertation**

**Chapter one** introduced the focus and purpose of the study, as well as the rationale and important background information for the study. The key research questions were introduced, and a synopsis of the research process was given. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of this dissertation.

**Chapter two** provides an overview of the literature analysed during this research and compares the findings of studies similar to this study. It examines differing views and arguments put forth by various authors around the topic of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses on international and local similarities and differences when it comes to challenges and opportunities encountered in education as a result of COVID-19. The chapter concludes with a description of the conceptual frameworks that inform the study, namely Situational Learning Theory (Lave &

Wenger, 1991) and Emotional Geographies of Teaching (Hargreaves, 2001).

**Chapter three** discusses the methodological choices of the study and justification for these choices. A detailed explanation ensues of the interpretive paradigm, qualitative approach, research design, methods of data generation (semi-structured interviews, collages and artefacts), data analysis techniques, sampling method and ethical considerations.

**Chapter four** provides clarity on the data generation methods used, which included semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artefacts. This chapter also reviews the theories that were used in the analysis of data, namely, Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as well as Hargreaves (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching.

**Chapter five** discusses the key findings of the research study and provides recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with the strengths and weaknesses of this study and recommendations for future research in the field.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the purpose, rationale and background of this research study. It highlighted the research questions, key concepts, conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches that were used to guide this study. The chapter concluded with an overview of the five chapters of which this dissertation comprises. The next chapter provides a detailed description and analysis of the literature and conceptual frameworks used in this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This study aimed to explore teaching strategies used by South African Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. A further aim of this study was to examine teachers' experiences, challenges and opportunities in teaching during these unprecedented times. This chapter commences with a brief overview of education continuing through the COVID-19 pandemic. Thereafter, the focus shifts to the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it originated. Next, teaching and teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic are discussed, as well as online and blended learning. This is followed by an explanation of teaching in the Foundation Phase, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic within the Foundation Phase. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the conceptual frameworks that guided this study – Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory and Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching. These frameworks provided direction and gave clarity to the focus of the study.

### **2.2 The COVID-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a topic at the forefront of many discussions, including those around education and the way forward. The novel coronavirus disease was first identified in humans in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2020b). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), COVID-19 was passed on from animals, most likely bats, to humans, and it is linked to other viruses that are categorised under Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and common colds (WHO, 2020a; WHO, 2020b). COVID-19 was caused by a coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 (WHO, 2020b). "Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment" (WHO, 2022a). The WHO declared a pandemic on 12 March 2020, due to COVID-19 (Ciotti et al., 2020). There have been many mutations and variants of the Coronavirus, with these variants labelled by WHO as variants of interest (VOI) or variants of concern (VOC) (WHO, 2022b). The most common VOCs include variants named using the

Greek alphabet, namely, the Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and most recently Omicron variants (WHO, 2022b). The VOIs noted by WHO include the Lambda and Mu variants (WHO, 2022b). VOCs seem to have a higher spread and more fatal consequences, while VOIs generally present milder symptoms in those who are infected (WHO, 2022b). The severity of the variant bears major impact relating to the level of restrictions and precautionary measures put in place to curb infection rates.

As 2023 comes to a close, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have ended and all COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted. During the pandemic, schools were one of the entities affected by these restrictions. The measures put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19 in schools included non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs). NPIs included environmental changes such as the distancing of learner desks to accommodate a one-meter social distance and ensuring good ventilation in classrooms, as well as administrative factors including rotational classes, screening all staff and learners and cleaning the school environment daily. Other NPIs implemented included the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), regular washing of hands and social distancing within the school environment (Department of Basic Education, 2020). The Department of Basic Education (2020) together with the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) referred to these interventions as standard operating procedures (SOPs). These SOPs were followed by many schools and institutions around the world in a bid to assist in reducing the COVID-19 infection rates within the schooling context and in our communities as a whole.

Schools in South Africa were closed from 18 March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and slowly started resuming on 1 June 2020, with staggered grades and rotational classes to ensure social distancing was maintained within the school environment (Ardington et al., 2021). From early June to late August 2020, South African Foundation Phase teachers provided learning materials in a digital format for their learners to study at home. This meant relying heavily on parental involvement to assist Foundation Phase learners with accessing and engaging with the material (Grobler, 2022). According to Gustafsson and Deliwe (2020), school closures in South Africa were initiated due to the belief that COVID-19 was a flu-like virus that could be easily transmitted by children. However, this information was replaced by the notion that younger learners were less likely to be infected or transmit the virus within a school setting than older

learners. Therefore, the schools in South Africa resumed promptly. Many children who contracted COVID-19 were either asymptomatic or presented with mild symptoms, although there were a few fatalities among children (Ciotti et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as the world's greatest devastation since the Second World War, triggering not only medical but also economic tragedy (Bentata, 2020; Gustafsson & Deliwe, 2020). Bao et al. (2020) claim that by April 2020, over 1.5 billion students worldwide had experienced a disruption in schooling due to the school closures that occurred in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an indication of the magnitude of pandemonium created by this virus in all parts of the world. This virus brought the entire world almost to a standstill during 2020, with lockdowns that were enforced throughout every continent (Bao et al., 2020). According to Lone and Ahmad (2020), the continent of Africa was the last continent to be affected by the COVID-19 disease. This being said, these authors predicted severe consequences of the virus in Africa, due to the vulnerability of the population with regard to infectious diseases and the poor economic status of the continent (Lone & Ahmad, 2020).

### **2.3 Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unexpected changes in education systems around the world. Al Lily et al. (2020) contend that in order for countries to counteract the COVID-19 pandemic, they have replaced traditional classroom-based education with distance education. Online education is a form of distance education where teachers and learners are physically separated, but contact is maintained via online platforms (Mukuna & Aloka, 2020). Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021, p. 134) mention the issues uncovered by research focusing on online teaching and learning, such as the “weakness of online teaching infrastructure, the limited exposure of teachers to online teaching, the information gap, non-conducive environment for learning at home”. The American Community School (ACS) in Athens, Greece, slowly introduced Grade 9-12 to online learning systems prior to the lockdown, but kindergarten and elementary school teachers and learners were not included in this change, as learning is very concrete at these ages. These teachers were forced to adapt swiftly to virtual learning systems (Avgerinou & Moros, 2020).

Not only did COVID-19 impact learners and teachers, but during the lockdown period when



schools were closed, parents and families were also affected. Cai and Wang (2020) found in their study, which was based on middle school learners in China, that parents had assumed some of the responsibilities that were previously assigned to teachers, such as monitoring and facilitating classwork activities. Assessments that were administered online were done so with trial and error, which brought about uncertainty regarding methods and results for students, teachers and parents (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). It is difficult to gauge learner performance using only online methods of assessment, as some learners require more remediation than other learners. Learners have diverse educational needs which need to be developed. These needs include personal development, social interaction and educational experiences (Nikolić & Vukić, 2021). Teachers have the difficult task of developing all facets of their learners, while catering to diverse learner needs. Bishop (2021) asserts that educational activities may not always cater to learner's stages of development, furthermore, learning at home makes it difficult for teachers to apply educational scaffolding techniques appropriately. Teachers in the classroom environment are able to analyse learners' reception of the content they are teaching and assess their level of understanding using standardised tests and assessments. Online learning platforms may provide teachers with a communication tool to assist the learning process of students from a distance, but this form of education may not accommodate all learners.

In order for teaching and learning to take place virtually, both learners and teachers need adequate resources and assistance. According to Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), students from low socio-economic backgrounds may experience difficulties adjusting to online or virtual learning systems due to their lack of internet connectivity or computers, which may result in these learners being at a disadvantage. Similarly, Mukuna and Aloba's (2020) research at a rural school in South Africa highlighted the problems with online learning, which included parental involvement with regards to children's homework was lacking, many learners had incomplete work which resulted in poor performance, personal protective equipment (PPE) was limited, poor network connectivity and the lack of access to digital devices. Likewise, Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) found that learners in rural Bhutan experienced difficulties accessing online learning platforms due to the high data prices and lack of finances and accessibility to electronic devices, as well as the fact that they were expected to assist family members with agricultural or household chores during the periods that they were not attending school. In the same vein, Lepp et al. (2021) maintain that economic inequality impeded learners' participation in online

learning, while the eagerness of schools to embrace use of technology inspired the success of distance education. Many of the poorer schools and communities experienced these difficulties when it came to implementing online or distance education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The limited time frames that schools had to ensure learning and teaching continued during this period also contributed to their lack of readiness for this immense change.

Teachers' emotional well-being was compromised during the COVID-19 pandemic due the risk of infection teachers encountered while being exposed to multiple social contacts and continuing with core functioning in schools (Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2022). According to a study conducted by Panadero et al. (2022), teachers experienced increased negative emotions such as anxiety, nervousness and sadness, while using Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). Similarly, some teachers in this study felt overwhelmed with the changes brought about during the COVID-19 pandemic, but this was overcome by their sense of resilience and passion for their learners.

In 2020, Gyimah claimed that the rapid shift to online learning platforms had the potential to exacerbate the existing inequalities in education between schools and learners with access to technological resources and those without these facilities. Similarly, Bishop (2021) argued that the ramifications of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed for the development of new educational inequalities, while exacerbating the ones that previously existed. The South African school year is considered to be longer than that in other countries, therefore teaching and learning losses, due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, could have been overcome once learners returned to school (Gustafsson & Deliwe, 2020). This, however, was dependent on the recovery systems put in place by both the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the teachers and learners in South Africa, who had to work harder to counteract the time lost during school closures. Those schools that had adequate resources available and accessible to both teachers and learners were able to continue with video lessons via Zoom, Teams, Google Meet or other synchronous and asynchronous learning platforms. This encouraged different forms of learning material for teachers to engage learner involvement, such as YouTube learning videos (Lepp et al., 2021). This allowed for learners with different learning styles to be accommodated, as compared to the traditional methods of teaching used in the classroom, such as the chalk and talk method, which is generally teacher-centred.

## **2.4 Teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic**

According to Sarode (2018, p. 58), “Teaching strategies refer to methods used to help students learn the desired course contents and be able to develop achievable goals in the future”. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers used the chalk and talk method of teaching which involved explaining concepts to learners using illustrations on the chalk board and textbooks (Makeleni & Sethusha, 2014). Herrington et al. (2000) describe the traditional teaching strategies as textbook guided, compartmentalised learning, teacher centered and whole class teaching rather than group work which has little emphasis on contextualisation and real-life experiences.

In the Foundation Phase, play-based learning is a common strategy used. Isaacs et al. (2019, p. 1) mentioned “Learning through play enhances the disposition of children to learn, and enables their content knowledge and their cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.” A programme was introduced to selected schools in the Eastern Cape in 2017. It was called ‘The Play Well & Be Happy approach to play’ which focused on free play (where learners are provided with resources to play with, without direction), guided play (which involved problem solving through play), instructional play (which involved teachers providing specific outcomes required that were decided by the educator) (Isaacs et al., 2019). A study by Dzamesi and van Heerden (2020) based in Kenya found that children were exposed to learning naturally using sand and water from the riverbeds, which also falls under sensory play (feeling different textures). The COVID-19 pandemic forced learners and teachers around the globe to move to a remote or online teaching and learning system during the periods of hard lockdowns (Al Lily et al., 2020; Avgerinou & Moros, 2020; Gyimah, 2020; König et al., 2020). Conventional teaching strategies seemed to be unable to deal with the restrictions placed on the schooling system due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Al Lily et al., 2020; Dube, 2020). Teachers had to adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate the global changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A study by Avgerinou and Moros (2020) found that an Elementary school in Athens had to engage 400 pupils promptly in virtual learning systems, which included student focus groups, telephone calls to parents and students, as well as documented progression of learner

performance. These technical changes caused many schools to evaluate their readiness for the digital age and their former teaching methods. Churiyah et al. (2020) argue that during the period of COVID-19 lockdowns around the world, many schools could not accomplish the results previously yielded by traditional teaching strategies. A study by Turchi et al. (2020) revealed that teachers made use of synchronous (using digital platforms for classroom-like lessons) and asynchronous strategies (offline activities or recorded lessons/video lessons). Their findings indicated that teachers were exhausted due to the digitisation of documents and lessons, while learners became disinterested in Zoom lessons and engagement diminished (Turchi et al., 2020). Teachers seemed to work harder to accommodate and facilitate the learning process. In contrast, a study by Bubba and Jones (2020) reported that teachers felt a reduction in their workload and they had more time to spend on learner feedback. This indicates the difference between schools that were not exposed to online learning prior to COVID-19 and were forced to make a rapid shift to teaching using online platforms and those that had implemented online learning prior to the pandemic.

Teachers developed their technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) in new instructional environments. This was made possible by integrating the use of technology in their classroom practices (Par, 2022). Teachers within the study used ZOOM, Google classroom and online libraries to facilitate their teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Professional development was increased due to technological exposure and collaborative communities, which encouraged learner engagement using online platforms (Cheng et al., 2022).

Teachers in developing countries faced issues in implementing online learning such as digital inequalities among teachers and learners, unsuitable instructional material, a lack of teacher training and support and inferior digital infrastructure (Khlaif et al., 2020). Distance or virtual learning, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, involved teachers being adequately trained and learners being technologically equipped, but this was not the case in many schools due to the rapid shift from classroom-based learning to the use of online learning platforms (Gyimah, 2020). While many teachers tried to educate learners during the lockdown, some were more successful than others due to being adequately resourced and having the required technological knowledge (Monareng et al., 2020). The research conducted by Monareng et al. (2020) identified both benefits and challenges of online learning in South African schools. The challenges

included lack of network and data availability and required skills, while the benefits included flexible learning times for younger learners who needed parental assistance, diverse teaching strategies and increased learner interaction (Monareng et al., 2020). Their findings also indicated that socioeconomics played a major role in the readiness of learners and teachers in accessing online platforms.

While many international schools have embraced online learning, South Africa faces the challenge of unequal education opportunities based on the economic divide that exists in the country. Independent and private schools in South Africa are able to carry out online learning, whereas public schools cannot use this as the sole means of educating learners because many teachers and learners, especially those in rural areas, cannot afford data and do not have access to digital platforms (Bubb & Jones, 2020; Dube, 2020; Monareng et al., 2020). According to Bubb and Jones (2020), Dube (2020) and Monareng et al. (2020), this widens the gap between poor learners and their affluent counterparts.

While online learning may seem like the only alternative to traditional classroom teaching methods, there is still a need to consider the lived realities of those who are underprivileged (Dube, 2020). Underprivileged schools and learners were hit the hardest by the sudden changes in the method of education and the fact that schools had to be closed for a long period of time during the pandemic. “The pandemic has had major short-term adverse psycho-educational and psychosocial effects and may also jeopardise the future of many learners in the medium and long term” (Maree, 2021, p. 250). South Africa made great efforts in the fight against COVID-19 to ensure that teaching and learning continued. The country has a long way to go, however, when it comes to achieving a fully inclusive online education system.

## **2.5 The shift to online or blended learning**

Education has developed over the years, which has led to the development of innovative methods of instruction. The global shift to digital instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the provision of online or blended learning instructional methods, despite many students and teachers not being familiar with or adequately trained in these methods (Lockee, 2021). The advancement in communication and web-based technologies provided a solution to meet the

needs of schools and organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lim et al., 2007). Online instruction can be defined as any form of learning or teaching that occurs with the use of computers connected via the internet where teachers and students are not required to be in the same place (Lim et al., 2007; Park and Shea, 2020; Watson & Gemin, 2009). Similarly, Park and Shea (2020) define online learning as distance education which is delivered solely using the internet. In addition, they mention that online learning is a form of distance education which is teaching that occurs in a different place to learning (Park & Shea, 2020). Online learning offers learners educational opportunities irrespective of their geographical location through the use of digital resources and content via the internet (Watson & Gemin, 2009). Online instruction addresses the issue of time and place constraints and allows for flexible learning modes so students can control their learning path, pace, and methods of instruction (Lim et al., 2007). According to Bishop (2021, p. 2), the advantages of online learning for teachers included “teachers’ expanded knowledge of individual learners, increased individualized instruction, greater opportunities for student choice and self-pace, more timely and detailed assessment feedback, enhanced family engagement, and improved technology skills.” One of the major pitfalls of online instruction is the lack of motivation and self-regulation of learners. Some learners in a study conducted by Lim et al. (2007) mentioned that they experienced a feeling of a lack of belonging to the school community and limited expression of emotions by both learners and teachers within the online community.

Blended learning, which is also referred to as hybrid learning, can be described as the combination of online learning platforms and face-to-face instruction methods (Park & Shea, 2020; Watson & Gemin, 2009). There seems to be consensus among authors regarding the two key ingredients of blended learning – face-to-face learning in combination with online learning platforms (Hrastinski, 2019). According to a study conducted by Watson and Gemin (2009) in Nevada, teachers found that blended learning is preferable to fully online systems for specific subjects such as Mathematics. The study also found that one of the schools arranged face-to-face sessions for learners who were experiencing learning difficulties as fully online instruction was inadequate for these learners (Watson & Gemin, 2009). Blended learning aids learner performance and satisfaction by engaging with learners personally, while incorporating a range of instructional and delivery strategies (Lim et al., 2007). Blended learning strategies that may be used include using a discussion board or other media, flipped classroom methods such as video

lessons that can be viewed by learners in the space of their own homes or even class group activities that may be continued via online platforms (Hrastinski, 2019). Blended learning accommodates learners who perform well in a classroom setting, as well as those who are more comfortable within their home environments or with the use of technology. This method may be more suitable for younger learners, as compared to a fully online system.

## **2.6 Teaching in the Foundation Phase during the COVID-19 pandemic**

There is limited research that focuses on Foundation Phase teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dong et al., 2020). In many countries, children begin their schooling and foundation in kindergarten, which ranges from ages under five to around six years old, before being promoted to elementary school and thereafter middle school (Bao et al., 2020; Cai & Wang, 2020). However, these titles differ in some countries. For example, in the United Kingdom, elementary schools are referred to as primary schools (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Likewise, in South Africa, primary school includes grades R-7, with grades RRR-3 being classified as either early childhood development (ECD) or the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) (Grobler, 2022). ECD and the Foundation Phase include ages from birth to eight years old (Britto et al., 2013).

The few studies that have been done on Foundation Phase teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic all have different findings from different contexts and countries. A study carried out by Dong et al. (2020) revealed that in China, parents with younger children had a hard time adjusting to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the lack of self-regulation of early childhood learners, as well as insufficient time and professional knowledge of parents when assisting children's online learning. On the contrary, a study by Bubb and Jones (2020) in Norway based on learners across grades 1-12 found that learners were more independent using online learning systems and parents of younger learners provided positive feedback regarding their involvement in their children's learning. In Poland, Marchlik et al. (2021) conducted a study based on English Second Language (ESL) teachers. This study indicated the difference between public and private primary schools' distant education methods in Poland. The research by Marchlik et al. (2021) revealed that private primary schools in Poland utilised more synchronous online lessons (Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams), while public schools provided more asynchronous lessons, in the form of emails, electronic logbooks, videos and Facebook

Messenger messages. A study based on primary school teachers' perceptions in Indonesia carried out by Rasmitadila et al. (2020) revealed that lesson time was shorter due to using online platforms such as Zoom, as well as some teachers used mainly video lessons as they felt they lacked the creativity to use other forms of media. Teachers from this study also mentioned the difficulty with assessing learners, as assessments in the Foundation Phase usually "include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects" (Rasmitadila et al., 2020, p. 97), which cannot be assessed fairly in an online setting. Grobler (2022) contends that when using online methods, if communication from the parents is limited, it is difficult for teachers to determine the success of learning. This meant that both learning and assessment of Foundation Phase learners were dependent on parental involvement.

In South Africa, the Foundation Phase applies to grades R-3, and focuses on learners aged between 5-9 years old. Learning areas in this phase include literacy, numeracy, home language, life skills and the option of a first additional language (Western Cape Education Department, 2013). Based on the age of Foundation Phase learners, it is difficult for these learners to access and navigate online learning effectively and independently (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020). Despite this, South African Foundation Phase learners were some of the last learners to return to school according to a staggered grade return in June 2020, after the prolonged school closures during the hard lockdown period (Ardington et al., 2021). The study carried out by Ardington et al. (2021, p. 1) based on early grade reading in South Africa found that Grade two learners "lost between 57 % and 70 % of a year of learning", while Grade four learners "lost between 56 %–60 % of contact teaching days due to school closures and rotational timetabling". This indicates the severity of learning losses that occurred in the Foundation Phase during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learners in Grade one, aged between 6-7 years old, are introduced to emergent reading and writing, which is the initial stages of reading and sentence writing (Department of Basic Education, 2011). This means that learners at this stage of learning are not equipped to access and complete online learning activities or lessons without the assistance of teachers or parents as they cannot read online prompts or materials. Indeed, a study conducted by Grobler (2022) based on Manguang Primary Schools in South Africa found that Grade one learners required parental involvement when accessing and engaging material sent via WhatsApp groups. However, not all



parents were able to access these groups, willing to engage in online learning and committed to continue with teaching their children in the home environment. This statement is echoed by Nel and Marais (2020) who conducted a study based on South African pre-service teachers' use of WhatsApp to disseminate information to learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. They argue that Foundation Phase learners lack the ability to access platforms such as Zoom for online lessons and, therefore, Foundation Phase teachers settled on using WhatsApp as an alternative means of communicating with parents and providing learners with learning materials (Nel & Marais, 2020). There is limited research on teaching in the Foundation Phase in South African schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlights the gap in research and the need for this study since it focused on the teaching strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2.7 Challenges faced by Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic**

When teaching younger learners, it is important to incorporate fun, play and movement, as these are aspects required to ensure an interactive learning environment (Marchlik, Wichrowska & Zubala, 2021). Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) found that the lack of parental involvement with younger learners posed a challenge, as sometimes both parents were working and could not assist learners. Parental involvement in Foundation Phase is directly linked to the provision and reception of the curriculum by learners (Grobler, 2022). Likewise, Maree (2021) asserts that the lack of parental involvement hampered learners' ability to engage in online platforms satisfactorily. Teachers in the Foundation Phase were tasked with creating innovative, fun and educational content for online use, whilst also bearing in mind that many learners did not have parental assistance to access this content. Younger learners were some of the last learners to be shifted to online learning platforms due to independent accessibility concerns, as well as the fact that learning is very concrete and tactile at this phase (Avgerinou & Moros, 2020). This includes learning through play, manipulation of objects and semi-concrete diagrams. These are difficult to achieve via online platforms, especially if learners do not have the concrete apparatus required to participate in lessons. Younger learners also require added stimulation in order to keep them engaged in their learning. This can pose as a challenge for teachers tasked with keeping learners focused while they are not in the classroom environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented teachers around the world with the challenge of exploring alternatives to face-to-face teaching, which include, but are not limited to, online teaching, remote and virtual classrooms (Al Lily et al., 2020; Gyimah, 2020; König et al., 2020). Iivari et al. (2020) assert that the problem with these methods is that there are still digital divides that exist in our society and this has an impact on the younger generation and their digital futures. Similarly, South Africa still experiences socioeconomic disparities. While the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light many of these differences, these differences still exist in our societies. Some rural communities in South Africa lack the electronic resources and connectivity, which makes it difficult to initiate a virtual learning programme (Gyimah, 2020; Monareng, et al., 2020). Maree (2021) mentioned three factors that impacted rural communities engaging in online learning. These included connectivity issues, poverty and poor living conditions, as well as the need for parental involvement to support their children's learning process. Therefore, Dube (2020) argues that the COVID-19 pandemic widened the gap between the privileged and those who are underprivileged as the uneven distribution of resources became more apparent. Learners who were able to access online learning continued with their schooling and are now at a greater advantage than those learners who lacked the opportunity to participate in online classes. Private schools are more affluent and have adapted more successfully using a combination of in-person, hybrid online, and digital formats of teaching and learning, however, many schools in disadvantaged areas found it difficult to transition from teaching in-person to now adapting their teaching strategies to incorporate online platforms (Maree, 2021).

South African Foundation Phase learners only returned to their classrooms, using a staggered approach, at the end of August 2021 with a 50% occupancy rate (Grobler, 2022). Due to the restrictions of limited numbers of persons gathering in close proximity, once the severe lockdowns had been lifted, many schools were presented with the challenge of dividing classes into groups and alternating days or weeks in order for teaching and learning to occur with face-to-face interaction (Ardington et al., 2021). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, South African teachers were faced with the challenge of a lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms which resulted in teachers not being able to give learners adequate individual attention (Makeleni & Sethusha, 2014; Maree, 2021). COVID-19 restrictions added to these challenges as educating all learners while maintaining the required social distance without leaving any learner behind was almost impossible. A study conducted by Spaull and Van der Berg (2020, p. 6) revealed that in

2020, 63% of South African primary school teachers had 40 or more learners in a class, while 16% had 60 or more learners per class. This made social distancing virtually impossible and even if class sizes were halved or divided into groups, South African classrooms will still not be large enough to accommodate a 1-meter distance between learners, as stipulated by government regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic (Department of Basic Education, 2020, p. 13). Due to the COVID-19 social distancing restrictions, learners had to keep a social distance at all times, which included during breaks and when leaving the classroom, which proved to be a difficult task (Maree, 2021). The large class sizes in South African schools does not afford teachers the opportunity to provide adequate individual attention to learners which would have been an advantage to learners, especially during a time such as during the COVID-19 pandemic after the hard lockdowns were over when remediation was necessary. Gustafsson and Deliwe (2020) outlined four challenges as per the resumption of school policies; these were, social distancing in the school setting, social distancing in the classroom, the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and teachers with co-morbidities having the right to stay at home. These policies were adapted so that all teachers returned to schools, including those who were at-risk and social distancing being removed in schools in February 2022 (South African Government, 2022). This may have increased levels of anxiety for some teachers considering the large class sizes without social distancing and the fact that COVID-19 was still in existence.

Mukuna and Aloka (2020) maintain that face-to-face communication aids human expression, which was, thus, hampered due to the restrictions initiated during the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020. The South African government and the DBE have recognised the detrimental effects that school closures had and decided to resume schooling full-time for all learners in February 2022. Primary, secondary and schools for learners with special education needs returned to school on a daily basis and resumed their regular timetabling formats, with no social distancing from 7 February 2022 (South African Government, 2022). Due to the learning losses caused by teaching time lost as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were teaching in classrooms that were equivalent to multi-grade classrooms, with each learner requiring different levels of remediation (Ardington et al., 2021). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) developed a recovery plan for a three-year period from 2020 with a trimmed curriculum to accommodate the losses in teaching time (Ardington et al., 2021). The aim was to allow teachers more time to consolidate concepts taught and attend to learners with learning gaps or difficulty grasping new concepts.

Foundation Phase teachers and learners were not impacted by the trimmed curriculum, however, as their curriculum remained the same. Laying a solid foundation for learners academically is considered of utmost importance and learning gaps impact learners for the rest of their schooling and tertiary careers (Maree, 2021).

## **2.8 Conceptual frameworks**

This study was framed by the Situated Learning Theory, which was proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), as well as Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching. The Situated Learning Theory focuses on concepts such as legitimate peripheral participation, contextual influence on learning, transferability of knowledge and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Emotional Geographies focus on "how teachers' emotions are embedded in the conditions and interactions of their work" (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 1058). This concept underpins teacher emotions related to the closeness and distance in social interactions between learners, colleagues and parents. These emotions were affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies include sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political distances. These concepts will be used to analyse the data generated within this study and draw conclusions.

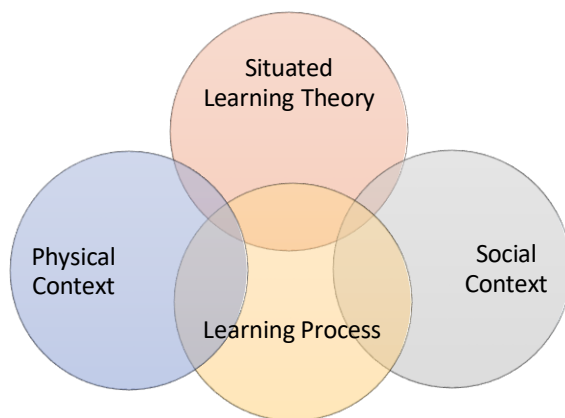
### **2.8.1 Situated Learning Theory**

Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 14) outline the concept of legitimate peripheral participation as the involvement and engagement of learners in their process of learning as co-participants. In addition, Lave and Wenger (1991) contend that learning consists of portable interactive skills, and, while the context of the learning environment plays a role in the process, it does not solely dictate the essence of what or how knowledge is transferred. Therefore, this framework was suitable for this research study, as it understands that learning is not restricted to the classroom environment, but rather a flexible exchange of communication and skills development of both teachers and learners. This was relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic as teachers, parents and learners had to adapt to the new ways of disseminating information and engaging in learning activities which were no longer limited to a chalk board and verbal instructions. Teachers within the study used various online platforms as a method of communicating and distributing

information to both learners and parents.

The Situated Learning Theory suggests that physical and social contexts influence the learning process (Putnam & Borko, 2000). This study aimed to explore teaching strategies of Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as examine their experiences and challenges of teaching during such uncertain times. Therefore, the influence of different physical and social contexts on online learning in South Africa was important to the study as learning took place from teachers' and learners' homes during the hard lockdown. According to Mathura and Zulu (2021, p. 3), "the manner in which learning takes place is based on the situation". The situation in which learning occurs determines the level of growth and development of the learner, as well as their application of what is learnt (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This was relevant to the study because the predominant mode of learning during COVID-19 was online learning.

Learners have different physical and social contexts in which they undertake online learning, but their ability to grasp and apply knowledge transferred is dependent on their understanding of the content and the skills they attain during the learning process. As stated by Daniella, a participant in this study, the learners they taught were English second language learners, who required detailed instructions to given to both learners and parents for the completion of tasks and still this did not guarantee that learners understood what was required of them. Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the Situated Learning Theory adapted from Putnam and Borko (2000).



*Figure 2.1 Situated Learning Theory adapted from Putnam and Borko (2000)*

Anderson et al. (1996, p. 6) contend that "sometimes knowledge is necessarily bound to a specific context by the nature of instruction". Similarly, Bell et al. (2013) suggest that learning cannot take place or be isolated from the environment in which it occurs. In light of the current

study, online learning for many schools is bound to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many schools would not have been exposed to or explored the online teaching strategy due to the socioeconomic dynamics in which these schools operate, had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, for the more affluent countries and communities, online learning had been infiltrating the education sector over a period of time prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in them being more prepared for the digital change in the education sector around the world (Iivari et al., 2020; Jain et al., 2020). Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 101) assert that “understanding the technology of practice is more than learning to use tools; it is a way to connect with the history of the practice and to participate more directly in its cultural life”. Learners’ participation in online learning programmes is dependent on their situation and availability of resources. In the same vein, Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 103) suggest “depending on the organization of access, legitimate peripherality can either promote or prevent legitimate participation”. This refers to learner participation being encouraged or hampered based on the resources available at the school and to the learners. If learners and teachers cannot access devices or networks required for online learning to take place, their process of learning is hindered. Elethu, a participant in this study, mentioned that the difficulty with using online teaching was that it was limited to learners who had access to this method of teaching and learning, which excluded some learners. Although learners’ gain knowledge in various contexts, this knowledge should be transferable to different contexts. According to Catalano (2015), concepts taught using alternate teaching strategies, such as online learning platforms, should be applicable to learners’ classwork activities, therefore being transferred from one context to another.

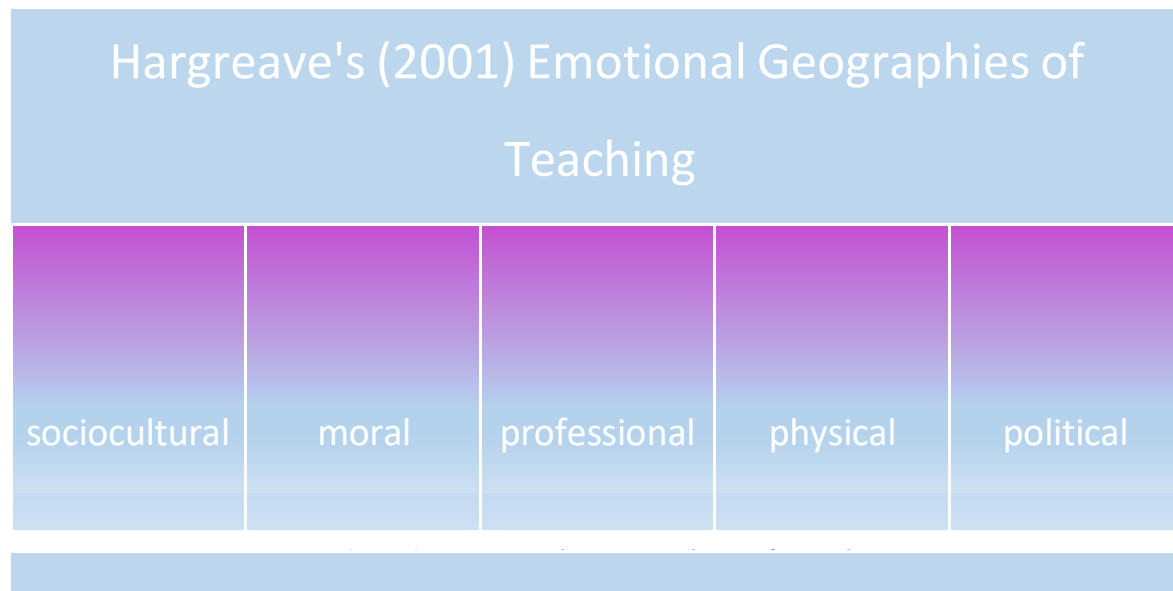
This study aimed to explore whether teaching strategies used in the Foundation Phase during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective and the challenges or opportunities involved in implementing these strategies. While various schools utilised different strategies during this time, the ultimate goal was to educate learners and get them to apply the knowledge gained during this period. Lave and Wenger (1991) posit that although learners are usually subject to learning within the confines of a classroom setting, learning should be transferable to real-life situations. Based on this claim, learning should have been effective during the COVID-19 pandemic since the learning process is transferrable and thus could be adapted to the COVID-19 context and the online and hybrid forms that were used. A study undertaken by Bell et al. (2013)

at a Mid-Atlantic University, focused on a science teacher preparation programme designed around the principles of Situated Learning Theory with the use of technology-based instruction. The study's findings suggested that using Situated Learning Theory increased pre-service teachers' instructional uses of technology (Bell et al., 2013, p. 374)

Teachers work within a community of practice (COP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This allows teachers to express their shared goal and common practices, while engaging in discussions and planning activities using online platforms (Mills, 2011). In doing so, their knowledge and experiences are transferred to a wider community using networks of communication. Teachers are encouraged to transfer technological knowledge from one context to another, while encouraging learners to do the same (Bell et al., 2013). These networks facilitated the learning process and ensured that teaching and learning continued in some form or another during the COVID-19 pandemic. Elethu mentioned communicating with teachers from different provinces to gather resources that would facilitate her teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kong and Wang (2020) carried out a study on primary school learners' computer programming development in Hong Kong. Their study used Situated Learning Theory to justify the participative design of computer-supported collaborative learning which allowed learners to work in small groups to engage in activities online (Kong & Wang, 2020). Learners have also worked within communities of practice with their peers and teachers during the period of distance education due to the pandemic (Kong & Wang, 2020). Knowledge gained from their experiences should be applied to tasks learners are presented with either online, in material provided or within a familiar classroom setting. Teachers and learners' adaptability and transferability of knowledge were put to the test during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 2.8.2 Hargreaves's Emotional Geographies of Teaching

Hargreaves (2001) mentions five emotional geographies of teaching: sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political. Figure 2.2 below depicts Hargreaves (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching.



Hargreaves (2001) explains sociocultural distance as the lack of contextual knowledge between teachers and their learners. Teachers may at times have a disconnected relationship with parents or learners due to insufficient or too much background information on a child or their situation. This can lead to premature judgements being made and distance being created between the teacher, learners and parents. Stereotypes are often construed regarding the particular race group or gender of learners based on sociocultural norms in society. For example, the stereotype that all rural learners do not have access to mobile devices seems to exist in South Africa. This is based on the presumption that all rural learners live in poverty and cannot afford luxuries such as technology. This was relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic as learners' sociocultural differences had to be considered and teaching strategies adapted appropriately. A study by Sari (2021) claimed rural parents with poor education do not nurture their children's educational needs as they ought to. On the other hand, it is usually assumed that well-educated parents in urban areas support and enhance their children's education. This shows the difference in sociocultural dynamics. This is highlighted in Elethu's response that learners lacked the interest to attend bi-weekly lessons and work that was sent home was not completed, as learners lacked the parental involvement required. Bethel on the other hand, who was another participant in this study, found that parents encouraged communication and engagement of resources provided by the teacher.



Moral distance refers to teachers being detached due to their purpose being questioned by learners, parents or even colleagues (Hargreaves, 2001). This may lead to emotions such as guilt, anger, frustration and anxiety (Hargreaves, 2001). On the other hand, teachers are encouraged by compliments and gratitude from parents or learners regarding their efforts (Hargreaves, 2001). During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents were burdened with some of the teaching responsibilities previously held solely by teachers in the classroom. This could have increased parents' appreciation of teachers or left them questioning teachers' competency in their jobs. An article by Giardina (2021) describes how he swapped between his career as a professor and to fulfil the duty of an ECD educator to his son. This allowed him to appreciate the time spent engaging with his son during his educational experience.

According to Hargreaves (2001), professional distance refers to keeping parents and learners at arm's length to avoid emotional entanglement. Teachers are required to show compassion towards their students, while at the same time remaining detached (Hargreaves, 2001). The COVID-19 pandemic created a situation where teachers were either too involved in parents or learners' lives (by means of social media or online communication) or they were too detached due to physical constraints placed on them by COVID-19 restrictions. Bethel mentioned during her interview *"Parents were not allowed to come to school... no parent interviews. So I had a parent, a parent week at my house."* This indicated the distance created by COVID-19 and the breaking of personal boundaries by allowing parents to enter her home environment.

Physical distance seemed to be the most relevant emotional geography during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is difficult to understand someone fully without engaging directly with them (Hargreaves, 2001). Physical distance refers to the separation between parents, learners and teachers (Hargreaves, 2001). During the COVID-19 pandemic, meetings were predominantly informal or telephonic creating great physical distances. Physical distance hampers relationships instead of building them. In the school setting, physical distancing was one of the requirements as per regulations provided by the WHO according to COVID-19 guidelines (WHO, 2020a). Bethel mentioned painting paw prints to indicate the 1.5m social distancing requirement for the learners, as well as her husband making screens between learners' desks to separate them.

Finally, Hargreaves (2001) refers to political distance as power relations that may exist between

parents and teachers. Power relations changed during the COVID-19 lockdown due to parents playing a dual role as a parent and teacher. Teachers are often empowered by the positive affirmations bestowed to them by their colleagues, parents and even learners (Hargreaves, 2001). The fact that teachers had to change their teaching strategies and were not familiar with the situation they were placed in during the COVID-19 pandemic may have left them feeling disempowered. Amelia, a participant in the study, mentioned feeling pressured due to the academic demands placed on her as a teacher to get her learners to reach the required standard. Caroline on the other hand felt overwhelmed by the changes she experienced with the shift to online teaching. Teachers experienced panic, confusion, frustration and burnout during the shift from face-to-face teaching to online teaching, but once they became more familiar with this mode of teaching, they also became more confident and competent (Sari, 2021). Teachers are often resilient and deal with the changes required to benefit the learners.

The theories used in this study, although different in their outlook, serve the purpose of encapsulating the experiences of Foundation Phase teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Tellings (2001) mentions the use of educational theories in research that follow similar ideologies, or contrast in their disposition. Lave and Wenger (1991) focused on the aspect of collaboration and working within a COP, whilst Hargreaves (2001) introspected the emotional and physical dilemmas that teachers had to endure. In parallel views, both theories address the physical and contextual factors that influence the dissemination of information.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

Teaching and learning were significantly impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The methods of information delivery adopted by schools depended substantially on the resources available to both students and teachers, as well as the technological competency levels of all parties involved. The shift to a digital era in education presented opportunities for teacher-parent collaboration, and allowed teachers to assist one another at a local level to improve online delivery methods with increased innovation in teaching and learning during difficult times (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021) The frameworks of Situated Learning proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), as well as Emotional Geographies (Hargreaves, 2001) were used as a lens of

interpretation for the data that was generated within this study. These frameworks shaped the study and provided a depth of understanding that allowed the linking of theory to practice. The next chapter will focus on the research methodologies used in the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter reviewed recent literature with a focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching strategies, teaching within the Foundation Phase and the experiences of teachers during the pandemic. This chapter begins with an outline of the research approach and methodology. The interpretive paradigm guided the study and methodological approaches were selected based on their relevance to the research questions. Next, the chapter presents a discussion of a case study research design and its significance to this study. Thereafter, the data generation instruments, namely semi-structured interviews, artefacts and collages are described, followed by an explanation of the research context, purposive sampling and data analysis. This chapter concludes with an outline of the ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness of the study, as well as the limitations of the methodological approach. The next chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of the data generated. The research design and methodology focused on addressing the following research questions:

1. What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

### **3.2 Qualitative approach**

This research study adopted a qualitative methodological approach. Merriam (2002) argues that meaning is constructed by individuals through their interaction in social contexts. Krauss (2005) contends that qualitative research is based on making meaning of the world around us. Cohen et al. (2018, p. 288) contend that qualitative data consists of multiple realities, dependent on the interpretations of participants, as data is “context-related, context-dependent and context-rich”. These authors add, “To understand a situation, researchers need to understand the context”

(Cohen et al., 2018, p. 288). Similarly, Merriam (2002) asserts that qualitative research consists of multiple reality constructs and interpretations at a particular time and in a specific context. Krauss (2005) also suggests that qualitative research comprises multiple realities constructed by people who experience a phenomenon of interest. Krauss (2005) further maintains that the goal of a qualitative research is to understand the world, behaviours and experiences of people based on the view of the participants in a study who are affected by a particular situation. In the same vein, Phothongsunan (2010) contends that the main focus of qualitative data is for I to interpret meanings. In other words, in order for a researcher to gather data that reflects the reality of a situation, a holistic view of the participants' circumstances is a key element to consider when conducting research. In this study, the research focused on the participants' experiences of teaching strategies used during the COVID-19 pandemic. In qualitative research, the term 'participants' is used rather than subjects to recognise the fact that participants are part of the research and their information generates the data required for the study (Vanclay et al., 2013). According to Jackson, et al. (2019), qualitative research is useful when I is trying to understand a process or experiences from participants in the study.

According to Stake (1995, as cited in Jackson et al., 2007, p. 37), there are three distinct differences between qualitative and quantitative research: "(1) the distinction between explanation and understanding as the purpose of inquiry; (2) the distinction between a personal and impersonal role for I; and (3) a distinction between knowledge discovered and knowledge constructed". Within this study, the purpose of inquiry was to identify common methods of instruction and teaching strategies utilised by Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The role of I in this qualitative study is more personal, considering that the research is directly linked to their profession and occurrences that affected many teachers within this profession. Within the study, knowledge and methods used by Foundation Phase teachers were constructed during the interview process and through the analysis of collages and artefacts as the participants' understanding of reality came into play.

There are both strengths and weaknesses within qualitative research. The strengths include the flexibility of the data generation methods involved, as well as I being the primary instrument for data generation and data analysis (Merriam, 2002). In addition, Azungah (2018) contends that qualitative research is less structured since questions are open-ended and data generation methods are adaptable to participants. This allows I to be creative in their representation of data

and the manner in which it is displayed to the reader. Kvale (1996) describes qualitative research through a miner analogy in which I discovers nuggets of information, and transcribes and analyses them to reveal the interviewee's authentic experiences. With the depth and information qualitative research allows, a rich description of information gathered by I can be conveyed to readers in an appealing way. Sallee and Flood (2012, p. 139) also describe three strengths of qualitative research which include: "(a) its focus on context, (b) its use of an emergent design, and (c) its use of thick description".

Qualitative research does have weaknesses, however. These include the biases or subjectivity of I as a human instrument within the research process, which may compromise the study, as well as a lack of data to describe the phenomenon of interest adequately (Merriam, 2002). According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), qualitative researchers may experience difficulties with adequately capturing and representing their participants' lived experiences. On the contrary, Azungah (2018) highlights that qualitative research allows participants to express their views on a phenomenon without imposing predetermined concepts or opinions on them. I need to remain objective and use probing during the data generation process. This objectivity needs to be present when analysing data generated as well in order to overcome these weaknesses. Research is further strengthened by the use of triangulation during the data analysis steps. This improves the validity of the data generated, while decreasing the room for biases to be imposed by I when interpreting the data generated.

Qualitative research focuses on understanding participants' interpretations of a phenomenon, at a particular point in time, within a specific context (Merriam, 2002). It is also important for researchers to consider how a particular context or situation impacts participants and their interpretations. While the purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 lockdown and once they had returned to schools, as well as the strategies they employed during this time, teachers' contexts and experiences were taken into account during the research process. Therefore, a qualitative research approach was most appropriate for this study.

### **3.3 Interpretive paradigm**

According to Creswell et al. (2007), researchers need to begin their qualitative research process with the ontology or nature of reality. This relates to epistemology, how researchers come to know what they know; axiology, their values and methodology, the unfolding of the research (Creswell et al., 2007). Krauss (2005) describes epistemology as how we come to know about particular realities, and claims methodology involves particular practices used to gain knowledge. Ontology refers to *what is*, while epistemology refers to *what it means to know*, which leads to the methods selected for data generation that are reflected in the methodology (Scotland, 2012). Scotland (2012) asserts ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods make up a paradigm.

The interpretive paradigm was used in the study to explore the teaching strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and understand their experiences of teaching during this period. A paradigm can be viewed as a research perspective based on the nature of inquiry. Cohen et al. (2018) describe a paradigm as a shared belief in pursuing knowledge. The interpretive paradigm aims to understand human experiences while bearing in mind the phenomena being investigated (Cohen et al., 2018; Sam, 2012). Phothongsunan (2010) contends that interpretive researchers make efforts to be *au fait* with how their participants make sense of and create meaning in their social world. It is important to understand individuals' experiences, and this can be accomplished through communication and social interaction within the interpretive paradigm. This study aimed to understand teachers' experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, including their meaning-making of the world and teaching during that time. It was also important for I to understand the situations of the participants, as well as their various contexts, which may have had an impact on their experiences. Thus, the interpretive paradigm was suitable as it allows the gathering and in-depth analysis of data from foundation teachers to understand these aspects of their experiences teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The strength of the interpretive paradigm includes the allowance for change over time without generalisability, while the weakness includes the emersion of researchers in the research which may lead to a lack of objectivity (Phothongsunan, 2010). Similarly, Scotland (2012) mentions that the interpretive paradigm has limited transferability as it is highly contextualised and subject to individual constructs which often bring into question the validity of the study. The interpretive

paradigm allows researchers to be fully involved in the study while taking a neutral stance within the compilation of data. Although the interpretive paradigm lends itself towards subjectivity, I often try to avoid imposing his or her own views on participants and sets aside any preconceived knowledge (Krauss, 2005). This may sometimes be a difficult task for researchers as often one's opinions or emotions are conveyed via their writing. According to Scotland (2012, p. 11), "reality is constructed through the interaction between language and aspects of an independent world". Likewise, Merriam (2002) suggests that interpretive researchers aim to understand the meaning of the world around them as constructed by their participants' views and experiences. Information gathered from participants can be objective, such as interview transcripts, or it can be subjective, such as collages or images provided by the participants (Krauss, 2005). Within this research study, interview transcripts, collages and artefacts were reviewed as part of the data generated by participants.

The focus of the study was the experiences of Foundation Phase teachers and the teaching strategies they employed during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore the interpretive paradigm was most suitable for this research study. Many people may encounter the same phenomena, but construct meaning in different ways (Scotland, 2012). This goes back to the nature of reality of a phenomenon being constructed or interpreted by individuals with differing views and perceptions. The selected paradigm is coherent with the research questions and research design of the study which focused on teaching strategies adopted by Foundation Phase teachers, as well as the challenges and opportunities they encountered while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **3.4 Case study research design**

This study employed a case study research design. "A case study is a research approach that is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context" (Crowe et al., 2011, p. 1). Cohen et al. (2018, p. 376) contend that a case study portrays "real people in real situations". Single persons, multiple individuals, a programme or activity may be selected for case study research, however, the focus is not necessarily on the individual or their story, but rather the issue being faced (Creswell et al., 2007). Case studies bridge the gap between theory and experience by illustrating participants' experiences, while engaging literature



around the case (Breslin & Buchanan, 2008). A case can be described as a person or functioning thing (Stake, 1995). For the purpose of this study, the case was a group of Foundation Phase teachers. Although their contexts varied, they all were exposed to the same situation of teaching and dealing with challenges in education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Creswell et al. (2007, p. 245), “case study research studies an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting or a context)”.

The case study approach focuses on ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions. For example, how is the intervention being implemented, what gaps exist in this process or why one implementation strategy might be chosen over another (Crowe et al., 2011). Likewise, Yin (2003, as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008) asserts that the focus of a case study design is to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. Like any other approach, case studies have limitations. They can be criticised for their lack of generalisability and rigour (Crowe et al., 2011). This can be overcome, however, by ensuring data generated is rich and in-depth, while also allowing participants to overview I’s interpretations and analysis of the data generated. One of the advantages of using a case study approach is that it allows I to use multiple lenses for a phenomenon to be explored and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This refers to the angles that a researcher is allowed when choosing the methods of data generation, as well as the analysis and interpretation of this data.

The crucial stages in undertaking case study research are: defining the case, selecting the case(s), generating and analysing the data, interpreting data and reporting the findings (Crowe et al., 2011). When defining the case, each case requires a specific scope, time period, social group, geographical location and type of evidence for data to be generated and analysed (Crowe et al., 2011). When determining the case, it is important to decide what the focus of the research is, for example, individuals, a programme, the process or the difference between organisations (Baxter & Jack, 2008). There are various types of case studies that can be selected based on the nature and focus of the study.

This research was categorised as a single intrinsic case study. A single case can either focus on one individual or a group of individuals with common criteria, for example, an age group or phase of teaching as selected for this study. An intrinsic case study is identified by its uniqueness and interest to I (Crowe et al., 2011). The case focused on Foundation Phase teachers in the

uMgungundlovu district during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason for this selected group was the gap in research relating to Foundation Phase teachers teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dong et al., 2020). As a Foundation Phase teacher, the study was of interest to me as it falls within my field of practice and could be beneficial to improving teaching strategies employed within my classroom.

Once the case has been selected, it is important to create boundaries to ensure that the questions and objectives of the research are not too broad. These boundaries include what will and will not be included in scope of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In order to better understand the case, multiple qualitative data generation methods are usually employed to increase the validity of the study (Crowe et al., 2011). This study used semi-structured interviews, collages and artefacts as data generation methods. According to Crowe et al. (2011), data generated could be analysed through thematic analysis or based on theoretical frameworks used within the study. These methods could be viewed as inductive or deductive analysis which is explained further in the following chapter. The goal of a case study design is to report the findings and describe the data generated in a manner that is easily understood by the reader and comprehensive enough for them to feel as though they have been active participants in the research themselves (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This can be accomplished by providing a thick description of data that is coherent to readers.

### **3.5 Methods of data generation**

Jackson et al. (2007, p. 22) contend that a “method is about ‘how to’ and methodology is about ‘why to’ collect data a certain way”. In the same vein, Scotland (2012, p. 9) asserts that “methodology is concerned with why, what, from where, when and how data is collected and analyzed”. The data generation methods adopted in this study were semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artefacts. These methods were selected to give the reader an in-depth understanding of the teaching strategies Foundation Phase teachers employed during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as teachers’ experiences and challenges during this period.

Merriam (2002) maintains that qualitative research usually provides a rich description of the context of the research, the participants involved and the situation of interest. Case studies

usually require more than one data generation method to enhance the depth and increase the evidence sources of the study (Cohen et al., 2018). Lester et al., (2020) identify qualitative research as generating a deep understanding of a phenomenon using a wide range of material to gather data. According to Crowe et al. (2011), triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data, which is a method used by I to increase the validity of a study. Hence, three data generation methods were selected for this research study. Although face-to-face interviews may have been preferable, telephonic interviews were carried out due to COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing protocols during the data generation period. Collages were used to articulate the participants' experiences and emotions of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, artefacts enabled I to better understand the resources used by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these influenced their choice of teaching strategies and the feelings they attached to these artefacts.

### 3.5.1 Semi-structured telephonic interviews

Interviews are often used in interpretive research to understand participants' experiences, with the use of probing and clarifying questions (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Similarly, Brenner (2006) suggests that open-ended interviews allow I the opportunity to clarify participants' responses by using probing to extract additional information. An interview is an exchange of conversation between the interviewer and interviewees for the purpose of knowledge production (Cohen et al., 2018). Semi-structured interviews involve a researcher planning a list of open-ended questions for the interviewee to respond to, which tends to incite conversation around the research topic (Brown & Danaher, 2019). Kvale (1996, p. 14) asserts "The qualitative interview is a construction site for knowledge." Although interview questions are semi-structured and carefully constructed to elicit information that responds to the research questions set out, the path that the interview takes cannot be dictated, as this is based on the dynamics between I and the participant. The more comfortable the participant is, the freer he or she feels to respond to questions honestly and with greater detail. Kvale (1996) argues that semi-structured interviews obtain descriptions of the world from the interviewee, while allowing the interviewer and interviewee to engage in discussions and make meaning of the phenomena described. Brenner (2006, p. 367) contends, "A semi structured protocol has the advantage of asking all informants the same core questions with the freedom to ask follow up questions that build on the responses

received”. According to Raboinet (2011, p. 563), there are six stages of planning and executing semi-structured interviews, namely, “(a) selecting the type of interview; (b) establishing ethical guidelines; (c) crafting the interview protocol; (d) conducting and recording the interview; (e) crafting the interview protocol; and (f) reporting the findings.” Similarly, Kvale (1996, p. 14) describes seven guidelines when conducting research interviews. These include (1) thematising and conceptualising the research topic and questions, (2) designing the study to address the research questions, (3) interviewing, (4) transcribing, (5) analysing, (6) verification and (7) reporting. When selecting the interview type, it is important to consider the type of data that is required for the research and the study, while also focusing on the theoretical background information that guides the study (Raboinet, 2011). The reasons for selecting semi-structured interviews in this study included the opportunity for some structure, while also allowing participants to share their stories in response to the research questions that guided this study.

Brown and Danaher (2019) contend that it is important for a researcher to maintain an element of humanness during interviews, as participants sometimes reveal sensitive or emotional information. During the interview process of this study, one of the participants mentioned that she suffered from hearing loss. This was only revealed towards the end of the interview, once she felt comfortable enough to discuss this. The interview protocol includes I encouraging the interviewee to be open with their responses, which should be set apart from everyday conversation (Brenner, 2006). It is important for I to identify and select appropriate interview questions carefully, while also considering questions to use for probing to enhance the richness of the data generated. Whilst conducting and recording the interviews, it is important to ensure that the environment or atmosphere created by I is one that encourages participants to feel comfortable when it comes to answering the questions set out for the interview, the quality of the recording is of a high standard and the transcriptions are accurate. The ethical guidelines of interviews need to focus on acquiring participants’ consent, respecting their confidentiality and considering any consequences as a result of the interview process, such as emotional discord (Brenner, 2006; Raboinet, 2011). According to Brenner (2006), one quality of a good interviewer is the ability of I to allow the interviewee to speak more than the interviewer. The next step is the analysis and summarising of the data generated. The final step is reporting the findings of the data.

Semi-structured interviews can take on a range of different formats, which include face-to-face, telephonic, online, electronic or E-interviewing (Brown & Danaheer, 2019). Semi-structured telephonic interviews were selected as one of the methods to generate data for this study. There are several advantages of telephonic interviews. These include mitigation of travel costs for I, flexible interview times, quicker response and interview times, the ability to reach a wider population than face-to-face interviews, greater safety for I as travelling to various locations is eliminated and the reduction of physical and emotional tension which can occur in face-to-face interviews (Cohen et al., 2018). On the other hand, there are many disadvantages noted regarding the use of telephonic interviews as a data generation method.

These include a lower motivation to participate in the study, the interviewee's ability to disconnect the call at any given time, the absence of visual, non-verbal and contextual cues that may limit the richness of data, shorter interviews which can restrict data generation, difficulties in concentration and limited emotional expression due to the disconnect created by the lack of an in-person presence (Cohen et al., 2018). However, while telephonic interviews may hamper the interviewer from making eye contact, using physical gestures of openness or smiling to ease participants' anxiety (Brown & Danaheer, 2019), nonetheless, interviewers can use their tone of voice, introduce themselves and encourage participants to feel comfortable in the interview process (Cohen et al., 2018). Given the fact that the participants involved in the study were not known to or familiar to me, it was important to build rapport during the initial stages of communication and thereafter during the interview process.

Although telephonic interviews were the preferred interview style, this study included one face-to-face interview and one electronic interview. These interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to capture the full essence of participants' experiences, challenges and opportunities teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This allowed for the research questions of the study to be addressed while enabling me to probe deeper into the phenomenon and teacher reactions to the situation. The data generated addressed the research questions 'What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic?' as well as 'How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?'

The telephonic interviews ranged from eighteen minutes to forty-six minutes, depending on the depth of information provided by participants and their availability of time. All interview questions were addressed by participants, while some responses were more detailed than others. Although telephonic interviews were set out as one of the data generation methods, a limitation of poor network coverage hampered one participant from continuing with this method. Therefore, she opted to send a digital response to the interview questions. Another participant requested a face-to-face interview as she has a hearing impairment and therefore needed to see my lip movement and facial expressions. These were two of the exceptions made during the interview process to accommodate participants. Despite these limitations, both these interviews were carried out and participants' responses were documented. Qualitative research accommodates exceptions like these as it allows researchers to respond to challenges and pursue challenges or changes that may occur while in the field, while still capturing meaningful data (Sallee & Flood, 2012).

### 3.5.2 Collages

Qualitative research includes different types of data generation methods. These could include arts-based methods such as collages. The word 'collage' is derived from the word *coller*, which refers to the gluing or sticking of images juxtaposed on a flat surface (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; Plakoyiannaki & Stavraki, 2018). According to Davis and Butler-Kisber (1999, p. 5), collages can be defined as "a collection of images that could be freely arranged and manipulated almost as substitutes for words on a page". A collage is an art piece that is gradually created by adding pieces to create a whole schema or overall pattern, and can sometimes be seen as uncanny (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999). Images or text are combined, layered and organised to create meaning (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999). Plakoyiannaki and Stavraki (2018) contend that a collage is considered a form of abstraction since the composition of distinguishable objects is organised to have an incongruous effect. In other words, the heterogeneous elements of collages enable them to capture the complexities experienced in life (Plakoyiannaki & Stavraki, 2018).

The collaging process involves cutting, arranging and sticking images or words to form a meaningful work of art (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Due to the simplicity of this activity, it

can be performed by young or old individuals, and is therefore very versatile as a data generation method. A study conducted by Mayaba and Wood (2015), used drawings and collages as data generation methods in their study involving children between the ages of 9 and 14 years who were orphaned and rendered vulnerable as a result of HIV or AIDS. They found that collages made it easier for children to express their emotions and challenges as it allowed them a visual representation of their contextual situations. Furthermore, Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010, p. 4) assert that “collaging can also be helpful in conceptualizing a phenomenon by fleshing out different facets in order to get a nuanced understanding of it”. This technique utilises space, proximity and language to express an individual’s view of the world and others within it (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999). Plakoyiannaki and Stavradi (2018) maintain that in collaging the creative strategy, juxtapositions and visual metaphors unravel the meaning behind this form of expression and disrupt the normative ways of making sense. Perril (2014) describes how he used collaging once exhaustion had set in, and words were not adequate as a form of expression. Although he primarily uses poetry as a form of artistic expression, he added collaging to his work that focused on the emergence of cinema.

Collages offer participants the opportunity to promote creativity, encourage metaphorical thinking and trigger affective responses as a result of the multi-layered process involved in the planning and execution of the collage design. It is for this reason that this method was selected, as participants’ views on teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic was shared via visual representations. Participants in this study were given an explanation of what a collage consists of and guidelines on how to construct one. Most participants used a variety of images to portray their thoughts and emotions around their teaching experiences and strategies used during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the participants in the study provided a written explanation of their interpretation of their collages and the reason for their choice of pictures, while one participant opted for a digital version of a collage consisting of words describing their experiences and emotions during this period. Both methods gave me a better understanding of participants’ feelings and experiences while teaching during these trying times. The collages allowed participants the freedom to express themselves visually and include data that may not have been mentioned during the telephonic interview process. Using this form of art expression as a means for data generation allowed the participants to engage with the research and consider their true feelings and experiences relating to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data

generated from the collages in this research study addressed the research question on the opportunities and challenges faced by Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and their feelings about teaching during this period. Collages form part of visual artefacts.

### 3.5.3 Artefacts

“Artefacts are conceived and designed to meet the demands of human need or purpose; they are tools for the achievement of human tasks” (Katz, 1993, p. 223). These tools can be concrete apparatus to aid teaching and learning, objects that elicit particular emotions or mechanical tools to enhance the learning experience. These may include teacher resources, electronic devices, photographs or picture drawings (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). According to Kortjass (2019), artefacts are visual stimuli that encourage memories and feelings while enriching meaning (Kortjass, 2019). Katz (1993) adds that artefacts possess an ontological relationship between human purpose and the existence of the artefact. Kortjass (2019, p. 75), who conducted a study on Mathematics in the Foundation Phase using artefacts, characterises this relationship as co-dependent and suggests “teachers should use support materials such as physical objects and artefacts to introduce and reinforce concepts”. Artefacts were appropriate for this study considering that in the Foundation Phase many of the concepts taught, especially in Mathematics, are introduced using concrete apparatus such as blocks or beads before learners are introduced to abstract thinking.

Technological artefacts, and artefacts in general, are considered to be instruments or tools utilised for the betterment of human life (Katz, 1993). Technological artefacts influence our visual interpretations. Through the use of media, communication has become instant, and information is immediately available via the internet enhancing decision-making abilities as we can access answers to almost any problem using digital platforms such as Google (Illies & Meijers, 2009). Also, technological devices such as computers, laptops or cell phones allow humans to interact seamlessly, transcending time and space. According to a study by Jayathirtha et al. (2020), learners in an e-textile class benefitted from the integration of physical artefacts in conjunction with simulated artefacts, which included coding programs, to assist their learning process during the COVID-19 lockdown period. In our current day and age, these technologies



can be referred to as anthropocentric, which means that humankind is dependent on these forms of technology (Katz, 1993). Illies and Meijers (2009) undertook a study to determine the autonomy humans possess when it comes to technological artefacts versus their moral responsibility in using these tools. They concluded that while technological artefacts boast an element of autonomy, it is up to human agents to remain morally responsible when making use of such technologies (Illies & Meijers, 2009). When analysing our daily routine, we as humans more often than not pick up one of our devices in order to communicate with those around us or to make meaning of the world.

The meaning and purpose of artefacts as a data generation method were explained to participants in this study and an example of this technique was provided to participants. Participants in this research study were required to choose two artefacts that they used during the planning and implementation of lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants in this study selected two artefacts that had the greatest impact on their teaching during the lockdown period and those tools that aided them the most while they were unable to access their classrooms, as well as once they had returned to school. They were then requested to take pictures of these artefacts and write a paragraph describing how these artefacts or objects facilitated teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The limitations of this method of data generation included one participant who only selected one artefact for discussion. Another participant did not include pictures of her artefacts, she merely provided a written explanation for her choices. The data generated from artefacts focused on addressing the research questions ‘What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic?’ as well as ‘How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?’

### **3.6 Research context**

This study focused on six schools within the uMgungundlovu District in KwaZulu-Natal. One of the schools had to be removed from the study as the participant who was representing that school opted to withdraw from the study. This school was a rural school situated on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg consisting of learners from the surrounding farms and rural locations. These learners’ Home Language and medium of instruction was IsiZulu. After the withdrawal of this

participant, the study comprised of five schools within the uMgungundlovu District. The medium of instruction at three of these schools was English, while one of the schools was Afrikaans-based and the other used IsiZulu as the medium of instruction. All the schools selected had a School Management Team (SMT) which consisted of a Principal, Deputy Principal and Departmental Heads.

The schools selected were multi-racial schools, and therefore comprised of learners and teachers from different social and economic backgrounds. Two of the schools selected, as mentioned by the participants, educated learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds, while the other three schools catered more for middle-income earners. One of the schools selected was a no-fee paying school, the second was a low fee-paying school and the other three were high fee-paying schools. The socio-economic status of the learners who attended these schools determined which of these schools they would attend based on convenience with regards to proximity and availability of finances for school fees. Likewise, the resources available to learners within the schools selected were determined by the school funding and that of the parents of these learners.

It was evident that some learners and schools were better resourced than others, and this posed a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period when learners were not attending school. Access to technological advancements was a great challenge for many teachers and learners during this time and hence the digital divide increased due to these factors. Foundation Phase learners were called to return to school much later than learners from the ECD, General Education and Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET) phases. This meant that there were added learning time and curriculum losses for learners in the Foundation Phase. When Foundation Phase learners eventually returned to schools following the COVID-19 lockdown, many of these learners attended school bi-weekly or on alternate days in order to accommodate the COVID-19 social distancing protocols put into place by the government.

### **3.7 Purposive sampling**

A sample is considered to be a small group of individuals who are representative of the total population of the study (Cohen et al., 2018). The two main sampling methods that dominate the research forum are probability and non-probability sampling (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

Non-probability samples are generally smaller in size and not representative of the wider population (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, non-probability sampling is appropriate to research that does not intend to be generalisable beyond the research context (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). This means that a non-probability sample is representative of itself. Etikan et al. (2015, p. 1) assert that “subjective methods are used to decide which elements are included in the sample” under non-probability sampling. Purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was used in this study. Purposive sampling is usually used by researchers within the interpretive paradigm who use case study research or research designs that seek to gain participants’ understanding of a particular phenomenon (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). Purposive sampling is used when the researcher seeks participants with specific characteristics or a certain category of individuals who are chosen for a particular purpose (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Etikan et al. (2015) concur that purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of participants based on their qualities and does not require a specific sample size. This research study focused on Foundation Phase teachers which served as an inclusion criterion for the selection of participants. Accordingly, six Foundation Phase teachers were purposively selected as participants for this study. The participants were selected based on their ability to provide in-depth accounts of their experiences, challenges and opportunities while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purposive sampling focuses on the uniqueness of a case and provides rich, in-depth data as it selects participants who are knowledgeable about a particular phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2018) and have the understanding and experience to provide I with in-depth and relevant information. This study aimed to explore the teaching strategies used and the challenges experienced by Foundation Phase teachers in the shift from face-to-face instruction to remote or online teaching. The selection of participants was based on teachers having a minimum of two years of teaching experience in the Foundation Phase as this ensured they had taught during the peak of the COVID-19 lockdown period. Teachers were selected from schools with different socio-economic and contextual backgrounds in order to provide a holistic view of teaching experiences in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants selected represented schools ranging from quintiles 2-5. Quintile two is rated as the lower socio-economic bracket. Schools within this quintile are less resourced, cater for learners who have increased socio-economic

issues and adverse contextual factors that affect their education. On the other hand, quintile five schools represent the higher socio-economic brackets in which schools are better resourced and learners are from middle- to higher- income homes (Department of Education, 2004). Six schools within the uMgungundlovu district were initially identified.

However, one school was removed from the study due to the withdrawal of one participant. Therefore, data from a total of five schools are presented in this study. One Foundation Phase teacher from each school was selected to participate in this study. These teachers were able to provide comprehensive data based on their experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the limitations experienced during the study included the withdrawal of a participant from the research study after the data generation methods were explained. This participant was the representative from a quintile two school which had minimal resources and students who came from poverty- stricken backgrounds. The data that would have been obtained could have been of great benefit within this study had the participant opted to be a part of the research study. Initially, the participant agreed to participate in the interview process only. However, she later mentioned her lack of time to commit to the interview or any of the other data generation methods. The participants' decision to voluntarily withdraw from the study was respected and this participant was removed from the study. An obstacle encountered during the research process, as mentioned previously, was network issues which did not allow one of the participants to participate in the interview telephonically. This was overcome by the participant opting to submit electronic written responses to the interview schedule. Another obstacle included a participant with a hearing ailment which also hampered their participation in a telephonic interview. The interview for this participant was carried out face-to-face to accommodate her disability and to ensure that she was included in the study.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

Qualitative researchers select their method of analysis based on the data generated, the research questions, philosophical assumptions and making sense of text and images in order to identify patterns from the data generated (Soiferman, 2010). Inductive and deductive approaches to data analysis were used in this study. Data was generated from telephonic semi-structured interviews,

collages and artefacts. Research questions one and two were analysed inductively using thematic analysis to identify themes that emerged from the semi-structured telephonic interview data and arts-based forms of data, namely collages and artefacts. The conceptual framework that guided this analysis was the Situated Learning Theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Research question two was analysed deductively using the conceptual framework of Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching, drawing on data from the semi-structured telephonic interviews. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

<b>Themes identified from the data generated</b>
1. WhatsApp groups
2. Online platforms
3. Work packs
4. Inaccessibility
5. Smaller class sizes
6. Balancing academics and emotions
7. Hargreaves (2002) five emotional geographies of teaching

*Table 3.8*

Thomas (2003, p. 2) maintains that “the primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies”. An inductive approach involves a process of identifying categories and themes emerging from the data generated (Cohen et al., 2018). Similarly, Michalakopoulou et al. (2023) contend that an inductive analysis begins with raw data being examined; next codes and sub-themes are identified and thereafter themes are determined. Inductive analysis is not based on pre-defined themes dictated by relevant literature. In contrast, it starts off with a large array of data and narrows down to specific

themes (Michalakopoulou et al., 2023). In the same vein, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 83) describe inductive analysis as “a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or I’s analytic preconceptions”.

Inductive analysis is incorporated under the thematic analysis umbrella. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, p. 82) define thematic analysis as “a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis”. Thematic analysis is not bound by any theoretical framework or a specific set of patterns, but rather allows I the flexibility to identify their own patterns by deconstructing the data generated to recognise emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is fluid in its nature and allows for a broad spectrum of interpretation by I. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) identify six phases of thematic analysis, namely:

1. familiarising yourself with your data
2. generating initial codes
3. searching for themes
4. reviewing themes
5. defining and naming themes
6. producing the report

These steps were used to identify themes within this study using the data generated from semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artefacts from Foundation Phase teachers to address research question one: What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic? and research question two: How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic? These themes are discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Deductive data analysis begins with predetermined themes which are supported by the data generated. Soiferman (2010) argues that deductive analysis is based on predetermined theories and searches for evidence from the data generated to support or refute these hypotheses.

“Themes can be hypodissertationed based on theory prior to data collection, with evidence to

support these hypotheses then gathered from the data in the form of codes” (Byrne, 2022, p. 1392). The deductive analysis during this research study was grounded by the conceptual framework of Hargreaves (2001) who describes five emotional geographies of teaching, namely, sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political distances. The data generated from the semi-structured telephonic interviews that addressed research question two, ‘How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?’ was analysed using a deductive method of analysis based on Hargreaves’ (2001) conceptual framework.

Data was generated from semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artefacts. The interviews were first transcribed verbatim. Before coding the data, the interview transcripts were read and the arts-based methods used, namely, collages and artefacts were reviewed multiple times. Once I was familiar with the data generated, the data was coded and sub- themes were identified. Themes were later identified based on commonalities found in the data and the sub-themes previously identified. A hybrid analysis was undertaken utilising both inductive and deductive data analysis methods based on the two research questions that guided the study. Therefore, research questions one and two were analysed inductively based on the Situated Learning Theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), whilst research question two was also analysed deductively guided by the conceptual framework of Hargreaves’s (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

When conducting research, there are two ethical factors to consider. These are procedural ethics and ethics in practice (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Procedural ethics refer to the submission of relevant documentation to undertake a research study, while ethics in practice are related to everyday situations that may arise while conducting research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). It is important to adhere to ethical procedures, but equally important to consider unprecedented events that may occur during the research process due to dealing with different people from various backgrounds who possess varying ideological beliefs. The ethical considerations discussed below include informed consent of participants and gatekeepers, voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study, anonymity and confidentiality. These

considerations were all adhered to during this study.

### 3.9.1 Informed consent

Informed consent was received from the participants, which included providing them with adequate information about the study and thereafter allowing them to take a decision to participate in the study voluntarily, without coercion (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Sivasubramaniam et al., 2021; Vanclay et al., 2013). This was accomplished by providing participants with an information sheet explaining the project in layman's terms so that it was easily understood (Sivasubramaniam et al., 2021). Signed consent from the participants is required when I am using audio or video recording devices during interviews and participants should be made aware of this during the interview process (Vanclay et al., 2013). Participants signed both informed consent and consent to the use of recording devices.

### 3.9.2 Ethical clearance, voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study

Participants in the research study were respected and their views were represented fairly. In the case of this study, I applied for Ethical approval from University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee and permission to conduct this study at the selected schools from the KwaZulu- Natal (KZN) Department of Education. Thereafter the informed consent of the Foundation Phase teachers participating in the research was obtained. Participants have the right to withdraw from a study at any given point, without any consequences (Sivasubramaniam et al., 2021; Vanclay et al., 2013). Participants within this study were advised of this and were free to exit the study at any time. One participant exercised this right, which was respected, and voluntarily withdrew from the study. Participants were informed that telephonic interviews were recorded, and their consent was obtained prior to the interview commencing.

### 3.9.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

Participants' confidentiality and anonymity should be ensured during the research process (Nolen & Putten, 2007). This was adhered to as pseudonyms were used in place of participants' names and the names of the schools at which they taught. The research should do no harm (non-



maleficence) and should also be of benefit to participants, which is referred to as beneficence (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Counselling via Life Line was in place for any participant who became emotional during the interview process, although this was not required by any of the participants. The study may benefit Foundation Phase teachers in the future by exposing them to alternative teaching strategies that can be utilised during crisis situations similar to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **3.10 Trustworthiness**

The quality of qualitative research is based on the trustworthiness of the data generated. Trustworthiness includes four criteria. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Golafshani, 2003). The trustworthiness of a study is ensured when a researcher follows the correct protocols, analyses data unbiasedly and utilises self-reflexivity during all research processes (Cohen et al., 2018).

#### **3.10.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the findings of the study reflecting the true reality and lived experiences of the participants (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This can be established by using audio recording devices during interviews to ensure transcripts are accurate and recorded verbatim (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Audio recordings of interviews were utilised for this study to enhance the credibility of the research. These recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure that participants responses were documented accurately. Field notes can also be used by researchers to increase reflexivity during the research process (Fahie, 2014). These transcripts are available for data verification purposes.

#### **3.10.2 Transferability**

Transferability is the extent to which the research can be applied to another context (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This refers to the generalisability of the research. This study focused on Foundation Phase teachers in the uMgungundlovu district. While the nature of the research does not promote generalisability, the findings may be transferable to schools or teachers within

similar contexts.

#### 3.10.4 Dependability

Dependability, also called reliability, of the study can be achieved by analysing the data generated and results of the study accurately. Triangulation is a method of increasing reliability of a study by using more than one data generation method (Golafshani, 2003). Member checking can be employed to ensure that the data generated is accurate. Dependability of the study is related to the account of I as to where or how variations in the study may occur; this may be related to a difference between the conclusions drawn by I and the actual findings of the study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). For example, I may have assumed that teachers in this study felt COVID-19 negatively impacted their teaching strategies, while the findings may have indicated that teachers were well supported and therefore they felt the process of change was of benefit to their teaching practice. Fieldwork can be unpredictable and due to working with human beings, there is always a possibility of unforeseen reactions (Fahie, 2014). Undertaking fieldwork in research allows researchers to clear preconceptions, while the findings of the study reveals the nature of participants' reality.

#### 3.10.5 Confirmability

Confirmability is associated with the level of consistency of a study (Golafshani, 2003). This requires I to compare the findings of their study against other studies carried out within similar contexts which may have yielded similar results (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Secondary data was used during the data analysis stages of research to compare the findings of other research studies carried out in a similar field.

### 3.11 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology. The qualitative methodological approach, interpretive paradigm and the research questions were outlined. Next, the case study research design was discussed and its appropriateness for this study highlighted. This was followed by a discussion of the data generation instruments, namely telephonic semi-structured

interviews, artefacts and collages and the reasons for the selection of these methods. Thereafter, a brief description of the research context was provided, followed by justification for the use of the purposive sampling technique and the data analysis methods chosen for this research study. This chapter concluded with an outline of the ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness involved in the study. The following chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of data and discussion of the emerging themes.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed the methodology and research design of this study. The focus of this chapter is on the presentation and analysis of the data. Once the data generation process concluded, the data was coded, analysed and interpreted. Verbatim quotes from participants were selected to convey the participants' viewpoints. Both inductive and deductive analysis approaches, as well as thematic analysis, were applied in this qualitative research study to ensure that the themes identified and presented were reflective of the data generated. Inductive and deductive data analysis was employed and guided by the following research questions:

1. What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory and Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching were the conceptual frameworks utilised to analyse and interpret the data generated in the study. These theories, in conjunction with the array of relevant literature reviewed in chapter two, assisted the coding and identification of themes that arose from the data. Themes were identified from participants' responses to the semi-structured interview questions, collages and artefacts. These themes addressed research questions one and two through the interpretive lens of Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory. Inductive analysis was utilised together with thematic analysis. In addition, the deductive analysis of the semi-structured interviews that addressed research question two was guided by the themes highlighted by Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching, namely, sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political geographies.

This chapter begins with brief descriptions of the five participants' biographical data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, collages and artefacts. This data includes their qualifications, the grades they taught and the duration of their teaching tenure at the time of the

study. Participants' names were substituted with pseudonyms to protect their identities and ensure their confidentiality. The pseudonyms used for participants were: Amelia, Bethel, Caroline, Daniella and Elethu. Using pseudonyms allowed participants to answer freely and express their views without the fear of a breach of confidentiality. Pseudonyms were also used for the schools involved in the research to ensure anonymity. Thereafter, the analysis of data is presented according to the method of analysis, namely, inductive and deductive analysis, drawing on the three data generation instruments.

## **4.2 Biographical profiles of participants**

A brief biographical sketch of each teacher participant is outlined below. For each participant, I used a pseudonym to maintain their confidentiality. The profiles of teachers were based on the data that was provided during the semi-structured telephonic interviews. This information provided me as I with a basic understanding of their teaching situations and their reasons for choosing the teaching profession. Some participants provided more detailed responses than others during the data generation process.

### **4.2.1 Amelia's Profile**

Amelia is a young Foundation Phase teacher who has a Bachelor of Education degree. When interviewed, she had been teaching for seven years. Initially, she started as an intern for two years and thereafter she taught as a qualified teacher for five years within the Foundation Phase. At the time of the interview, she was a Grade two teacher at a school located in central Pietermaritzburg. This was one of the quintile five schools in the study. The school consists of learners from homes with a high economic standing. It is an English medium school.

The reasons for Amelia choosing to teach in the Foundation Phase included her passion for younger learners and her ability to impart knowledge and values to the learners that she teaches. *"I feel it's a nice place to start off so I can mould them and teach them values and morals."* Amelia believes that teaching in the Foundation Phase is not monotonous and the learners make it worthwhile. She elaborated: *"every day is different... and so the children make teaching enjoyable in the Foundation Phase."*

## Bethel's Profile

Bethel is an experienced teacher who is in possession of a Bachelor of Education degree in ECD and the Foundation Phase. She had been teaching for 16 years at the time of the research study. She was a Grade two teacher who was often involved in assisting with school activities. Bethel has a hearing impairment and has managed to teach for many years in spite of her disability. She uses a hearing aid and often lip reads. She explained: *"being a teacher that has severe hearing loss, before I told anybody that I cannot hear, I was lip reading for three years, teaching three years through lip reading."*

When interviewed, Bethel was based at a school located just outside the Central Business District (CBD) in Pietermaritzburg. The school is a quintile four school with a combination of affluent learners and learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It is an Afrikaans medium school, but also uses English as its medium of instruction.

Bethel qualified as both an ECD and Foundation Phase teacher and shared that she loves both these phases equally: *"I love both I must say I love both, but I got given a job in the Foundation Phase...and I... I just love it so I'm stuck there."* The reason that Bethel decided to teach in the Foundation Phase was her love for children and the nurturing role that a teacher plays at this stage of a learner's schooling career. Her endearment to younger learners was evident from her responses and expression: *"They adore you. They see you as their...not their role model they don't know what that is, but you are their hero, you are their mum at school and I can take care of them. So...that's why I love it."*

### 4.2.2 Caroline's Profile

Caroline is a vibrant teacher who qualified with a Bachelor of Education degree. She had been teaching in the Foundation Phase for ten years by the time of the interview. At that time, she was a Grade two teacher at a school based in central Pietermaritzburg. The school is a quintile five, English medium school with learners from more affluent backgrounds, considering that the school also offers boarding facilities for their learners. Although this may be the case, not all

learners' circumstances are the same. Caroline added: *"I think realistically speaking, it's given me a bit of a, it's just a subtle reminder of the academic challenges that these learners face and also just their home situation... they all come from different backgrounds and we just need to take cognisance of that in our teaching day to day lives."*

Caroline has always had a passion for teaching younger learners, which was the reason for her choosing to teach in the Foundation Phase, rather than teaching the higher grades or older learners. She explained: *"I wanted to teach more than teach the subject teaching. I wasn't very interested in teaching subject teaching as in the senior primary as well as just have passion for the younger children. And it's just something that I've always felt like I was going to excel in."*

#### 4.2.3 Daniella's Profile

Daniella is a dynamic teacher with a Diploma in Education. At the time of the study, she was working towards achieving her degree, but she had already obtained a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course. She had been teaching for seven years in the Foundation Phase at the time of the interview. She has taught in various grades within the phase and explained: *"I teach Grade Twos Life Skills right now. I taught Grade ones. I'm in between. I taught Maths, I taught English, I taught Life Skills, I taught everything, everything in Foundation Phase."*

The school Daniella taught at during the study is based in the lower central region of Pietermaritzburg. Although the school is a quintile five school, many of the learners that attend this school come from lower-income homes, with poor economic circumstances. Daniella shared: *"we teach mostly settlement children and our parents actually don't know how to speak and communicate with English very nicely."* Many of the learners are IsiZulu Home Language learners, although the school is an English medium school.

The reason that Daniella chose to teach in the Foundation Phase is her love for teaching younger learners and the affection they give to their teachers. Daniela elaborated:

*I think the smaller children are much more enjoyable ...you know your teacher for the smaller ones, for the Foundation Phase, is always a role model, so they look at us and we*

*know everything. So, I think that makes me so, you know, so happy to actually be a Foundation Phase teacher and not an intermediate.*

#### 4.2.4 Elethu's Profile

Elethu is an experienced teacher who possesses a Primary Teacher's Diploma (PTD) and an Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) certificate. At the time of the study, she was teaching Grade three and had been teaching for 28 years. When she was interviewed, she was teaching at a quintile three school based on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg. This school is not well-resourced, and the learners generally come from lower socioeconomic background homes. Elethu shared: *"My school has limited resources."* The school is an IsiZulu medium school as the learners who attend this school are IsiZulu Home Language learners. The school is smaller than the schools based in the city centre.

The reason for Elethu's choice of teaching in the Foundation Phase was her love for children and the impact that she makes on their lives with her teaching. She explained:

*I love to be around kids. They are amazing; they can say something unexpected. I love it when they come up with something new. I love teaching them because every single day I make a difference in their lives which goes far beyond knowledge. I enjoy teaching and making a difference in their lives. I try by all means to give them the best I can.*

### 4.3 Inductive analysis

Inductive analysis is not based on pre-determined themes set out by literature; in contrast, it begins with a vast amount of data that is broken down into specific themes (Michalakopoulou et al., 2023). Braun and Clarke (2006) define inductive analysis as the coding of data without expectations of it fitting into specific categories or preconceptions guided by literature or I. Inductive analysis is more fluid and open to interpretation based on the data generated during the research process. An inductive approach involves a process of identifying codes and themes that emerge from the data generated (Cohen et al., 2018). Thomas (2003) contends that the purpose of inductive analysis is to allow dominant, frequent themes to emerge from the raw data



that was generated from participants. The conceptual framework that guided the inductive analysis was the Situated Learning Theory of Lave and Wenger (1991). The focus of this theory is the prospect that learning can occur in any setting and is not limited to a specific dimension or location (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This was appropriate during the COVID-19 lockdown period because teachers and learners could not access their classrooms which were considered their usual places of learning.

The data generated from semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artefacts was analysed inductively and are presented in this section, as well as the themes that arose from it. The data addressed research questions one and two and were analysed according to the conceptual framework of Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory. Research questions one and two were analysed inductively and codes and themes were derived from the data generated using thematic analysis. Since thematic analysis is not bound to a set of themes, but rather, allows themes to emerge from the data generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006), it is an inductive method of analysis. The themes that emerged highlighted the teaching strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers as well as the challenges and opportunities of Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 4.3.1 Semi-structured telephonic interviews

Semi structured telephonic interviews were conducted during this research study to gather data about teachers' experiences, challenges and opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The semi-structured interview format allowed the participants to share their encounters within the education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic freely. The questions encouraged the participants to engage in a dialogue and provide feedback to I when requested. Each theme identified is discussed in relation to the participant's responses during their semi- structured telephonic interviews.

##### *4.3.1.1 Research question one: What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The themes that emerged during the inductive analysis of the semi-structured telephonic

interviews included under research question one included: *WhatsApp groups, online platforms, work packs and adaptability*

#### (1) WhatsApp groups

A study conducted by Grobler (2022) contends that Grade one learners needed parental assistance when accessing work sent via WhatsApp, however, not all parents were able to access these groups. Despite this, Grobler (2022) found that teaching and learning still continued to a certain extent. Lave and Wenger (1991) claim that understanding the practice of technology is not merely using it, but also directly applying it. In this case, the practice was the use of WhatsApp groups to facilitate the teaching and learning process.

Elethu explained the challenges teachers experienced with WhatsApp groups, *“Teachers would communicate via WhatsApp groups to share worksheets. It is only those learners that have made use of their personal communication gadgets and airtime that enjoy the provision of our teachings”*. She also stated that her school did not have many resources, but they made do with the little they had to continue teaching. This resonates with the view that some rural communities in South Africa lack technological devices and internet connectivity which makes it difficult to access internet-based programs (Gyimah, 2020; Monareng et al., 2020).

Four of the five teachers interviewed used WhatsApp groups to communicate with their parents and learners. Amelia stated: *“We did rely a lot on technology and the use of technology during the COVID-19 period. Our teachers we all had... once COVID-19 had started we had... we all started WhatsApp groups with our parents.”*

While WhatsApp groups were primarily used for work, they were also used to send videos and other material to learners. Bethel and some of the Foundation Phase teachers at her school used their WhatsApp groups to show learners the importance of wearing a mask once they returned to school. Bethel explained: *“So they were given work on WhatsApp groups. So, as they introduced the masks, we made little videos of Pooh bear now with Pooh bear and Garfield interacting for the Grade 1-3 to put on the WhatsApp group.”*

Daniella used her WhatsApp group to inform parents of the work that learners needed to complete and the methods they needed to use to get it done. She added: *“We also worked on like WhatsApp apps. We could explain on the WhatsApp groups what we needed them to do.”*

Nel and Marais (2020) conducted a study based on pre-service teachers’ use of WhatsApp to provide learners with information. Their study revealed that Foundation Phase learners lacked the ability to access other online platforms and therefore, teachers settled on using WhatsApp as their main tool for communicating with parents (Nel & Marais, 2020).

Bethel explained her reasons for choosing to use WhatsApp groups to communicate with parents: *“We also had Google classroom workshops, so the senior phase teachers went onto Google classroom. I felt Google classroom for Grade twos... three quarters of them don’t have access to WiFi and stuff, especially if you don’t get a salary, it’s not fair on the parents. So, we went to WhatsApp teaching”.*

While many teachers did not complain about the use of WhatsApp but rather emphasised how it assisted them in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, not all teachers had pleasant experiences with using this application as a teaching strategy.

Bethel described some of her challenges while using WhatsApp to teach learners their handwriting skills as follows: *“They had to learn cursive and it was a challenge because how do you teach cursive... So teaching through WhatsApp was very difficult and also for some of the work parents required memos...so you had to send the memo, take a photo of the memo and send it to the parents. And I also had to broaden my knowledge.”* Some concepts are very difficult for teachers to teach using WhatsApp, as learners need to participate practically during certain lessons or when learning skills such as handwriting.

Lave and Wenger (1991) highlight the opportunity of learning in one context, while being able to transfer this to another context. This occurred when teachers used their WhatsApp groups to disseminate information and lessons to learners, who could then transfer this knowledge to the classroom when school resumed. Catalano (2015) asserts that content knowledge shared via alternate teaching strategies should be transferable from one context to another.

## (2) Online platforms

Foundation Phase teachers mentioned the different online platforms that they used during the COVID-19 lockdown period during their semi-structured telephonic interviews. Amelia outlined the following online platforms that they utilised at her school during the hard COVID-19 lockdown: *“We had online books that we would send to the kids because we weren’t able to have library lesson. We had Google classrooms, and each child was given a login or a sign in. We had to use different resources such as voice notes, video calls with our kids. And then also... we did videos.”*

Bethel, on the other hand, did not feel that it was fair for parents to use online platforms seeing as many of the learners did not have access to WiFi and some parents’ salaries had been cut due to the days they were not at work. She explained: *“I read the story like voice recording and send it to each child or send them a personal message. I felt Google Classroom for Grade twos, three quarters of them don’t have access to WiFi. So we went to WhatsApp teaching.”* So even though Bethel was provided with the opportunity to utilise online platforms, such as Google Classroom, she opted not to for the benefit of all her learners and parents, ensuring that none of them were excluded from the learning process.

Gyimah (2020) contends that an instant shift to online learning platforms has the potential to exacerbate the existing digital divide in education between schools and learners who have access to technological resources and those who are at a disadvantage technologically. Similarly, Lave and Wenger (1991) state that access, or the lack thereof, can either promote or prevent participation.

Caroline explained the online learning platform that she used during the COVID-19 lockdown period and some of the challenges she experienced with it. She stated: *“We started using Microsoft Teams. It’s an online platform, in terms of making video sessions with the learners.”* She further mentioned that lessons continued as they would in the classroom, but the difference was that it was over a screen. She further explained: *“It was still myself as an educator presenting the lesson, I suppose or whether it was online or in face value at school.”* Catalano

(2015) mentions that, according to Situated Learning Theory, learning may take place in a specific context, but knowledge learnt is transferred to different contexts.

Although there were benefits to using online platforms, Caroline explained the challenges she experienced as well. She stated:

*[It was] very overwhelming in the beginning, again navigating through Microsoft Teams, something that we worked so profound on before. It was a quick trial and error and what works and what doesn't work. I think for me, having to overcome all of these things was just to remain calm and make her routine for myself... work smartly with my time and not let it become overwhelming so as it as it does.*

Bell et al. (2013) conducted a study of pre-service teachers which indicated that teachers' use of technology improved with the implementation of Situated Learning Theory implying that they learned through practice. This was evident with Caroline as she was not familiar with the online platforms used, nonetheless, she embraced the learning experience and adjusted to the changes in her teaching strategies.

Although Caroline found it difficult to adjust to using online platforms initially, she proved to be resilient in the end and saw the positive in a situation that seemed bleak. She elaborated:

*The internet is always a good thing to use in your lessons... which we often used in our online lessons during the COVID year. I would still, I mean we still implement that in our today using that sort of thing. I guess again, just learning the new online platforms, you know, reading platforms, those sort of things, I think... I can use those opportunities to learn, every day is a learning opportunity...*

Watson and Gemin (2009) assert that online learning affords learners educational opportunities despite their geographical location through the use of digital resources, such as laptops or cell phones, which are connected via the internet. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that access is dependent on the availability of resources, which can either promote or prevent legitimate participation. Concepts taught using various teaching strategies, such as online learning platforms, should be adaptable to learners' classwork activities, and, therefore, encourage the

transfer of knowledge from one context to another (Catalano, 2015).

Teachers are encouraged to transfer technological knowledge from one context to another while encouraging learners to participate in their learning (Bell et al., 2013). According to Lave and Wenger (1991), the location in which learning occurs governs the degree of progress and development of the learner, as well as how they apply what they have learned. This means that learners can progress well in a classroom setting or while accessing online platforms, provided they apply the knowledge that they have gained.

Online education forms part of distance education where communication is maintained via online platforms, even though teachers and learners are physically separated (Mukuna & Aloka, 2020). Lave and Wenger (1991) contend that learning is transferrable and based on communicative skills. Thus, while the context of the learning situation plays a role in the learning process, it does not specifically dictate the crux of what or how knowledge is conveyed (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Thus, using the conceptual framework of Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory allows an understanding of how learning occurred during the COVID-19 lockdown period as it was not bound to a classroom setting, but occurred in many different settings, with the use of various tools or teaching strategies.

Online learning platforms allow teachers to communicate with parents and assist the learning process of students, but this teaching strategy may not accommodate all learners as some learners may not have access to online platforms. This was evident in Bethel's responses. This data corroborates the findings of a study done by Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) in which students from low socio-economic backgrounds experienced difficulties with accessing online or virtual learning systems due to the lack of internet connectivity or computers, which resulted in these learners being at a disadvantage. Similarly, Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) found that learners in rural Bhutan could not access online learning platforms due to exorbitant data prices, lack of funds, lack of accessibility to electronic devices, as well as the expectation for learners to assist family members with agricultural or household chores during the periods that they were not attending school.

### (3) Work packs

All five of the participants mentioned that they made work packs for their learners during the period that they were not at school. Amelia said:

*We did work packs. We would follow a month, so we had we had planned things in advance for a month and we followed our same themes that we would at school... and then we would prepare work packs and arrange a time for parents to come and collect.*

Bethel explained in detail the process that her school used to distribute work packs to parents and learners as follows:

*We moved to the next...to the level four [of lockdown] ...teachers were allowed to go back to school to copy.... We had to have a permit from the police officer. We had one parent saying, one parent in the police that gave us permission to go to school so...each grade, each phase had their day. We had a meeting and decided we need to give these children work to do, but basic even if it's just revision.*

As much as teachers were faced with the difficulty of not having contact with parents and learners, they found a way to work around this as Bethel described. Catalano (2015) contends in her study students used three different types of materials in their situated learning and teaching for transfer – books, articles and websites. Similarly, Caroline used both work packs and online teaching with her students, who were lucky enough to have blended learning strategies during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Caroline stated, “*And we also started making up like workbook booklets in packs and got the parents to come and collect them from the school property, so that they could have their hands-on work that they needed to do as well as the work that we presented online.*” The content knowledge that Caroline taught her learners using online platforms and work packs was transferable to learners’ classrooms once they returned to school.

Daniella also used worksheets and work packs for her learners during the COVID-19 period when they were not allowed to attend school. She mentioned:

*We did have workbooks, worksheets, booklets. We made copies of it, and we gave them*

*and... obviously there was actually no homework in that part so...we did it all in one... And then the workbooks were actually brought back at a certain stage and was marked by the educator, so where the children went wrong, we actually let the parents know and maybe did that section again for them to understand.*

Elethu had a slightly different experience when it came to the distribution of work packs as her school had limited resources as compared to the other schools in this study. Although this was the case, teachers tried their best to ensure that teaching and learning still continued, despite their challenges. Elethu explained, *“My school has limited resources...Work packs per se were not distributed by the school but teachers would communicate via WhatsApp groups to share worksheets which we collated into work-packs for our students.”* Although these teachers had tried their best with the limited resources they had, they still faced the challenge of learners’ lack of work ethic and enthusiasm towards their learning. Elethu described her challenge as follows: *“Work-pack when you are not alternating are very useful but there is a risk that some students may be left behind. Some students just do not complete take homework. About 80 per cent of the students wouldn’t do their work claiming they forgot and there is little to no support at home.”* The lack of learner and parental involvement made it difficult for these teachers to ensure that adequate teaching and learning occurred. Maree (2021) points out three factors that influenced the participation of rural communities in online learning, namely, connectivity issues, low socio-economic status, as well as the need for parental support to facilitate their children’s learning process. Difficulty arose when parental support was absent, and learners lacked individual motivation. This was evident from Elethu’s responses.

#### a. Challenges of distribution of work packs

Work packs were made to be distributed to parents and learners, but during the distribution process, there were a few challenges that teachers encountered. Bethel mentioned how she and her colleagues managed to get these work packs to their learners.

*The distribution of the work packs was a huge problem, a challenge for us because parents weren’t allowed to leave certain areas and no parents allowed at*



*school. So, we would have grade ones, twos and threes had a like a collection point at Value Co. there by Victoria Pick 'n Pay. I spoke to Value Co. and we used their parking lot. We sent work packs every second week. So parents would come and collect the work pack.*

#### b. COVID-19 regulations and compiling work packs

While compiling and distributing work packs for the learners, specific COVID-19 protocols had to be adhered to. For example, schools provided plastic bags for the work packs to be placed in to allow them to be sanitised without damaging the content inside the bag. Bethel explained the process used by her school while distributing work packs to learners as follows:

*Each work pack had to be individually wrapped in a zip lock bag with the child's name and surname on. A parent had to sign, to say that I collected my child's work pack. We had to keep file of all of that... But when the work packs returned it had to be sealed with a zip lock bag, you had to take it with your plastic glove every day.*

#### (4) Adaptability

Teachers, parents and learners had to adapt to the new ways of communicating and engaging in teaching and learning which were no longer limited to the classroom or school environment. The findings of the study correspond to Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory that suggests learning can occur in different physical and social contexts, provided knowledge is transferred.

Amelia mentioned how she had to adapt her teaching strategies and think outside the box when she was faced with the unprecedented situation of not having the learners within the confines of the classroom. Amelia explained: *"We had to think and be creative in our strategy. I know in Foundation Phase we do a lot of concrete work constantly...it allowed us to be more creative in*

*the concrete apparatus that we used.*” In a study done by Anderson et al. (1996), teachers were able to adapt their teaching strategies based on their context-bound situations at the time to ensure learning still occurred within that situation.

Caroline, on the other hand, mentioned that even though they adapted to their circumstances, they encountered challenges nonetheless. Caroline explained: *“Our environments were very different. Foundation Phase it’s also difficult in terms of concentration to have them sit in front of a screen for X amount of time.”*

Despite the challenges encountered, Caroline managed to see the positives of adapting her teaching strategies. *“I mean it in terms of online basis that I mean as a port of call the internet is always a good thing to use in your lessons which we often used in our online lessons during the COVID year.”*

Teachers like Caroline expressed how the strategies used during COVID-19 could assist them in their teaching in other challenging situations that they may encounter in the future with regards to learner absenteeism.

*We still implement that in our today. In terms of like if you have a learner or learners that are ill and will not be able to attend school for... a period of about a week or longer, you could still adopt those sorts of things that we had used during the COVID year.*

Elethu tried her best to adapt the teaching strategies used pre-COVID-19 and incorporated them with new strategies used during the pandemic. Elethu elaborated: *“We also used visualised learning such as posters, pictures etc. We have always used imagery in class to help the children visualise the work... We are also able to go back to the packs when students start to forget. The visual work really helped the children engage and remember the points being taught.”*

*4.3.1.2 Research question two: How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Under research question two, the themes identified were *inaccessibility, smaller class sizes and balancing academics and emotions*. These themes are discussed in greater detail below.

### (1) Inaccessibility

During the COVID-19 lockdown period, teachers and learners could not access schools or their classrooms. Their personal contact was also hampered posing a challenge for all parties involved. Maree (2021) claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic had harmful educational and psychosocial effects which may affect learners in the medium and long term. The teachers interviewed expressed their feelings towards not being able to access their learners and classrooms as they would under normal circumstances. The accessibility to data was another issue that many of the teachers found a challenge.

Amelia expressed how she felt about not having the learners at school during the lockdown period. She explained: *“What I think the one challenge was not having the kids in the classroom and not being able to communicate with them as we normally would and not being accessible and not having us being accessible to them.”* Even though this was a challenge, there was a way of overcoming this to ensure that learners were afforded the opportunity to be educated. She added: *“So we had to rely on technology like I said earlier on...I would call them; I would send them a message privately.”*

Bethel, on the other hand, stated, *“You didn’t have access to your classroom to get it and everything was at your classroom, so you had to start from scratch, which was horrible...”* Bethel refused to let this challenge stop her from teaching her students and providing them with resources. She elaborated: *“You had to think on your toes, you were not allowed to get your file from school...I also had to broaden my knowledge. By thinking where can I get worksheets...We on Pick ‘n Pay school club, we haven’t used Twinkle, well I used it as a resources”.*

Bethel was a resilient teacher who never missed an opportunity to go over and above for her learners. She added:

*I had a boy in my class that had, his mother doesn’t have an immune system. So, he was*

*one of the first ones at our school got a comorbidity to do work, school work at home. I phoned mum and I said I can't teach like this. I got their address, went to drop off work packs every second week, but to me it wasn't fair on the child. So I started, shall we call it 'home schooling' him.*

Even though this was a major challenge for Bethel and other teachers who were in a similar situation, she managed to find an alternative method to ensure this learner was not left behind. In contrast, Caroline did not mention lack of access to her learners or the classroom as one of her challenges. Instead, she claimed learners' lack of accessibility to an electronic device at the time lessons were presented was one of her major challenges. She went on to say: *"We obviously have parents that work and therefore the learners could not access the computer at certain hours. So, you had to sort of adapt to change your lessons to incorporate all the learners."*

Amelia mentioned another challenge and explained: *"I think the challenge would be that data was an issue... Because whilst we were sending stuff home, not all parents had data and even some teachers not everybody had WiFi so I would say that would be a challenge."* The digital divide and the gap between those with and without resource availability widened during the COVID-19 period, as data prices were exorbitant making online lessons inaccessible to learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Bubb & Jones, 2020; Dube, 2020; Monareng et al., 2020). Similarly, Bethel explained that many of her Grade two learners did not have access to WiFi. Hence, they decided to use WhatsApp groups as this was more economical for parents and allowed more learners the opportunity to be educated.

With regards to data, Caroline indicated that one of her challenges was not being provided with data or internet usage while being at home during the COVID-19 lockdown period. This challenge was overcome once teachers were allowed to return to school. She explained further: *"We sort of had to make do with the internet we had at home, at our own cost. However, after a certain amount of time, we were given the go-ahead to return back to work. And worked from school, therefore we would have internet and all of our teaching resources."*

Daniella also experienced difficulties with learners not having access to data and online learning

platforms while they were not at school. She shared: *“But our schools, like government schools, lot of kids don’t have data and online. You know, we couldn’t do online teaching. So, we had to look the other way, a way that could benefit us, in our schools.”*

Elethu suggested that teachers had to use their personal data to disseminate messages to parents via WhatsApp groups. She also mentioned that, unfortunately, only those who had access to data or electronic devices benefited from these messages. Furthermore, she explained: *“We were using our private resources from home such as internet, printers and computers. Cafés were not advisable... It is only those learners that have made use of their personal communication gadgets and airtime that enjoy the provision of our teachings.”*

Uneven data accessibility and affordability, as well as learners’ accessibility to technological devices widens the gap between underprivileged learners and their well-to-do counterparts (Bubb & Jones, 2020; Dube, 2020; Monareng et al., 2020).

Another challenge relating to the accessibility of learners included the rotational timetabling. Amelia stated, *“I would say was alternate days, when we did go back to school and the alternate days I think that was very disruptive for the kids and also for the teachers.”* Many schools moved to alternating days or weeks once learners could return to school to accommodate the 50 per cent occupancy rate and COVID-19 restrictions placed on social gatherings (Ardington et al., 2021; Grobler, 2022). In the same vein, Elethu suggested that alternating days or weeks were detrimental for the learners. She further mentioned: *“Alternating also worked against the learners concentration and memory of the work.”* Learners often require reinforcement and repetition in order for them to retain information taught to them. The alternating timetabling, although it was set in place for a good cause, also expanded learning gaps.

## (2) Smaller class sizes

According to Spaull and Van der Berg (2020), many South African schools have overcrowded classrooms which prevents teachers from giving learners individual attention (Makeleni & Sethusha, 2014; Maree, 2021). Some of the teachers who were interviewed mentioned that rather

than a challenge, one of the opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic was smaller class sizes.

According to Amelia, *“The small classes were a good opportunity for us to work with the kids. When we did go back and we were on alternate days where the kids were not coming every day I think it was nice to have an opportunity to be able to work with the kids one-on-one.”* Similarly, Daniella expressed her gratitude for having a smaller class as compared to the large class sizes that teachers normally have to contend with. She declared:

*A lesser class, I would say is easier to teach. That’s a good opportunity. With us we have like 40-43 in a class, so if I have an opportunity to teach a lesser class, I would grab it...Because when it was like 20 children it was like so much easier to teach than 43 children.*

In the same vein, Elethu explained: *“There were less children in the class, so the classroom was more manageable. I was able to spend more time with some of the struggling learners.”*

This shows that teachers still managed to see opportunities through all the difficulties they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The fact that three of the five teachers mentioned that the smaller classes benefitted learners by providing them with individual attention shows their passion for teaching and focus on learner development.

### (3) Balancing academics and emotions

Teachers went through a range of emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic as they were removed from their comfort zones – their classrooms. Their safety nets were removed, forcing them to adapt their resources and teaching strategies.

Amelia declared *“I think as a teacher...the strain or the demand or the pressure we get put under is, is you know negatively impacts us because you got to try and you know get the children up to the school’s standards.”* Teaching alone during the COVID-19 was a tedious task for teachers, but maintaining learner performance added to the pressure that teachers were under

during this period. In keeping with Amelia's sentiments, Elethu had this to say: *"Maintaining a good teaching pace to cover the syllabus was extremely difficult. Keeping track of the learner's progress during the alternating times was difficult sometimes... We were not able to cover all the work. We were severely disadvantaged."*

Even though teachers tried their best to ensure that learners did not miss out on any concepts, the time lost during the period that learners were not attending school resulted in classrooms having similar dynamics to multi-grade classes with increased remedial work required once learners returned to school (Ardington et al., 2021).

Bethel shared her view on the different roles that teachers took on during the COVID-19 pandemic. She explained these different roles as follows: *"You became a psychologist, you became a social worker, you cried with the people that didn't get a salary. So COVID came and it took my privilege to lip read, my safety net, it took my safety net away completely and it was horrible."* This statement by Bethel shows that teachers are also human and feel for their learners and parents alike. Furthermore, they experienced personal difficulties, but still made their learners' education and well-being a priority.

Caroline also described being overwhelmed: *"Just in terms of teaching, it was very overwhelming in the beginning, just because everything was so new and the learner needs had been met and it's solely, you know, it's your responsibility as educator to educate these learners."* In the same vein, Daniella mentioned: *"We needed to test their knowledge and see how much they have learnt at home and if they didn't really grasp much, then we would go over that and we would try to make them understand sections we needed them to understand. So, it took a bit of time... it was a big challenge for us."*

The common issue that arose amongst teachers in this study were their difficulties with managing curriculum coverage, assessing learner performance and the emotional disarray that COVID-19 created in the education sector. Despite these challenges, teachers remained resilient and adapted to the changes in teaching and learning.

#### 4.3.2 Analysis of collages

With the growing interest in arts-based approaches in research, collaging has interested many qualitative researchers (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Mkhize-Mthembu (2023) used collage-making as a visual representation of thoughts and emotions which aided in the development of her teaching practice. According to Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010, p. 3), “[w]hen using collage reflectively, I focuses on a question, dilemma, or the like, and then selects pictures that metaphorically reflect aspects of this thinking.” In this research study, participants focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and their emotions around teaching during this difficult time. While analysing participants’ collages, the common themes or codes identified among them were words or pictures of *masks*, *germs/hygiene*, *thinking out the box*, *collaboration/team work*, *anxiety/mental health* and *teaching and learning through COVID-19*.



Figure 4.1 Amelia's Collage

Amelia's collage depicts her experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The focal point of her collage, which is situated in the centre, is the heading 'COVID-19' with a mask and a picture of a virus/germs. The words 'stress' and 'anxious' are placed on top of the mask which could be indicative of the emotions that COVID-19 raised. The words perseverance, teamwork and collaboration are pasted at the top of the collage, with perseverance being the largest of the three words. A study carried out by Kong and Wang (2020) highlighted the collaborative use of computer programs as a learning strategy for primary school learners. Similarly, teachers worked in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) during the COVID-19 pandemic. These



online COP allowed teachers to engage in discussions and share their experiences (Mills, 2011). This shows teachers' resilience and tenacity when it comes to dealing with challenges.

*'Change'* and *'teaching using technology'* were factors brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic which previously may not have otherwise occurred. The COVID-19 pandemic also brought about new rules, including social distancing, sanitising and wearing of PPE, to which teachers and learners had to adapt. *'Thinking out the box'* and *'creative teaching techniques'* shows Amelia's willingness to embrace change and cultivate learning. Amelia also factored in the prospects of being *'overwhelmed'* and *'confused'* which were feelings many teachers experienced while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers were overwhelmed with the new technological adjustments and online teaching platforms that were implemented to ensure teaching and learning continued while learners were not able to attend school. The Situated Learning Theory by Lave and Wenger (1991) addresses the notion of learning in new situations into which one is placed, be it a physical context, social context or learning process (Putnam & Borko, 2000). During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were situated in different physical and social contexts, but they all engaged in various teaching strategies to ensure that learning continued. Lastly, *'gratitude'* and *'appreciation'* feature as words of hope and opportunity in Amelia's collage highlighting the message that through it all she had to remain grateful for her employment and the gift of life. Once learners and teachers returned to schools, she appreciated the presence of her learners and being able to teach them in person much more. The COVID-19 pandemic made her appreciate things that she previously took for granted.



children’ was a common feeling that participants encountered during the level five lockdown period when learners were prohibited from attending school. ‘What more can I do?’ is a question that teachers asked themselves when trying to facilitate learning the best they could, given the challenges many teachers encountered when it came to a lack of resources and parental involvement. ‘New ideas’ were born when traditional teaching strategies could not be implemented. COPs allowed teachers to share their ideas using various online platforms (Mills, 2011).



*Figure 4.3 Elethu’s Collage*

Elethu designed a beautiful collage consisting of a wide range of pictures, words, magazine cut outs and newspaper clippings. Her collage mentions ‘welcome back to school’ and the phrase ‘Return to School Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic’ with a picture of a learner wearing a mask and sanitising her hands. This was the reality at schools during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic as sanitising and the use of masks was compulsory.

One of the pictures depicts the distance between desks being measured. It was mandatory that learners maintained a distance of one meter between each other within the classroom setting (Department of Basic Education, 2020). Some of the other pictures show the screening of learners, COVID-19 testing swabs being done, a vaccinated learner and a teacher who is teaching while wearing a mask. Putnam and Borko (2000) mention that the Situated Learning Theory

consist of three factors: physical context, social context and the learning process. The physical context at schools included social distancing, the social context included isolation and the learning process included unconventional strategies, but learning occurred, nonetheless. One of the phrases that stood out for me was '*Mental Health of the vulnerable most at risk from social isolation in COVID-19 pandemic*'. This statement speaks volumes because as human beings, we are most dependent on those around us when we are sick. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, created distance between people, hence affecting the mental health of those who were already in a vulnerable state. This being said, the opportunity for teachers to network using online platforms became more prominent. Teachers worked within COPs (Lave & Wenger, 1991) during the COVID-19 pandemic which allowed them to participate in ongoing discussions and engagements regarding the different teaching strategies that were used during this period.

The picture of the lady wearing a mask standing at the window shows the sorrow or worry in her eyes as she looks out the window almost longing for freedom. Another profound picture is the animation of a man coughing and germs being released, while the man next to him is seen running away in fear. In the same way, the COVID-19 pandemic created a sense of fear – fear of infection, fear of death, fear of uncertainty. The picture in the bottom right corner mentions the word 'connected' and has a picture of a cell phone. This shows that people were connected via technological devices, rather than in person. WhatsApp became the new teaching App. As Elethu mentioned, teachers used WhatsApp to disseminate messages to parents and learners.

A study by Bell et al. (2013), revealed that preservice science teachers benefited from the application of Situated Learning Theory with their focus being on the integration of technology in their instructional practices. Similarly, teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic used technology as part of their instructional methods when communicating with learners and disseminating information. Situated Learning Theory suggests that learning occurs through practice. This was evident from the research study, as teachers became more familiar with the use of technology and online platforms as they interacted with them more regularly during their teaching.

#### 4.3.3 Analysis of artefacts

Artefacts can be concrete teaching aids, mechanical or electronic devices, photographs or drawings of pictures (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Artefacts may be visual stimuli that encourage memories and feelings, while enhancing meaning (Kortjass, 2019). Participants within this study were requested to select two artefacts that assisted their teaching practice during the COVID-19 pandemic.



*Figure 4.4 Artefact – Cell phone*

The most common artefacts, selected by four of the five participants, were electronic devices. Either a cell phone or a laptop was selected as a tool that aided participants' teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Technological artefacts assisted many teachers (Illies & Meijers, 2009) during the time of the COVID-19 level four and level five lockdown periods when they were unable to have learners physically present in the classroom environment. Bethel's first artefact listed was her Grade two WhatsApp group, which she referred to as "WAPP group". Bethel elaborated on how WhatsApp groups assisted her during the lockdown period. She explained:

*During lockdown of 2020, teaching my Grade two class became a huge challenge. At first it felt like a normal holiday, but as the days turned into weeks and the weeks turned into months, worrying about my class's academic and social wellbeing and progress, became a big problem. Quick thinking and creativity skills were put to the test.*

In the world we live in, we have become increasingly dependent on technological devices and communicating via these devices (Illies & Meijers, 2009). Bethel expressed how grateful the parents and learners were to have contact with her as the class teacher via technological devices.

She said: *“WAPP APP became our first medium of teaching during COVID. We taught by making videos, giving oral tasks, making art and share it on group, give some Mathematics concepts and taught language.”*

Similarly, Amelia selected a cell phone as the artefact that assisted her teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Amelia stated:

*At my school, all teachers relied on our cell phones to assist us with teaching during COVID-19. We used our cell phones to create a class WhatsApp group, where all parents were added on... We also used our cell phones to send voice notes of the Letter land stories; this was to help with sounds that were being taught in the week. We also sent exercise videos on the group.*

In the same vein, Elethu mentioned the use of WhatsApp groups and a cell phone as the artefact that assisted her in continuing her teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Elethu explained how teachers used cell phones to aid their teaching. According to Elethu:

*Some of the best material we would use came from teachers who were in other provinces. These teachers used to use WhatsApp to communicate and send material that they would get from their districts, other private schools and old material that they found would be helpful to us. We would be able to communicate difficulties and come up with solutions for our classroom issues.*

Likewise, a study conducted by Nel and Marais (2020) found that WhatsApp groups were an effective tool that pre-service teachers used to disseminate information to their learners. Due to some teachers not having the technological skills required to utilise alternative online learning platforms such as Zoom or Google classroom, WhatsApp groups worked more seamlessly when it came to transferring information.

Caroline on the other hand, selected a laptop as the electronic device that assisted her with continuing her teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Caroline explained:

*The laptop was used for connecting with the boys via Microsoft Teams, the internet for reading materials and online Maths and educational platforms. The laptop was also used for means of communication with the parents and colleagues, via Microsoft Teams and E-mail. Although teaching during lockdown was difficult at times, for many reasons, it was comforting to know that we were privileged enough to have access to internet, computers, reading materials etc.*

According to a study by Bell et al. (2013), Situated Learning Theory suggests that teachers will be able to integrate technology into their teaching instruction successfully when they learn to apply the use of technology in the context of their teaching and learning. This will benefit both teachers and learners. Bell et al. (2013) further mention the transfer of knowledge from one context to another. In terms of this study, knowledge was transferred from the home environment, while learners were not attending school, to the classroom environment once they returned to school.

Amelia's second artefact that assisted her with teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic was the work packs that were made bi-weekly. She explained:

*Our staff had created work packs every two weeks that parents could collect. The work packs included activities that were based on the planning for those two weeks. This helped us encourage and motivate our learners to continue working even though we were not physically at school. The work packs included activities for Maths, English and Life skills.*

These work packs helped learners stay on track with the curriculum requirements, while teachers were able to provide resources for learners to engage with while they were not in the classroom environment.





Figure 4.5 Bethel's artefact (Winnie the Pooh bear)

Bethel's second artefact was a Winnie the Pooh teddy bear that she used as a class mascot. The teddy bears pictured above were used to show learners how to use a mask and what to expect once they returned to school. Bethel shared:

*We used our class mascots to explain the “NEW NORMAL”. Coming back to a COVID school is like starting school all over again. So many rules and regulations, do's and don'ts and a mask to keep germs away, the new normal was scary. So, what better way than to use our class mascots to help with the transgression of change.*

Bethel and her colleagues tried to make a daunting experience for learners more appealing to them since both teachers and learners were being faced with uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Caroline mentioned using chalk and a chalkboard as her strategy to facilitate learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. She said:

*I used a chalkboard and whiteboard to write on for the boys to see the activity that they needed to do, as well as to illustrate certain methods in Maths and Phonics. We used the board for writing answers and for transcribing books.*



As much as many teachers moved away from the traditional ‘chalk and talk’ method of teaching, it is evident that some teachers still resorted to using this teaching strategy in their classrooms or while doing online lessons. Caroline used both technology and traditional teaching strategies, such as a chalkboard, to ensure that her learners were not left behind. Bell et al. (2013) contend that Situated Learning Theory points to the successful integration of technology in teaching instructions, which Caroline did while she used her laptop and Microsoft Teams to facilitate online lessons with her learners during the period they were not attending school as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions.

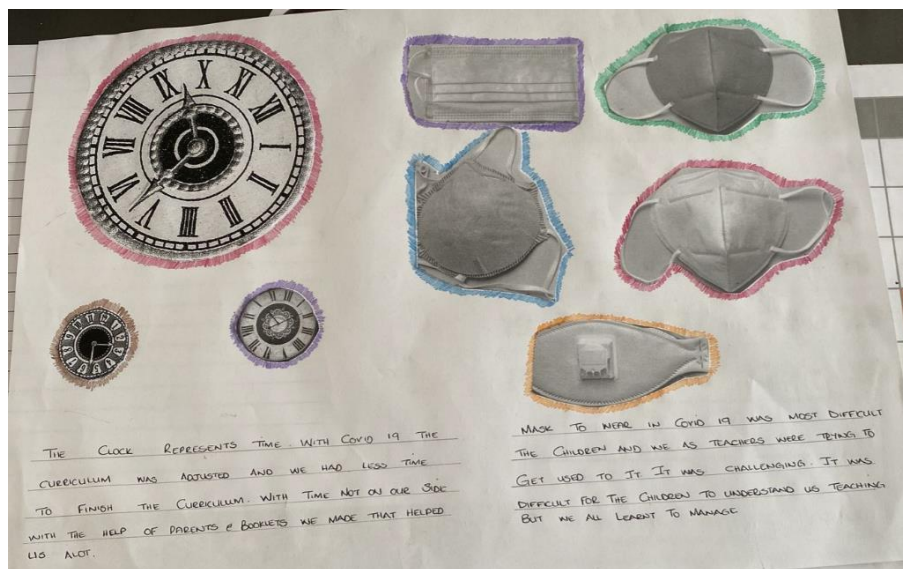


Figure 4.6 Daniella's artefacts

Daniella's artefacts included a clock and a mask. The clock was representative of the time lost during the COVID-19 pandemic and the short period that teachers had to cover the curriculum with their learners. On the other hand, she had a picture of a mask which, instead of aiding her teaching, seemed to have hampered it. She elaborated: *"It was difficult for the children to understand us teaching."* This meant that the pronunciation of vocabulary was difficult to hear while teachers were wearing masks. This could hamper learners' phonemic awareness as sounds are important in their language development. Learners' phonemic awareness refers to them sounding words and internalising them before writing it down (Mathura & Zulu, 2021).

## 4.4 Deductive analysis

Deductive analysis refers to the use of a set of predetermined themes or codes based on theory to analyse evidence from the data generated to support a hypodissertation (Byrne, 2022). The deductive analysis in this study was based on the conceptual framework developed by Hargreaves (2001) describing five emotional geographies of teaching, namely, sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political geographies. The data generated from semi-structured telephonic interviews was categorised and analysed deductively according to these themes.

### 4.4.1 Sociocultural distance

Many studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic found that not all learners and parents were adequately equipped to embrace online learning as the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a rapid shift to this form of education (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Mukuna & Aloka, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Sociocultural factors differed and, although some households could afford data and electronic devices to continue learning while learners were not attending school, economic inequalities hindered many learners from participating effectively in their studies (Lepp et al, 2021). Hargreaves (2001) outlines sociocultural distance or ‘otherness’ as an unintentional distance between teachers and learners or parents that can be created by a lack of cultural knowledge or emotional understanding.

Amelia stated that *“whilst we were sending stuff home, not all parents had data and even some teachers not everybody had WiFi.”* Teachers’ and learners’ circumstances and financial situations were different. Bethel on the other hand mentioned that *“getting the work packs to parents who lived in Imbali and Edendale, those were huge challenges. Google classroom for Grade twos three- quarters of them don’t have access to WiFi and stuff.”* It was not always an easy task for teachers and parents to get work packs during the period learners were not attending school. Parents who lived in outlying or rural areas found it difficult to collect work packs, while teachers were not able to deliver work packs to parents individually. Accessibility to network coverage and data was another factor that impacted many learners and teachers alike.

In the same vein, Caroline explained *“it’s just a subtle reminder of the academic challenges that*

*these learners face and also just their home situation. As we teach them all, you sort of forget that what kind of home situations they come from.*” Even though Caroline taught at a more affluent school, she still felt that learners’ home situations impacted their learning and not all learners were afforded the same opportunities.

According to Daniella:

*We teach mostly settlement children and our parents actually don’t know how to speak and communicate with English very nicely. They learning to speak with their children. But our schools, like government schools, lot of kids don’t have data and online. You know, we couldn’t do online teaching.*

At the time of the study, Daniella taught at a school where most of the learners come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds which meant many of these learners were not in a position to access online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, Elethu found:

*Some learners just would not come to school. The school has limited facilities which made it difficult to get information and workbooks. It is only those learners that have made use of their personal communication gadgets and airtime that enjoy the provision of our teachings.*

Nurturing a culture of teaching and learning in a community where emphasis is not placed on education is a very difficult task for educators. Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) found that rural communities expected learners to assist their families with chores and sourcing income for the household while they were not attending school which hampered their ability to participate in online learning. In the same vein, a study by Sari (2021) found that parental involvement from rural parents was minimal which impeded learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers have a duty to educate learners and, in doing so, sometimes teachers tend to give too much of themselves to try to accommodate learners or they create a sociocultural distance between

themselves and their learners in order not to become too involved and burnt out (Hargreaves, 2001).

#### 4.4.2 Moral distance

Morals are closely linked to our purpose and emotions as human beings (Hargreaves, 2001).

Teachers are often teaching learners what is right from what is wrong and, in turn, they appreciate positive feedback from parents. Morals focus on what is right and what is best given the situation being faced.

Amelia stated: *“Whilst I do think we could have done [online] lessons... I just don’t know how fair it would have been and how...accessible we would have been or how beneficial it would have been for all the kids.”* This statement speaks of Amelia’s moral standing. She was thinking about the best interests of not just some of the learners, those who have access to resources, but rather all learners in her class, those who have access to electronic devices and data and those who do not. She feels that morally it would not be fair for her to cater for some of the learners in her teaching strategies and not others.

Bethel explained how she fought for the rights of deaf people during the COVID-19 pandemic as she felt that their rights were being marginalised with the use of masks. Bethel explained that she would go:

*...further for fighting for the rights of deaf people because... your deaf people lost it all. a lot of children you picked up have hearing difficulty because of COVID, which you never knew. I refused to attend a staff meeting because the principal kept on wearing a mask and refused to speak through a microphone and it was in the hall. I said you taking away my right.*

Bethel understood the moral and emotional dilemma of not being able to hear or lip-read due to everyone wearing masks. She felt marginalised, which led to her passion for fighting for the rights of deaf people.

Bethel further stated:

*I had a boy in my class... mum couldn't send her son to school to be in the class due to the high risk of COVID... So I started, shall we call it 'home schooling' him. I had J... in my house, in the dining room, for two hours at a time, to do Mathematic whatever, so we did in the class.*

This was a moral decision taken by Bethel, as this learner's teacher, because she felt she could not let this child suffer academically because of his mother's illness. She opted to go the extra mile for this learner due to the unforeseen circumstance he was in. She was not obligated to do this, but she made a moral choice to educate this learner despite the difficulties experienced when it came to him attending school and his academic progress.

#### 4.4.3 Professional distance

Hargreaves (2001) suggests that professional distance is a means for teachers to keep parents at bay when they are criticised or questioned by parents.

Amelia stated:

*We all had, once COVID-19 had started we had... we all started WhatsApp groups with our parents where we would send planning and examples of work and we would communicate over WhatsApp with the parents. We had online books that were sent to them with a bookshelf where they would pick out a book and they would be able to read it online. We did voice notes of sounds. We had to try to use different resources so voice notes, video calls with our kids.*

Amelia also mentioned the difference in the teaching strategies employed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which included:

*We worked a lot with one-on-one individual attention and working in small groups. We*

*had... we had planned things in advance for a month and we followed our same themes that we would at school. Normally we would say to the parent's limit screen time... but this was very different because we actually relied quite a bit on technology and where the kids had to use cell phones, tablets and laptops. Resources were limited so when we were planning, we had to really be creative and think outside of the box.*

Amelia and other teachers alike used different platforms to continue educating learners, even during the COVID-19 pandemic when it was difficult for them to maintain the same academic standards to which they were previously used.

Bethel mentioned:

*I will read, we had daily story time. We would explain the concept; I didn't do online teaching... example we supposed to do verbs this week voice recording what is a verb send them on WhatsApp a picture of what is a verb. Before COVID we had reading groups, we had Mathematics ability groups. Children didn't learn how to follow reading anymore, everything was just given to them. We also had Google classroom workshops.*

Bethel explained how her teaching strategies, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, were more 'hands-on' and focused on interaction with the learners than the electronic or mobile teaching that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, Caroline explained:

*We started using Microsoft Teams. The Internet is always a good thing to use in your lessons which we often used in our online lessons during the COVID year. I would still, I mean we still implement that in our today. You had to sort of adapt to change your lessons to incorporate all the learners. It was very overwhelming in the beginning... it's your responsibility as educated to educate these learners... navigating through Microsoft Teams. We worked long hours, and we did a lot more [for] these learners and obviously it's a lot different from what we normally do.*

Professionally, Caroline felt that she had done her best for her learners and had actually worked much harder than she previously would have, had her learners been with her in the classroom daily as they normally were.

In the same vein, Daniella explained:

*We also worked on like WhatsApp apps. We did have workbooks, worksheets, booklets. Even on the WhatsApp groups we had to explain how it had to be done, what technique we had to use, what pattern we had to use. I believe as a teacher, I rather teach that section to a child so they understand it, then rather move to another section and them not understand it. Whatever we work with them in class, we make copies and give them so they work at home. We also make like flashcards for them for their words.*

Teachers used their professional knowledge and the resources they had to ensure that they equipped learners with what they required in order for learning to occur.

Daniella further stated:

*To teach with a mask is very difficult. Kids tend not to understand you very properly because the pronunciation of words do not come out properly with a mask on. At the end of the year, we had a good pass rate, so that was an achievement. I would definitely take it as a personal growth, definitely in my teaching career.*

Teachers were obligated to wear a mask during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to protect themselves and their learners, but this was a tedious task for many.

Elethu explained how teaching strategies had changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges that were faced with regards to curriculum coverage. She stated:

*Teachers would communicate via WhatsApp groups to share worksheets which we collated into work-packs for our students. I would always use effective lectures in my class to set the tone for the work. Prior to COVID we could use active learning teaching*

*strategies, we could use team-based learning, group work, class discussions and be more interactive as a class. Maintaining a good teaching pace to cover the syllabus was extremely difficult. Keeping track of the learner's progress during the alternating times was difficult sometimes. Alternating also worked against the learners' concentration and memory of the work.*

Even though it was difficult for teachers to cover the curriculum requirements and meet their academic deadlines, they tried their best to educate learners and ensure that teaching and learning continued. Likewise, parents also had the task of stepping into the professional role of being an educator to their children while they were learning remotely. An article by Giardina (2021) elaborates on the switching of roles of a parent, who was a professor, to being an early childhood teacher to his child.

#### 4.4.4 Physical distance

The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools and teachers to come up with alternative methods of educating learners while they were not allowed to attend schools. Hargreaves (2001) states that physical distance and infrequent communication between teachers and parents' hampers the development of emotional bonds.

Amelia explained:

*When we did go back, and we were on alternate days... it was nice to have an opportunity to be able to work with the kids one-on-one. One challenge was not having the kids in the classroom. I'm grateful you know now that we have all the kids back and we are able to teach the way we should be.*

Bethel elaborated on the COVID-19 protocols as follows:

*Learners had to be 1.5m apart. You had to do paw prints so that's where they were lining up. There were feet going to the bathroom. I had more than I think 26 that year and I had four of the children that had to share desks. So, we got this pre-primary, the short ones*



*were sitting by the pre-primary tables, my husband had to make screens in between, that see-through screens, so that they don't get into each other. Break times they took hoops, painted on the field circles, each child had to sit in the circle. To see them sitting, weren't allowed to run, weren't allowed to play.*

Bethel mentioned the following changes that occurred within the teaching environment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic:

*COVID came, immediately our mats were removed from the class, that was the first thing that went because of the space issues. Parents were not allowed to come to school... no parent interviews. So, I had a parent, a parent week at my house. I scheduled appointments and I said to the parents, if you want to come and see me let me know, I'll do that, and they actually showed up. We had coffee with the parents, with masks everything.*

This is the physical distance that Hargreaves (2001) refers to with parents and teachers not being able to meet physically which creates an untold distance between them.

Bethel also saw a positive side to the social distancing with the learners, and shared: *"It was nice for each child to have his own personal space in class, to sit by him/herself and to know this is my table, with my belongings, you cannot take mine."* She further explained that the problem arose when it came to teachers keeping a social distance within the confines of the school environment, *"We weren't allowed in the staffroom, we weren't allowed one person in the kitchen to make coffee... it's like there was no staff interaction."*

According to Caroline, *"not having the learners with us at face value was different. Having them on the other side of the screen was difficult."* As much as online learning has become more prominent nowadays, it is a very new experience for many teachers, which can be quite daunting.

Daniella explained:

*To get the children to understand while not being at school and not explaining to them,*

*that was the hardest thing ever. With us we have like 40-43 in a class, so if I have an opportunity to teach a lesser class, I would grab it the same time.*

Daniella found it difficult to get learners to grasp concepts while they were not at school, but she also mentioned the large class sizes and how she would jump at the opportunity to have a smaller class.

Elethu's teaching strategy, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic involved her standing and teaching the children, encouraging them to ask questions and engage with the material. Once COVID-19 surfaced, she explained:

*The learners had to social distance meaning they could not work in groups. Learners would often take off their masks to communicate so we discouraged communicating. Interaction was severely decreased. Some learners just would not come to school. There were less children in the class, so the classroom was more manageable. The classroom environment was cleaner.*

Elethu found that physically having fewer learners improved classroom management and the cleanliness of the classroom, which was a positive change.

#### 4.4.5 Political distance

The political geographies that Hargreaves (2001) points to are the power dynamics and the different levels of authority that people hold. Political issues that arose from the data generated included the lack of government involvement and support, as well as the lack of resources experienced by teachers employed at government schools.

Bethel speaks of the lack of power when it came to deaf people fighting against the use of masks. She added: *"Your blind people have guide dogs, I have my hearing aids, but you were too scared to wear them because they falling off. So, I would fight for the rights of deaf people."*

Daniella mentioned that:

*Government schools, lot of kids don't have data and online. You know, we couldn't do online teaching. If we had more like if we were like other schools and we had online teaching, that would have been like so much easier, you know, for us to teach the children. It would be so much better because we could have taught a group of children at a time.*

Likewise, Elethu mentioned, *"If we had better facilities and more government support we could have done much better."* Sadly, many teachers felt that the government did not support them adequately during the COVID-19 period, especially considering the fact that this was a new phenomenon and teachers were still navigating their way through teaching during such unprecedented times. Sari (2021) found in her study that, although teachers may have felt confused and unsupported at times, they were resilient and navigated through the challenges they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, teachers' technological skills were improved which lead to teachers being more confident and competent (Sari, 2021).

## **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the data analysis and the themes that were identified from the data generated. A combination of inductive and deductive data analysis was used guided by the conceptual frameworks of Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory and Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching. The following chapter provides a discussion of the findings and presents recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study aimed to examine the teaching strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this study sought to understand the challenges and opportunities experienced by Foundation Phase teachers during such unprecedented times. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a rapid shift from traditional face-to-face teaching strategies to technological methods that incorporated the use of digital platforms and devices. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of this study based on responses from five participants in response to three data generation methods. These were semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artefacts. The study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The data generated from the three data generation methods were analysed inductively using the conceptual framework of Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory to address research questions one and two. The deductive analysis of the data generated from semi-structured telephonic interviews to address research question two was guided by the conceptual framework of Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching. In this chapter, the findings are presented according to inductive analysis first and thereafter deductive analysis.

This research study titled: 'Teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences, challenges and opportunities of Foundation Phase teachers' was presented in five chapters.

**Chapter one** introduced the focus and purpose of the study, as well as the rationale and important background information on which the study was based. The key research questions were introduced, and a synopsis of the research process was given. The chapter concluded with an overview of the structure of this dissertation.

**Chapter two** provided an overview of the literature reviewed during this research and a comparison of the findings of studies similar and relevant to this study. It examined the differing views and arguments put forth by various authors around the topic of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter also focused on international and local similarities and differences in challenges and opportunities encountered in education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter concluded with a description of the conceptual frameworks that informed the study, namely Situational Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and Emotional Geographies of Teaching (Hargreaves, 2001).

**Chapter three** discussed the methodological approach of the study and the justification for its methodological choices. A detailed explanation ensued of the qualitative approach, interpretive paradigm, research design, methods of data generation (semi-structured interviews, collages and artefacts), inductive and deductive data analysis techniques, sampling method and ethical considerations.

**Chapter four** described the data generation methods used. These were semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artefacts. This chapter also reviewed theories that were used in the analysis of data, namely, Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and Hargreaves's (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching as well as relevant literature.

**Chapter five** focuses on the key findings of the research study and a discussion of these findings. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this study and recommendations for future researcher in the field.

## **5.2 Discussion of findings**

The following findings were identified based on the data generated from semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artefacts.

The key findings of this study were:

1. Foundation Phase teachers used social media, online platforms and work packs as teaching strategies;
2. Foundation Phase teachers adapted through the use of creative teaching strategies and saw teaching smaller class sizes as an opportunity;
3. Foundation Phase teachers navigated the challenges of inaccessibility, lack of technological devices, poor internet connectivity and balancing academics and emotions;
4. Foundation Phase teachers used teamwork and collaborated with their colleagues and parents to adapt their teaching methods during COVID-19; and
5. Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic was an emotional practice for teachers who experienced the emotional geographies of teaching.

These findings are discussed below in relation to the data generated from this research study.

#### 5.2.1 Foundation Phase teachers used social media, online platforms and work packs as teaching strategies

Nel and Marais (2020) found that WhatsApp groups are effective for the dissemination of information to learners. Likewise, participants in this study found the use of WhatsApp groups successful when it came to sending learners voice notes, videos, worksheets or instructions on what tasks needed to be carried out. In contrast, a study carried out by Grobler (2022) found that although WhatsApp groups were widely used, they required parents to assist Foundation Phase learners with the material and information sent to them which decreased the efficacy of this platform. In this regard, Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) found that the lack of parental involvement with younger learners was very challenging for teachers. Teachers' use of WhatsApp groups during the COVID-19 pandemic ranged from using this platform as a teaching strategy to using it for sending messages to parents and learners. Four of the five participants involved in the study used WhatsApp groups to communicate work to their learners and parents. WhatsApp is considered a cheap form of communication as the data costs are low. Bethel mentioned that she opted to use WhatsApp groups instead of other online platforms due to more learners and parents

being able to access content through this application.

During COVID-19, South African Foundation Phase teachers provided material for learners to engage with using digital formats (Grobler, 2022). Some teachers were privileged enough to have the opportunity to use online platforms as a teaching strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. These platforms included Google Classroom, online bookshelves and Microsoft Teams. Mukuna and Aloba (2020) contend that online platforms allowed teachers and learners to overcome the difficulties of space and geographical distance by communicating via online platforms. This allowed teachers to transcend space and distance through digital communication networks. Lave and Wenger (1991) assert that learning can be transferred from one context to another, so, while one can learn a concept online, it can be related to the classroom environment when learners return to their classrooms. This was applicable to the study as teachers within the study, such as Caroline, used social media and online platforms to educate learners during the COVID-19 level five lockdown period. Caroline stated *“we started using Microsoft Teams. It’s an online platform, in terms of making video sessions with the learners.”*

Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) raised the concern that learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may be further disadvantaged by their lack of access to technological devices and internet connectivity preventing them from accessing online learning platforms. Amelia, a participant from this study, mentioned that her learners were provided the opportunity to have online libraries and online lessons via platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom, while other learners, such as Elethu’s, were not as fortunate due to their lack of resources.

Schools in South Africa were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic from 18 March 2020, with Foundation Phase learners only resuming school in June 2020 (Ardington et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 level five lockdown period, Foundation Phase teachers had to find alternative methods of getting learners resources and learning material to ensure that teaching and learning continued. This was accomplished by providing learners with work packs for them to engage with during the period that learners were not physically at school. These work packs included worksheets, booklets, workbooks and resources that learners could use to assist them with their learning in their home environments. According to Daniella from the study, these were returned to teachers to be marked and allowed teachers to assess learner knowledge gained during the

time they were not attending school. Parents either collected work packs for learners, or they were sent to learners using WhatsApp groups.

#### 5.2.2 Foundation Phase teachers adapted through the use of creative teaching strategies and saw teaching smaller class sizes as an opportunity

Teachers, learners and parents had to adapt to a ‘new normal’ during the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning mainly occurred through digital platforms, such as cell phones or laptops, and parents took on the roles of teachers to a certain degree. Learners had to facilitate their own learning in many instances under guidance provided by their parents or caregivers.

Some of the teachers from the study mentioned how they had to become creative with their teaching strategies and ‘think out of the box’ when it came to the resources they disseminated to learners to use during the period when they were not at school. Because learning outcomes are determined by different social contexts (Anderson et al., 1996), some learners were better equipped based on their social contexts and the assistance received compared to other learners.

Teachers had to ‘think out of the box’ and be creative in their teaching strategies to overcome the extended period that learners were not in the classroom due to the COVID-19 level five lockdown restrictions. Amelia mentioned being creative with the resources teachers used while they were not at school and were unable to access their classrooms or resources. Amelia stated *“we had to think and be creative in our strategy. I know in foundation phase we do a lot of concrete work constantly. it allowed us to be more creative in the concrete apparatus that we used”*. Caroline also referred to thinking out the box in her collage. This included the use of online platforms to ensure that teaching and learning continued while learners were not attending school physically.

Although COVID-19 social distancing posed a challenge in the school environment, the smaller class sizes when learners were expected to return to schools using the rotational system were seen as an opportunity by some of the teachers in the study. Learners either attended school on alternate days or bi-weekly to allow for adequate social distancing by limiting the number of learners in the classroom at any given time (Ardington et al., 2021; Grobler, 2022). Teachers within this study saw this as an opportunity to work in smaller groups with their learners who



required additional attention due to poor academic performance. They also mentioned that the classroom environment was more manageable and cleaner due to the limited number of learners.

On the contrary, Amelia and Elethu found the alternating attendance model disruptive for learners and they found that learners would often not retain work taught due to the extended periods of absence from school. This created further learning gaps for those learners who required consolidation of work taught.

### 5.2.3 Foundation Phase teachers navigated the challenges of inaccessibility, lack of technological devices, poor internet connectivity and balancing academics and emotions

During the COVID-19 hard lockdown period, teachers and learners could not access their classrooms or their resources. Teachers were not accessible to learners and vice versa. Communication became a point of concern as data accessibility was another problem encountered by both teachers and learners.

The digital divide that existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was exacerbated as learners and teachers who could not afford the exorbitant data prices were alienated when it came to the use of online platforms (Bubb & Jones, 2020; Dube, 2020; Monareng et al., 2020). Iivari et al. (2020) claim that various digital divides still exist in our society and impact the younger generation and their digital futures. Similarly, Elethu, a participant in this study, mentioned that only learners who could afford data and had access to electronic devices were able to gain from the resources sent to learners via WhatsApp groups. Elethu shared her experience by mentioning *“The school has limited facilities which made it difficult to get information and workbooks. It is only those learners that have make use of their personal communication gadgets and airtime that enjoy the provision of our teachings.”* Dube (2020) states that COVID-19 seems to have widened the gap between those learners who are privileged and those who are underprivileged.

Teachers in this study expressed their concerns about the lack of economic resources available to both teachers and learners and the disadvantage at which this placed them when it came to accessing online learning platforms. Amelia, Bethel, Caroline, Daniella and Elethu mentioned their difficulties as a result of their learners not being physically accessible to them in the classroom environment. They also all referred to their lack of access to necessary resources

which were in their classrooms. Learners were not able to access their learning materials that they had in the classroom. Teachers overcame this challenge by providing worksheets or work packs for learners to work through at home. Both teachers and learners had to work around the challenge of physical distance and social contexts. Putnam and Borko (2000) mentioned that physical and social contexts influence the learning process. In other words, if an environment is conducive to learning, this will enhance the reception of learning. Some learners' environments were more conducive to learning than others, giving them an advantage.

Teachers had the difficult task of trying to adapt to the educational changes created by the COVID-19 pandemic, while also ensuring that teaching and learning continued. Catalano (2015) describes the benefits of the Situated Learning Theory and its relevance to online learning which should be applicable to learners' classwork activities. In contrast, Gyimah (2020) stated that the rapid shift from conventional teaching strategies to online systems increased educational inequalities. By the same token, Bishop (2021) expressed concern about the ramifications of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the development of additional educational inequalities.

Learners who did not complete the tasks provided while they were on a rotational system, or not attending school, fell further behind academically with teachers carrying the burden of trying to ensure that educational standards were met and in line with both school and departmental standards. Churiyah et al. (2020) found in their study that many schools could not accomplish the same academic results as they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The time lost during the COVID-19 lockdown period required teachers to assume the role of being remedial educators with classrooms consisting of vastly different academic levels (Ardington et al., 2021). This relates to Daniella's experience when she said *"we teach mostly settlement children and our parents actually don't know how to speak and communicate with English very nicely. They learning to speak with their children. But our schools, like government schools, lot of kids don't have data and online. You know, we couldn't do online teaching."*

5.2.4 Foundation Phase teachers used teamwork and collaborated with their colleagues and parents to adapt their teaching styles during COVID-19

The words 'collaboration' and 'teamwork' were identified in four of the five collages. This

shows the importance of working with teammates, especially during challenging times. Teachers formed groups and networked with one another to ensure that they provided their learners with quality education. Collaboration and teamwork allowed teachers to share ideas, while removing the feeling of isolation which was common during COVID-19. Parents also played a vital role in educating learners. Younger learners were some of the last learners to be shifted to online learning platforms due to independent accessibility concerns (Avgerinou & Moros, 2020). Parents were required to assist younger learners with interacting with material and resources sent via online sources. Giardina (2021) contends that he had to swap from the role of a lecturer to an ECD teacher to his child when he got home. Some parents were willing to participate in their child's learning process. This meant that teachers had to collaborate with parents to ensure that learners completed the tasks provided to them.

Lave and Wenger (1991) mention how teachers work within a COP to engage with other teachers. During COVID-19, this allowed them to communicate and share ideas regarding strategies that worked during this period and those that did not. Lepp et al. (2021) found that COPs encouraged learner involvement as a variety of teaching material was available to teachers, such as YouTube videos and online worksheets. Resources were also shared among teachers during this period which cultivated bonds and closer working relations among the teaching community. A study conducted by Mills (2011) revealed that teachers engaged in discussions and planning of educational activities through the use of online platforms. Similarly, Elethu mentioned that she communicated with teachers from different provinces about planning activities and adapting teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 5.2.4 Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic was an emotional practice for Foundation Phase teachers who experienced the emotional geographies of teaching

Daniella indicated that she had increased stress and anxiety when it came to maintaining academic standards and covering the curriculum in the time frames allocated once learners had returned to school. Teachers and learners were anxious when it came to returning to school. They did not know what to expect as the COVID-19 pandemic had caused a wave of panic throughout the world. Teachers were also stressed and anxious about curriculum coverage and getting learners to meet the required standards, as mentioned by some of the participants during their interviews. All teachers and learners were required to return to schools as of February 2022,

including those with comorbidities (South African Government, 2022). Teachers were concerned for themselves, their families and their learners' academic wellbeing. All of these factors may have impacted their mental health and increased their stress levels. The concern around the risk of exposure forced teachers to keep a physical distance, from both learners and parents, to protect themselves during this period. Hargreaves (2001) mentions that teachers sometimes use physical and professional distance as a method of protection.

Foundation Phase teachers focus largely on the development of phonemic development for English, but this was hampered by the use of masks during COVID-19. Teachers who participated in the study mentioned that the use of masks during teaching was difficult for them to become accustomed to as it hampered their pronunciation of words. In turn, this impacted learners' ability to hear and sound words correctly. This ability is known as learner's phonemic awareness (Muhammad et al., 2016). According to Mathura and Zulu (2021, p. 6), "learners at a young age often sound their words before writing them and hence spelling errors are common at this stage of writing." This explains the importance of learners hearing words correctly in order for them to sound them and spell them correctly. The use of masks may have been a hindrance to learners hearing the pronunciation of words, especially during phonics lessons, as stated by Daniella, a participant in this research study.

Hargreaves (2001) discusses five emotional geographies of teaching which include sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political distance. Lepp et al. (2021) found that some learners were able to continue with online learning as they could afford data and digital devices, while other learners were not afforded the same opportunity. This sentiment resonates in this research study as teachers such as Caroline were able to continue with online learning, while learners in schools with limited resources and poorer communities, like the school Elethu taught at, were not as privileged. Hargreaves (2001) refers to the sociocultural distance being created by a lack of cultural knowledge or emotional understanding. Teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic had to understand parents' and learners' situations while incorporating teaching strategies that accommodated all their learners' circumstances. Teachers sometimes create sociocultural distance between themselves and their learners to avoid becoming too involved or invested in their learners' lives (Hargreaves, 2001).

Morals are often linked to the choices that we make as human beings based on our emotions and purpose (Hargreaves, 2001). Bethel from this study mentioned that she chose not to engage in online learning platforms as her primary means of educating learners while they were not attending school because not all parents and learners had access to an internet connection or devices to assist their online learning. This meant that teachers were faced with the moral dilemma of catering to some of their learners while marginalising others, or finding alternative strategies that accommodated all learners. Bethel took it upon herself to home school one of her learners who could not attend school due to his parent's comorbidities.

Hargreaves (2001) describes professional distance as a means of ensuring parents respect professional boundaries. This was not always easy for teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic as teachers had WhatsApp groups with parents which allowed them to enter into their personal space and time via digital communication. Many teachers maintained contact with parents and learners during the COVID-19 pandemic and kept their professional relations intact through the use of online platforms or online communication networks.

The COVID-19 pandemic created physical distance between teachers and learners, especially during the level five lockdown period when teachers and learners were not allowed to attend schools. Hargreaves (2001) asserts that physical distance and a lack of communication between teachers and learners thwart emotional bonds from developing. Teachers who participated in this study mentioned the difficulties they encountered with not having their learners physically in the classroom. These included learners being easily distracted, work not being completed, a lack of understanding, insufficient resources available and the change in teaching strategies. The physical distance that was created by the level five lockdown prevented teachers and learners from engaging in teaching and learning in the classroom setting as they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges encountered, teachers saw the opportunities provided by social distancing, especially the opportunity to work with learners one-on-one in smaller groups. The participants in the study also mentioned opportunities for learners to have their personal space, to have smaller class sizes once learners returned to school and to keep the classroom environment more manageable and cleaner due to the reduced number of learners occupying the space.

Hargreaves (2001) refers to political roles and power dynamics that come into play with political distance. Daniella, a participant in this study, mentioned the lack of resources that government schools have and the disadvantage they were at due to their learners and schools not having the facilities to engage in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Elethu stated, *“If we had better facilities and more government support we could have done much better.”* This indicates that government support was minimal at a time when teachers needed it the most. Teachers proved their resilience and dedication to the education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, while support from government and departmental structures was sometimes limited.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

It is recommended that further research be carried out in the field of teaching strategies in the Foundation Phase. During the research study, it was identified that the Foundation Phase is not adequately represented with data around the changes in teaching strategies and factors that influenced this change during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional literature on the differences in teaching strategies used in the Foundation Phase prior to, during and subsequent to the COVID-19 pandemic is highly recommended as a field of study for further research. This research study can be used to assist teachers and future researchers who are searching for teaching strategies that can be employed in situations where teachers and learners cannot attend schools physically. Further research based on the emotional impact on teachers during the COVID-19 is also suggested, as well as moral and social boundaries of teachers engaging in online communication with parents.

Additionally, it is recommended that the Department of Education assists under-resourced schools with technological advancements to ensure that teachers and learners are better equipped should they be faced with a similar situation to that of the COVID-19 pandemic in future. The COVID-19 pandemic struck the world by surprise and caused major disruptions to education and schooling systems. Thus, this study recommends the assistance of under-resourced schools in technological advancements as a means to ensure better preparedness for crises similar to COVID-19. The Department of Education should also provide training for teachers with regard to the utilisation of online platforms as some teachers struggled to navigate and use these platforms effectively during COVID-19 due to a lack of exposure. Teachers need to be

adequately trained in Information Technology programmes in order for them to implement them appropriately.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the teaching strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also examined their experiences, challenges and opportunities. This chapter focused on summarising the research findings and providing recommendations for future research. The discussion of findings was supported by literature from preceding chapters to provide closure to this study. The study revealed that Foundation Phase teachers used multiple teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic which differed from their regular classroom practices. Despite challenges, teachers ensured that teaching and learning continued during the unprecedented context of COVID-19. This corresponds with Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory which suggests that learning occurs in a particular situation, but knowledge gained can be transferred to any context.

The conceptual frameworks used in this study were Lave and Wenger (1991) Situated Learning Theory and Hargreaves (2001) Emotional Geographies of Teaching. The theories focused on conceptualizing the experiences of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and these teachers' emotional journeys during this period. Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to COP, which teachers within the study used to communicate with colleagues from various schools. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers engaged and shared resources to ensure that teaching and learning continued. Hargreaves (2001) highlights the dynamics of emotional factors that influence the educational environment. This was relevant to the study, as teachers within the study mentioned feeling stressed and overwhelmed by the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Classroom dynamics changed, as well as teaching strategies used during this period.

The research methodology included data generation methods of semi-structured interviews, collages and artefacts. The purposive sample consisted of five Foundation Phase teachers, who teach at various primary schools within the UMgungundlovu district. The limitations of the study included COVID-19 restrictions during the interview period, which resulted in most interviews being carried out telephonically. One participant request an in-person interview due to a hearing

impairment, while another opted to provide electronic correspondence due to poor network coverage in her area. Telephonic interviews are usually shorter or require follow up interviews, which served as another limitation. A further limitation included one of the participants opting not to participate in the study, which impacted the array of data generated, as the school she represented was a farm school. With a larger sample, a greater depth of data could have been represented.

The findings of the study suggest that teachers used WhatsApp groups, online platforms and work packs to distribute information to learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. They displayed adaptability and exhibited their resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they collaborated as teams and conquered their academic challenges by implementing creativity and perseverance. Their challenges included inaccessibility, smaller class sizes (which posed as an opportunity) and balancing academics and emotions. COVID-19 allowed teachers growth in their pedagogical knowledge and teaching practices by creating community engagement platforms, which encouraged teacher education and learning. Schools were opened to the possibility of using digital technology to support teaching and learning.

Teachers faced the challenge of distance during the COVID-19 pandemic, as mentioned in Hargreaves (2001), but they overcame this and made sure that learners were the central focus of their efforts in teaching and learning. Teachers exhibited their resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic as they collaborated as teams and conquered their academic challenges by implementing creativity and perseverance.

To conclude, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Foundation Phase teachers used alternative teaching strategies to the traditional methods used prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. They provided learners with resources and platforms to ensure that all learners were accommodated during this period and to achieve academic standards prescribed by the Department of Education. Teachers experienced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic but were not overcome by these challenges. On the contrary, many teachers sought to find opportunities in their difficulties.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Letter to Principal

4 Jean Herold Place

Pietermaritzburg

3201

14 March 2022

ATTENTION: THE PRINCIPAL

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Shivona Mathura (Student No. 210504612) a Master of Education (MEd) student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus). As part of the requirement for this degree, I am required to conduct a research project. The title of my research study is: **“Teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences, challenges and opportunities of Foundation Phase teachers”**.

The aim and purpose of this research study is to examine teaching strategies adopted by Foundation Phase teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as explore the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I request your assistance in this research project by being granted permission to conduct my study in your school/institution. This study is expected to use six participants, one of whom will be a teacher in your school and will involve the following procedures. Participants will be required to participate in semi- structured telephonic interviews that are expected to last between 20 to 40 minutes at a time suitable to them which will not disturb teaching and learning. Follow-up interviews may be conducted if necessary. Each interview will be voice-recorded. Participants will also be requested to design an A3 collage and select 2 artifacts that assisted their teaching during Covid-19. The duration of their participation if they choose to participate and remain in the study is expected to be 4-6 weeks.

This study will not involve any risks and/or discomfort for the school and participants. Also, the

study will not provide direct benefits for the school or participants.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact me, my supervisor or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

**My contact number**

Email: [shivonamathura@gmail.com](mailto:shivonamathura@gmail.com)

Cell: 0823594297

**Supervisor**

Dr J. Naidoo Email address: [naidooj@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:naidooj@ukzn.ac.za)

Telephone 033 260 5867

**UKZN Research Office**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Participation in this research study is voluntary and participants may withdraw participation at any point. In the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation the participants will not be penalised. There are no consequences for participants who withdraw from the study.

No costs will be incurred by participants as a result of participation in the study and there are no incentives or reimbursements for participation in the study.

All names of schools and participants will be changed and pseudonyms will be used so that schools and participants remain anonymous. Information provided by participants will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. Data generated through semi-structured telephonic interviews, collages and artifacts will be stored in my supervisor's office (Room 47), at the School of Education, Pietermaritzburg campus for five years, and thereafter be destroyed.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours in Education

Shivona Mathura

## **DECLARATION OF CONSENT**

I \_\_\_\_\_

(Full names of the school principal) have been informed about the study entitled: **Teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences, challenges and opportunities of Foundation Phase teachers** by Shivona Mathura.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL

\_\_\_\_\_

DATE

## Appendix 2: Letter to Participants

4 Jean Herold Place  
Pietermaritzburg  
3201  
26 June 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

### REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Shivona Mathura (Student No. 210504612) a Master of Education (MEd) student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus). As part of the requirement for this degree, I am required to conduct a research project. I request your participation in this research study. The title of my study is: **“Teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences, challenges and opportunities of Foundation Phase teachers”**.

The aim and purpose of this research study is to examine teaching strategies adopted by Foundation Phase teachers during the C-19 pandemic and explore the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is expected to use six participants and will involve the following procedures. As participants, teachers will be requested to participate in semi-structured telephonic interviews that are expected to last between 20 to 40 minutes, at a time suitable to them which will not disturb teaching and learning. Follow-up interviews may be conducted if necessary. Each interview will be voice-recorded. Participants will also be requested to design an A3 collage, and select 2 artifacts that assisted their teaching during COVID-19.

This study will not involve any risks and/or discomfort to teachers. Also, the study will not provide direct benefits for teachers.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact me, my supervisor or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

**My contact number**

Email: [shivonamathura@gmail.com](mailto:shivonamathura@gmail.com)

Cell: 0823594297

**Supervisor**

My supervisor is Dr J. Naidoo who is located at the School of Education, Pietermaritzburg campus of University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Email address: [naidooj@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:naidooj@ukzn.ac.za)

Telephone 033 260 5867

**UKZN Research Office**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

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KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw participation at any point. In the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation you will not be penalised. There are no consequences for participants if they withdraw from the study.

No costs will be incurred by teachers as a result of participation in the study and there are no incentives or reimbursements for participation in the study.

All names of schools and participants will be changed and pseudonyms will be used so that schools and participants remain anonymous. Information provided by learners will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. Data generated through semi-structured telephonic interviews,



collages and artifacts will be stored in my supervisor's office (Room 47), at the School of Education, Pietermaritzburg campus for five years, and thereafter be destroyed.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours in Education

Shivona Mathura

## **DECLARATION OF CONSENT**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of participant) have been informed about the study entitled: **“Teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences, challenges and opportunities of Foundation Phase teachers”** by Shivona Mathura.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact I at (provide details).

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or Is then I may contact:

## **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to: (Please circle response)

Participate in semi-structured, narrative interview	YES / NO
---	----------

Audio-record my interview	YES / NO
---------------------------	----------

Design a collage	YES / NO
------------------	----------

Provide evidence of 2 artifacts	YES / NO
---------------------------------	----------

---

**Signature of Participant**

---

**Date**

## Appendix 3: Data generation instruments

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Topic

Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences, challenges and opportunities of

Foundation Phase

**Research Questions**

1. What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your highest qualification?
2. How many years have you been teaching in the Foundation Phase?
3. Why did you choose to teach in the Foundation Phase rather than the FET/GET phase?

What teaching strategies did Foundation Phase teachers adopt during the COVID-19

4. Describe the teaching strategies you used during the COVID-19 lockdown period.
5. Were work packs made and distributed to learners?
6. How different were these strategies compared to the teaching strategies used prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?
7. Can you elaborate on the similarities or differences between these strategies?
8. Which of the strategies used during COVID-19 would you consider to be beneficial to use on an ongoing basis in the education sector?
9. Why do you feel this strategy in particular will be beneficial?

How did Foundation Phase teachers experience challenges and opportunities in the implementation of different teaching strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

10. What are some of the challenges you encountered while teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown?
11. Did the school you are teaching at assist you in any way or provide any resources such as data or paper for work packs?
12. How did you go about overcoming these challenges?
13. Do you feel like you could have done anything further?
14. Has the change in education during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted you positively or negatively as a teacher? How so?

15. What opportunities did you experience while teaching during COVID-19?

16. Would you consider this experience as personal growth in your teaching practice?

YES	NO
-----	----

## **Instructions for Data Collection Instruments - Collage and Artefacts**

### **Collage**

A collage is a collection of words or pictures that are stuck on a page to form an art piece. For this collage, you will need to stick words or pictures that best describe your feelings of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. You may use a combination of words and pictures to illustrate your feelings. You may choose to use words or pictures from newspapers or magazines, which will be pasted onto an A3 poster to form the collage. The collage must be done on an A3 size poster, which can be provided to participants. This can be used to express the challenges or opportunities faced while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. A photo of the completed collage can be emailed to I or sent via WhatsApp.

### **Artefacts**

Artefacts are tools that aid teaching, which may include teacher resources, electronic devices, photographs or pictures. Artefacts encourage memories and feelings. For this, participants are required to choose two artefacts that were used during the planning and implementation of lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, laptops, cell phones or even a clock which can be indicative of the school time lost due to COVID-19 or representative of the time spent trying to catch up on the curriculum once schools resumed. Pictures may be taken of these artefacts and a short paragraph written on how these objects facilitated teaching and learning during the pandemic. The paragraphs and pictures of the artefacts can be emailed to I or sent via WhatsApp.

Researcher: Shivona Mathura

Email: [shivonamathura@gmail.com](mailto:shivonamathura@gmail.com)

Phone: 082 359 4297

Thank you for your participation.

## Appendix 4: Ethical Clearance Certificate from UKZN



08 May 2022

**Shivona Mathura {210504612}**

**School Of Education**

**Pietermaritzburg campus**

**Dear S Mathura,**

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00003850/2022

**Project title:** Teaching strategies during the coronavirus pandemic: Experiences, challenges and opportunities of Foundation Phase teachers

**Degree:** Masters

### **Approval Notification - Expedited Application**

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 15 February 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

This approval is valid until 08 May 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

**All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.**

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Dipane Hlalele {Chair}**

**Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**Postal Address:** Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

**Telephone:** +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 **Email:** hssrec@ukzn.ac.za **Website:** <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: - Edgewood - Howard College - Medical School - Pietermaritzburg - Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## Appendix 5: Permission Letter from KZN DoE



### KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

### OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200  
Anton Iembede 8u, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201

Email: buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Tel: 033 392 1051

Enquiries: Buyi Ntuli

Ref.:214/817198

Miss Shivona Mathura  
4 Jean Herold Plac.e  
**PIETEIRMARITZIBIJRG**  
3201

Dear Miss Mathura

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "TEACHING STRATEGIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF FOUNDATIONAL PHASE TEACHERS" in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from **02<sup>nd</sup> December 20'21 to 30 November 21123**.
7. Your research and interviews **will** be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal



Department of Education.



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**D,r M.J.B. M thembu |**

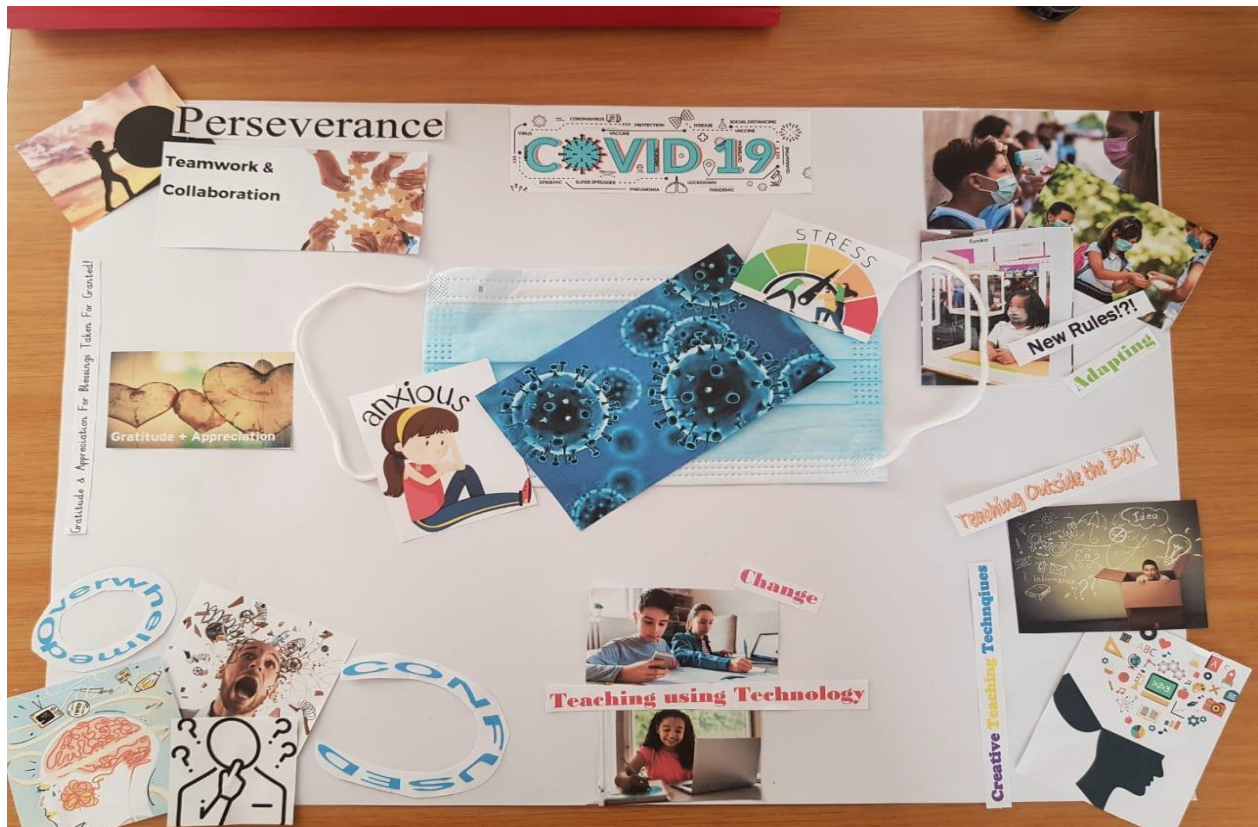
**AcUng Head of De1par1:ment: Education**

**Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021**

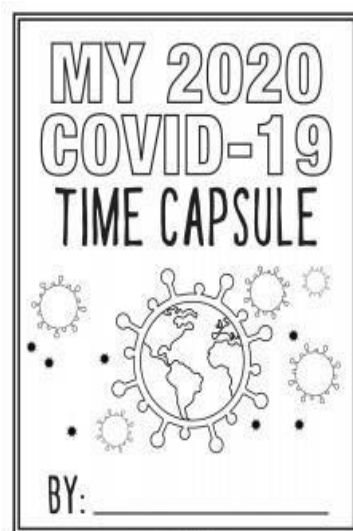
GROWING KWAZULU•NATAL TI>GETHER

## Appendix 6: Collages and artefacts of participants

### Amelia's collage and artefacts



Artefacts  
Cell phone  
COVID-19 time capsule booklet



## Bethel's collage and artefacts



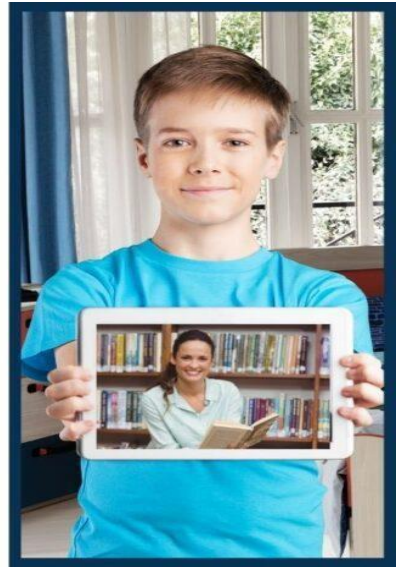
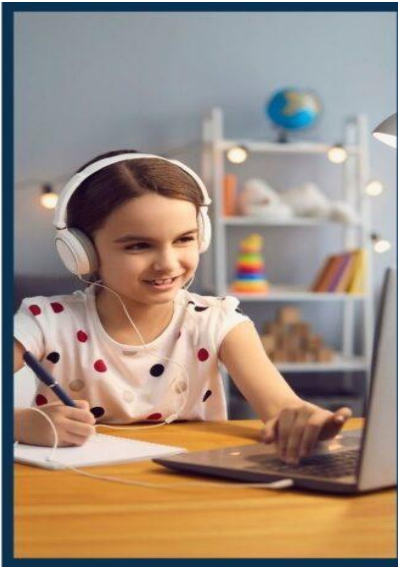
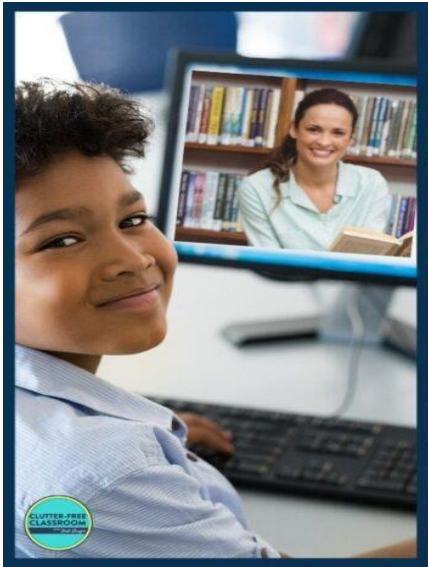
## Artefacts

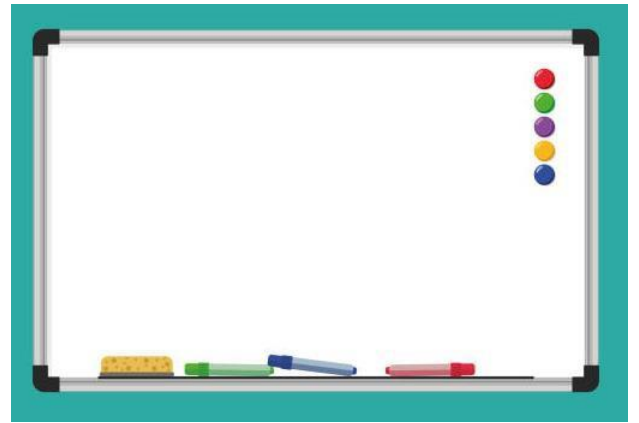
- Grade 2 Parents WhatsApp group
- Winnie The Pooh Bear, Bugsy and Garfield class mascots



## Caroline's collage and artefacts





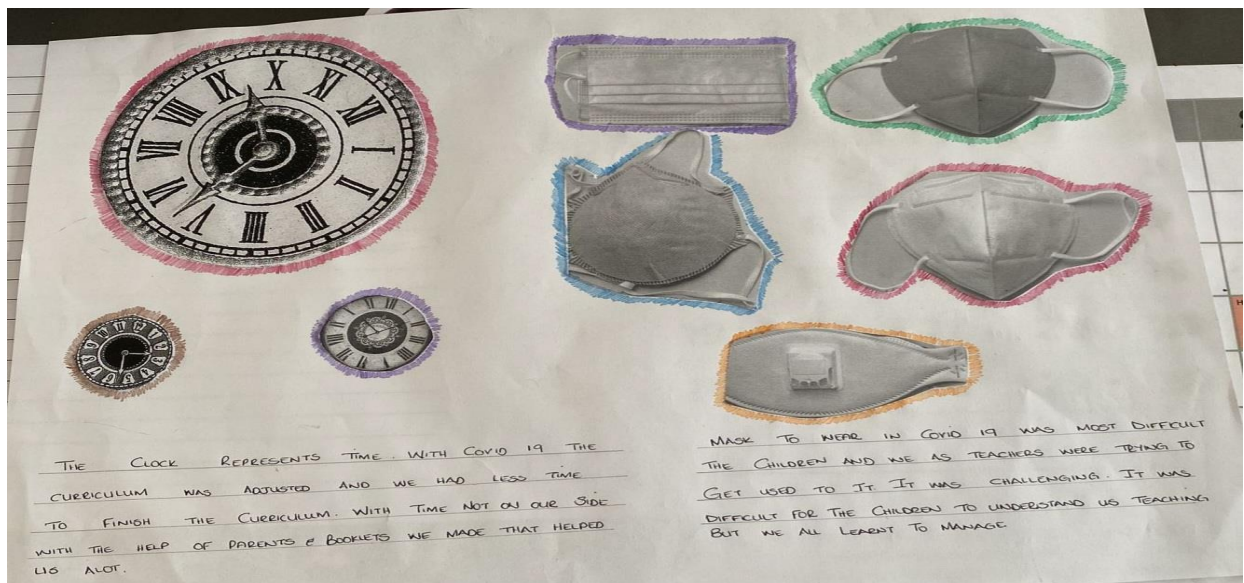
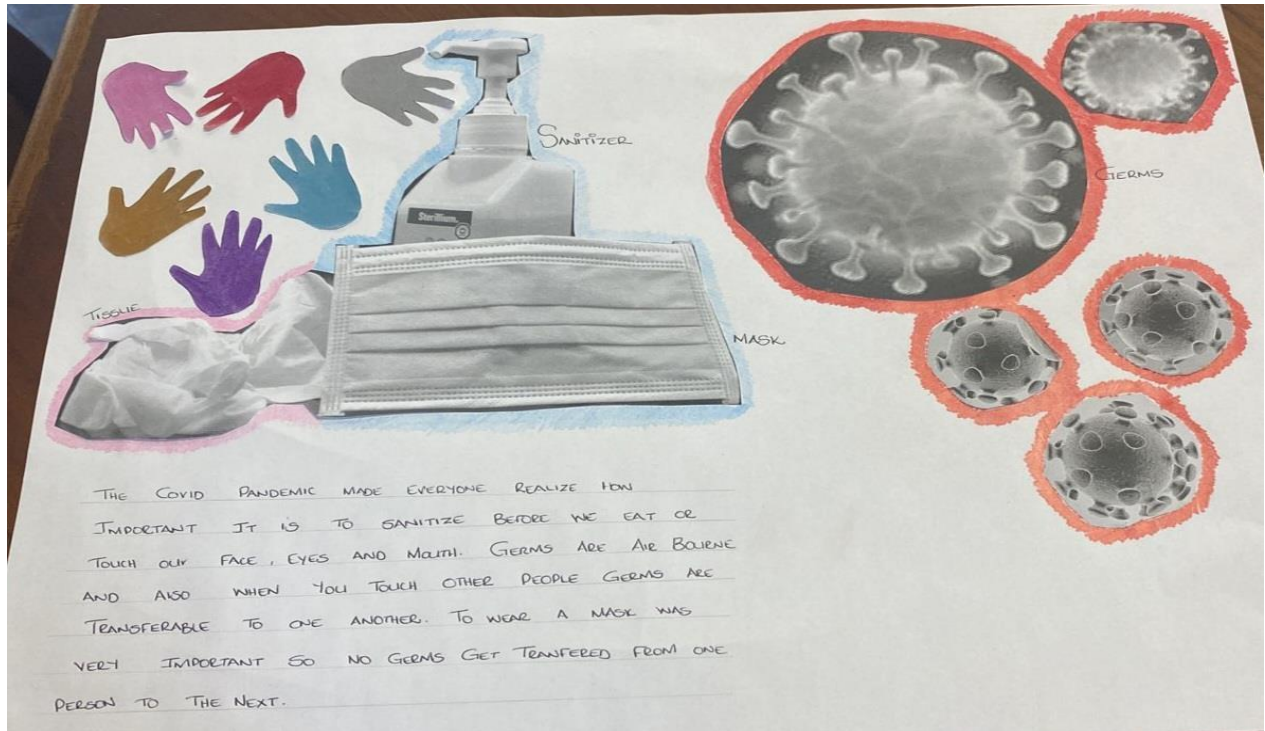


### Artefacts

- Chalkboard, chalk and whiteboard:
- Laptop



## Daniella's collage and artefacts



## Artefacts

- Clock

- Mask



[illegible]

- Cell phone

## Appendix 7: Emerging themes

### Emerging themes from data analysis

RESEARCH QUESTION	CODES/PHRASES	THEMES	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
1. What teaching strategies did foundation phase teachers adopt during the Covid-19 pandemic?	<p><b>Amelia:</b> We did or rely a lot or on technology or and the use of technology during the Covid-19 period. Our teachers we all had once Covid-19 had started we had we all started Whatsapp groups with our parents.</p> <p><b>Bethel:</b> So they were given work on whatsapp groups. So as they introduced the masks we made little videos of Pooh bear now with Pooh bear and Garfield interacting for the Grade 1-3 to put on the Whatsapp group.</p> <p><b>Daniella:</b> we also worked on like Whatsapp apps. we could explain on the Whatsapp groups what we needed them to do.</p> <p><b>Elethu:</b> teachers would communicate via Whatsapp groups to share worksheets. It is only those learners that have make use of their personal communication gadgets and airtime that enjoy the provision of our teachings.</p>	<p>Whatsapp groups</p> <p>communicate via Whatsapp groups</p> <p>We did rely on technology</p>	Situated Learning theory by Lave and Wenger (1991)

	<p><b>Amelia:</b> We had online books that we would send to the kids because we weren't able to have library. we had Google classrooms and each child was given a login or a sign in. We had to use, try and use different resources so voice notes, video calls with our kids. And then also we would we did videos.</p> <p><b>Bethel:</b> read the story like voice recording and send it to each child or send them a personal message. I felt Google classroom for Grade 2's three quarters of them don't have access to WIFI and stuff, especially if you don't get a salary, it's not fair on the parents. So we went to whatsapp teaching</p> <p><b>Caroline:</b> we started using Microsoft Teams. It's an online platform, in terms of making video sessions with the learners.</p>	<p>Online platforms</p> <p>online books</p> <p>Google classrooms</p> <p>Microsoft Teams.</p>	
	<p><b>Amelia:</b> We did work packs.</p> <p><b>Bethel:</b> So Grade 1, 2 and 3 can come on that day at that time and copy work packs.</p> <p><b>Caroline:</b> we also started making up like workbook booklets in packs and got the parents to come and collect them from the school</p> <p><b>Daniella:</b> We did have workbooks, worksheets, booklets, all that.</p> <p><b>Elethu:</b> Work packs per se were not distributed by the school but teachers would communicate via Whatsapp groups to share worksheets which we</p>	<p>Work packs</p> <p>making up like workbook booklets in packs</p>	

	collated into work-packs for our students.		
	<p><b>Amelia:</b> we had to think and be <b>creative in our strategy</b>. I know in foundation phase we do a lot of <b>concrete work</b> constantly. it allowed us to be more creative in the <b>concrete apparatus</b> that we used.</p> <p><b>Caroline:</b> our <b>environments</b> were very <b>different</b>. Foundation Phase it's also difficult in terms of <b>concentration</b> to have them sit in front of a screen for X amount of time. It's just I mean it in terms of online basis that I mean as a port of call the Internet is always a good thing to use in your lessons which we often used in our online lessons during the COVID year. I would still, I mean we still implement that in our today using that sort of thing. In terms of like if you have a learner or learners that are ill and will not be able to attend school for, you know, a period of about a week or longer, you could still adopt those sorts of things that we had used during the COVID year, things like that, so you could still use those sorts of things.</p> <p><b>Elethu:</b> We also used <b>visualized learning</b> such as posters, pictures etc. We have always used <b>Imagery</b> in class to <b>help the children visualise</b> the work.</p>	Adaptability  <b>creative in our strategy</b>	

<p>2. How did foundation phase teachers navigate the challenges or opportunities experienced while teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic?</p>	<p><b>Amelia:</b> not having the kids in the classroom and not being able to communicate with them as we normally would. I would call them, I would send them a message privately. I think the challenge would be that data was an issue. Because whilst we were sending stuff home, not all parents had data and even some teachers not everybody had Wi-Fi. the other challenge I would say was alternate days, when we did go back to school and the alternate days I think that was very disruptive for the kids and also for the teachers</p> <p><b>Bethel:</b> you didn't have access to your classroom. you were not allowed to get your file from school. I felt Google classroom for Grade 2's three quarters of them don't have access to WIFI. So we went to whatsapp teaching</p> <p><b>Caroline:</b> We obviously have parents that work and therefore the learners could not access the computer at certain hours. So you had to sort of adapt to change your lessons to incorporate all the learners. We sort of had to make do with the internet we had at home, at our own cost.</p>	<p>Inaccessibility</p> <p>you didn't have access to your classroom.</p> <p>data was an issue</p> <p>challenge</p>	

	<p>However, after a certain amount of time, we were given the go-ahead to return back to work. And worked from school, therefore we would have internet and all of our teaching resources.</p> <p><b>Daniella:</b> But our schools, like government schools, lot of kids don't have data and online. You know, we couldn't do online teaching. So, we had to look the other way, a way that could benefit us, in our schools.</p> <p><b>Eluthu:</b> We were using our private resources from home such as internet, printers and computers. Cafés were not advisable.</p>		
	<p><b>Amelia:</b> the <b>small classes</b> were a good <b>opportunity</b> for us to work with the kids. when we did go back and we were on <b>alternate days</b> where the kids were not coming everyday uhm I think it was nice to have an opportunity to be able to <b>work with the kids one-on-one</b>.</p> <p><b>Daniella:</b> A <b>lesser class</b>, I would say is easier to teach. Because when it was like 20 children it was like so much <b>easier to teach</b> than 43 children.</p> <p><b>Elethu:</b> There were <b>less children</b> in the class so the classroom was more <b>manageable</b>, I was able to spend more time with some of the struggling learners.</p>	<p>Smaller class sizes</p> <p><b>More manageable /easier to teach</b></p> <p>opportunity</p>	

	<p><b>Amelia:</b> I think as a teacher I think the <b>strain</b> or the <b>demand</b> or the <b>pressure</b> we get put under is, is you know <b>negatively impacts us</b> because you gotta try and you know get the children up to...(pause)..the <b>schools standards</b>.</p> <p><b>Bethel:</b> You became a <b>psychologist</b>, you became a <b>social worker</b>, you <b>cried</b> with the people that didn't get a salary. So <b>COVID</b> came and it took my privilege to lip read, my safety net, it <b>took my safety net away</b> completely and it was horrible.</p> <p><b>Caroline:</b> just in terms of <b>teaching</b>, it was <b>very overwhelming</b> in the beginning. it's <b>your responsibility</b> as educated <b>to educate these learners</b>. we <b>didn't have control over</b>, obviously, the <b>learner's getting the actual work done</b>.</p> <p><b>Daniella:</b> we needed to <b>test their knowledge</b> and see how much they have learnt at home. It was <b>quite difficult</b> and the <b>curriculum</b>, ja, that was the <b>most challenging</b> for us</p> <p><b>Elethu:</b> Maintaining a <b>good teaching pace</b> to <b>cover</b> the <b>syllabus</b> was extremely difficult. Keeping track of the <b>learner's progress</b> during the alternating times was difficult sometimes.</p>	<p>Balancing academics and emotions</p> <p>Academics: Maintaining a <b>good teaching pace</b> to <b>cover</b> the <b>syllabus</b> was extremely difficult.</p> <p>Emotions: it <b>took my safety net away</b> completely challenge</p>	
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### Themes from Hargreaves (2001) Emotional Geographies of teaching

Themes	Codes/Phrases
Sociocultural	<p><b>Amelia:</b> whilst we were sending stuff home, not all parents had data and even some teachers not everybody had Wi-Fi.</p> <p><b>Bethel:</b> And getting the work packs to parents who lived in Imbali and Edendale, those were huge challenges. Google classroom for Grade 2's three quarters of them don't have access to WIFI and stuff.</p> <p><b>Caroline:</b> it's just a subtle reminder of the academic challenges that these learners face and also just their home situation. as we teach them all, you sort of forget that what kind of home situations they come from.</p> <p><b>Daniella:</b> we teach mostly settlement children and our parents actually don't know how to speak and communicate with English very nicely. They learning to speak with their children. But our schools, like government schools, lot of kids don't have data and online. You know, we couldn't do online teaching.</p> <p><b>Elethu:</b> Some learners just would not come to school. The school has limited facilities which made it difficult to get information and workbooks. It is only those learners that have make use of their personal communication gadgets and airtime that enjoy the provision of our teachings.</p>
Moral	<p><b>Amelia:</b> whilst I do think we could have done lessons... I just don't know how fair it would</p>



	<p>have been and how (pause)...accessible we would have been or how beneficial it would have been for all the kids.</p> <p><b>Bethel:</b> further for fighting for the rights of deaf people because... your deaf people lost it all. a lot of children you picked up have hearing difficulty because of Covid, which you never knew. I refused to attend a staff meeting because the principal kept on wearing a mask and refused to speak through a microphone and it was in the hall. I said you taking away my right. I had a boy in my class that had, his mother doesn't have an immune system... mum couldn't send her son to school to be in the class due to the high risk of Covid and the danger... So I started, shall we call it 'home schooling' him. I had Juda at my in my house, in the dining room, for two hours at a time, to do Mathematic whatever, so we did in the class. some children were never at school and their work packs came back empty. So what are we supposed to do? I can't just give you a report and say by the way your child's failing, you need to know the reason.</p>
Professional	<p><b>Amelia:</b> we all had once Covid-19 had started we had we all started Whatsapp groups with our parents where we would send planning and examples of work and we would communicate over Whatsapp with the parents. we had online books that were sent to them with a bookshelf where they would pick out a book and they would be able to read it online. we did voice notes of sounds. We had try and use different resources so voice notes, video calls with our kids. we worked a lot with one-on-one individual attention and</p>

working in small groups. we had we had planned things in advance for a month and we followed our same themes that we would at school. normally we would say to the parent's limit screen time... but this was very different because we actually relied quite a bit on technology and where the kids had to use uhm cellphones, tablets and laptops. resources were limited so when we were planning we had to really be creative and think outside of the box.

**Bethel:** I will read we had daily story time. We would explain the concept, I didn't do online teaching. example we supposed to do verbs this week voice recording what is a verb send them on Whatsapp a picture of what is a verb. before Covid we had reading groups, we had Mathematics ability groups. Children didn't learn how to follow reading anymore, everything was just given to them. one of the biggest challenges is the mask, being a teacher that has severe hearing loss. We also had Google classroom workshops. I felt Google classroom for Grade 2's three quarters of them don't have access to WIFI and stuff, so we went to Whatsapp teaching.

**Caroline:** we started using Microsoft Teams. the Internet is always a good thing to use in your lessons which we often used in our online lessons during the COVID year. I would still, I mean we still implement that in our today. you had to sort of adapt to change your lessons to incorporate all the learners. it was very overwhelming in the beginning... it's your responsibility as educated to educate these learners... navigating through Microsoft Teams. we worked long hours and we

	<p>did a lot more these learners and obviously it's a lot different from what we normally do.</p> <p><b>Daniella:</b> we also worked on like Whatsapp apps. We did have workbooks, worksheets, booklets. even on the Whatsapp groups we had to explain how it had to be done, what technique we had to use, what pattern we had to use. I believe as a teacher, I rather teach that section to a child so they understand it, then rather move to another section and them not understand it. whatever we work with them in class, we made copies and give them so they work at home. we also make like flashcards for them for their words. like government schools, lot of kids don't have data and online. You know, we couldn't do online teaching. to teach with a mask is very difficult. Kids tend not to understand you very properly because the pronunciation of words do not come out properly with a mask on. at the end of the year we had a good pass rate, so that was an achievement, I would definitely take it as a personal growth, definitely in my teaching career.</p> <p><b>Elethu:</b> teachers would communicate via Whatsapp groups to share worksheets which we collated into work-packs for our students. I would always use effective lectures in my class to set the tone for the work. Prior to covid we could use active learning teaching strategies, we could use team based learning, group work, class discussions and be more interactive as a class. Maintaining a good teaching pace to cover the syllabus was extremely difficult. Keeping track of the learner's progress during the alternating times was difficult sometimes. Alternating also worked</p>
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	<p>against the leaners concentration and memory of the work.</p>
Physical	<p><b>Amelia:</b> we did go back and we were on alternate days... it was nice to have an opportunity to be able to work with the kids one-on-one. one challenge was not having the kids in the classroom. I'm grateful you know now that we have all the kids back and we are able to teach the way we should be.</p> <p><b>Bethel:</b> 1.5m apart. you had to do paw prints so that's where they were lining up. There were feet going to the bathroom. By the, behind each class we painted a Covid snake. So it was our, it was our mask-free zone. I had more than I think 26 that year and I had 4 of the children that had to share desks. So we got this pre-primary, the short ones were sitting by the pre-primary tables, my husband had to make screens in between that, see-through screens, so that they don't get into each other, but we adjusted, but it was horrible. Break times they took hoops, painted on the field circles, each child had to sit in the circle, but we had a problem with the hardidahs coming to the children stealing their food out of their lunch boxes so we moved them. to see them sitting, weren't allowed to run, weren't allowed to play. They could talk, but only 1 in the bathroom. Covid came, immediately or mats were removed from the class, that was the first thing that went because of the space issues. Parents were not allowed to come to school... no parent interviews. So I had a parent, a parent week at my house. I scheduled appointments and I said to the</p>

	<p>parents, if you want to come and see me let me know, I'll do that and they actually showed up. We had coffee with the parents, with masks everything. it was nice for each child to have his own personal space in class, to sit by him/herself and to know this is my table, with my belongings, you cannot take mine.</p> <p>we weren't allowed in the staffroom, we weren't allowed one person in the kitchen to make coffee... it's like there was no staff interaction.</p> <p><b>Caroline:</b> not having the learners with us at face value was different. Having them on the other side of the screen was difficult.</p> <p><b>Daniella:</b> to get the children to understand while not being at school and not explaining to them, that was the hardest thing ever. With us we have like 40-43 in a class, so if I have an opportunity to teach a lesser class, I would grab it the same time.</p> <p><b>Elethu:</b> I would stand and teach the children, encouraging them to ask questions and engage with the material. The learners had to social distance meaning they could not work in groups, learners would often take off their masks to communicate so we discouraged communicating. interaction was severely decreased. Some learners just would not come to school. There were less children in the class so the classroom was more manageable. The classroom environment was cleaner.</p>
Political	<p><b>Bethel:</b> Your blind people have guide dogs, I have my hearing aids, but you were too scared to wear them because they falling off. So I would fight for the rights of deaf people.</p> <p><b>Daniella:</b> government schools, lot of kids don't have data and online. You know, we couldn't do</p>

	<p>online teaching. if we had more like if we were like other schools and we had online teaching. That would have been like so much easier, you know, for us to teach the children. It would be so much better because we could have taught a group of children at a time.</p> <p><b>Elethu:</b> if we had better facilities and more government support we could have done much better.</p>
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### **Collages – Common themes/codes**

- Masks (4 of 5 participants)
- Germs/hygiene (4 of 5 participants)
- Thinking out the box (2 of 5 participants)
- Collaboration/team work (4 of 5 participants)
- Anxiety/mental health (3 of 5 participants)
- Teaching and learning through COVID-19 (4 of 5 participants)

### **Artefacts – Common themes/codes**

- Cellphones/laptops (4 of 5 participants)

### **Other artefacts mentioned**

- Work packs
- Teddy bears (class mascots)
- Chalk board
- Clock
- Masks

## Appendix 8: Turnitin Report



## Digital Receipt









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## Appendix 9: Letter from Language Editor



LANGUAGE  
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### Certificate of editing

28 November 2023

**Name:** Shivona Mathura

**Title:** 'Teaching strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.:  
Experiences, challenges and opportunities of Foundation Phase  
teachers'

This serves to confirm that the above document was edited substantively by members of the KZN Language Institute's professional English language editing team. The document was returned to the author with tracked changes and comments intended to correct errors and to clarify meaning. It was the author's responsibility to attend to these changes.

J. Kerchhoff

Director of the KwaZulu-Natal Language Institute