



UNIVERSITY OF
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**THE IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON TEACHING
PRACTICES AND TEACHER-LEARNER PROFESSIONAL
RELATIONSHIPS IN A RURAL SCHOOL CONTEXT**

By

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

Teacher Development Studies

School of Education: College of Humanities

University of KwaZulu-Natal

South Africa

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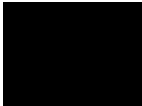
2023

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As the candidate's supervisor I agree to the submission of this thesis.

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Signed:



Date: 04 December 2023

DECLARATION

I, Siphesihle Nomvelo Ngubane, declare that:

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on teaching practices and teacher-learner professional relationships in a rural school context, examining the lived experiences of teachers. The teaching practices that rural context teachers used prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and those they employed during the lockdown begun in March 2020 when schools shut down are examined. Framed by the Hargreaves (2001) conceptual framework of emotional geographies, this study illuminates the subjective experiences of teachers in rural geographical contexts. The study adopted a qualitative approach, grounded within interpretive paradigm and using case study research design. Semi-structured interviews and collages were used as data generation method. A total of eight teachers (four from each school) were sampled to participate in the study. The deductive approach was best suited to analyse the data. The findings of study suggest that teachers in rural context schools adopted various teaching practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily embracing online teaching methods and using social platforms to distribute learning materials. However, these adopted practices encountered significant challenges including limited internet connectivity, teachers' insufficient ICT skills, and the overarching digital divide posed formidable obstacles, impeding the sustained effectiveness of these methods. These challenges worsened the existing disparities in access to education between rural and urban areas. The findings also indicate that the impact of teaching practices amidst the COVID-19 pandemic on the professional relationship between teachers and learners in rural context schools revealed predominantly negative outcomes. It came out from the findings that the lack of communication due to contextual factors strained professional relationships significantly. Furthermore, the introduction of a rotation timetable created emotional voids for teachers, hindering their ability to deliver academic content and maintain previous interaction levels with learners. COVID-19 restrictions prevented teachers from offering pastoral care or engaging in non-curricular discussions, diminishing the overall teacher-learner relationship. Disruptions caused by the pandemic hindered teachers' multifaceted roles, impeding their capacity to identify and address individual learner needs. The physical distance enforced by the pandemic limited teachers' ability to detect struggling learners, eroding the efficacy of a prior learner-centered and interactive teaching approach. This led to emotional strain on teachers, underscoring the importance of a deeper connection beyond curriculum delivery. Contrary to assumptions, emotional bonds couldn't compensate for physical distance, impacting the professional

relationships between teachers and learners adversely and leaving teachers questioning their teaching purpose amidst this perplexing period.

DEDICATION

The Creator of the Heavens and Earth. The Son of the living God. Without a shadow of doubt, this journey would have not been possible if you were not by my side.

This work is dedicated to my son. My source of joy. Olwenkosi Senzelwe Cebolenkosi Makhubo. Your birth was my rebirth. You were for healing and for growth. My love for you is infinite. Thank you for being my biggest motivator, even though you are not aware of it as yet.

To my late dad, Mr C.M. Ngubane. Thank you for everything, the tough and the gentle love, the discipline and patience. It all makes sense now. Above all, thank you for teaching me the power of prayer. I dedicate this body of work to serve as a living tribute to your memory.

To Mom, Mrs T.M. Ngubane. You give me life. This is for you. Ukubonga kwami akusoze kwanela, ngyabonga.

To all of my siblings, my two sisters, Nosisa and Ziphelele Ngubane and my brother Meluleki Ngubane, I dedicate this to you. Thank you for the support. May we never stop trying, may the spirit of relentlessness never leave us.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey has been challenging and long. This work was only a success because of the people who guided and supported me until completion. I would like to acknowledge and give my warmest gratitude to the following people:

My supervisor, Dr Zulu, thank you. Your warmth has made it easy for me to always approach you. This paper is the fruits of your patience, guidance, support, encouragement and advice you have given me from the first day of meeting you.

My research participants, thank you for opening up to me and sharing your lived experiences with me.

My friends whom I met on this academic journey, you have been crucial in my journey, my gratitude for your encouragement, support and input.

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	CAPTION	PAGE
Table: 2.1.	Table of 2021- 2023 national targets for the school allocation	16
Table: 3.1.	Time for each interview with participant	37
Table: 4.1.	Sub-themes that emerged using the Hargreaves (2001) emotional geographies model	55

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	CAPTION	PAGE
Figure: 2.1.	Outline of the literature review	13
Figure: 2.2.	National quintiles for 2007 distribution of funds for quintile rankings	16
Figure: 3.1.	Example of a collage (Adapted from: Gerstenblatt, 2013)	38
Figure: 4.1.	Yamkela's collage and verbatim transcript	46
Figure: 4.2.	Bukhona's collage and verbatim transcript	47
Figure: 4.3.	Qophelo's collage and verbatim transcript	48
Figure: 4.4.	Langa's collage and verbatim transcript	49
Figure: 4.5.	Zanothando's collage and verbatim transcript	50
Figure: 4.6.	Khwezi's collage and verbatim transcript	51
Figure: 4.7.	Manelisi's collage and verbatim transcript	52
Figure: 4.8.	Nandi's collage and verbatim transcript	53

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ATP: Annual Teaching Plan

B. Ed: Bachelor of Education

COVID-19: Coronavirus pandemic of 2019

DBE: Department of Basic Education

DHET: Department of Higher Education and Training

DOE: Department of Education

ELRC: Education Labour Relations Council

HOD: Head of Department

ICT: Computers and information technology

ISPFTED: Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development

KZN: KwaZulu-Natal

LTSM: Learning and teaching support material

M + 4: Matric plus four years accredited university qualification

NRTT: National resource targeting table

PGCE: Post Graduate Certificate in Education

SACE: South African Council for Educators

SASA: South African Schools Act 84 of 1996

SES: Socio-economic status

SMT: School management team

SRC: Student representative council

UK: United Kingdom

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

WIFI: Wireless fidelity

Table of Contents

SUPERVISOR'S AUTHORISATION	ii
DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	ix
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the study	1
1.3 Purpose and focus of the study	3
1.4 Problem statement	3
1.5 Rationale	4
1.6 Research questions	5
1.7 Research objectives	5
1.8 Preliminary literature review	5
1.8.1 Rural context	5
1.8.2 Qualified teacher	6
1.8.3 Teaching practices	7
1.8.4 Online and remote learning	8
1.8.5 Teacher-learner professional relationship	8
1.9 Conceptual framework	9
1.10 Research design and methodology	9
1.11 Overview of chapters in the thesis	10
1.11.1 Chapter one: Introduction and background of the study	10
1.11.2 Chapter two: Literature review and conceptual framework	10
1.11.3 Chapter three: Research design and methodology	11
1.11.4 Chapter four: Data presentation and analysis	11
1.11.5 Chapter five: Discussion of findings, recommendations and conclusion	11
CHAPTER TWO	12
LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Context of South African schooling	14

2.3 Teaching practices in rural primary schools.....	17
2.4 Changes in teaching practices and new methods of teaching adopted by teachers amid the COVID-19 lockdown	21
2.5 Empirical studies on COVID-19 and teaching practices	22
2.6 Professional relationship between teachers and learners in and out of class	23
2.7 Impact of COVID-19 on the teacher-learner professional relationship	25
2.8 Conceptual Framework.....	26
2.9 Hargreaves’ emotional geographies	26
2.10 Conclusion	28
CHAPTER THREE	29
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	29
3.1 Introduction	29
3.2 Research paradigm	29
3.3 Qualitative research approach.....	30
3.4 Research design	31
3.5 Population and sampling	34
3.6 Data generation methods	35
3.6.1 Interviews.....	35
3.6.2 Collage.....	37
3.7 Data analysis	39
3.8 Ethical considerations	41
3.9 Trustworthiness of the study	41
3.10 Conclusion	43
CHAPTER FOUR	44
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS	44
4.1 Introduction	44
4.2 Profiling of participants.....	44
4.3 Thematic analysis.....	54
4.3.1 Sociocultural.....	54
4.3.2 Moral distance	58
4.3.3 Professional distance	63
4.3.4 Physical distance	67
4.3.5 Political distance	70
4.4 Conclusion	76
CHAPTER FIVE	77
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION	77

5.1 Introduction	77
5.2 Discussion of findings.....	77
5.2.1 Research question 1: What are the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during the COVID-19 pandemic?	78
5.2.2 Research question 2: How have the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic affected the professional relationship between teachers and learners?.....	86
5.3 Limitations of the study	88
5.4 Implications of the findings.....	89
5.5 Recommendations for future research.....	89
5.6 Conclusion	90
REFERENCES	91
APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE	102
APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH.....	103
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO PRINCIPALS.....	104
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS	107
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	112
APPENDIX F: COLLAGE GUIDELINES	114
APPENDIX G: TURNITIN ORIGINALITY REPORT	115

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of this study, which explores the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on teaching practices and teacher-learner professional relationships in a rural school context. The chapter begins with a discussion on the background to this study. This is followed by the purpose and focus of the study, the problem statement and the rationale. Research questions and research objectives are stated. Subsequently, the preliminary literature review, conceptual framework, research design and methodology of the study are introduced. Lastly, the overview describes each of the five chapters presented in this thesis.

1.2 Background to the study

The South African education system evolved from an apartheid system which officially ended in 1994. The apartheid system separated people and forcibly restricted them to distinct physical spaces on the basis of race. The different race groups were allocated different schooling systems (Bantu Education Act, 1953). Blacks were restricted to distinct physical places, which were known as Homelands. According to Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), in the Homelands there were inequalities in teacher qualifications, teacher-pupil ratios, facilities, infrastructure and resources. The most inferior of the education systems of that time was the Bantu Education system. Bantu Education was under the Department of Native Affairs. This department stipulated that schools would be funded by tax money from the communities they served (Bantu Education Act, 1953). This meant poor communities had poor schools that lacked in resources. Ncokwana (2020) explains that poor schools are mainly located in rural contexts. Low socio-economic areas such as rural contexts and townships had schools that were extremely under resourced. This situation was further exacerbated by teachers that were qualified, but opted to search for employment in urban areas. This pattern created a never-ending cycle of a shortage of qualified teachers in rural context schools (Lowe, 2006). The DBE (2017b) highlights the challenges in recruiting, retaining and developing teachers in rural contexts. Long distances from schools to towns, poor infrastructure and service delivery makes it difficult to recruit, retain and develop rural context school educators. One of the many strategies the Department of Basic Education has initiated is emphasis on the importance of offering teacher incentives on the basis of classification of rural schools. These incentives are called Rural Incentive

Allowance (Department of Basic Education, 2017b). The Department of Basic Education (2017b) further explains that the improvement of education in rural context schools inseparably depends on service delivery in other sectors such as economic development, health, social development and transport.

When South Africa gained its democracy, considerable focus was given to the education sector in a bid to try to redress the past imbalances (Lowe, 2006). The mandate was to reverse policies like the Bantu Education policy, which perpetuated racial and other forms of inequality in the education sector (Lowe, 2006). Whilst schools in the Homelands remained under resourced with underdeveloped infrastructure, those in urban areas continued to thrive. These are clearly challenges that existed prior to COVID-19, but were illuminated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, according to Du Plessis and Mestry. (2019), some teachers throughout the country are, to date, semi-qualified, if rated by the standard of matric plus three years of formal education training. Although South Africa has undergone a political transformation at different levels of the government and structures in the society (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019), the majority of black schools still do not have enough qualified teachers and have a shortage of learning space. This leads to multi-grading, as grades need to be combined in a single class to save space and use one teacher for more than one grade (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995). Multi-grading teaching in rural and farm schools remains a huge factor in the delivery of quality teaching and learning. Rodriguez et al. (2021) suggests that challenges, which had already existed in rural communities, were intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Some of these challenges affecting provision of quality education in rural schools are insufficient water and sanitation and insufficient funding from the state. Due to the existing challenges in the education sector, combined with poverty that remains prevalent in most rural communities, the provision of quality education is severely compromised (Lowe, 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2021). These challenges affect how teachers plan and deliver learning content. This study explores teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and investigates how the teaching practices adopted during the pandemic have affected the relationship between teachers and learners.

1.3 Purpose and focus of the study

This study explored the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also investigated how these teaching practices adopted amid the pandemic affected the professional relationship between teachers and learners. The study focused on teachers in rural context schools, looking specifically at those who had the experience of teaching during the COVID 19 pandemic lockdown and also went back to school after the lockdown in the UMzinyathi district. The study was conducted at two primary schools. Qhakaza Primary School (pseudonym) had a slightly higher learner enrolment of approximately 182 learners, 1 principal, 1 head of department and 4 teachers. Ithemba Primary School (pseudonym) had an enrolment of approximately 158 learners, 1 principal, 1 head of department and 3 qualified teachers.

1.4 Problem statement

Due to the abrupt school closure in March 2020, teachers, learners, parents and the Department of Basic Education had no concrete plan in place for curriculum coverage. The COVID-19 lockdown was unexpected and new to everyone. When teachers and learners were placed on lockdown, new strategies had to emerge for teaching and learning. This study seeks to understand the teaching practices teachers had to adopt during the entire lockdown period. This period includes the first phase of the hard lockdown, when everyone was indoors from March 2020, and also the phase when COVID-19 restrictions were lifted slightly and learners were phased back into school, but still had to social distance and adhere to the rotation timetable in July 2020. Firstly, the study seeks to understand the teaching methods teachers in rural context schools adopted and used during this period. For example, Jones and Kessler (2020) describe that the transition to distance learning came with a lot of challenges in many countries. Some teachers became overwhelmed and felt unsupported to do their jobs, possibly due to the transition to teaching remotely and having to use electronic devices (Jones & Kessler, 2020). Additionally, the study seeks to also understand the challenges associated with the adopted teaching strategies and the outcome of adopting these practices. Moreover, this study seeks to understand the impact of these adopted teaching strategies on the professional relationship of teachers and their learners. For example, Polick et al. (2010) report on teachers assuming other crucial roles such as parenting and pastoral care in the classroom. Therefore, the transition to online teaching had deprived the learner of essential services that they would normally have got in a school environment, thus negatively impacting the teacher-learner professional relationship.

1.5 Rationale

COVID-19 has made us focus more closely on the daily challenges teachers in rural contexts face on a daily basis. The coronavirus (COVID-19) was reported in China, Wuhan City, in December 2019 and soon spread worldwide (Prather et al., 2020). In an attempt to curb its spread in South Africa, schools were shut down in March of 2020 (Brodie et al., 2020). When schools re-opened in July 2020, the Minister of Basic Education released a statement that numerous measures had been gazetted, which included social distancing. In response to social distancing, learners were supposed to alternate days of school attendance (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Online learning became the new norm for most schools (Brodie et al., 2020) and for well-resourced schools, teachers could continue with the syllabus even during the lock-down period, as they had sufficient technological and digital means to sustain distance learning (Brodie et al., 2020). As learning continued unabated in resourced schools, rural context schools were lagging behind and learners were dropping out of school (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Dube (2020) explains that the transition to remote learning was a challenge for most teachers, but especially in the under resourced schools, as most learners had never used a computer in their lives, let alone used electronic devices for schooling.

I decided to undertake this study as a teacher who has taught in a rural context school. The study approach and the findings make a significant contribution to the literature on experiences of rural context teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. I undertook this research to gain the perspectives and lived experiences of rural context school teachers. Despite the challenges these teachers face, the teaching practices they adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic warrant understanding. The relevance of this study is so that teachers in similar rural context schools may gain insight from the experiences of teachers situated in similar geographies. Teachers, teaching in similar contexts may benefit through the knowledge that the challenges they faced were mainly contextual limitations and not a reflection of their teaching abilities.

My experience of teaching in a rural context school has also taught me that sometimes bridging the curriculum is the only viable option. There are numerous daily contextual factors that contribute to the disruption of teaching and learning in these schools, such as learners crossing the river daily to get to school and thus the weather controlling their school attendance. I have experienced on many summer days, when the SMT has had to take a decision to abruptly stop classes and release learners who cross the river to get home before the river floods and it

becomes unsafe for them. Such contextual challenges are numerous, contributing to loss of teaching and learning, causing teachers to resort to bridging the curriculum.

1.6 Research questions

1. What were the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during COVID-19 pandemic?

This question aims to understand the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges they experienced and how these impacted on the teaching practices they adopted during the pandemic.

2. How have the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic affected the professional relationship between teachers and learners?

This question aims to analyse the adopted teaching practices, especially how they affected the relationship between teachers and learners.

1.7 Research objectives

1. The first objective of this study is to explore the teaching practices adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic and the experiences of rural context teachers in one district from two schools.

2. The second objective is to examine how the adopted teaching practices affected the professional relationship between teachers and learners.

1.8 Preliminary literature review

In this preliminary literature review, I defined the key concepts of this study. There are several key concepts that play a vital role: rural context, qualified teacher, teaching practices, online and remote learning, and teacher-learner professional relationship.

1.8.1 Rural context

According to Khattri et al. (1997), a rural context is a certain geographical area with certain characteristics that are not generally found in urban areas. A rural context school can be understood as a high-needs school (Boix- Tomàs, et al., 2015). Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) suggest that rural areas are remote and are usually underdeveloped, with very little or no

infrastructure such as water, electricity and sanitation. These are some of the challenges that affect curriculum deliverance in rural context schools. Therefore, the Department of Basic Education (2017b, p.20) classifies the rural contexts as farms and traditional areas characterised by low population, low level of economic activity and low level of infrastructure.

One of the main challenges thus far highlighted was the shortage of man power brought about by the pandemic. As rural context schools were already experiencing a shortage of resources, some teachers succumbed to the virus and some were classified as ‘comorbidity’ cases and were placed on special leave. On May 30th 2020, the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) published a concession process, which was an agreement between unions and the Department of Basic Education that when schools re-opened, teachers who were 60 years of age and above or who had underlying illnesses were placed on special leave (voluntarily) as a means to protect them from the virus. These teachers could work from home (Education Labour Relations Council, 2020). As necessary as this concession was, it was another blow in the rural context schools, as they had already missed out on so much teaching and learning due to the shortage of technological tools to learn during the lockdown. The remaining teachers in school’s had to take on the classes of the absent ‘comorbidity’ educators. The literature suggests that this resulted in educators taking classes and subjects they were not trained for, or out-of-field teaching. Out-of-field is a term used to describe the phenomenon of educators who are teaching subjects they are not technically skilled and qualified to teach (Hill & Willie, 2003). According to Hill and Willie (2003), usually when there is a shortage of certain teachers, it is not unusual to replace them with out-of-field teachers. Ingersoll (2003, p.5) cited in McConney and Price (2009), describes it as education’s “dirty little secret”.

1.8.2 Qualified teacher

According to the Department of Basic Education (2017b), a qualified teacher is an individual who holds an approved professional teaching qualification fit for employment in public education. Wienk (2016) highlights that the accepted definition of being qualified in any discipline is someone who has completed methodology training in that particular discipline. This means a qualified teacher may still be unqualified to teach a particular subject they have no methodology training in. According to the South African Education Council (SACE), a teacher that is regarded as a qualified teacher is one that has completed M+4 years of training. This means a four-year Bachelor of Education degree or a three-year Bachelor’s degree/diploma followed by one-year Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Both

routes lead to classification as a professionally qualified teacher, who is then required to register with SACE (South African Council for Educators, 2005).

1.8.3 Teaching practices

A teacher or instructor must hold a plan for the lesson or content they aim to share with the student/receiver (Issac, 2010). Teaching strategies are using various methods in an attempt to achieve certain objectives (Abulhul, 2021). Abulhul (2021) describes teaching strategies as a method in which teaching or delivering content can be approached. Issac (2010) narrates that a teaching strategy for a planned lesson must have structure, instructional objectives and an outline of planned tactics that will facilitate the implementation of strategies. The teaching tactics are the behaviours a teacher portrays in class as the means to facilitate effective teaching and learning and to obtain maximum results. These tactics may, for example, include giving out more activities to gain more responses from learners (Issac, 2021). According to Issac (2010), teaching methods come under teaching strategies, as they are constrained to the demonstration of subject matter. Liu and Shi (2007) explain teaching methods as a set of values, techniques and approaches that are employed by teachers to attain the anticipated learning in their students. Wehrli and Nyquist (2003) explore the numerous teaching strategies that a facilitator can employ to draw in a positive outcome. Teaching strategies may include, but not be limited to, brainstorming, small group discussions, demonstrations, games, independent study and so forth. Liu and Shi (2007) suggest that appropriateness and efficiency of a teaching method can be measured in relation to the characteristics of learners and its intended learning objective. Abulhul (2021) explains that a teaching practice that is effective for one lesson or one learner may not be effective in another lesson or for another learner. Abulhul (2021) further suggests that it is pivotal for teachers to employ various teaching practices to accommodate all their learners. However, COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of noting that different teaching practices are effective within each context and time of implementation. These traditional teaching practices here described were recently challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic and most were suddenly deemed ineffective. This study explores the use of these traditional teaching practices prior to COVID-19 in rural context schools, and how these teaching practices had to be abandoned for more effective practices when COVID-19 hit the country. The more effective teaching practices, such as online learning and the blended learning approach, gained popularity because of the time the country was going through.

1.8.4 Online and remote learning

Online learning can be understood as the learning system that uses electronic resources to facilitate formalised teaching. The main objective of online learning is that the interaction and exchange of knowledge is taking place utilising electronic devices such as computers, tablets and cell phones, mainly relying on internet connectivity (Zarzycka et al., 2021). Zulu (2022) explains online teaching as using different electronic gadgets like computers and cell phones, whilst having an internet connection. This can happen through holding an online class where all learners are attending and it semi-resembles a real classroom where active participation is taking place. This method can also apply where teachers send recorded lessons to their learners and the learners submit work/activities online in a platform and teachers/facilitators mark work submitted by learners and send feedback via electronic devices online. There are challenges to be expected in this method, as it is a growing method of learning. Zulu (2022) further highlights that one of the challenges of online teaching and learning in universities is the shortage of electronic devices for some students. The challenges are parallel to those faced by primary schools, especially those in rural context schools.

1.8.5 Teacher-learner professional relationship

The teacher-learner relationship can be conceptualised as a positive relationship shared by a teacher and learner with an aim to advance mutual respect and trust (Coristine et al., 2022). Coristine et al. (2022) further explain that the benefit of fostering a positive teacher-learner relationship is that learners are more open to learning and it creates a warm and safe space for the learner and teacher in class. Learners learning in a safe warm space generally produce stronger performance in class (Coristine et al., 2022). Positive teacher-learner professional relationships have been celebrated for allowing teachers to easily identify their learners' capabilities and academic needs and therefore adjust their expectations accordingly (Admin, 2017). Buffet (2019) expresses the importance of the teacher-learner professional relationship, as it gives confidence to the learner and ensures that their ideas are valuable. This confidence boost results in improved academic performance for learners. Tucker (2021) highlights that a learner's ability to learn and interact with teachers is highly reliant on their family upbringing, mental process, personality, maturity levels and even academic ambitions. It is therefore important to give each learner individualised attention (Tucker, 2021). This study explores the teacher-learner professional relationship prior to COVID-19. Prior to COVID-19, traditional teaching practices were employed. Teachers and learners shared the same space and there was

no social distancing. This study also explores the changes in the teacher-learner professional relationship during the period of COVID-19 lockdown and after the lockdown. The aim was to analyse the impact of the adopted teaching practices on the teacher-learner professional relationship.

1.9 Conceptual framework

Baxter and Jack (2008) describes a conceptual framework as serving several purposes, one being identifying who will or will not participate in the study. It describes relationships that may be present and gives the researcher a chance to collect general constructs to place in, what are described as, the ‘intellectual bins’ a storage space of ideas to be used. Emotions tell us how close relationships are (Hargreaves, 2001). Hargreaves (2001) explains teachers’ emotions in a five-factor model, which describes how teachers manage their learners’ emotions or emotive events in class, therefore recognising learners’ experiences and learners’ emotional realities.

This study aimed to understand and analyse teaching practices adopted by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and examined how the practices adopted affected the professional relationship of teachers and learners during the pandemic. This was achieved through using the Hargreaves (2001) five-factor model of emotional geographies containing these aspects: sociocultural distance, moral distance, professional distance, physical distance and political distance. This model is explained in more detail in Chapter two.

1.10 Research design and methodology

In this section I highlight the research design and methodology adopted in this study that is discussed in detail in Chapter three. In this study research was conducted in the interpretive paradigm and underpinned by the Hargreaves (2001) conceptual framework. The context is South African rural context schools. The sampled participants are teachers in rural context schools in the same district and circuit. These teachers were sampled based on the fact that they were teaching during and prior to COVID-19. They were also present as qualified school teachers during the abrupt school closures due to COVID-19 in March 2020 and were present during the period when learners gradually began returning to schools as COVID-19 restrictions were eased. This period is from 2019 to the end of 2021.

Four participants were sampled from each of two schools: Ithemba Primary School (pseudonym) and Qhakaza Primary School (pseudonym). A head of department from each school was selected because they have the required experience, but unlike principals, they are not mainly office based. Ithemba Primary School (pseudonym) consisted of one female teacher and three male teachers. Amongst the four sampled from the school for the study, was one HOD. Qhakaza Primary School (pseudonym) consists of one female teacher and three male teachers. Amongst the sampled group at that school was one HOD.

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews and collages. Data was interpreted and is presented in Chapter four. Constructs of the Hargreaves (2001) emotional geographies were used to analyse the data. Through applying pre-determined themes (Hargreaves, 2001) to the data, thematic analysis was applied and sub-themes were formed.

1.11 Overview of chapters in the thesis

1.11.1 Chapter one: Introduction and background of the study

This chapter presents an overview of this study, exploring the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their professional work and professional relationships. It describes the background, purpose and focus, problem statement and rationale. This chapter also lists the research questions and research objectives, provides a preliminary literature review, the conceptual framework, research design and methodology of the study. To conclude, this chapter presents an overview of the dissertation.

1.11.2 Chapter two: Literature review and conceptual framework

The following aspects are discussed in Chapter two: the context of South African schooling, teaching practices in rural primary schools, changes in teaching practices and new methods of teaching adopted by teachers during the COVID-19 lockdown, empirical studies on COVID-19 and teaching practices, professional relationships between teachers and learners in and out of class, and the impact of COVID-19 on teacher-learner professional relationships. The conceptual framework is explained, and the emotional geographies (Hargreaves, 2001) are elucidated as playing a crucial role in understanding the findings of study.

1.11.3 Chapter three: Research design and methodology

Chapter three begins by outlining the research paradigm and then the research approach. The population and sampling of the study is described and, thereafter, the two data sources employed in the study (semi-structured interviews and collages). The chapter explains the process of analysing data, describes the ethical considerations, before finally discussing the trustworthiness of the study.

1.11.4 Chapter four: Data presentation and analysis

Chapter four begins by profiling the participants, also presenting their collages and verbatim transcript. This is followed with the thematic analysis and concludes with a presentation of the data collected.

1.11.5 Chapter five: Discussion of findings, recommendations and conclusion

Chapter five discusses the findings. This involved engaging with the two research questions, employing various themes (presented in Chapter four) interchangeably. Then the limitations of this study and the implications of the findings are discussed, before the chapter concludes by providing recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Chapter one provided an overview of the study. This chapter reviews literature that is drawn from both South African and international contexts. It is crucial to have literature reviewed as it allows for content gaps to be identified. Using both manual and electronic methods of searching data, this study has been able to draw on relevant literature for the review. Various electronic databases were used such as Google Scholar, EBSCO hosts, Sabinet, Social Science Research Network, Directory of Open Access Journal, PsycINFO, ERIC, JSTOR and Social science database search engines and the unlimited use of inter-library loan at the University of KwaZulu-Natal at the Pietermaritzburg campus library. To narrow down the literature searched, key words were used: teaching practices, COVID-19, methods of teaching, teacher-learner professional relationship and rural context. The search was limited to the English language and it was conducted over the period of June 2021 to December 2022. To gather more relevant literature, also searched were the reference lists of relevant articles. As displayed in Figure 2.1, the structure outlines of the literature review.

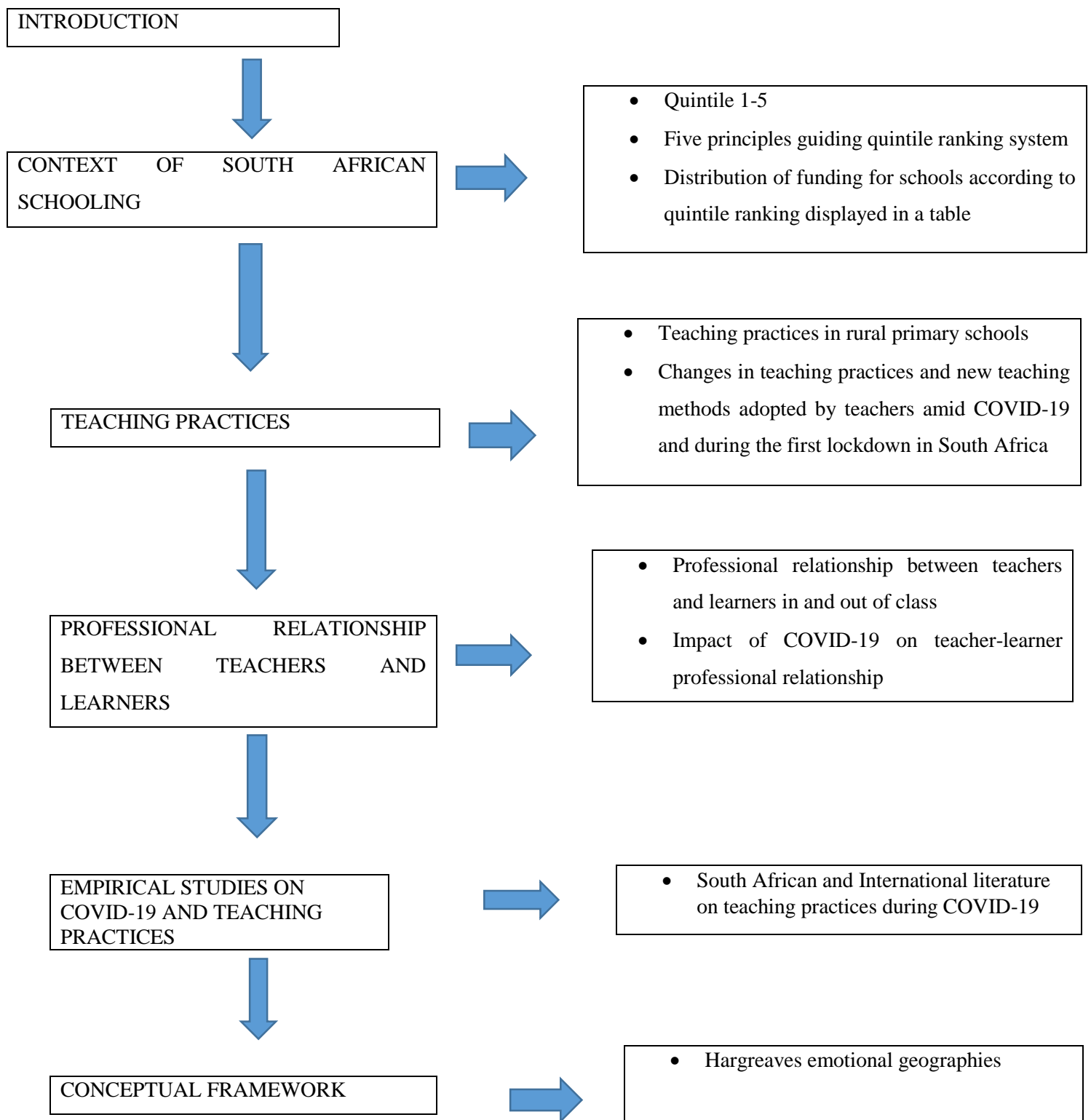


Figure 2.1: The outline of the literature review

2.2 Context of South African schooling

The South African schooling context discussed in this section is focused on the post-apartheid era after the 1994 elections. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA) (Republic of South Africa, 1996), advocates that in South Africa two types of schools exist: Independent schools and State schools. Independent (private) schools, on the one hand, hold power to fully financially manage their funds and have full responsibility for their own funding, including raising funds to run the school. State (Public) schools, on the other hand, are categorised on a poverty index called the quintile ranking system (Department of Education, 1998). This system in schools is pivotal, as the status of a school in respect of funding and fees relies on it (Motala & Sayed, 2009, p. 4). The schools receive funding from the state based on their given rank or category (Menstry & Bisschoff, 2009). The Department of Education (1998) states that: “The state is mandated to fund public schools from public revenue on an equitable basis in order to ensure proper exercise of the rights of learners to education and redress of past inequalities in educational provision” (Department of Education, 1998, p. 4). Public schools in South Africa are categorised into five (5) quintiles. The aim is to ensure that each school receives the subsidy they need from the Department of Basic Education. This categorisation of schools will in turn ensure there are adequate resources that will enable quality teaching and learning for all learners regardless of their economic background. White and Van Dyk, (2019) explain that the quintile ranking system was adopted from the former Department of Education and Higher Learning. The five (5) quintile rankings set out by the National Resource Targeting Table (NRTT) are part of the sustainable development goals set out by UNESCO, built from five fundamental principles (UNESCO, 2014):

1. Access: No learners should be hindered from receiving education due to school fees, therefore there are no fee-paying schools in South Africa.
2. Redress: Amend the past socio-economic imbalances and inequality due to apartheid era.
3. Equity: Highlight the importance of giving everyone equal opportunity and access to learning.
4. Quality: Provide quality teaching and learning for every South African learner.
5. Efficiency: Ensure the South African schooling system addresses the most basic needs of South African learners.

With these principles governing the quintile ranking system in public schools, it is important to note that the Department of Basic Education ranks schools after assessing the income, literacy and unemployment levels of each community (Department of Education, 2017a). This assessment helps to give indications for determining the school quintile ranking. Several

scholars (Motala & Sayed, 2009; Ncokwana, 2020; White & Van Dyk, 2019) drew from the National Norms and Standards for School Funding policy to clarify the categorisation of South African public schools into quintiles 1-5. The first three quintiles (1-3) are 'no fee' paying schools (White & Van Dyk, 2019). According to White and Van Dyk (2019) the 'no-fee' paying schools are those categorised as the neediest, normally situated in areas of high levels of unemployment or extremely low income. Quintile 1 schools are located in the economically disadvantaged geographical contexts such as townships, rural contexts and areas with mainly RDP housing. Ncokwana (2020) elucidates that the two-tiered system of quintile ranking, allocates the first tier (quintiles 1-3) mainly in rural contexts. These rural context schools are plagued with numerous issues, which may include unemployment, poverty, limited resources and other challenges aggravated by the context (Ncokwana, 2020). Motala and Sayed (2009) also highlight quintile 1-2 schools as the neediest schools located in low socio-economic status areas. Quintiles 4-5 are 'fee paying' schools. As the quintile rank rises, so does the geographical position of the school, thus indicating a majority of 'affording' learners (Maistry & Afrika, 2020). The second tier of the quintile ranking system, quintiles 4-5, are located mainly in urban areas (Ncokwana, 2020). Stott (2013, p. 173) explains that, usually, schools in the higher-ranking quintiles tend to hold more affluent school governing bodies (SGBs). These higher-ranking schools are at an advantage of acquiring more materials and school resources than those in lower ranking quintiles (Stott, 2013, p. 173). Despite lower ranking schools receiving more state funding, the higher-ranking schools are more resourced (Stott, 2013, p. 174). Hall and Giese (2009) state that schools ranking in the lower quintiles have a smaller population on average.

The National Norms and Standards for School Funding policy permits schools ranked in quintiles 4-5 to charge fees (Department of Education, 2006). The School Governing Body (SGB) (which comprises of the school's management team (SMT), teacher representative and parents) is mainly in charge of deciding on the amount of fees the school will charge. The deciding factor mainly relies on the school expenses and learner needs (Mestry, 2014). The quintile ranking system differentiates the amount of funding each school receives based on its quintile ranking. As mentioned, the lowest ranking quintiles (1-3) are the neediest schools in low socio-economic geographical contexts, whilst higher quintiles (4-5) include the most affluent schools located in high socio-economic geographical areas. Previously discussed in the five principles, the quintile ranking system aims to redress past imbalances created by apartheid to create equity rather than equality (White & Van Dyk, 2019).

Dieltiens and Motala (2014) explain that the first original quintile ranking system ensured that the neediest schools ranked in quintile 1 received the most subsidy of 30% and as the quintile ranking increased the subsidy decreased. Quintile 2 received 27.5%, quintile 3 received 22.5%, quintile 4 received 15% and quintile 5 received just 5% (Dieltiens & Motala, 2014).

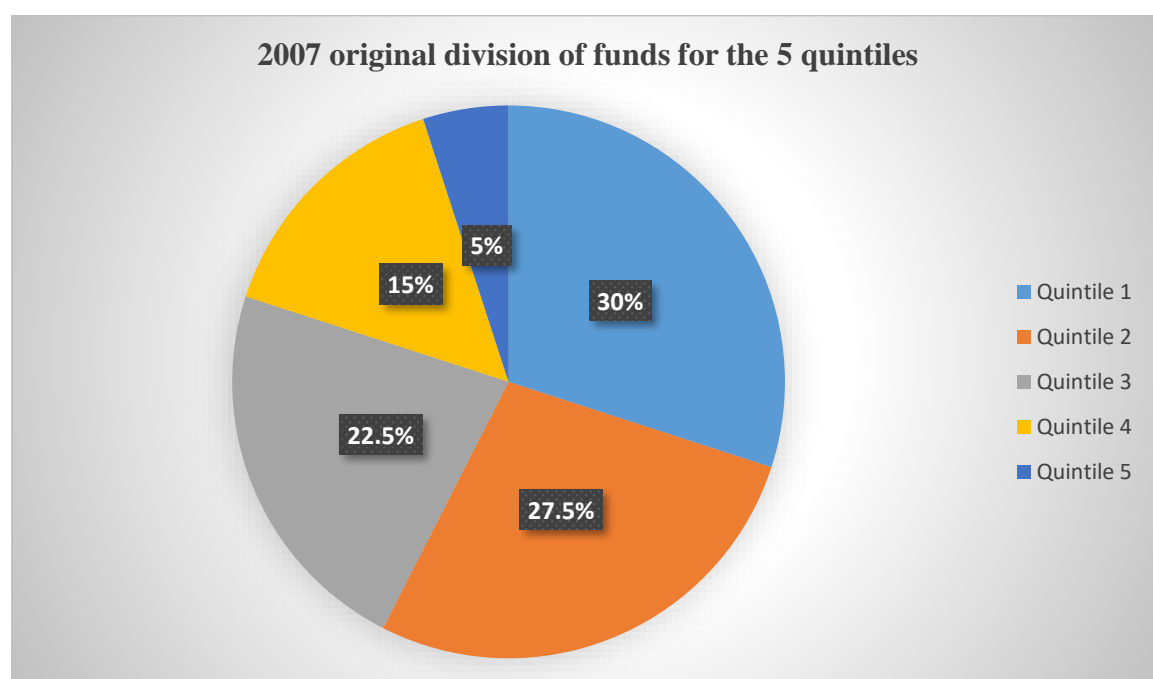


Figure 2.2: National quintiles for 2007 distribution of funds for quintile rankings (Adapted from Dieltiens & Motala, 2014)

According to the Department of Basic Education (2017b), the intention was to ensure allocations to the neediest schools should increase disproportionately over time in comparison to the subsidy received by upper quintiles, thus creating an even distribution. Table 2.1 shows the 2021-2023 national table of targets for the school allocation.

Table 2.1: 2021-2023 national table of targets for the school allocation (Adapted from The Government Gazette, 10 March 2021)

QUINTILE	SUBSIDY PER LEARNER (National threshold)		
	2021	2022	2023
Quintile 1	R1,466	R1,536	R1,610
Quintile 2	R1,466	R1,536	R1,610
Quintile 3	R1,466	R1,536	R1,610
Quintile 4	R735	R770	R807

Quintile 5	R254	R266	R279
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The amounts depicted in Table 2.1 shows that in the revised distribution of funds in the year 2021, quintiles 1-3 are allocated the same amount of 27.2% for each quintile. In comparison to the previous 2007-distribution system, quintile 4 is allocated 13.8% and quintile 5 is allocated 4.6%. It is notable that in the original 2007 distribution, the most allocation went to the poorest schools in the first quintile and the distribution of funds decreased as the quintile levels went up (Dieltiens & Motala, 2014). The revised allocation of funds allocates equal funds to quintiles 1-3. The revised allocation most benefits quintile 3 schools, which received an increase of 4.5% in comparison to the previous allocation.

However, the literature (Maistry & Afrika, 2020; Mestry & Ndhlovu; 2014; Xala, 2018) shows that categorisation of schools into quintiles has been criticised. Mestry and Ndhlovu (2014) highlight that it is not uncommon for schools to host learners from outside their geographical position. It is also not uncommon for learners to leave their local schools and attend schools in other geographical contexts. Parents of learners situated in rural contexts who can afford transport fees and school fees send their children to schools in urban areas. It is also a common practice for learners in townships to leave their local schools and attend schools in urban areas. Xala (2018) queries whether assessing the income, literacy and unemployment levels of a community is a fair system of categorising schools into quintiles. However, Ahmed and Sayed and (2009) explain that there just may be no way around this system, as it is always problematic to find a complete balance. Moreover, COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on most communities, resulting in loss of jobs for many. Thus, in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic context, Maistry and Afrika (2020) assert that using the system of assessing income, literacy and unemployment in communities impacts the quintile ranking, as schools that were previously classified in the higher rankings may now be classified even as ‘no-fee’ paying schools due to the unemployment rate in the community.

2.3 Teaching practices in rural primary schools

Teaching practices are methods and principles a teacher can use to facilitate learning by students. Liu and Shi (2007) describe teaching practices as pedagogy and administration strategies a teacher or facilitator can use for classroom instruction. Teaching practices are important as they are used as a broader tool to assist students to achieve learning outcomes (Liu & Shi, 2007). A variety of methods can be used to deliver pedagogical knowledge to students. Teaching practices are affected by the context in which teaching and learning take place (Liu & Shi, 2007). Biesta (2015) maintains that education is mainly about finding a balance between

qualification, socialisation and subjectification. Finding this balance proves to be easier for teachers in urban areas than it is for teachers in rural contexts, because rural context teachers face contextual challenges coupled with lack of resources (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Hedges (2002) explains that rural schools are often short of qualified teachers. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) suggest that rural areas are remote and are usually underdeveloped, with very little or no infrastructure such as water, electricity and sanitation. These are some of the challenges that affect curriculum deliverance in rural context schools.

In a press release on February 15 (2021), Shenilla Mohamed (Executive Director of Amnesty International South Africa) stated: “A child’s experience of education in South Africa is still dependent on where they are born, how wealthy they are, and the colour of their skin”. Although COVID-19 was a global pandemic, affecting every learner and school in South Africa, one can argue that the effects have not been the same throughout. Well-resourced schools were fortunate that during school closures they could continue via online learning. When learners returned to school, to adhere to social distancing they had to alternate school days.

Lewin (2004) explains multi-grading as teaching learners of different grades in one classroom at the same time. Multi-grading is a teaching practice that has become a norm in rural schools. This meant that a teacher with one class, would now have two or more classes when learners were attending on alternate days divided, depending on the number of learners. Lewin (2004), suggests that teaching multi-graded classes can be extremely demanding and teachers would rather leave rural context schools and search for employment in urban areas. Teachers leaving rural context schools create a never ending cycle of a shortage of qualified teachers in rural contexts. Another problem arises because teachers may resort to not following the provided planned curriculum, or annual teaching plan, and may create their own abridged curricula (Aziz, 2011; Eppley, 2009; Taylor & Mulhall, 2001). This cycle creates a notion that rural school teachers offer less teaching than urban school teachers and implies that the planned curriculum is enacted in different ways in different classrooms and schools.

The Department of Higher Education and Training and (DBE) (2011) in the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development highlight that because the rural context schools are in the remote areas, teachers experience difficulties in accessing and receiving support, resources and continuing professional development opportunities close to where they live and work (DBE & DHET, 2011). Bernard and Unicef (2002) asserts that

teachers in rural context schools are usually far from places of support services and even further from opportunities that offer in-service teacher development assistance. In agreement with Bernard and Unicef (2002), Wallin and Reimer (2008) raised concern about professional support of teachers in rural schools. These scholars suggested that travelling to these schools with a purpose of monitoring or even providing much needed teacher development assistance from subject advisors and departmental officials is rather a rare occasion. In relation to the lack of support for teachers in remote areas, the DHET and DBE in the South African context, have initiated professional learning communities (PLCs) to support teachers (DBE & DHET, 2011). Canagarajah (2012) explains how PLCs can be used as a platform of sharing expertise with other colleagues. Through the network of PLCs at a local level, the DBE and the DHET (2011) envisage that support and resources for teachers will be enhanced. The establishment of PLCs in schools can enhance access to professional development opportunities (DBE & DHET, 2011). However, during the COVID-19 lockdowns, teachers were not able to continue supporting one another through PLC's, as face-to-face interaction was not permitted. This could have led to teachers feeling unsupported and overwhelmed with work.

The impact of COVID-19 led to the necessity of academic catch-up plans for teachers trying to address the academic knowledge gaps on learners (Brodie et al., 2020). This period produced much stress and uncertainty for teachers, as the primary focus of hope was on them. Few development workshops were announced and even fewer guidelines on how they should proceed (Brodie et al., 2020). Mohamed (2021) asserts that COVID-19 has pushed inequality to an extreme level and this has evoked negative emotions in teachers. During the lockdown, pressure mounted on teachers, who were unable to continue with curriculum coverage via e-learning (Chisango & Marongwe, 2021). Rural context schools were a large section of South African schools that could not cover the curriculum during the lockdown due to contextual challenges. Chisango and Marongwe (2021) contend that schools situated in underprivileged communities are usually less prepared for adversities such as COVID-19 with its requirement of information and communication technology and technological advances.

According to UNESCO, South African learners rate as the fourth most affected by COVID-19 in comparison to other African countries (UNESCO, 2020). It therefore became paramount for South African leaders in the education department to have structured plans of rescuing the remaining months of the 2020 academic calendar. As COVID-19 restrictions lifted, plans to start accommodating learners back into school had to start. Mahaye (2020) highlights the phasing in approach and the blended learning as plans proposed by the Department of Basic

Education officials as a means of rescuing the remainder of the academic year due to COVID-19 disruptions. Mahaye (2020) states that the approach was designed to phase in learners in controllable numbers. However, this approach could only take place once COVID-19 levels allowed for minimal interaction (Mahaye, 2020). Blended learning as a method that uses both face-to-face learning and the use of ICT was also proposed for teaching and learning during the pandemic (Mahaye, 2020). Graham (2007) explains that in blended learning both these methods of interaction are pivotal. However, if implemented, the blended approach would prove rather difficult to accomplish in rural context schools. Mahaye (2020) further states that rural contexts schools are usually short on essential resources and infrastructure due to their socio-economic conditions. Tamrat and Teferra (2020) corroborate Mahaye (2020) when stating the challenge of considering online teaching and learning in a country with only 24% of the entire population with adequate access to internet connectivity.

School policies advised on by the SGB, principal and teachers have authority to decide how a curriculum should be interpreted and implemented in a school (Ojo & Mathabathe, 2021). Post-democratic South Africa birthed several curriculum changes, from C2005 to CAPS. The revised curriculum mandated a change from teacher centred classrooms to learner centred classes in all South African schools (Khan et al., 2017). The changes in curriculum demanded changes in implementation. A more learner centred class requires more learner participation and activity, which requires more resources. All South African schools now share the same traditional teaching practice of learner centred classes. However, resources to implement this practice, sets schools apart (Ojo & Mathabathe, 2021). Schools such as rural context schools usually run short on resources (Du Plessis, 2020). Dube (2020) and Hoadley (2012) describe the curriculum implementation of science subjects without proper resources in science laboratories in rural contexts. Ojo and Mathabathe (2021) report on the difficulty of implementing and sustaining traditional teaching practices of learner centred classes with the limited resources. Teaching practices in rural context schools are extremely traditional. Teachers in rural schools use traditional teaching methods and when compared to urban schooling, they are regarded as backwards or even as offering less content (Dube, 2020). The most effective method of teaching and learning in rural context schools is the chalk and chalkboard. The teacher uses the chalk and chalkboard to teach and learners use their textbooks as resources. The teacher may collect the more attainable resources for the lesson of the day, but there are resources such as laboratories and functioning school libraries that are out of reach for rural context teachers and learners (Dube, 2020; Hoadley, 2012).

2.4 Changes in teaching practices and new methods of teaching adopted by teachers amid the COVID-19 lockdown

Teaching and learning activities had to drastically change to adapt to COVID-19 regulations. Teachers had to adapt to remote learning and even to social media as means of communication (Zarzycka et al., 2021). Distance learning is not just the use of electronic devices, but can also translate to teaching without physical contact with learners. The common feature is that teaching is remote, whether through e-learning or even mobile learning. The main objective is that the interaction and exchange of knowledge takes place (Zarzycka et al., 2021). Jones and Kessler (2020) note that in adopting remote learning, teachers reported being much busier than they were prior to COVID-19. Namitha (2018) suggests that technology as an innovative method of teaching is changing the classroom experience. Yet the use of electronic devices is extremely far-fetched in most rural context schools, as there are more pressing issues like shortages of learning space that need to be attended to first (Dube, 2020). There is almost always the issue of network coverage, thus even if parents had wanted their children to continue via online classes, it would always be challenging (Dube, 2020).

Traditional methods of teaching a learner centred class propose learners as actively engaging and leading in class activities and teachers as facilitators. Thus, learners could be grouped and assist one another whilst also sharing resources. However, COVID-19 mandated a change in the traditional ways of teaching and learning (Dube, 2020). During the lockdown, online technology was adopted to facilitate remote learning through online platforms such as Zoom, Moodle, Google Meet and Blackboard, to name a few examples (Zulu et al., 2021). Zoom is a preferred online application that allows the interaction of up to 300 people at a time and up to 1000 upon request. It allows teachers and their learners to teach and learn from anywhere, but the primarily works on internet connectivity (Zulu et al., 2021). Although this application could be utilised as a good teaching and learning tool, unfortunately it was not accessible to all South African schools.

Teachers connect on an emotional level with their learners, so adapting to remote learning has been challenging, as they end up trying to endlessly keep in contact. Jones and Kessler (2020) argue that distance learning reinforces teaching and learning approaches that are known for failing. Zarzycka et al. (2021) echoes this, stating that learners need contact with teachers, and need this connection in order for productivity to take place. Learners sitting and listening passively serves neither teacher or learner (Zarzycka et al., 2021). Namitha (2018) further states that in a traditional teaching method where the teacher delivers content through chalkboard and

talking whilst the learners listen passively, is of limited effectiveness. Learners lose concentration fairly quickly and this one-way flow of information ends up not serving the purpose (Namitha, 2018). Thus, the efforts from the Department of Basic Education to deliver subject content on television and radio platforms during the pandemic were not preferred by many.

2.5 Empirical studies on COVID-19 and teaching practices

The empirical studies discussed in this section draw from local and international contexts. Anderson and Auxier (2020) explains that the digital divide has affected the entire world, including rural America. Anderson and Auxier (2020) suggests that this global issue needs urgent policy attention. As funding continues to be of huge concern in rural context schools, adopting teaching practices of remote learning has been challenging. In agreement, Sacks et al. (2020) explain that Australia has been no exception. Adopting remote teaching for rural context school teachers is further complicated by differences across state and territory jurisdictions.

In the South African context, the adoption of online teaching and learning proved rather challenging. Rural context schools are mainly classified under the quintile 1-3 ranking in the poverty scale (Maistry & Afrika, 2020). This translates to rural context schools as receiving more state funds as a majority of these schools are under resourced and situated in low socio-economic areas (Maistry & Afrika, 2020). Learners and parents of such communities would rarely afford to purchase technological gadgets to enable this type of learning method. Nkomo et al. (2023) asserts that, as the cost of mobile data rises, parents of these communities would struggle to purchase data, let alone purchase gadgets such as smart phones and laptops. Internet connectivity is another limitation mentioned (Chisango & Marongwe, 2021).

Kim and Ashbury (2020) state that in England the hard lockdown came into effect in March 2020, and in response, school's shutdown. During the first six weeks of lockdown in the UK, many changes took place. The government gave two days' notice for teachers and their learners to immediately adapt to a new method of learning. Teachers were expected to ensure that remote teaching and learning took place. Their difficulties were no different to the challenges experienced by South Africa teachers teaching in rural contexts. Kim and Ashbury (2020) mention the extreme concern about the most vulnerable learners. The UK Department of Education (2020) explained that a means to reach areas with limited or no access to online classes, schools were able to print hard copies and drop them at learners' homes or alternatively parents could collect them from the school or the local supermarket (Department of Education, 2020). For assessments, learners who used hard copies were permitted to photograph copies on

cell phones to submit work via email to their teachers. Teachers would then call back to provide formative feedback.

According to Zhu and Lui (2020), the Chinese government imposed strict measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 in early 2020. Most face-to-face activities, including teaching, were banned. To ensure curriculum deliverance continued to take place, the Ministry of Education launched an initiative named, 'Disrupted classes, undisrupted learning' (Ministry of Education, 2020). This initiative was soon followed by the 'Guidance on the Organization and Management of Online Teaching in Higher Education Institutions During Epidemic Prevention and Control Period'. The driving force for these initiatives was to ensure that local governments guided colleges, universities, schools and the society to take part in the joint implementation of online education (Wang, 2020). This was a new teaching practice that teachers were not accustomed to. Zhu and Lui (2020) further allude to the Ministry of Education aiming to ensure that the same quality of teaching received from face-to-face teaching would be received via online classes. Zhu and Lui (2020) state that this teaching practice came with several challenges. What is noteworthy in China, is that the School of Educational Technology gathered a professional team for providing support. According to Wang (2020), this team provided online training and shared their knowledge and skills on different platforms. In comparison to South Africa, China seemed to better equip and prepare their teachers for the new online teaching practice to ensure they were comfortable and would be able to provide the quality teaching online as they had done in face-to-face classes. Wang (2020) further narrates that a few classes were selected for trial lessons on different platforms as a pilot study before introducing this new teaching method on a larger scale. Special attention was given to learners who came from poor regions and struggling family backgrounds.

What is evident in all of these countries is that online teaching was the most used new teaching practice and it came with different challenges. Of significance is the fact that learners from rural contexts or poor regions were the most challenged by online learning. The difference is that some countries were better equipped to deal with this situation than others. The change was drastic and unexpected, affecting teachers and learners mostly in a negative manner.

2.6 Professional relationship between teachers and learners in and out of class

Hargreaves (2001) suggests that teaching is a form of emotional labour, meaning that it is almost impossible to separate teachers' emotions from their solving capacity. Although teachers provide knowledge to learners and learn from learners in the process, learners connect with their teachers emotionally. Cotnoir et al. (2014) define influence as having a lasting effect

on the character, development or behaviour in someone's life. The teacher-learner professional relationship usually works on both parties having an effect on one another's lives. Teachers may influence learners in different aspects of life. A teacher's influence on their learner is not limited to providing knowledge for academic progression, but can touch other aspects of the learner's life. Teachers play many roles in learners' lives. Wang et al. (1994) assert that learners who receive love, nurturing, motivation, and are mentored by teachers, seeing them as role models, often show strength in overcoming personal vulnerabilities and environmental adversities.

The literature on professional relationship (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001) maintains that if the professional relationship between teacher and learner is positive, it makes the process of learning for learners an interesting one. Birch and Ladd (1998) states that professional relationship also promotes learners' desire to engage in class, thus manifesting into attainment of higher levels of academic achievement. Positive teacher-learner professional relationship aims to build trust, whilst learners show more engagement. As learners thrive on complements, those with negative relationships with their teachers tend to show signs of disengagement, thus resulting in more criticism from the teacher and lowering the academic desire for the learner (Hamre & Pianta 2001). Birch and Ladd (1998) explain that teachers who foster positive teacher-learner professional relationships create a warm learning space which is more conducive to learning and caters to learners developmental, emotional and academic needs. Thus, a positive relationship contributes greatly to learner social skills, promoting healthy relationships out of class. A learner who is comfortable with their teacher is able to relate social achievements out of class, as they know their teacher will be happy for them. This relationship results in more trust between teacher and learner and reinforces the professional relationship.

There are different ways of developing professional relationship with learners. Hamre and Pianta (2001) suggest that one of the ways a teacher can develop a positive professional relationship with learners is through showing interest in their individual emotional strengths and academic attainments. It is also important to interact with learners in a responsive manner and be able to offer them help so they are able to attain their academic and social objectives (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Creating a caring community for learners and encouraging them to engage in class produces positive teacher-learner relationship and also taps into learners' emotional and relational needs (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Teaching practices that promote interpersonal skills among learners in class, results in a lower likelihood of them rejecting one another (Donahue et al., 2003). Hughes et al. (2012) elaborated that positive, constructive teacher-learner professional relationships have a vital and positive influence on the social skills of learners who are rather difficult to deal with. This is proof of the benefits in other aspects of classroom life.

Positive teacher-learner relationships with high levels of engagement are described as one of the main reasons for teachers not abandoning the teaching profession (Zins et al., 2000). This type of relationship also gives educators enjoyment and motivates them to be good teachers (Hargreaves, 2000). Hughes et al. (2012) explain that most of the stress teachers experience is a result of negative relationships with their learners. Negative teacher-learner professional relationships can build stress and undesirable emotions for teachers especially if there is minimal engagement with learners. Hughes et al. (2012) highlight that teachers receive intrinsic rewards from positive teacher-learner professional relationships. Zins et al. (2000) further suggest that the teacher-learner relationship is reciprocal by nature and is formed due to repeated behaviour and interaction. This means that if an unfriendly contact is repeated and creates a hostile relationship, it will remain that way and becomes extremely hard to reconcile.

2.7 Impact of COVID-19 on the teacher-learner professional relationship

COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on the teaching and learning space. Studies such as Kim and Ashbury (2020) narrate on the drastic unforeseen changes for both teachers and their learners. Some changes have been positive and have brought about much needed change, but some changes have affected teachers and learners negatively (Chisango & Marongwe, 2021).

With the introduction of e-learning in most schools, especially during the first hard lockdown in year 2020, teachers and learners were unable to have any of the usual face-to-face interaction (Chisango & Marongwe, 2021). Kim and Ashbury (2020) report on the challenge of teachers and learners not being able to interact during the lockdown resulting in a huge gap between teachers and their learners. During the lockdown, teachers had to assume the role of facilitator from a distance and had difficulties delivering pedagogical knowledge (Colao et al., 2020). Teachers were not available for learners to fully rely on as they would be in a classroom environment. This meant learners and their caregivers at home had to intensify their efforts in attaining their academic objectives (Colao et al., 2020). The interaction between teachers and learners was greatly compromised and may have resulted in learners feeling distress. As teachers also thrive on learner engagement, not being able to fully interact with the learners also brought distress to teachers (Colao et al., 2020).

Amidst the changes, families had to take care of their children's learning, which took place on multimedia platforms, television channels, radios and other platforms. As families took on the role of facilitators in their own personal spaces, teachers became confused about their identities in the midst of it all (Kim & Ashbury, 2020). Colao et al. (2020) explains that learners went through the entire transition period from traditional learning to exploring online learning, but some areas had a shortage of tools to conduct online classes. This situation, for some learners, caused levels of stress, anxiety and uncertainty. Learners also had no idea when they would be able to return to their normal schooling (Kim & Ashbury, 2020). To some extent, this had a negative impact on the teacher-learner professional relationship.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework can be used as a visual organising tool and 'mental map' to assist in directing and guiding research (Van Der Waladt, 2020). Scholars such as Van Der Waladt (2020) and Ravitch and Riggan (2017) regard the conceptual framework as an integral part of a research project. In its function as a mental map, it aims to focus a literature review through identifying relevant theory (Van Der Waladt, 2017). Therefore, one can simply suggest that it should be regarded as the result and focus of a literature review (Van Der Walt, 2020). This study uses the Hargreaves (2001) emotional geographies as a conceptual framework, which is central to understanding its topic.

2.9 Hargreaves' emotional geographies

Emotions narrate how solid relationships are (Hargreaves, 2001). Emotional geographies can be understood as "special and experimental patterns of closeness and distance in human interactions and relationships, that help to create, configure and colour the feelings and emotions we experience about ourselves, our world, and each other" (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1061). This study looks at teaching practices adopted by teachers during COVID-19 and how these teaching practices have impacted the professional relationship between teachers and learners. The Hargreaves (2001) five-factor model of emotional geographies: the sociocultural distance, the moral distance, the professional distance, the physical distance and the political distance, is here described, enabling this study to answer the research questions.

The *sociocultural* factor addresses the possible distance that may be felt by teachers in relation to parents and learners in that they may at times see differences in how they discipline, in the support received from parents, and even economic resources. It may be the closeness or the distance created by the differences in race, gender and culture.

Moral distance addresses how teachers understand their purpose for teaching. In this context teachers' sense of purpose has been challenged by the many changes COVID-19 brought such as adopting new teaching practices. Some teachers, especially those in rural contexts who could not teach remotely, constantly questioned their purpose for teaching.

Professional distance addresses the closeness or distance created by different understandings of norms and of professional practice. What can be considered as good practice in one educational system may be regarded as bad practice in another geographical area or educational system.

Physical distance is understood as not only concerning physical phenomena (Hargreaves, 2001). For example, it is possible to be distant whilst standing right next to a person, just as it is possible to feel really close to someone whilst being physically far in distance. It is the emotions that bring closeness rather than the distance itself. People create emotional bonds and not physical bonds. As teachers could not be with all their learners in one classroom during the lockdown and when remote learning was adopted as a teaching strategy in many schools, the teacher-learner professional relationship was challenged.

Political distance refers to the closeness or the distance that is created by various understandings of power. Power structures have the authority to determine the order of interaction and practice. Not adhering to these rules may lead to various emotions. Teachers could not exercise much power in the teaching practices adopted amid COVID-19. They had to take the instruction of adopting remote learning as a teaching practice and this led to various emotions in teachers. This study examines the emotive responses of teachers as they adopted new teaching practices amid COVID-19. This aspect relates especially to one interview question that asks if teachers felt included in decision making before adopting new teaching practices during COVID-19.

Through the use of the Hargreaves five-factor model of emotional geographies (2001), this study was able to connect the existing literature to the new data collected. The five-factor model allows this study to merge both existing literature and the newly conducted research to form a solid basis that supports the findings of this study in Chapter five. The Hargreaves emotional geographies framework laid a foundation for this study to interpret the findings presented in Chapter four and make generalisations.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter of the study presented the context of South African schooling, exploring the teaching practices, including the traditional teaching practices that were used prior to COVID-19 and those adopted amid the pandemic. Furthermore, this chapter explored the professional relationship between teachers and their learners and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these relationships. In addition, it explored the empirical studies on COVID-19 teaching practices. Finally, it also analysed the Hargreaves (2001) five-factor model of emotional geographies that is used as a framework for this study. The next chapter explores the research design and methodology of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the research design and methodology, which were adopted to examine the impact of COVID-19 on teaching practices and teacher-learner professional relationships in a rural school context, are described and justified. This chapter focuses primarily on the research paradigm, approach and design chosen in this study. It also describes the data generation methods (namely: interviews and collages), population and sampling, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and finally the conclusion of the study.

3.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm is defined by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) as the lens through which researchers decide on the methodological aspects of their research project. As the means of trying to determine the truths of rural context teachers from their personal experiences, the interpretivist paradigm was considered to be best suited for this study. The interpretivist paradigm aims to understand the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Wiersma (2000) explains that interpretivists do not have one precise route of acquiring knowledge. Hasa (2016) simplifies ontology as questioning what is true, what is the reality, what is the nature of that reality. In this study I was aiming to understand the reality of rural context teachers, their teaching experiences, and methods during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the impact of the pandemic on the teacher- learner relationship as the study's ontology. Epistemology is using the various methods of trying to establish those truths, via methods such as interviews and collages as used in this case study (Hasa, 2016).

Being able to conduct face-to-face interviews with teachers in rural contexts about their experiences, this study has benefitted from the strengths of the interpretive paradigm, as this paradigm strongly relies on a natural form of human communication (Photongsunan, 2010). Furthermore, Creswell (2014) explains that one of the advantages of interpretivism is that researchers do not only describe objects, events or humans, but also understand them in depth within a social context. Gill et al. (2008) emphasise that researchers in this paradigm can use key methodologies, like case studies, as was used in this study in attempting to conduct this type of research in a more natural context. In this study most teachers are interviewed in their natural context in a school where they work.

However, the limitation of the interpretive paradigm is that, although the researcher may aim to gain a deeper understanding of the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals, it falls short in generalising these results to other people and contexts. Generalising results obtained in this case study may prove challenging, as data collection conducted is based on rural context teachers' subjective experiences of teaching practices in a particular geographical context and their professional relationship with their learners, which may be a different experience for teachers in another geographical context who face different contextual challenges. This paradigm can also be criticised for its ontological views that seem to be subjective rather than objective (Creswell, 2014). Thus views expressed and teachers' experiences during the pandemic in this study are their particular reality and feelings which are only valid to them and cannot be cemented as the reality of every teacher in a similar context and situation. Due to these mentioned limitations, the outcomes of research may be affected by a researcher's own belief system, interpretation and even cultural preferences, resulting in bias (Gill et al., 2008).

3.3 Qualitative research approach

The qualitative research approach is a method used to explore and gain in-depth understanding of the meaning people individually or in groups assign to a human or social issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By nature, qualitative research generates non-numerical data, for example, video, text or audio. In this study, non-numerical data was generated through audio, text and images, produced and then presented through pictures and text. There are various steps and techniques that were followed in coding data. The plan this study followed in collecting qualitative data was using an art-based method of collage and interviews, as explained in the data collection process.

This study takes a qualitative research approach, which is most suitable with the use of a case study. Qualitative research adopts collective approaches that are utilised to analyse information that is put in the form of natural language like words and expressions (Levitt et al., 2018). Levitt et al. (2018) further explain a qualitative research approach as identifying patterns linked to a phenomenon and creating sense of the entire phenomenon as informed by those patterns. Levitt et al. (2018) highlight that qualitative data sets are normally gathered from fewer sources such as the eight participants sampled for this study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe a broad range of qualitative methods such as case study, grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, critical, discursive, performative and narrative research, to highlight a few. Bodgan and Biklen (2006) suggest that it is important to analyse one's own views about a

possible study, even before engaging in it, as this will affect the approach eventually used in the study.

Qualitative research is centred in understanding a research question through a humanistic approach. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings. In this study, teachers were studied in their natural setting, as research was conducted at the schools where they work. In relation to the interpretive paradigm, Wonga (2008) says that the interpretive perspective is rooted in the idea that qualitative research efforts should focus on revealing multiple realities rather than searching for one objective reality. This study enquired and was informed of teachers' perspectives of their individual realities, on teaching practices they adopted amid COVID-19, and their emotions in response to how these practices affected the professional teacher-learner relationship.

3.4 Research design

According to Sileyew (2019), research design is the structure of research methods and techniques that the researcher chooses in order to conduct a study. It is the strategy the researcher uses to answer the research question. A research design states the approach to be undertaken and defines how data will be collected and analysed. In this study, the data collected was analysed deductively. The chosen research design suited to this study is a case study. Crow et al. (2011) explain case study as a multifaceted detailed investigation, through the use of qualitative research methods, studying a single social phenomenon in its real life context.

There are numerous different types of case studies. Baxter and Jack (2008) state that case studies can be explanatory, exploratory or descriptive. Baxter and Jack (2008) also differentiate between single, holistic, and multiple case studies. Furthermore, case studies can also be identified as intrinsic, instrumental, or collective (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Intrinsic case studies are undertaken with a purpose of understanding a certain case in question (Yin, 2003). Instrumental case studies aim to examine a particular case for the purpose of gaining insight into a theory (Cohen et al., 2018). Collective case studies are similar in nature, as a group of individual studies undertaken with a purpose of gaining a more detailed picture (Yin, 2003). Explanatory case studies can be used as a pilot to generate hypotheses that are tested in larger scale surveys (Cohen et al., 2018). Exploratory case studies can be used if a researcher aims to conduct a pilot for other similar studies or research questions (Yin, 2003). Illustrative studies are descriptive studies that aim to present narrative accounts.

The case study type in this study is an illustrative case study, deemed appropriate as it examines a familiar case with an aim to assist others to understand it. With this particular case, the experiences of rural context teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic are studied, with an aim to enlighten and bring greater understanding to other teachers who may have had a different teaching and learning experience during the pandemic due to their geographical context.

Cohen et al. (2018, p. 253) explain case studies as, “the study of an instance in action”. This approach can also be understood as the in-depth study and complexity of a single case (Cohen et al., 2018). The case may be a person, like a learner, or a group, like a classroom (Gering, 2016). This study was on a group of teachers, but the data was conducted through individual one-on-one interviews, and collages done individually. In a case study, one particular group or organisation is selected. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), the group is studied in depth and normally studied in their natural context. The sampled group in this study was sampled based on their geographical context and teaching experience prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, to better understand case studies, Bertram and Christiansen (2014) state the importance of noting that they are a study of a particular case, as in this case study, which specifically investigates the adopted teaching practices amid COVID-19. Gering (2016) asserts that the goal is to shed light on a bigger class of cases or a population. Cohen et al. (2018) go further, explaining that case studies mainly focus on the complexity, dynamics and the circumstances of a particular case. Using case study as a research method should also be considered if the researcher aims to cover contextual conditions that are believed to be relevant to the phenomenon being studied (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

As the main aim of studying a particular case is to better understand the selected phenomenon, in this study, it is the adopted teaching practices and their effects on the teacher-learner professional relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore imperative that the researcher is able to describe in detail and also evaluate the phenomenon. This study adopts Cohen et al.’s (2018) definition of a case study. The suitability of the case study in this research was the small scale, meaning there were only four participants per school in two schools. The use of a small-scale case provided rich, in-depth data. Working with a smaller group also allowed me to explore deeper causes of the phenomenon, as the findings revealed the external conditions that existed prior to COVID-19, and the impact of the limitations of adopting new teaching practices during the pandemic. Using case study also presented me with an opportunity to capture the lived reality of the participants. In accordance with Cohen et al.

(2018), that a case study can be undertaken by a single researcher, in this study, I was the only researcher.

One of the strengths of a case study is presenting the researcher with more insight into the phenomenon being studied so as to have better understanding of the occurrence (McLeod, 2019). Gering (2016) asserts that results of case studies are easy to understand by most, including non-academics. This is due to the language used when writing case study results. Yin (2003) highlights that case studies are attention holding, therefore in the synchronization with the researchers own experience, case studies are able to present a minimum natural basis for generalisation. In agreement, McLeod (2019) states one of the strengths of case studies as providing rich qualitative information, therefore providing insight for further research (McLeod, 2019). This is evident in this study, as teachers narrated their own experiences and challenges during the pandemic and how they felt these were different due to the context. Teachers in this study also narrated their experience of adopting alternative pedagogical methods to accommodate the situation at the time. Another strength of case studies is that several data sources are used to get in-depth perspectives of the social phenomenon. Case studies are also strong in reality and they can capture unique features that could easily be lost in larger scale data. However, this case study did not generate larger scale data because it was based on the experiences of only eight participants from two schools.

As previously stated, this study used both semi-structured interviews and collages to strengthen the data collected. Rarely, case studies do make use of both qualitative and quantitative methods piloted in a comparative framework. Yin (2003) explains that case studies collect data using interviews, observations and even document analysis such as information attained from records and analysis of official statistics. With the study using interviews as a data collection method, Cohen et al., (2018) explains that interviews can either be formal or informal.

The case in this study was a group of primary school teachers in rural context schools, who taught during the opening of schools after the first lockdown in 2020. This study gained comprehensive understanding because the research was conducted in the participants' natural context of the school at which they were teaching, one participant opting to do the face-to-face interview in her own home. This study got the teachers personal perceptions and their feelings of how COVID-19 impacted their teaching. However, findings based on feelings cannot be generalisable, as Yin (2003) suggests is the norm for findings in case studies.

While this study benefitted from the aforementioned strengths, the disadvantages of using case study research design were also noted. A disadvantage is that a case study may be selective, biased and is not easily open to cross-checking (Cohen et al., 2018). Challenges highlighted in this study may be similar in other rural contexts, such as the concern about internet connectivity impacting negatively on the communication between teachers and their learners. However, it cannot be assumed that similar contextual challenges have the same effect in other geographical contexts and would result in the same emotional detachment in the teacher-learner relationship, as in this specific case. Therefore, as the aforementioned scholars also highlight, case studies are difficult to replicate (Cohen et al., 2018) because they deal with one particular person, group, or organisation, and the researcher cannot guarantee that the case study researched is able to represent a wider body of similar instances. As this study was conducted on the sampled group of teachers, it cannot be replicated, even with the same group, and still yield the same results. This is because these experiences were particular to these teachers during this period of COVID-19, with this specific group of learners in this geographical area and is only valid for this case study.

3.5 Population and sampling

There are two methods of sampling: purposive (non-probability) and random (probability) sampling (Cohen et al., 2018). This study used non-probability purposive sampling, which is selected according to the characteristics of a population and the objectives of the study (Bernard & Unicef, 2002). In purposive sampling the cases are selectively chosen by the researcher for inclusion in the sample (Cohen et al., 2018). Purposive sampling was suitable for this study, as it allowed me to select participants who understood the research phenomenon. This study selected teachers based on their teaching experiences in a rural context school prior to and during COVID-19. This period is from 2019 to the end of 2020. The participants selected from two different schools consisted of four females and four males per school. Two of the participants were departmental heads in their respective schools. Departmental heads are not mainly office based as school principals are, but they also teach and so had the required experience to partake in this study. I recruited four teachers per school (a total of eight) to participate in both the interviews and collage making. I went to each of the two schools I had targeted due to their geographical location in a rural context. I requested for time from the school principal so I could present my study to all the educators in the school. After I presented my study, I was able to sift through those who qualified to participate in the study and requested

some teachers to volunteer to partake in my study. All the teachers I requested to take part agreed to participate, reading and signing the consent forms.

3.6 Data generation methods

Data was generated using both interviews and collage making, conducted in English. This was to ensure every participant understood the instructions and did not feel marginalised as English is a medium of communication. IsiZulu was only used for participants who needed clarity on certain aspects, using their native tongue. Interviews were conducted in their schools for the majority of the participants and only one interview was done at the participant's home.

3.6.1 Interviews

K'vale cited in Cohen et al. (2018), describes interviews as an exchange of views on a particular topic between two or more people. The aim is not only to collect data, but also to have a social, interpersonal encounter (Cohen et al., 2018). Interviews can either be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. Mathers et al. (2011) simplifies structured interviews as presenting all interviewees with an identical set of questions for response. Structured interviews are usually observed in quantitative studies as they mainly aim to collect data in numerical values and are typically easy to replicate (Mathers et al., 2011). In semi-structured interviews the interview process is far less controlled than in that of a structured interview (Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all eight participants as a means to collect in-depth data. This type of interview was used as it allowed for open-ended questions and flexibility. Interviews were conducted face to face whilst observing all COVID-19 regulations. Although preparing for the data collection was a lengthy process, actual interviews were conducted from the 11th to the 22nd of August 2022. Collages were collected between the 22nd to the 30th of August 2022. Recording of the interviews was done through the use of my cell phone and my laptop was used as a backup tool. This was most convenient and cost efficient. (For the interview schedule see Appendix E.)

Adams (2015) explains semi-structured interviews as conversations with the respondent that adopt a mixture of closed and open-ended questions and are usually followed up by the why and how questions. This study gathered extensive data from participants through the structuring of both closed and open-ended questions (see Appendix E: Interview questions). As the researcher I used some closed-ended questions strategically as ideal gateways to open-ended probing (Adams, 2015). I also probed the participant responses during the interview session in cases where I felt more data could still be obtained from the participant for that interview question.

The benefits of using semi-structured interviews is that they allow extended probing and open ended questions which may assist to generate more data (Cohen et al., 2018). The researcher can get a better sense of the interviewee's values, interpretations, insights, prejudices and even feelings on the subject being researched (Cohen et al., 2018). Semi-structured interviews also encourage two-way communication, especially if they are done individually and not in a focused group, because they allow interviewees to express their views on their own terms. In this study some questions were based on the feelings of participants and interviewees were able to be open as interviews were one-on-one sessions.

Semi-structured interviews are criticised for being time consuming and labour intensive, as they may require the researcher to analyse a huge volume of data and invest a lot of time for transcribing (Adams, 2015). They may cause fatigue for the interviewee and cause inconvenience for both the interviewer and the respondent. During my data collection process I observed that for the participants whose interviews became longer than 30 minutes, although the participant started with enthusiasm, they slowly grew tired. I also observed that the participant would start asking me to repeat questions, which showed less concentration. Moreover, when the response was long the interviewee started to go off topic, I had to intervene with a comment whilst trying to bring the interviewee back to the original point. To minimize fatigue for both the interviewee and interviewer, Adams (2015) suggests that an hour is the usual maximum time for the semi-structured interview. The Table 3.1 shows the duration of interview sessions with each participant.

Table 3:1. Time of each interview with participants

Participant	Interview time
Miss Zanothando	44:02
Miss Yamkela	15:55
Miss Khwezi	21:17
Miss Nandi	10:58
Mr Langa	31:33
Mr Qophelo	18:20
Mr Bukhona	15:38
Mr Manelisi	10:37

3.6.2 Collage

I conducted collage making with the participants after I had completed the semi-structured interviews. Collages are an art-based approach, a method which, according to Kara (2015), can be understood as an effective way to address complex questions in social science. Collage is able to act as a means of conceptualizing ideas. Art-based approaches are able to represent the subtleties of experience, deep feelings and understandings in creative ways (Kara, 2015). In qualitative research, collage can be used as a reflective process, a form of elicitation and a way of conceptualizing ideas (Butler-Kisber, 2008). A collage is defined as “a flexible composition that is assembled gradually and additively; as each part is labelled, the intuitive relationships among the various parts are ordered and re-ordered until a convincing overall pattern or schema is achieved” (Vacchelli, 2018, p.2).

Collages have a unique ability to capture what has been said and what has not been said through the use of pictures and word phrases. Mkhize- Mthembu (2023) explains the use of collage making as a method used to cultivate teaching practices as well as enhance the relationship between teacher and learner in the classroom. In an article (Mkhize- Mthembu 2023) narrates how the process of collage making has allowed her to communicate her emotions thus presenting her with an opportunity to interrogate her teaching and classroom practices (Mkhize- Mthembu 2023).



Figure 3.1: Example of a collage (Adapted from Gerstenblatt, 2013).

Collage as an art-based method of data collection, has gained popularity in arts-based research over recent years (Butler-Kisber, 2008). In this study, I used interviews as verbal data and collages as visual data. I aimed to gain as much information from every single representation in the collages. Mannay (2010) argues for the importance of acknowledging the one who created the image and investing in finding out the message they were trying to portray via the image may bring greater understanding of the narrative of the image. In agreement with Mannay (2010), I highlight one of the images used by a participant, which is a quote from the book *Animal farm* by George Orwell: “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others”. It became easier for me to interpret the quote as explaining the inequalities that exist within the education system, because I understood the original creator of the quote had translated it to the disparities that exist in society. All participants were able to make the collages independently, which was at their own pace and in their own space. I provided stationary and materials in the form of charts, magazines, newspapers, glue, scissors, crayons, highlighters, markers and so forth. I collected the collages a week later when the participants had completed them and immediately photographed each collage. Some had minimal words to explain the images and artwork and all the collages were explained by verbatim transcript attached to each collage.

Participants took the material provided to them to create collages at a time convenient for them. To aid the process, I gave them access to their interview responses, which were in a digital recording on my cell phone and laptop (see Appendix F: collage guidelines). I shared the recordings with the interviewees through platforms such as Airdrop, WhatsApp, Bluetooth and SHAREit. Participants were asked to use the recordings to narrate their stories through the use of pictures and drawings. I only collected the collages once the participants had completed them, which was a period of one week. The decision to leave participants with collages to complete in their own space and time was to allow them enough time and space to mentally go back to the period of COVID-19 and relive that experience, which could possibly bring emotionally charged issues for some. In this study there were protocols in place to address the risks related to emotional distress which may have been evoked by the research. Participants were provided with the necessary information of the phone number of a psychologist in case they needed the services.

Collages allow research to be expressed in a non-verbal way, allowing the participants to express themselves in an unusual way. Collage gives freedom, as drawing may allow them to express themselves in an artistic way. I observed in the collages that the use of images allowed the participants to be as emotive in their response as they wished, which was evident in the result. The collages were able to collect in-depth data that interviews were unable to reach. The freedom of exploring with images, cutting and pasting with no limitation of direct questions and answers as in the interview process, allowed the participants enough space to be vulnerable with their feelings and freely express their views with no fear of judgement. Johnson et al. (2012) explain that a disadvantage may be that not all approaches may suit everyone's preferences. It is important to be mindful that using unfamiliar ways of data collection may evoke emotions in some participants, especially when dealing with a sensitive time frame, such as the period of COVID-19.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis in a case study is determined by the method used (Cohen et al., 2018). Cohen et al. (2018) suggest that there is a preference for analytic instead of statistical generalisation of data. This suggests that a theory that is developed can assist researchers to better understand other similar cases, phenomena or situations (Yin, 2003). When analysing data in case studies, the researcher can search for themes (interpretational), or search for patterns in discourse (structural), or search for the portrayal of participants' views (reflective). As a qualitative approach is used in case studies, it relies heavily on the skills of the investigator to interpret the data collected in a rigorous manner instead of reporting on selective perceptions (Cohen et al., 2018). Case studies prefer reporting results using chronological or biographical description of cases, rather than using traditional methods of presenting data like literature reviews (Yin, 2003). According to (Yin, 2003), another key characteristic of case studies is that they are continuous in nature.

In this study, qualitative data was analysed deductively. Qualitative data often consists of in-depth information and is usually presented in the form of words (Wong, 2008). Deductive reasoning uses a method where the researcher approaches the data with some preconceived themes and anticipates they will be mirrored in the data collected and in the process of analysis (Vanover et al., 2021). Saldana (2009) further simplifies deductive analysis as an approach that is top down because the researcher starts with predetermined ideas than find pieces that will fit those ideas.

When I was analysing data deductively in this study, I was guided by the Hargreaves emotional geographies (2001) theoretical framework. According to Vanover et al. (2021), the process of analysing data deductively is three-phased: preparation, organisation and reporting. I adhered to these three phases when I analysed my data collected from the semi-structured interviews, using Otter.ai software for the data collected in audio. I began by sorting out the interview data into organisational categories. I made two folders, one for each school, Ithemba Primary School (pseudonym) and Qhakaza Primary School (pseudonym), and placed interviews according to each school. Within these folders, I created other folders that I named 'Collages' and placed the collages correctly under the right school and folder. According to Vanover et al. (2021), deductive analysis can assist the researcher to stay focused on the purpose of their research. Thus, to ensure I did not lose focus on the purpose, as the second step, I organised data into categories to ensure I retained alignment with my research questions. I transcribed my data using Otter.ai, a software that uses artificial intelligence to develop speech and recorded audio to text transcription in real time. I proceeded to read the transcribed interviews and fixed any errors such as spelling, grammar, misspelled names among others that came from the transcribing process. I read all my interviews again, then placed my data according to similarity of ideas. This second step allowed me to focus on relevant data in all the numerous rounds of analysis. For the third step, which was to apply the theoretical frameworks, I coded all five aspects from the Hargreaves emotional geographies (2001): sociocultural, moral distance, professional distance, physical distance and political distance, with different colours. I read through the interviews once again and highlighted parts of the interviews with colours that matched to the ones used on the five aspects to correlate parts of the interview to each aspect. My data was then sorted into preconceived theory-based categories. The themes are presented in Chapter four.

After analysing data from the interview transcripts, I proceeded to analyse the art-based data in the form of collages. I began the process of analysing the collages by looking at the choice of pictures used by the participants. I examined the details of the important visual elements such as the colour used and the meanings that were being conveyed by the elements. Participants included stories in their collages next to pictures which explained the choice of images they had used. In the process of analysing the collages I grouped all the pictures that depicted the same or similar ideas together and assigned them to each of the Hargreaves emotional geographies framework aspects as I did with the interview transcripts. I then analysed and sorted my data using the Hargreaves (2001) aspects of preconceived ideas.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues are important in research, a technique used to decide how to act and analyse difficult issues (Resnik, 2020). Resnik (2020) explains that the importance of ethics is for researchers to be held responsible for their actions. In every study, it is therefore mandatory for the researcher to account on the ethical considerations of their study. Connelly (2014) explains that it is important for the participants to understand that giving consent is free and voluntary, that they should also have full knowledge of what is being asked of them. Connelly (2014) further explains that the researcher must inform the participants of any changes to treatment and that they must be made aware that they have the right to withdraw from participation at any moment.

Gatekeepers' permission was obtained from the Department of Basic Education (See Appendix C). Ethical clearance was received from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (see Appendix B). Pseudonyms were used to protect the identification of the participants and both schools. The participants were able to see the data collected after the interview, and read the transcripts. The raw data (transcripts and audio recordings) was only made available to the participants. Confidentiality, anonymity, non-identification and non-traceability were guaranteed. After approval of the thesis I will give feedback to my participants and to the Department of Basic Education on the findings of my study. Although the use of case studies limits the generalisation of findings, with the rich description of the methodology used in the study, readers have the freedom to decide if these findings can apply in their own contexts.

In this study ethical considerations for the collages and interviews included the participants' informed consent (see Appendix D). They understood that they had the right to withdraw at any stage or to even opt to not complete the collage. Participants also had full knowledge that the research did not intend to cause harm to them in any way. I gave participants pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. They were also given full assurance that the information would be kept confidential and that there would be anonymity and non-traceability in the research.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the study

Trustworthiness of a study is understood as the level of confidence and the self-reliance in the data, and the interpretation and techniques used to confirm the quality of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014). The issue of trustworthiness in this study was due to using interviews as a method of data collection. As the researcher, I cannot ensure trustworthiness and honesty during interviews, but can only rely on what the participants opt to share about their subjective views. This study was able to get an understanding of the participants' emotions and perspective of

their realities, but ensuring trustworthiness can be challenging. Scholars such as Shenton (2004) and Korstjens and Mosser (2018) recommend Guba's (1989) constructs of trustworthiness as the criteria for ensuring trustworthiness. Shenton (2004) narrates Guba's four criteria that a researcher in a qualitative study can consider as credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Guba, 1981 cited in Shenton 2004)

1. Credibility is internal validity where the researcher aims to ensure the study is actually testing what it intended to measure (Shenton, 2004). Korstjens and Mosser (2018) describes credibility as the confidence of the findings of the study. Carter et al. (2014) suggest that triangulation is the use of multiple data collection methods. This is done in a qualitative resource as a strategy to test the validity of a study. This study used more than one method of collecting data (interviews and collages) as a means to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.
2. Transferability, or external validity, examines the extent to which findings of the study can be generalised to other similar situations, a larger population or other settings along with other respondents (Shenton, 2004; Korstjens & Mosser, 2018). Shenton (2004) states that there should be certain considerations before the researcher can confirm transference of the study, such as the time frame of the collection of the data, the number of sessions it took for the data to be gathered and completed, the number of participants in the study, the type of restrictions that applied to the participants and even the methods that were used to collect the data. Transferring the findings of this study may prove to be challenging, as it analysed teachers' perspectives of their realities. Therefore, generalising findings that are based on emotions may prove rather difficult to achieve.
3. Dependability requires that the qualitative research must adopt a method that will prove that if the same study were to be repeated within the same context, using the same techniques and even the same participants, then the results obtained would be similar to the ones obtained in the first study (Shenton, 2004). Dependability refers to the stability of the results with passing time (Korstjens & Mosser, 2018). Views expressed by participants in this study are subjective. They are also based on the circumstances encountered and how they opted to respond to the circumstances influenced by the availability or lack of resources at that particular time. It would prove rather challenging to sustain consistency in the findings that are partially based on subjective views, experiences and emotions.

4. Conformability is necessary because researcher biases cannot be fully ruled out in a qualitative study and ensuring true objectivity can be challenging due to the fact that even tests and questionnaires are developed by humans (Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) states that other scholars like Miles and Hubberman (1994), highlight the importance of triangulation in promoting conformability. Shenton (2004) further explains that this process could help reduce the effect of a researcher's biases. In this study, although interviews were conducted as a method of collecting data, I applied a second method of collecting data through the use of collages from the same participants to strengthen the data collected. This process of triangulation was used in this study as a means to promote conformability. According to (Korstjens & Mosser, 2018), comfortability is the extent to which other researchers can confirm the findings of the study. It is important to note that as a qualitative study, interview questions were developed by the researcher, therefore researcher bias cannot be fully ruled out. However, the process of triangulation was used with efforts to minimise this. Data collected was stored as raw data, that is, the audio recordings of the participants in the study, thus promotion of confirmability can be assured in this study.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter focused on and discussed the research paradigm, design and the methodology it adopted. It also detailed the data generation methods, namely interviews and collages, population and sampling, data analysis, ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data and its analysis on the teaching practices adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they impacted the professional relationship between teachers and their learners. It brings to light the process of analysing and presenting collected data generated through the semi-structured interviews and collages in a more readable format. The first part provides profiles of the participants and portraits of their collages. Secondly, the chapter analyses the data deductively through the use of the Hargreaves (2001) conceptual framework.

4.2 Profiling of participants

In this section I start by presenting the profiles of participant according to their schools. The profile of each participant consists of their biographical information, portraits of their collages, along with the verbatim transcripts of participants. All eight participants taught in rural context schools and were employed by the Department of Basic Education as permanent teachers prior to the start of COVID-19.

Ithemba Primary School

Ithemba Primary School (pseudonym) is located in a rural context within in a low socio-economic community. The school is a quintile 1 school with a learner enrolment of approximately 158 learners. The SMT consists of one principal and only one head of department, due to the learner population. There are three qualified teachers, excluding the principal.

Yamkela:

Yamkela is a 37-year-old female. She has been teaching for three years six months. She is a post level one educator and holds a Bachelor of Education degree. She teaches grade three in the foundation phase, teaching mathematics, English (first additional language), IsiZulu (home language) and life skills.

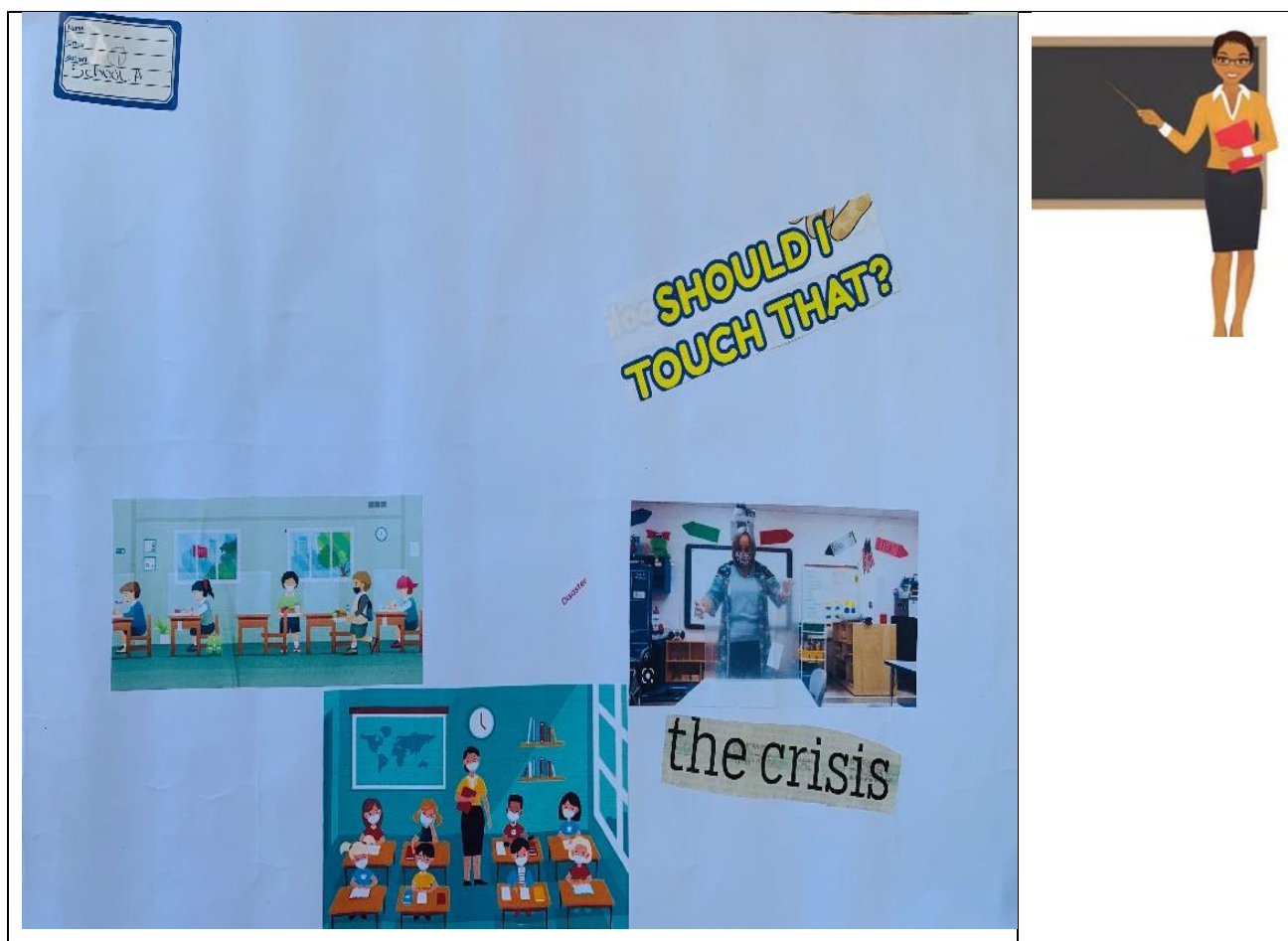


Figure 4.1: Yamkela's collage

Yamkela's verbatim transcript:

I themed my collage as the CRISIS. The COVID-19 pandemic was a crisis in my eyes. I added the writing 'should I touch that' because during this period when learners were being phased back at school, I was really scared as a teacher. I didn't want to contract the virus and go home to infect my family. On the other hand, my heart broke for my learners as I was constantly asking myself, 'Am I doing justice to my learners as per my teacher pledge?' My crisis was mostly not being able to fulfil my oath of staying committed to doing my best in teaching, loving my learners as my own kids and always thriving to deliver my best. But how does one fulfil their oath when placed in a crowded class and yet expected to social distance, when one is placed in an environment with a shortage of teaching and learning material but yet expected to give learners homework for days. I was scared and I didn't feel comfortable touching anything.

Bukhona:

Bukhona is a 48-year-old male teacher. He has been teaching for twelve years. He is a post level one educator and holds a Bachelor of Education degree. He teaches grade seven creative arts and economic and management sciences.



Figure 4.2: Bukhona's collage

Bukhona's verbatim transcript:

For me COVID-19 was a challenging time that I feel resulted in a 'Tale of Terror' for myself and my learners. Classes in my school are small, crowded and yet we were also mandated to social distance. I put the word 'secrets' because I felt our learners and our geographical context challenges are the department's secret and our problems are overlooked because we do not 'exist'. We are ruled out by our leaders. I say this because every national decision regarding teaching and learning that was passed down to us at school level and expected to implement as educators, the decision makers did not have 'us' in mind. The poor planning from our leaders showed how their decisions were a one size fits all approach. I pasted the writing 'leaders blamed for school trouble' as this for me I felt our leaders planning only considered well-resourced urban schools and definitely not my learners who reside in the rural geographical context.

Qophelo:

Qophelo is a 33-year-old male teacher. He has been teaching for nine years. He is a post level two educator and holds a Bachelor of Education degree. He teaches grade seven social sciences and life orientation.

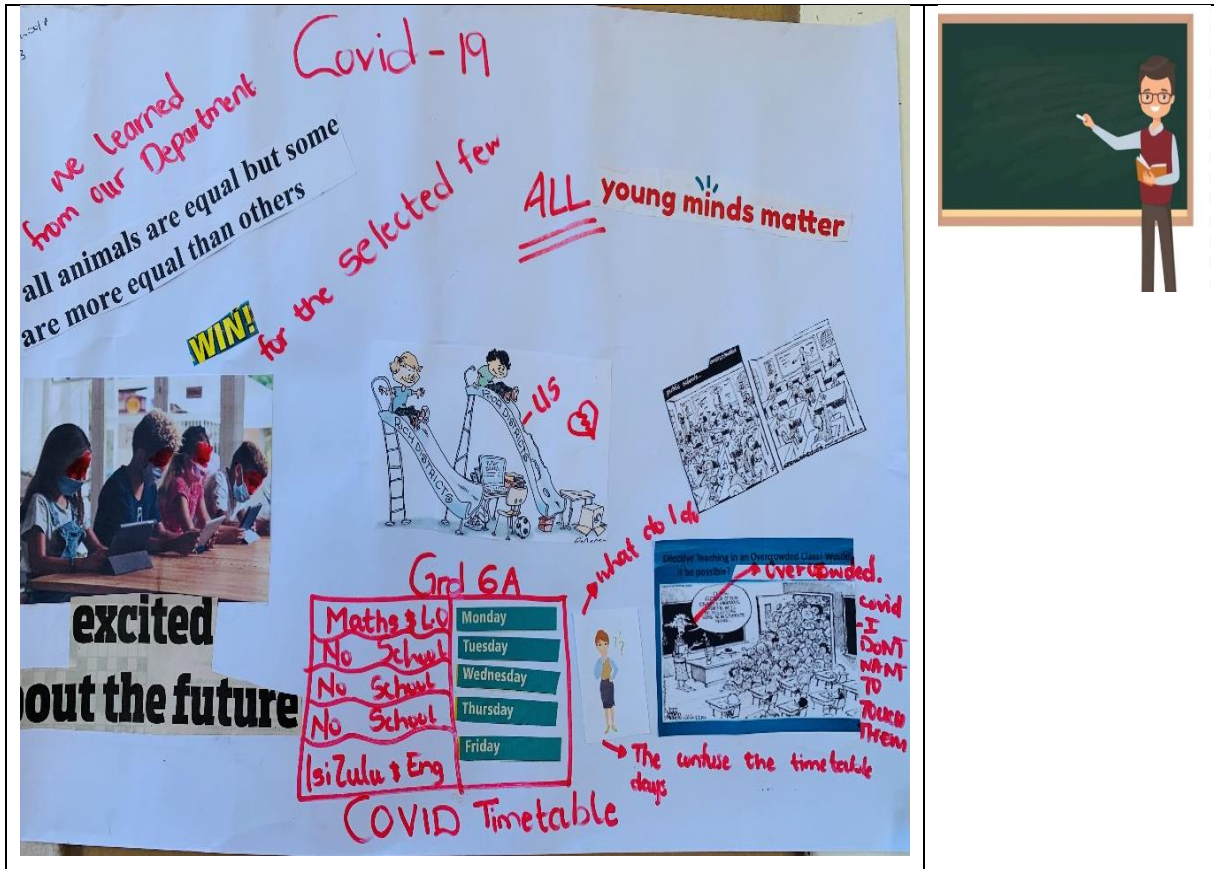


Figure 4.3: Qophelo's collage

Qophelo's verbatim transcript:

'All animals are equal but some are more equal than others'. In a democratic South Africa where the constitution clearly states that children have the right to learning, but are not given assurance that education provided will be of the same quality throughout the country and across the education department. This is what our Department of Basic Education has taught us educators in these rural context schools. That although learners are equal, but some are more equal than others in the eyes of our leaders. This was my experience during the COVID-19 pandemic era. I pasted the words 'win for a selected few'. This for me meant the win was for the schools that had means to learn during the pandemic and shutdown of schools. These are urban schools who used digital devices during COVID-19 shutdown to learn. I have two slides that are a contrast. One slide has holes which represents the poor districts like my own

and the other slide written rich districts has no holes and it is smooth sailing. The slide with holes represents my district which had so many challenges implementing the mandates from our leaders. I believe ALL young minds matter so rural context schools need support to catch up with the curriculum. 'Excited for the future' is only pasted next to the learners with digital devices as this meant they could still learn and social distance, not have to share textbooks. This picture is in contrast to the picture of the overcrowded class with no social distance.

Langa:

Langa is a 34-year-old male teacher. He has been teaching for eleven years. He is a post level one educator. He holds a Diploma in Tourism and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education. He teaches grade six mathematics and natural sciences and technology.

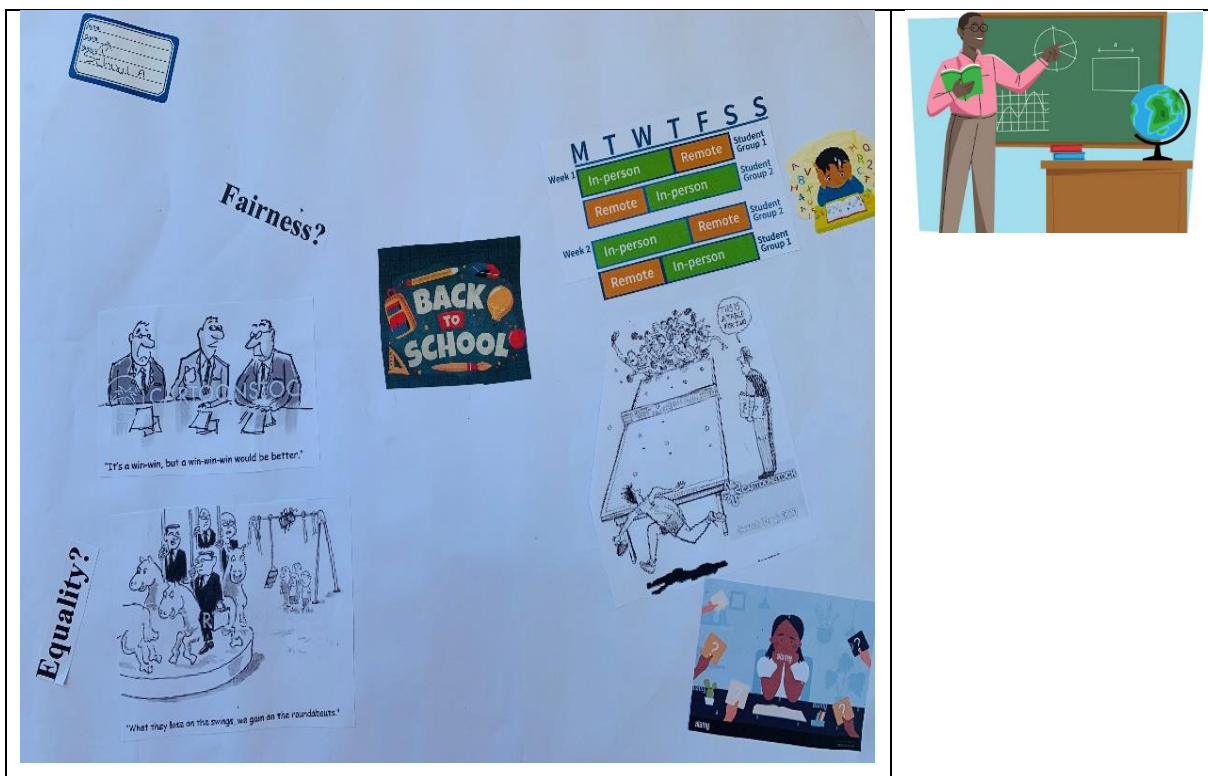


Figure 4.4: Qophelo's collage

Qophelo's verbatim transcript:

The issue for me was fairness. I wanted fairness in how learners are treated, in how curriculum is delivered. My relationship with my learners is beyond just curriculum deliverance, I provide pastoral care. So my issue was why was there no fairness within the education system for our learners.

Ohakaza Primary School

Qhakaza Primary School (pseudonym) is a quintile 1 school located in a rural context. This school is rooted in a low socio-economic community. It holds a learner enrolment of approximately 182 learners. The school has one principal, one head of department and four teachers.

Zanothando:

Zanothando is a 40-year-old female teacher. She has been teaching for six years. She is a post level one educator and holds a Bachelor of Education degree. She teaches grade seven English (first additional language), economic and management sciences, and life orientation.



Figure 4.5: Zanothando's collage

Zanothando's verbatim transcript:

'You disappearing leader', 'weakness revealed'. My main question whilst making this collage was who is going to take accountability for the knowledge gaps created during the pandemic? Will there be programmes or we will just continue like nothing happened after skipping topics in the annual teaching plans due to time constraints after phasing in learners. These gaps need proper planned programmes and I have not seen one being implemented. The revised ATP

cannot undo the damage caused by the pandemic. How do we ensure all learners are on the same pace with the ones who continued to cover curriculum during the lockdown? What is the measuring stick to measure the knowledge gaps? Our leaders disappeared during the pandemic and they are still not taking accountability even now. That is what I feel.

Khwezi:

Khwezi is a 27-year-old female teacher. She has been teaching for four years. She is a post level one educator and holds a Bachelor of Education degree. She teaches grade one in the foundation phase, teaching mathematics, English (first additional language), IsiZulu (home language), and life skills



Figure 4.6: Khwezi's collage

Khwezi's verbatim transcript:

The writing of 'End of an Era' for me shows end of freedom as life was, before COVID-19. I used to be close with my learners before COVID and I could read for them showing facial expressions which are very important for primary school learners. I play many roles as an educator, my learners were able to share even challenges they had at home, which some of those problems resulted in my learners having learning barriers. Although in this picture I show learners sharing lunch, before COVID-19 they shared even stationary and textbooks. Now adhering to social distance created an inconvenience for both my learners and myself. The second frame I have a picture which I've labelled as the 'ending' because for me COVID-19 was not just ending of life but also ending of a beautiful relationship I share with my learners. When they returned from lockdown the relationship was not the same, more so because even when they were in class we had to social distance and wear masks which made connecting to them rather difficult. 'You should learn these kind of things because superheroes are supposed to know how to help people', the picture with that writing covering learners' faces reminds me of the heavy burden I felt during that era. As a teacher my learners saw me as their superhero but in reality, I also needed my leaders to be my superheroes. Of which they weren't.

Manelisi:

Manelisi is a 32-year-old male teacher. He has been teaching for five years. He is a post level one educator and holds a Bachelor of Education degree. He teaches grade six mathematics.

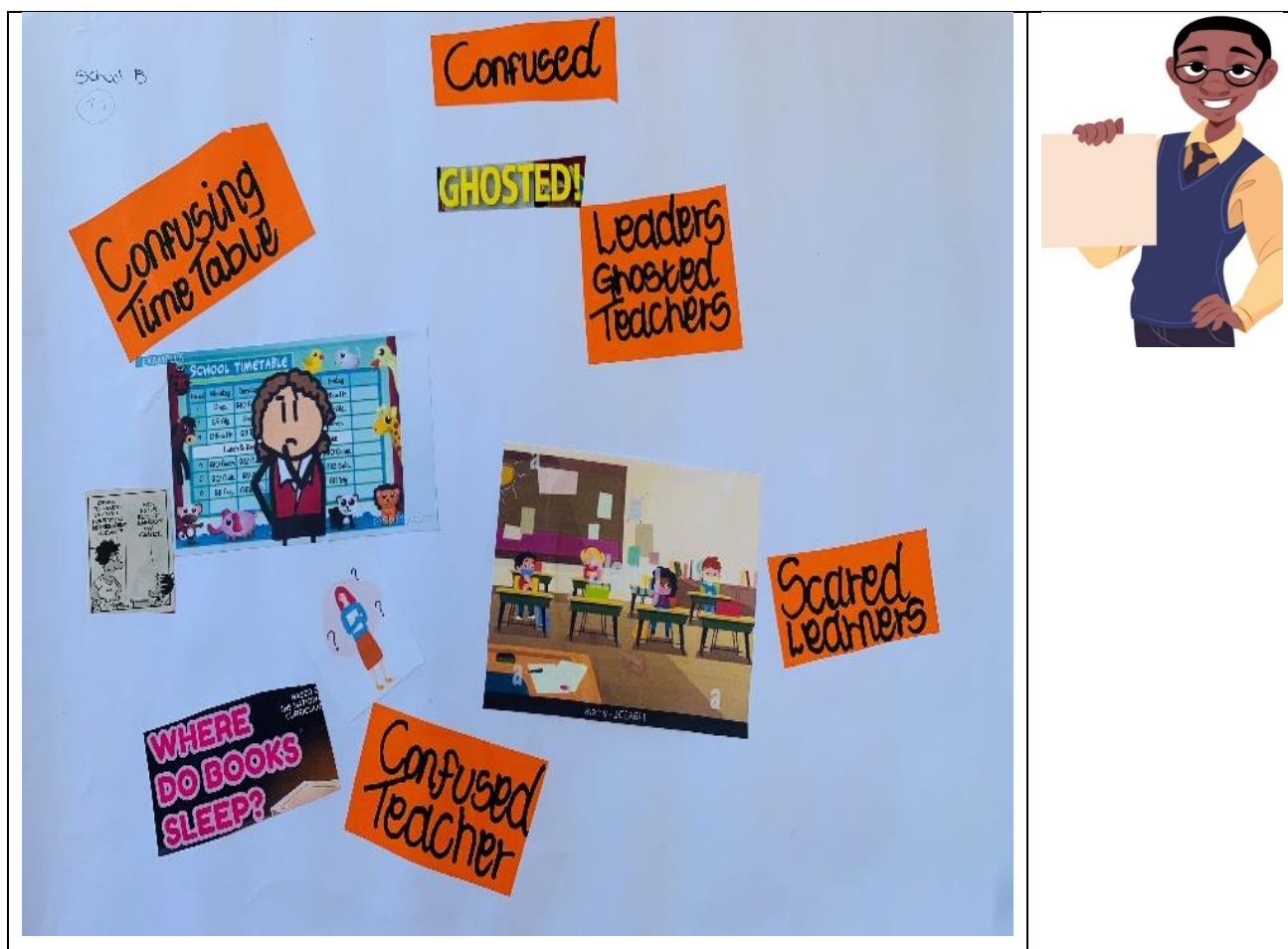


Figure 4.7: Manelisi's collage

Manelisi's verbatim transcript:

'Ghosted.' I had the Department of Basic Education leaders in my mind when I created this poster. I felt our leaders in the education system 'ghosted' us. By 'us' I specifically mean the rural teachers and learners. I was very confused during the phase of the rotation timetable. If as a teacher I was confused, my learners might have also been confused and scared. I feel the most confusion came from that we didn't have leaders that were willing to take accountability of the fact that COVID-19 highlighted challenges we already had in our rural context and therefore provide the necessary support. The confusing timetable for me, it was stressing because how do I honestly tick off topics and say I have covered them in the ATP when I know I did not do justice to them. Learners would come to school once than take about four days off school, some with no support learning material as we are short of textbooks as a school. Where were our leaders during this period and where were our leaders to assist with the issues that existed and were highlighted by COVID-19, like the issues of infrastructure etc.

Nandi:

Nandi is a 34-year-old female teacher. She has been teaching for ten years. She is a post level two educator and holds a Bachelor of Education degree. She is currently enrolled for her Honours degree. She teaches grade six English (first additional language) and natural sciences.

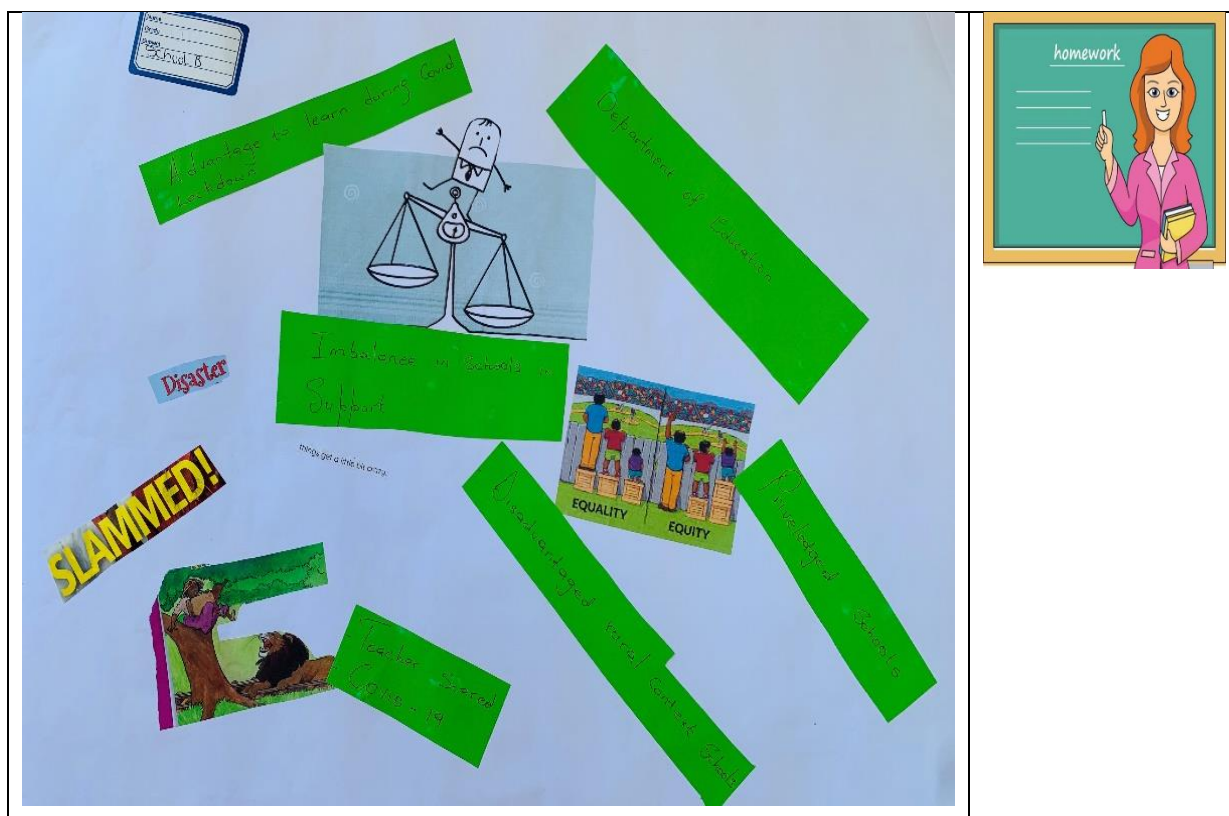


Figure 4.8: Nandi's collage

Nandi's verbatim transcript:

'Imbalance of support in schools.' That was my feeling throughout the pandemic and after. I understand that our contextual factors prevented us from learning during the lockdown but what about the period of phasing in learners or even now. Where is the support and programmes to close the knowledge gaps created through the pandemic? I have the picture of equity vs equality. The approach in support cannot be the same for schools that were already thriving in resources and even in infrastructure with schools that were under resourced and were struggling even before COVID-19. COVID-19 highlighted all the challenges we had in our school, the shortage in learning material and even in infrastructure. I feel like there should be more support provided to schools like my own.

4.3 Thematic analysis

Data was gathered through collages as an art-based research approach and one-on-one, face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis as an approach to analysing qualitative data was applied to the transcripts from the interview and to the collages. The themes used are from the Hargreaves (2001) emotional geographies conceptual framework. Therefore, the qualitative data generated in this study is presented in five themes: sociocultural, moral distance, professional distance, physical distance and political distance. Table 4.1 presents sub-themes that emerged relational to the Hargreaves (2001) emotional geographies.

Table 4.1: Sub-themes emerged relational to the Hargreaves (2001) emotional geographies

Themes	Sub-themes
4.3.1. Sociocultural	4.3.1.1.Inability to assist learners with homework. 4.3.1.2.Communication between teachers, learners and parents. 4.3.1.3.Back to school challenges.
4.3.2. Moral distance	4.3.2.1.Teaching practices before the pandemic. 4.3.2.2.Teaching practices adopted during COVID-19 disadvantaged learners.
4.3.3. Professional distance	4.3.3.1.Online teaching created detachment between teachers and learners. 4.3.3.2.Covid-19 regulations.
4.3.4. Physical distance	4.3.4.1.Effects of lockdown on teacher-learner professional relationship. 4.3.4.2.Teachers assume numerous roles in the classroom to strengthen the emotional bond with their learners.
4.3.5. Political distance	4.3.5.1.Digital divide 4.3.5.2.Authority for decision making during the lockdown.

4.3.1 Sociocultural

Hargreaves (2001) describes the sociocultural aspect as the possible distance that may be experienced by teachers from parents and the learners that they teach.

4.3.1.1 Inability of parents to assist learners with homework

Three out of the eight participants were concerned about the inability of parents to help learners with homework. While this issue existed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it escalated during the pandemic. Yamkela and Manelisi stated during their interviews how parents could not be of assistance to their children when they were given homework and were on the rotation timetable during the period when COVID-19 restrictions were being reduced. Yamkela from Ithemba Primary School who teaches the foundation phase narrates:

The homework's were not done because their parents couldn't understand it, they had no one to assist them with the homework's. The teachers couldn't even check the homework's, the homework's that were given to the learners.

Nandi, a departmental head from Qhakaza Primary School also shared the same sentiments, explaining:

Not at all. The changes were not accommodating all learners, because learners were given tasks to complete at home, with the help of their parents and not all parents are educated, not all parents are in position to help their learner. We've got some learners with barriers, which needs our support to be able to do work, they couldn't work independently. So those learners could not grasp anything, could not master any content.

Nandi explained further that some learners ended up dropping out of school due to lack of support at home from the parents:

The teaching practices were not good at all, but we had no choice, learners would come back to school after a whole week, because they were rotating. They had forgotten everything that they learnt and the work that they were given, they couldn't complete them. So that negatively affected the process of teaching learners and again learners could not get help at home to complete the given activities. That had a very negative impact on our learners because some of them ended up losing interest in school, which resulted in some of our learners dropping out of school.

In his interview, Manelisi, expressed the same concerns:

Right, since the schools were closed, when they were re-opened there was this rotation, rotation where certain learners come and where others do not come. So when you give the activities that I used to give them was homework. They will take the homework, then they will take four to three days not coming to school and when they come to school you'll find that some did not

do their homework because we didn't do... have this one on one interaction with each other. They do not have someone to ask.

4.3.1.2 Communication between teachers, learners and parents

Collected data indicates that teachers felt distanced from the parents who did not assume active roles at a crucial time in trying to help learners catch up on work lost during the lockdown. Yamkela complained about the lack of communication between teachers and parents, when she said:

So that was the problem, some of the work that was sent to their parents via WhatsApp. But some would not even receive that work because they didn't even have data, the textbooks that we have at school was not enough to give it to all the learners to carry on with the schoolwork.

The parents couldn't come to school and look at their learners work and discuss it with the ... with the educator.

Bukhona also explained:

To me, it was total lockdown because we were at deep rural and we're working at a deep rural. So, there was no communication at all between the learners and the parents and any other school activity.

Zanothando emphasised the challenge of communication between teachers, parents and learners. She explained:

So, this was very challenging there was no interaction at all and even parents, most of the parents in rural areas, they're not well educated so they could not help the learners.

Nandi who is a departmental head in the intermediate phase, explained:

There was also no communication between teachers and parents of the learners that we teach since there were no walk-ins allowed in schools for parents.

Nandi further explained the gap that teachers felt between them and the parents, that during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, parents were expected to bridge the gap between teachers and learners by getting information and activities from school social pages and digital platforms. She explained that the lack of communication with parents really derailed their efforts to catch up on the curriculum with the learners.

Some parents are not even in positions of cell phones or data or any communication. You couldn't even give learners work through WhatsApp groups, because the method could not accommodate all learners in my community.

4.3.1.3 Back-to-school challenges

Data obtained from participants in both schools indicated that some learners did not return to school when they reopened. Teachers voiced concern that during the lockdown parents and learners of these communities did not engage in any educational activities that stimulated the mind of the learner in an academic manner, but instead, learners played games. When Qophelo was asked if he noticed any changes after learners were phased back in to school, he stated that some learners came back to school a bit withdrawn:

But the only thing that was apparent was the learners were a bit withdrawn from the schooling thing. So they were mostly used to being at home and playing and not doing practical things. So they took a long time to acclimatize and come back.

During the interview session, Khwezi explained her experience with grade ones. They also had a challenge adapting to the school environment when learners were phased back in at school. She said:

Firstly, the learners came back blank especially you know the grade ones, as I have mentioned how they were struggling to just cope again with being in the school environment. You can see that all they did at home was play and you know obviously with the stress of COVID and everything parents were not really assisting with homework and you know, trying to take over from the teachers.

Common in both schools is that during the lockdown, the culture in the communities where learners reside, was to engage in other activities that did not include academic work. Lack of communication and engagement between teachers and learners resulted in the neglect of school work, thus encouraging a negative attitude towards school even when it re-opened. In her interview, Zanothando also described her observations of her learners after the lockdown.

So no, I wasn't able because as I am teaching in the rural area. So most of the parents they don't have like access to internet they don't have social media. Most of the... of the people our learners stay with, they are grannies. So it was quite difficult, because they couldn't learn.

So what they did is just to stay home and do whatever the chores they were given, and then they actually forgot about what they were taught before that lockdown.

A sociocultural difference that created an even bigger gap between teachers and their learners in the rural communities is the approach some parents and learners of the community have towards education.

In a collage created by Qophelo (Figure 4.3), a departmental head, he expressed that the lack of communication between him and his learners meant less time for curriculum coverage. He stated that the communication could have been used for teaching and learning time with his learners, amongst other important aspects of communicating.

This for me meant the win was for the schools that had means to learn during the pandemic and shutdown of schools. These are urban schools who used digital devices during COVID-19 shutdown to learn.

The aforementioned extract indicates that learners had just started school when the first hard lockdown started. The gap was further exacerbated by the lack of communication between teachers and their learners during the lockdown. Teachers explained how it was easy to identify that the effects of lockdown and lack of communication resulted in learners not engaging in any academic activities during this period. Thus, learners struggled to come back to school when COVID-19 restrictions were reduced.

The sociocultural differences create either closeness or distance. Soldaat (2019) describes the sociocultural aspect as addressing cultural differences between different groups sharing space. Teachers may be placed in spaces or communities where other individuals affiliate to numerous cultural groups and this can cause teachers to become detached from their learners. In instances where the teacher is not a community member, they may be viewed as possessing stereotypical assumptions. The inability of parents to assist learners with homework, the limited communication between the three main stakeholders, and back to school challenges, are all issues born out of sociocultural differences between teachers and the community they serve. The interviews suggest that during the COVID-19 lockdown, and even when learners were being gradually phased in, teachers and parents of learners in the rural contexts had different perspectives of teaching and learning. It is also notable that the geographical context of both these schools is one of high unemployment and low literacy. The culture of prioritising education is preferred by only a select few.

4.3.2 Moral distance

Teachers have a deep and strong desire to fully understand their purpose for teaching (Hargreaves, 2001). There are numerous factors that influence their purpose for teaching and

ultimately how they comprehend what it is. The teaching practices used before and during COVID-19 were extremely different in nature.

4.3.2.1 Teaching practices used before the COVID-19 pandemic

The data collected suggests that teaching practices that were used before COVID-19 are commonly described as traditional teaching method and direct method. Findings reveal that COVID-19 brought many changes in schools, as expressed by teachers: everything drastically changed during the pandemic.

When asked about his teaching practices before the pandemic, Langa teaching grade six mathematics and natural sciences & technology explained:

Usual traditional teaching methods, I would stand in front of my learners and engage with them.

Langa further explained that pairing learners prior to COVID-19 was an effective teaching method for him, as learners assisted one another.

You introduce your lesson. You teach them and the learners, the way they sit mostly, they were sitting in pairs. So it's... sometimes it was easy to teach in that way because at some point you will find out that if one learner doesn't understand something maybe the other learner who is sitting in pairs with will explain maybe while you are still teaching.

In agreement with his colleague, Manelisi, teaching mathematics, also narrated:

It was a direct method. Question and answer method.

According to Nandi her teaching method is centred around her learners. Learners play a more active role and she facilitates the learning process by ensuring they take the lead and she just guides them.

Teaching has always been more learner-centred before the pandemic. Uhm... learners were the active participants in the process of teaching and learning. I acted as a facilitator in the process of teaching and learning.

Khwezi emphasised that before COVID-19 her learners were very close to her and this is important in the foundation phase. She explained how she needs to be hands on:

Also maintain close contact with them, as I sat close to them... ensured they are comfortable and had easy access to me. Also in my foundation phase, particularly the grade ones they obviously require more hands approach and require more hands on attention.

The collage created by Khwezi (Figure 4.6) clearly shows a teacher with her learners in a circle reading a book and having close interaction with them, labelled 'END OF AN ERA'. This possibly suggests that COVID-19 brought the end of what teachers enjoyed doing and were used to. It brought an end to their conventional teaching methods they were accustomed to, methods they feel had worked for them ever since they had started teaching. Teaching with close interaction with their learners.

The picture (Figure 4.6) in her collage shows text saying 'THE BIG ISSUE' and an image of COVID-19 social distancing showing learners in a class wearing masks and showing no close interaction. This picture, in contrast to the one across from it, shows the teaching practices during the pandemic of social distancing. This teaching practice may have resulted in a shift in her relationship that she had shared with her learners of close interaction, as she then explains how the relationship was never the same after the learners returned from the lockdown.

Bukhona explains how learners were able to work in groups and even get emotional support from parents. For activities like market day, learners worked in groups and parents were able to come into school physically and give support.

For instance, we had this thing on market day, where learners had to do a market day where the parents have to be called in to support them in market day. Not only financial but also being there.

Yamkela explains how her classroom seating arrangement allowed for her to be close to her learners. She narrates how learners were able to even share textbooks in class.

Everything was normal. You could group the learners according to their level of understanding. They even shared everything such as learning material.

Bukhona further explains that he could get instant feedback in class before COVID-19.

The teaching practices prior to that was the teacher-learner involvement in class. Where me as the educator was directly involved with the children and what we discuss or what I taught was I wanted to immediately see feedback from what the learners perceive from my teaching. So basically it was direct communication, instant reply, instant assessment and that.

4.3.2.2 Teaching practices adopted during COVID-19 disadvantages the learners

Data collected presents a number of challenges that teachers faced with the teaching practices they adopted during COVID-19 in attempts to cope with the changing times. Some of these practices were not appreciated by teachers and parents, as they came with changes that disadvantaged learners.

In her collage (Figure 4.6), Khwezi, teaching the foundation phase, narrates the teaching practices she had to adopt due to the COVID-19 pandemic as rather unpleasant, as she felt these practices negatively impacted her relationship with the learners. In describing her collage, she explained:

Now adhering to social distance created an inconvenience for both my learners and myself. The second frame I have a picture, which I've labelled as the ending, because for me COVID-19 was not just ending of life but also ending of a beautiful relationship I share with my learners.

It also appears as if the pandemic period brought much confusion for the teachers. For example, the collage (Figure: 4.1) created by Yamkela. This collage depicts a teacher holding a partition glass to protect herself, uncertain if she should touch her learners work or not. It is important to note that when learners returned to the school environment and adhered to social distancing, they had already lost out on teaching and learning time during the lockdown. The teaching practice in a class where COVID-19 protocols had to be observed seems to have instilled fear in teachers. Some asked themselves if they could or should not touch their learners work. Data suggests that this teaching experience whilst adhering to social distancing in class and ensuring that all learners are individually catered for was emotionally taxing to teachers

Yamkela's narration of what is portrayed in the collage (Figure 4.1) reports that learning materials that could not be shared also disadvantaged the learners:

But how does one fulfil their oath when placed in a crowded class and yet expected to social distance, when one is placed in an environment with a shortage of teaching and learning material but yet expected to give learners homework for days. I was scared and I didn't feel comfortable touching anything.

It also emerged from the data that teaching methods changed for teachers when learners were phased in and the adopted teaching practices created a moral distance.

Khwezi teaching the foundation phase grade ones, explained in her interview how she was ‘accessible’ to her learner’s prior to COVID-19 regulations being implemented in class. As a primary school teacher and foundation phase teacher, she explained how the very young learners need close contact with their teachers, but unfortunately this could not be the case after learners were phased back in to school.

Well, those methods they did... they affected us in a way that... excuse me, I lost contact with my learners and that's you know I felt that I could not teach them during lockdown and I was failing them.

The challenge of feeling that learners are disadvantaged also presented itself through the concern of Langa not being able to pair learners during the COVID-19 period of the rotating timetable. Langa explained:

So and also learners... also it was difficult for the learners in terms of they need to sit with that social distance as they were supposed to. As we know that some learners they learn from other learners. So the COVID-19 pandemic the teaching practice that was done at that time it practices that learners should learn individually. So of which it affected sometimes the performance of learners in class and also the interaction amongst one another with the learners because they were also afraid. So it was not good... it was not good.

In agreement with Langa, Zanothando also suggested the adopted teaching practices due to COVID-19 disadvantaged the learners, narrating:

Yeah, yeah, it did because they normally, they work in groups. Now most of the time when learners work in groups they feel comfortable. But if they feel comfortable, and also some other learners are or cannot perform individually, but when they are grouped together, even though there are some challenges, but if they are grouped together it means that everyone is going to get the same mark. Yeah, that was the advantage, but it was a win. When there was COVID then they... it was a disadvantage to them because now they had to work individually.

Data collected in this study revealed that the challenge of the digital divide created a concern in teachers in rural contexts. Teachers such as Bukhona and Khwezi were concerned with how they were going to catch up with the curriculum and how to ensure the lockdown did not create academic gaps and disadvantage the learners. In her interview Khwezi explained:

Yeah, so when I started I had to re-teach a lot. I had no idea how to handle that because now what do I escape, the curriculum is obviously so close knitted. What do I escape... what do I

teach? How do I deal with the gaps in between because now you have to understand each child is different and this one could remember that and that one is not really remembering that? So just trying to bridge that gap and just... they are lost and then the culture and the school was very scary and confusing.

The same sentiments were shared by Bukhona in his collage (Figure 4.2). He shows how learners were able to sit right next to one another and share resources. In Bukhona's collage pictures and verbatim report one can clearly observe this:

Writing of 'Times are changing' and this sharing of resources is now what is described in the collage as a 'tale of terror'. Moving from this conventional teaching method touched on teachers' emotions as they were moving to the world of 'unknown'.

The collage (Figure 4.2) seems to indicate a lot of emotions, as the teacher also writes how poor planning led to a compromise in KwaZulu- Natal schools. This was possibly directed to the shortage of resources, as learners were sharing textbooks. Data in Yamkela's interview suggests that when COVID-19 restrictions were slightly lifted, and learners were phased back in to schools, the COVID-19 regulations had to be adhered to and so there was no sharing of textbooks. Thus, learners would be short of textbooks, especially because they needed textbooks to work with at home. The close interaction between teacher and learner prior the COVID-19 pandemic is what fuelled the teacher-learner professional relationship.

The interview and collage data shows the process of understanding the moral distance, which was greatly challenged in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, as teachers and their learners struggled to overcome the many challenges. Adopting new teaching strategies such as those of trying to teach remotely, infused with the confusion that came with COVID-19 regulations, left teachers searching and constantly questioning their true purpose for teaching. Data collected from both schools proves that teachers felt uneasy around their learners, although they had to remind themselves that they still had to understand and fulfil their purpose for teaching, even under different circumstances and with different teaching strategies than before COVID-19.

4.3.3 Professional distance

Closeness or detachment can be created by different understandings of the norms of professional practice. What can be measured as good practice in one educational system may be observed as bad conduct in another geographical zone or educational system (Hargreaves, 2001).

4.3.3.1 Online teaching created detachment between teachers and learners

The data obtained from both schools suggests that some teaching practices which were measured as good in the urban contexts were observed as bad conduct in the rural geographical contexts. Online teaching as a teaching practice that was used in some schools in the urban contexts was unsuccessful in the rural contexts due to unequal distribution of resources. Qophelo in his collage titled, “*All animals are equal but some are more equal than others*”, portrays the inequalities that exist between rural and urban schools (Figure 4.3).

Qophelo put it in this manner:

...although learners are equal but some are more equal than others in the eyes of our leaders. This was my experience during the COVID-19 pandemic era. I pasted the word ‘win for a selected few’. This for me meant the win was for the schools that had means to learn during the pandemic and shutdown of schools. These are urban schools who used digital devices during COVID-19 shutdown to learn.

The inequality of resources was also highlighted by Khwezi during the interview when she responded to the question about her teaching practices during the lockdown, she stated:

You know I think that for some... certain schools which were obviously afforded the privilege to... you know work remotely. They were very successful. Unfortunately given our own circumstance and given where we are educators, primarily or specifically speaking for myself, they were not successful at all.

During the interviews, teachers from both schools showed intense dissatisfaction that online teaching was only a success in urban schools. This practice created detachment between teachers and their learners. As e-learning became the main method of connecting with learners, but teachers from the rural contexts narrated that due to contextual factors they could not be in contact with learners. This created a detachment, as Khwezi narrated:

I started hearing news that you know schools were now going to try to teach remotely, which shocked me again as that was going to be a bit of challenge, a bit of a challenge given where I am an educator. So yeah, it was... it was very challenging and I did ask in the school group, if we had any other way of trying to reach out to our learners or to their parents. I was quickly reminded of our circumstance that we are situated in the rural areas and how great of a challenge that would obviously be for us, because I mean, even on our normal days just trying to reach a parent on WhatsApp or school WhatsApp of course or you know telephonically is such a major problem. Network coverage is just... you know terrible for the lack of better

words. So we just tried to discuss of course amongst ourselves as educators how we can obviously combat this challenge given where we are situated. But you know most of the parents they are unemployed so they aren't even able to afford data. So we tried that method, the principal created a WhatsApp group where we'd be able to post activities for our learners. Where you know, 30 about 30 parents had joined.

4.3.3.2 COVID-19 regulations

Data collected from interviews and collages explains that the Department of Basic Education introduced the rotational learning where learners would take turns coming to school in efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19. Teachers also touch on the rotation system as a method of phasing in learners that was introduced to them when COVID-19 restrictions were eased for the public. The rotation system allowed for learners to come to school in smaller numbers where they would only come to school on certain days. This was done mainly so there would be enough space for learners to social distance as one of COVID-19 regulations.

Zanothando during her interview when she was responding on the question on the period of phasing learners back in and rotation timetable, narrated:

I was worried. I was very worried that whatever it is that was taught by me to the learners I was worried that if they come back I would have to go back...having to recap to what was taught before.

Manelisi, during his interview narrated how mathematics as a subject needs the teacher to be very hands on. He explained that when COVID-19 restrictions were eased, the school introduced a rotation period timetable which did not do justice to his learners.

It affected my teaching practices because mathematics as I've said is a practical subject. We need to engage with the learner show the learner how to get possible answers. So it was very hard for me.

The rotation system allowed for teachers to see learners only on certain days and thus they gave learners enough homework to last them a couple of days till they returned to school again according to their timetable. During his interview, Manelisi explained that this system did no justice to his subject mathematics, as learners had no one to assist them at home and they could not interact with him due to the rotation timetable, added to the social distancing COVID regulation.

The data indicates that the curriculum was not completed fully according to the ATP. Nandi, stated in her interview:

It was not... it was not effective again, because the curriculum was not completed, so the learners had to come in different days. In school, we took time to complete the curriculum and by that curriculum was not completed at all.

Due to challenges of uncompleted ATP's, teachers like Qophelo expressed concerns for knowledge gaps. He also mentioned in his interview the challenges he faced with regards to his subject. He displayed concern for knowledge gaps, as he used the word 'anxious', which expresses just how concerned teachers were by the detachment that was created by different understandings of professional practice.

...so no teaching was taking place at that particular time and that on its own has created so many gaps in the subjects that I'm teaching. Also learners forgetting that they're still supposed to go back to school, because things just changed suddenly for them and for me as well being anxious not knowing when you go back to work.

Nandi raised the same concern of knowledge gaps in her collage (Figure 4.8). She said:

My main question whilst making this collage was who is going to take accountability for the knowledge gaps created during the pandemic? Will there be programmes or we will just continue like nothing happened after skipping topics in the ATPs due to time constraints after phasing in learners?

Manelisi also raised the concern for knowledge gaps. He explained how the rotation system resulted in the curriculum not being fully covered and thus resulting in learners being progressed to the next grade with knowledge gaps.

I think these changes they brought about since... I've said that mathematics... I teach mathematics. So these changes, if they are rotations meaning you won't cover the whole curriculum or the whole syllabus, meaning there will be gaps. So even if the learner goes to grade seven, eight or nine but the learner needs that foundation from grade six, as I'm teaching grade six. So there will be gaps then at later stages it will affect the learner.

One participant touched on the revised ATP's and highlighted that there were topics omitted in efforts to save time. Zanothando narrated the issue of curriculum coverage and the knowledge gaps created. In her collage verbatim report (Figure 4.5), she narrated:

My main question whilst making this collage was who is going to take accountability for the knowledge gaps created during the pandemic? Will there be programmes or we will just continue like nothing happened after skipping topics in the ATPs due to time constraints after phasing in learners? These gaps need proper planned programmes and I have not seen one being implemented. The revised ATP cannot undo the damage caused by the pandemic. How do we ensure all learners are on the same pace with the ones who continued to cover curriculum during the lockdown? What is the measuring stick to measure the knowledge gaps?

4.3.4 Physical distance

Hargreaves (2001) emphasises the primary concern is not just the physical phenomena. People could be standing right next to each other, but be distant simultaneously. The primary concern is the emotion that creates the closeness and cancels the distance. The closeness and distance created by the patterns of how people opt to interact, shape the emotions people experience about relationships of themselves and even other people around them. People bond emotionally more than they do physically.

4.3.4.1 Effects of lockdown on the teacher-learner professional relationship

The lockdown period affected professional relations between teachers and learners significantly. Data collected suggests that most teachers from both schools suffered the emotional effects of being physically away from their learners for the lockdown period and this also affected their professional relationship and the bond they had with learners.

Khwezi teaching the foundation phase, narrated:

I lost contact with my learners and that, you know I felt that I could not teach them during lockdown and I was failing them. You know also the teaching practice of the rotation period was hard and it affected their relationship, my relationship with them because if you think of it you know you go from seeing a person throughout the week and now I'm seeing them on a random Tuesday and some random Thursday you know, whatever I'd already commenced with their personalities and getting to know them is obviously getting affected.

When the first lockdown happened in mid-March 2020, teachers had only spent less than three months with their learners in their new grade. Nandi, described how the physical distance between her and her learners affected the emotional bond and the teacher-learner professional relationship negatively.

These changes, they affected the relationship between teachers and learners badly because it took time for the teachers to recognize and know learner's names because they didn't spend

much time with them. Teachers could not develop the effective teaching strategies that will accommodate all learners as they've got different learning needs, because they couldn't in time be able to identify the learners needs in barriers so as to come up with effective teaching strategies.

Qophelo also shared how the lockdown affected his professional relationship with his learners. When asked in his interview session, he replied:

When we first came back after the hard lockdown, we came back in dribs and drabs and that led to connection being lost between the teacher and their learners. We sort of became strangers because we were away from each other for quite some time. Which is something that is not usual and barriers emerged from there because some learners you could see that now they don't even recognize you as a teacher because they used now to roaming the streets during the lockdown.

Yamkela teaching the foundation phase, expressed how her relationship was affected with her learners. She further highlighted that the start of lockdown was in the first term when she was still trying to build a bond with her new learners. In her interview she explained:

So some of the learners, since I've got a big number in my class, I... I couldn't remember their names. I had to start remembering their names. Also. It was during the first term and it was a year, it was a new grade. So yes. So even to bond with them physically, that was very sad, that I couldn't bond with them in person.

4.3.4.2 Teachers assume numerous roles in the classroom to strengthen the emotional bond with their learners

It is imperative to understand that teachers assume multiple roles in the classroom other than that of facilitating teaching and learning. Siddiqui and Ahamed (2020) explain that the teaching profession by nature does not only require teachers to be well versed in their speciality learning area or syllabus, but also to ensure all round development of learners through assuming other roles outside of curriculum deliverance that will enable this process. Some teachers were worried about the physical distance during lockdown and lack of communication with their learners. The communication between teacher and learner can strengthen the bond, which allows the teacher to assume other important roles in the life of a learner, thus getting a fuller picture of each learner and understanding why each is the way they are in class and what strategies would be best suited to assist them academically and in other ways.

In her collage Khwezi (Figure 4.6) explains how the emotional connection she shared with her learners allowed her to tap into her pastoral care role and gain better understanding of her learners holistic wellbeing. She could get insight into the challenges learners face, even at home, and how those situations present themselves as learning barriers in the learning environment. The physical distance between teachers and learners due to the COVID-19 pandemic affected the emotional bond she had with her learners.

Khwezi explained:

The writing of End of an Era for me shows end of freedom as life was, before COVID-19. I used to be close with my learners before COVID and I could read for them showing facial expressions which are very important for primary school learners. I play many roles as an educator, my learners were able to share even challenges they had at home, which some of those problems resulted in my learners having learning barriers.

This is corroborated by the collage created by Langa He explained:

My relationship with my learners is beyond just curriculum deliverance, I provide pastoral care. [Figure 4.4]

Manelisi also explained:

As an educator, I don't think I'm only an educator, I'm also a parent to these learners. So during this lockdown and these changes, I saw that as a teacher, I played an important role to the learners. So since I was not in contact with them, or since I was separated with them for this period, I saw that kids need their teachers.

In her verbatim report, Khwezi narrates the challenge of not being close to her learners, which impacted the emotional bond between them.

Khwezi explained:

No, as a teacher I think of myself as somebody who is way more than just a person who is delivering curriculum. You know this pandemic proved to me that you know my role just goes beyond the classroom. I am a comforter when they need a comforter. I am you know a teacher when they need a teacher or I'm an educator they need an educator. I am a playmate when they need a playmate and I'm you know, I'm also just somebody they can generally try to relate and to hopefully, um, yeah, when I'm needed to provide support. The only time I can really say honestly that I felt how hopeless and helpless was during the first lockdown when I had

absolutely no power over circumstances. Worse, I myself was over very scared you know obviously this was a pandemic and it was not just affecting our, uhm... learners, but it was affecting literally everyone else. [Figure 4.6]

In contrast to the preceding narratives, Yamkela had a different experience. During her interview, when asked about the effects of being physically away from her learners, explaining the teacher-learner professional relationship, she said:

Not really, it didn't affect anything because as they came back from school we started bonding again even though there were still restrictions, but I would say it didn't affect any professional relationship between myself and my learners.

On the physical distance aspect, Hargreaves (2001) maintains that people are able to bond emotionally regardless of space and distance between them. It is also notable that experiences based on emotional bonds and relations are subjective, as they are based on an individual's perception of that situation. Data collected suggests that not all professional relationships were affected between teachers and their learners due to physical distance during the lockdown. The findings suggest that COVID-19 presented a new challenge of teachers being away from their learners and adopting a remote teaching strategy in numerous schools. This challenged the teacher-learner professional relationship drastically.

4.3.5 Political distance

The political distance emotional geography refers to the closeness or the remoteness that is created by numerous understandings of power. Power structures govern the order of interaction and practice and opting not to abide by these guidelines may lead to various emotions (Hargreaves 2001).

COVID-19 regulations and policies were created from higher centralised national political power structures and passed down to different government subunits and then to the public, which was expected to adhere to those policies. For instance, policies, as mentioned by Macupe (2020), mandated the gradual phasing in of learners. Within the Department of Basic Education, teachers had limited authority regarding teaching practices adopted amidst COVID-19. Data obtained from teachers in this study suggests that teachers felt pressure to adopt remote teaching and learning as a teaching strategy and this led to various emotional responses from teachers. Each leader, in their level of power structure, looked up to the next leader in a higher level for direction. Data collected proposes that political distance was witnessed at all power structure levels, down to the school environment. Circuit managers were looked upon by

principals positioned in schools to provide a pathway for teaching and learning which would be fair to all schools within the circuit regardless of their contextual backgrounds, quintile rankings and amount of resources, amongst other differences. Principals and the SMT within the school structure were also looked upon by teachers to provide solutions to the challenge of losing teaching and learning time due to COVID-19. Media, more specifically, social media, became the new source of information, showcasing what schools in one part of the country were doing, thus prompting other schools to imitate those teaching strategies to try and salvage what little time they had left and commence with the ATP.

4.3.5.1 The digital divide

Participants from both schools indicated that in both these rural context schools they could not cover the curriculum during the lockdown, as the ‘digital divide’ created a gap between them and the privileged urban schools with adequate resources and network coverage. These honoured schools were observed to be taking giant steps towards curriculum coverage leaving the rural context schools behind.

In her interview Khwezi, from Qhakaza Primary School (pseudonym) teaching grade one explained:

The SMTs were also just as confused when we asked questions... they told us that they were just following the circular that had been mandated to shut down the schools. So a few weeks into the lockdown it was also extended. I started hearing news that you know, schools were now going to try to teach remotely, which shocked me again as that was going to be a bit of challenge, a bit of a challenge given where I am an educator. So yeah, it was it was very challenging and I did ask in the school group, if we had any other way of trying to reach out to our learners or to their parents. I was quickly reminded of our circumstance that we are situated in the rural areas and how great of a challenge that would obviously be for us because I mean, even on our normal days just trying to reach a parent on WhatsApp or school WhatsApp of course or you know telephonically is such a major problem. Network coverage is just, you know, terrible, for the lack of better words. So we just tried to discuss of course amongst ourselves as educators how we can obviously combat this challenge given where we are situated. But you know most of the parents they are unemployed so they aren't even able to afford data. So we tried that method, the principal created a WhatsApp group where we'd be able to post activities for our learners. Where you know, 30... about 30 parents had joined. Unfortunately, at the end of the week we had less than half parents. The principal was thus forced to close the group where as it was obviously not as helpful.

Further into her interview she narrated:

You know I think that for some... certain schools which were obviously afforded the privilege to... you know work remotely. They were very successful. Unfortunately given our own circumstance and given where we are educators, primarily or specifically speaking for myself, they were not successful at all. So unfortunately a lot of our learners got stuck behind and when I refer to that I just refer to them not being able to easily catch up, you know... obviously they'd been away from school for such a long period of time. You know, we had no teaching aids to ensure that learning continued and you know the rotation as I explained it. I don't think it was as successful, you know you go from having to spread the curriculum throughout the year to now having to squeeze it in bits and pieces and even with that, you obviously only seeing them a certain period and you know tomorrow they've forgotten... it's just such a change and then a change in a child's routine and we obviously all know how important routine is and you know, it was... it was it was incredibly hard and those who are able obviously afforded the opportunity to be and continue with learning were at such a great privilege. Unfortunately, not so much for the school that I teach at... uhm, yeah and importantly, not for my grade ones.

Zanothando in her interview, narrated:

There was no online teaching online stuff. So it was very difficult for them because time was lost during the lockdown.

In agreement with both teachers from Qhakaza Primary School, Yamkela from Ithemba Primary School, teaching grade 3 in the foundation phase, explained during her interview:

We couldn't teach the learners because we didn't have the resources as the urban schools do. Yeah.

Power structures indirectly determined the order of interaction and practice during the period of lockdown. What seems to be the highlight in teachers' interviews and collages from both schools is that of the digital divide and how the authorities became sightless towards this. This divide created an even bigger gap between the teachers and their learners, as the teachers felt powerless during the lockdown and felt somewhat let down by the leaders in national governing structures and, in turn, let down their own learners within the school structure.

In a collage created by Manelisi (Figure 4.7) narrates:

Ghosted. I had the Department of Basic Education leaders in my mind when I created this poster. I felt our leaders in the education system ghosted us. By 'us' I specifically mean the rural teachers and learners. I was very confused during the phase of the rotation timetable. If as a teacher I was confused, my learners might have also been confused and scared. I feel the most confusion came from that we didn't have leaders that were willing to take accountability of the fact that COVID-19 highlighted challenges we already had in our rural context and therefore provide the necessary support.

4.3.5.2 Authority for decision making during the lockdown

In the two schools where I conducted research, political distance was more eminent in the challenges of decision making within the schools, as it became clear that as post level one teachers, educators had minimal power to make decisions to continue with teaching and learning during the lockdown.

Bukhona felt that the already existing challenges that were highlighted by the pandemic in rural context schools are kept as a 'secret' by the officials, who are aware of these challenges. He explained that decisions and policies created during the pandemic to help teachers and learners cope with that period did not consider schools in rural contexts. Bukhona felt that if shortage of resources and infrastructure had been a known issue and not kept secret by leaders, there would have been methods suggested by them that would accommodate rural context schools. Yamkela, from the same school as Bukhona, through the use of her collage verbatim report and the use of images in her collage, also mentioned the challenges of inadequate infrastructure (Figure 4.2).

Bukhona narrates:

I put the word secrets because I felt our learners and our geographical context challenges are the department's secret and our problems are overlooked because we do not 'exist'. We are ruled out by our leaders. I say this because every national decision regarding teaching and learning that was passed down to us at school level and expected to implement as educators, the decision makers did not have 'us' in mind. The poor planning from our leaders showed how their decisions were a one-size-fits-all approach. I pasted the writing 'leaders blamed for school trouble' as this, for me, I felt our leaders planning only considered well-resourced urban schools and definitely not my learners who reside in the rural geographical context.

Yamkela explained:

But how does one fulfil their oath when placed in a crowded class and yet expected to social distance, when one is placed in an environment with a shortage of teaching and learning material but yet expected to give learners homework for days. I was scared and I didn't feel comfortable touching anything. [Figure 4.1]

Langa from Ithemba Primary School highlighted the importance of leaders within the Department of Education to equip teachers with the necessary skills and resources for rural schools so all learners get a fair chance in curriculum coverage, despite their geographical context, as should have been the case during the lockdown. He touched on the political distance experienced by teachers like him, who felt powerless, as they hold no power to make changes concerning resources for the school or its infrastructure.

During his interview Langa explained:

But again, as it affects me, I have nothing to do in terms to act for the change for this in a way that the environment and the community that we teach under. Sometimes we are forced by the conditions of our schools, by the conditions of our society that our schools are under, to teach in that way. In terms of being IT informative, I do have some skills for IT, but those skills I cannot implement under the condition of the community I serve under, so it's made us to think that it made me see that the government has a lot to do in terms of improving the schools and empower some teachers in terms of making use of IT in our schools, so that these teaching can be effective, because if I may make an example, teachers could have went to school maybe to perform the teaching, but learners while they are at home, if they do have resources, do the lesson, present the lesson, maybe using resources, laptops, Wi Fi and also for those learners who have those access to that part you will find that a learner cannot have access to IT or to a laptop or to a cell phone, internet data and so forth. Of which may be the use of iPad, that was going to be introduced to schools, that learners must have iPad with some data, maybe it will have some changes at a later stage. But for now, it affected many of us, not in a good way. It's telling us things need to change.

In an extremely emotive collage created by Qophelo (Figure 4.3), he used the animal farm phrase of 'All animals are equal but some are more equal than others', suggesting that the digital divide for them in the rural context highlighted more than anything that the leaders within the Department of Basic Education prioritize other learners in more urbanized environments, but neglect them from the rural context. Qophelo emphasises in his collage that all young minds matter, regardless of their contextual background. [Figure 4.3]

In a verbatim text accompanying his collage, Qophelo explained:

'All animals are equal but some are more equal than others'. In a democratic South Africa where the constitution clearly states that children have the right to learning, but are not given assurance that education provided will be of the same quality throughout the country and across the education department. This is what our Department of Basic Education has taught us educators in these rural context schools. That although learners are equal, but some are more equal than others in the eyes of our leaders. This was my experience during the COVID-19 pandemic era. I pasted the words 'win for a selected few'. This for me meant the win was for the schools that had means to learn during the pandemic and shutdown of schools. These are urban schools who used digital devices during COVID-19 shutdown to learn. I have two slides that are a contrast. One slide has holes, which represents the poor districts like my own, and the other slide, written rich districts, has no holes and it is smooth sailing. The slide with holes represents my district, which had so many challenges implementing the mandates from our leaders. [Figure 4.3]

A collage by Nandi in Qhakaza suggests there was an imbalance in how the leaders supported schools. This collage suggests there should have been equity instead of equality. Equity would have ensured all schools, all districts, within the country and all learners were afforded the same experiences and opportunities, as this was a global pandemic and not a provincial or district disaster (Figure 4.8). She stated:

Imbalance of support in schools. That was my feeling throughout the pandemic and after. I understand that our contextual factors prevented us from learning during the lockdown but what about the period of phasing in learners or even now. Where is the support and programmes to close the knowledge gaps created through the pandemic? I have the picture of equity vs equality. The approach in support cannot be the same for schools that were already thriving in resources and even in infrastructure with schools that were under resourced and were struggling even before COVID-19. COVID-19 highlighted all the challenges we had in our school, the shortage in learning material and even in infrastructure. I feel like there should be more support provided to schools like my own.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented, analysed, and interpreted the data generated through semi-structured interviews and collage portraits. The next chapter presents the discussion of findings, limitation of the study, recommendations and conclusion.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter of the study summarises the findings presented in the previous chapter in relation to the two research questions. The study was conducted in rural contexts in two KZN primary schools and the participants were selected purposively based on their geographical context and that they were teaching before and during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter begins with a discussion of the findings, then highlights the limitations of the study, in addition, assessing its implications. Finally, it makes recommendations for future research.

Data has been gathered and is presented in this study in relation to the two research questions:

1. What are the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How have the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic affected the professional relationships between teachers and learners?

5.2 Discussion of findings

The interviews and collages were essential data generation tools in answering the research questions in this study. In its efforts of relating findings of this study to the pertinent literature, this study used the Hargreaves (2001) emotional geographies as a theoretical framework. In a study conducted by Chisango and Marongwe (2021) on the digital divide in three disadvantaged schools, they argue that schools in disadvantaged societies have been, and continue to be, less prepared for adversity such as COVID-19 in terms of ICT and technological advances. Rural context teachers and learners situated in low socio-economic areas like the ones sampled for this study are unprepared to fully adopt online teaching and learning. Even if there were to be an urgent need to do so in the near future, these less resourced schools would continue to be unprepared unless they are brought to the same level as that of their counterparts in terms of resources.

The afore mentioned findings of the study highlight issues of social justice in education that need to be addressed. Hackman (2005) narrates social justice in education as a process and framework that empower learners to be actively involved in their own education and support their teachers in providing democratic and critical educational environments. Hooks (1994)

emphasised on the importance of collaboration and discussions of various stakeholders who are intentional about developing teaching practices for the aim of creating a space for intervention. Social justice in education embody vital goals such as justice, critical pedagogy, anti- oppressive education, empathy and equality (Hackman 2005). Williams et al. (2021) presents data collected on the provision of technological gadgets during COVID pandemic to facilitate learning in schools, this article clearly shows that even when there has been equality on the distribution of resources, there were still digital inequalities. There were challenges that existed in some geographical contexts prior COVID that prevented the access and use of technological tools provided. Challenges are unique to each geographical context and thus the provision of any form of assistance should address this and focus on equity rather than equality (Hall et al. 2020). Social justice should therefore emphasise radical transformation in the education system with aim of eradicating the long lasting traces of oppressive education that was birthed by the apartheid system in South Africa.

Findings of this study have revealed that rural context schools lacked prior COVID-19 and during COVID, technological resources to carry them through the pandemic which draws from the literature provided by scholars such as (Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) and Ncokwana (2020)) in the first chapter of the study, that narrate the oppressive history of our education system. These findings are a testament that the oppressive methods of apartheid still carry a lasting effect in our education system to date (Calderwood 2003). The findings in this study through a collage created by one of the participants clearly depicted a picture of what equity and equality looked like for them as teachers. This collage showing equality as everyone being provided the same resources despite their unique needs. Thus we can see a picture on the collage, people of different heights being provided equal height chair to stand on which ultimately serves only the tallest in the group who could already see over the fence without the chair. The equity picture shows people of different needs being catered according to their needs. Here we see the shortest person being offered the tallest chair to stand on because those are his needs which are unique to him. The findings show that teachers in rural school contexts have unique needs and need resources that can cater for their unique situation.

5.2.1 Research question one: What are the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The primary objective of this study was to identify the teaching practices that were adopted by the teachers in rural context schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings reveal that the

teaching practices teachers adopted, had numerous challenges, these challenges prevented teachers and their learners to sustain the adopted teaching practices. Research conducted highlights through the professional distance theme, that teachers adopted online teaching and learning practices at the start of school closure, but the strategy soon collapsed. Another teaching strategy adopted by one of the researched schools, was the social page directed by the school principal, intending to distribute learning materials electronically. This second attempted teaching strategy was also unsuccessful. The findings highlighted the moral distance theme, that teachers expressed concerns regarding the teaching practices they adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to their pre-pandemic teaching methods. Before the onset of COVID-19, their teaching approaches were characterized by a learner-centred approach, active interaction with learners and grouping learners. Participants expressed concern about how COVID-19 drastically changed the norm and left them questioning their purpose for teaching. In the moral distance theme, when describing their teaching methods before the pandemic, most participants employed the term 'traditional' to characterize their approach. They further explained that their pedagogy involved standing in front of the learners. Teachers predominantly utilized chalkboards, textbooks and their verbal communication as primary teaching aids. With this method, teachers could effectively deliver lessons and conduct formative assessments within the classroom. Teachers received immediate feedback to identify content gaps and adapt their teaching accordingly. This teaching strategy also provided teachers with a clear sense of their role in the classroom. They articulated how the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a profound disruption to their conventional teaching practices and led to introspection regarding the very purpose of their role as educators.

The findings seem to indicate that teachers in the rural contexts were willing to adopt the online teaching and learning strategy as a method that would be beneficial to their learners. Although some participants suggested that they were able to set learner activities to do at home, Van der Berg and Spaul (2020) argue that teachers in South African schools lack the necessary ICT skills. One teacher mentioned the social page set up by the school. It is thus clear that teachers had already adopted the teaching practice of using social platforms, although it failed due to school's location. Findings provide clarity that the adopted teaching practice of online teaching and learning during the lockdown could only be advantageous to learners residing in more urbanized locations.

Leaders such as the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Buti Manamela, foresaw the challenge of the digital divide. He foresaw that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds would suffer from this divide when the country made moves to adopt online teaching and learning and he stated: “No student should be left behind. Students who have no study gadgets or internet connectivity should not be treated as though they were the cause of #Covid-19” (Njilo, 2020). Findings in this study corroborate Manamela’s statement. Teachers expressed great concern for their learners in rural contexts with limitations that prevented online teaching and learning. In an article, Nkomo et al. (2023) state that only 11.7% of South African schools offered e-learning platforms in 2020. They (2023) further narrate that within that number, geographical divides presented the country with 24.7% of urban school learners that adopted online teaching and learning. Rural schools sat at just 7.6% of online teaching and learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Nkomo et al.’s (2023) statement is a testament to the statement by Manamela along with the findings of this study.

The findings seem to suggest that in both schools the participants encountered challenges. These challenges prevented teachers and learners from adopting and carrying out the online teaching and learning practice. Challenges also prevented the distribution of learning materials to parents via school WhatsApp groups throughout the school closure. Both researched schools are situated in rural contexts within low socio-economic communities. Contextual challenges like limited internet connectivity and limited access to digital devices contributed to the digital divide. The challenge of the digital divide in South African schools is easily observed in less resourced schools situated in the low socio-economic areas when compared to schools in affluent suburbs (Department of Education, 2004). Chisango and Marongwe (2021) put emphasis on statements made by the Department of Education, as they clarify in depth how the digital divide was worsened by the pandemic. In corroboration with the statement made by the (DOE, 2004) above, similar findings in this study were revealed through the moral distance theme. Participants had concerns with lagging behind on the curriculum coverage due to the digital divide. According to Chisango and Marongwe (2021), the Student Representative Council (SRC) of the University of Johannesburg noted in 2020 that the most excluded people from technological advances are usually those that are situated in rural areas and in developing countries. Findings reveal that both schools were excluded from any technological advances. In the theme of political distance, teachers express how the pandemic exposed the digital divide in schools when they discovered some schools advanced with curriculum coverage during the lockdown.

The COVID-19 pandemic created an urgent need for teachers worldwide to learn new technologies in addition to their content subjects (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020). In this study, participants frequently raised the issue that they were able to remotely prepare academic work for their learners as teachers. However, the challenge was that the work they prepared could not reach their learners. Teachers also said that they did not have any sort of interactive learning and teaching due to contextual factors on the learners' side. This barrier resulted in loss of valuable time. Notably, UNICEF (2023) asserts that South African learners lost approximately 46% of schooling within the past two years.

Communication between teachers and parents was a common theme across all eight participants. They expressed concerns that parents should have served as the vital link for information exchange between teachers and learners during the lockdown. They emphasized that both parents and teachers share the responsibility of facilitating effective communication regarding the students' progress and needs. Teachers stressed that for remote learning to succeed, parents need to play an active role. During the lockdown, school premises were off-limits to everyone, preventing teachers from preparing hardcopy activities for their learners. They felt they had no choice but to wait for COVID-19 restrictions to lift before traditional teaching and learning could resume. An alternative would be to adopt electronic teaching methods, as seen in more privileged schools, but this was not a feasible plan. Findings suggest that when schools partially reopened, some parents allowed their children to continue staying at home. This highlights the difficulties of low adult literacy in the community and sociocultural differences. It can be reasoned that these challenges contributed to the sociocultural gap mentioned by Hargreaves (2001), as explained in the previous chapter.

The findings underscore that during the lockdown period, and up to the present, the geographical context of rural areas posed challenges due to limited network coverage. Consequently, parents and learners faced difficulties accessing learning materials through social platforms. This reflects the impact of these contextual constraints on the online teaching practice adopted during COVID-19. Poor internet connectivity and expensive Wi-Fi connections in South Africa were also identified as contributing factors to parents' inability to access learning materials for their learners (Crompton et al., 2023). This emphasizes the impact of these contextual constraints on the teaching practices adopted during COVID-19. On average the current cost per gigabyte is R38.93 from major mobile network providers

(Crompton et al., 2023). South Africa ranks 136th worldwide, on data affordability (Biggs, 2021).

Findings reveal that in addition to attempting online teaching and learning, schools also attempted to strengthen communication between teachers and parents. This was a strategy that would allow parents to collect learning activities on behalf of their children. Communication between the two parties was vital, as it could also have allowed parents to collect hardcopy learning activities at certain pickup points. In the sociocultural theme, great concern was expressed by teachers about the lack of communication between them and parents. Limited internet connectivity contributed to the restricted communication. This continued into the period of phasing in learners. Findings reveal difficulties even when learners were partially phased in, rotating school days and taking activities to complete at home. Parents' lack of communication with teachers due to limited network coverage prevented them from gaining insight on how to assist their children with the numerous activities they received at school.

Lack of communication was a huge deterrent for these participant teachers, especially during the hard lockdown. Teachers had learnt that some schools were able to continue with curriculum coverage using social platforms and electronic devices. To corroborate this statement, in a study comparing South African teachers and teachers from the United States during COVID-19, Crompton et al. (2023) suggest that teachers from South Africa were far less resourced. South African teachers lacked technology, internet connectivity and technological gadgets like laptops and webcams. A statement reported in The South African newspaper makes this point: "This pandemic is proving that South Africa is not ready for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) if its implementation calls for some people to be left behind. It also highlights the gap that exists between the rich and the poor, and that the marginalized and disenfranchised are always left behind" (Ncwane, 2020). This statement seems to relate to both schools in this study, as there is a lack of technological resources and internet connectivity, amongst many other shortages, in these schools. This draws a conclusion that South Africa may not be ready for the fourth industrial revolution, as its implementation leaves schools and communities like these behind.

Through the moral distance theme, the findings show that schools like the ones sampled in this study were unable to successfully adopt teaching strategies that would carry them throughout the hard lockdown. Thus, teaching and learning time was lost due to the lockdown, but rushing

through the syllabus would not be a viable solution, as it would only minimize the quality of education provided to the learner (Mthethwa, 2020).

The findings illuminate how the issue of the digital divide exposed additional challenges prevalent in rural contexts. Du Plessis & Mestry (2019) explains the challenges rural schools face as lack of parental interest in their children's education, lack of resources and insufficient state funding to mention a few. In the moral distance theme, findings pointed out that a significant proportion of the adult population in the area faces low literacy levels. Furthermore, the low literacy rate has led to parents being unable to allocate the necessary time, attention, and care to their children's education. This includes the inability of parents to engage with teachers in accessing learning materials for their children during lockdown.

To highlight the importance of meritoriously using the remaining time of the year, the Minister of Basic Education spoke at length about the disruption caused by the pandemic and the importance of using the little time that was left in the year 2020 for effective teaching and learning. She instructed South African schools to adopt the ICT and online teaching and learning as a means to rescue what was left of the 2020 academic year (Motshekga, 2020). However, some findings through collages show intense dissatisfaction in leadership within the education sector. Phrases such as confused, ghosted, leaders ghosted teachers, scared learners and confusing timetable are evidence to show this dissatisfaction. Findings in the political distance theme reveal how teachers relied on the upper power structures for direction. Teachers also expressed how they felt let them down by leaders who were unreachable during such a critical time when teachers needed direction. Findings also reveal the lack of resources as another limitation that hindered the progress of adopting online teaching and learning in both schools. These two rural context schools are quintile 1 schools situated in low socio-economic areas. Learners are in no position to own electronic gadgets such as laptops. Teachers expressed how they felt let down by their leaders upon discovering that some schools were advancing with the curriculum through the use of electronic devices.

Gustafsson (2022) explains a correlation between learning time lost during COVID-19 lockdown and large socio-economic inequalities. Schools are allocated a grant from the state accordingly through the National Norms and Standards (Sayed et al., 2020). It is important to note that learners who own electronic gadgets are not supplied by the schools using state funds. State funds are reserved to maintain school needs and the (learning and teaching support

materials) (Sayed et al., 2020). Hoadley (2020) asserts that adaption of remote teaching and learning strategies widened the inequality gap, as this strategy greatly depended on the capacity of each home to provide the necessary additional educational support and resources. Learners in both these schools were in no position to acquire any additional learning gadgets or resources.

The political distance is summarized as the different understandings of power. Hargreaves (2001) highlights how structures of power hold the ultimate power to control the order of interaction and practice. Power structures present mandates and teachers have the responsibility of implementing the decisions passed down to them at ground level. An article on teacher resilience during COVID-19 reports on South African teacher participants relaying that the only form of support they can recall as a means to deal with the time lost and curriculum coverage after the lockdown was in the form of trimming the curriculum (Crompton et al., 2023). Hoadley (2023) asserts that the tightly structured time-bound curriculum required the Department of Basic Education to implement central curriculum strategies. There could either be a reduction in curriculum content, suspension of subjects, changes to assessment or remote learning (Hoadley, 2020). In preparation for school opening in June of 2020, there was trimming of the curriculum as a means of ensuring the most essential topics were covered (Hoadley, 2023). Recovery ATP's were issued in December of 2020, curriculum content was trimmed and the focus was covering minimum content, which were priority topics (Hoadley, 2023). Findings revealed the lack of support from leaders and teachers felt it was unfair that some schools were able to cover more of the curriculum than others. Findings of the study suggest that trimming the curriculum may have been an attainable goal due to time constraints, but teachers felt there was still no equality, as some schools were already advancing with the curriculum during the hard lockdown.

Findings also unveiled the adoption of a rotational timetable as a new period with changes that teachers had to adapt to. Higher political structures had mandated the phasing in of learners gradually, thus rotating school days (Macupe, 2020). Teachers expressed through the moral distance theme, that their teaching practices prior to COVID-19 included grouping learners. This strategy served as group work, but also as a means to share textbooks, as findings also reveal the textbooks shortage. Teachers expressed how their teaching practices had to also change to accommodate the rotation timetable that had been introduced. A collage explained this period as a 'tale of terror'. This shows how uncomfortable teachers were regarding adopting this particular alternative pedagogical teaching practice of not being permitted to

group learners in order to adhere to social distancing and also to teach learners through giving them loads of homework. Homework was to be completed at home on the days they would be off school to allow another group to attend. The rotation timetable seems to have been a huge challenge, as teachers explained that this method suggested that they give learners a lot of homework to do on the days they would be away from school (Hoadley, 2023). This proved fruitless, as most learners had no one to assist them at home with homework, especially coming from a community with a large proportion of adult illiteracy. Participants stated that mathematics is a subject that needs a lot of practice and requires a lot of hands-on assistance with a teacher. Participants suggested the rotation timetable disadvantaged the mathematics subject, but learners of that year were simply progressed to the next grade without the required minimum curriculum coverage of mathematics content.

As COVID-19 was a national pandemic, most education decisions were broadcast and presented nationally by the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motsekga. One can draw the conclusion that decisions taken were general and were a ‘one size fits all’ approach. However, different geographical contexts hold different issues and challenges that create difficulty in implementing the decisions taken by the higher structures, even adopting new teaching practices.

How one perceives the norms of professional practice can create either closeness or distance, which is what Hargreaves (2001) describes as professional distance. Participants constantly mentioned how they were disadvantaged by a professional teaching practice in urban context schools during the lockdown. On the one hand, the use of social platforms and digital devices by teachers in urban contexts was a good teaching practice for both they and their learners. On the other hand, this practice was a destructive one in rural contexts, as participants narrated their inability to adopt this teaching strategy. Findings suggest that access to these teaching aids was not feasible for teachers in both these rural context schools. This made a good teaching method seem like a destructive one, because it created inequality in the education sphere. One half of South African learners covered the curriculum, and one half could not (Sayed et al., 2020). The findings suggest that teachers in rural contexts were uncomfortable, as they felt that the inequality, and the knowledge gaps created by this, was unfair to their learners, as the education system expected all learners to be on the same level with curriculum coverage (Hoadley, 2023). It is also noted that the matric exam paper is always the same for all learners in public schools, despite the challenges learners in rural contexts face.

Findings reveal how this issue was further exacerbated by the Department of Basic Education, through the introduction of the rotation timetable when COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. Participants narrated that most dissatisfaction came from the reduced time spent with learners. This meant that again learners would be disadvantaged by poor curriculum coverage. Teachers said their concerns emerged from the fact that they saw learners sometimes once or twice a week at most, during the period of phasing in learners and using the rotation timetable.

Adding to the already challenged teachers, lack of resources proved to be another load to carry. Teachers explained how they could group learners prior to COVID-19 in attempts to share the minimum resources they have, such as textbooks and stationary. However, when the new teaching method of a rotation timetable was introduced, the sharing resources in class and away from school (textbooks) for homework was a difficulty. Isaacs (2007) explains that the Department of Education in South Africa developed Thusong in 2005, which is a centre of learning providing access to online resources to parents, school managers, teachers and learners. This centre was developed in attempting to bridge the gap in accessing materials. Centre's such as Thusong should have been essential to learners during the lockdown, accessing activities to ensure academic advancement continued even during the lockdown. However, for communities like the one in this study, it is important to note that there are issues of limited internet connectivity and WIFI access.

The findings clearly indicate that teachers had minimal input in the change and adoption of new teaching practices during the period of COVID-19. As for teachers in rural contexts, they were presented with even fewer options of new teaching practices by the higher structures.

5.2.2 Research question two: How have the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic affected the professional relationship between teachers and learners?

This research question intended to address the effects of teaching practices that were adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these practices affected the professional relationships that existed between teachers and their learners prior to the pandemic. Findings summarise the negativity that the COVID-19 pandemic brought into teacher-learner professional relationships. In the sociocultural theme, findings highlight that the lack of communication due to contextual factors during this period seems to have added strain to the teacher-learner professional relationships in both schools.

Findings in the physical distance theme suggest that teachers felt at an enormous distance from their learners and the parents, who had not helped to bridge the gap during the pandemic. Teachers narrated that they could not physically be in the same space as their learners. They revealed the void they felt was more a desire to cater to the need of academic content delivery in a manner they were accustomed to. This accustomed method had allowed them to bond with their learners. Findings reveal that the fact that some learners did not return to school when they were being phased in affected the teacher-learner relationship negatively.

It is revealed in the professional distance theme that the introduction of the rotation timetable further impacted the teacher-learner professional relationship negatively. Teachers provide more than just content and curriculum to their learners, but they play other crucial roles. The Norms and Standards for Educators lists seven roles of an educator (Kimathi & Rusznyak, 2018). The one role that teachers highlighted was that of pastoral care. Teachers said they were unable to see their learners daily as they had prior to COVID-19, which meant they could not interact with their learners daily because of the alternate days of schooling policy. Teachers narrate that even when learners were at school on those particular days, COVID-19 restrictions dictated that there should be no close interaction and social distancing should be adhered to. Teachers expressed how learners could no longer have intimate conversations with their teachers, even about things that were not curriculum related.

Findings of this study highlight the importance of teacher-learner professional relationship. Spilt et al. (2011) suggest that positive teacher-learner relationships provide a vital source of purpose in the work of a teacher. The changes and disruptions to the teacher-learner relationship can affect the teacher's sense of professional identity (Kim & Asbury, 2020). As mentioned in the previous chapter of this study, teachers are multifaceted, holding many important roles in the life of a learner other than that of being their teacher and providing them with knowledge (Kimathi & Rusznyak, 2018).

Findings of this study reveal the teaching method of learner centred classes and interactive learning with the teacher as the facilitator strengthened the professional relationship between teacher and learner. Teachers narrated how prior to COVID-19 they could easily spot learners that were awkwardly silent in class or showed drastic behavioural changes during learning and discussions. They would be able to talk with that learner privately. Teachers expressed how, as class teachers prior to COVID-19, they were able to pick up learners with learning barriers whilst teaching in class or through interaction with their learners. In the physical distance theme

teachers expressed the negative impact on the teacher-learner professional relationship during COVID-19, thus preventing teachers from picking up those barriers and providing the much needed assistance to their learners. To corroborate findings of this study on how physical distance due to the pandemic impacted negatively on teacher-learner professional relationships, I draw on an international context article. Kim and Asbury (2020) share findings on how much teachers in England valued their relationship with their learners. These teachers expressed how their professional identity was affected due to the abrupt school closures in England due to COVID-19 pandemic (Kim & Asbury, 2020). They further narrate how the physical distance between them and their learners affected their bond and professional relationship (Kim & Asbury, 2020).

Hargreaves (2001) suggests that in the physical distance theme people bond emotionally rather than physically. Therefore, distance should be of less concern compared to emotions. Findings in this study are in contradiction to this statement by Hargreaves (2001). Teachers from both schools in this study had no interaction at all with their learners during school closure. This may have also impacted on the negative effects on teacher-learner professional relationships. Findings have revealed there is a great need to understand that teachers connect on a deeper level with their learners beyond that of curriculum deliverance. Hargreaves (2001) explains this as the moral distance. Teachers explained the emotional exhaustion experienced during the lockdown, created by the need to know how their learners were. Teachers expressed in the physical distance theme, that when learners returned gradually to school, they still could not have close interaction with learners as they did prior to COVID-19 due to pandemic restrictions. It is evident through the findings that this was a very confusing period for teachers in understanding and fulfilling their purpose for teaching and that this period also had a negative impact on the teacher-learner professional relationship.

5.3 Limitations of the study

While this study adopted a case study research design, which allows for in-depth data collection, the study consisted of a small group of teachers in rural context schools. Both schools researched were from the same area, so it is possible that problems experienced by Ithemba Primary School may be similar to Qhakaza Primary School. I am a teacher in a school within the same district and circuit as the two schools sampled, and therefore conscious of the contextual challenges. However, chances of bias were eliminated because I do not work in either of the two schools where data was collected. In attempts to limit bias, detailed records of data collected are kept. However, as has been explained, in a qualitative study where even

tests done are developed by a human, chances of bias cannot be completely ruled out (Shenton, 2004). One of the limitations of this study is that a large part of the data collected was based on participants' experiences and feelings, which are subjective and changeable in nature. Another limitation is this study covered a small convenience sample of teachers from two primary schools in similar geographical context in one province in the country. Therefore, these findings, being based only on this small sample, cannot be generalized to all teachers in rural context schools in South Africa at large.

5.4 Implications of the findings

Drawing from the teacher interviews and collages, one can undoubtedly conclude that teachers in these rural context schools had a rather unpleasant experience during the lockdown. This continued during the period of phasing in learners and rotating school days for learners. Teachers had to discard their 'traditional' teaching practices. The adoption of new teaching practices proved to be a difficult challenge. This is not because teachers failed to adopt the new teaching practices. This was because teachers were expected to adopt these teaching practices in geographical contexts that were not conducive.

Teachers (except one) from both schools highlighted how the adopted teaching practices resulted in a negative impact on teacher-learner professional relationship. The geographical context caused obstacles in their attempts to continue teaching and learning. Shortages of technological electronic gadgets deepened and widened the digital divide between less resourced schools in rural contexts and the well-resourced schools in affluent geographical contexts. Therefore, all the stakeholders including DBE, non- governmental organisations and school governing bodies must work together to provide resources in rural schools.

5.5 Recommendations for future research

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the Department of Basic Education provide strategies and programmes that will assess the knowledge gaps created in the past two and a half years due to the pandemic. This study also recommends that the department implement strategies that will cover these knowledge gaps and all the topics that were trimmed from the curriculum. Teachers are essential tools in curriculum deliverance and should therefore be equipped to have adequate information and strategies on how to close these knowledge gaps. Moreover, the study recommends that the department provide workshops that will develop strategies that are suitable for each geographical context, thus addressing issues specifically for schools in those areas. This will prevent a 'one size fits all' approach that teachers expressed dissatisfaction with. Finally, this study also recommends that the stakeholders in the

Department of Basic Education address the challenges highlighted in rural contexts and put in place policies that will address them, especially those that will arise in the future as a result of gaps created by the pandemic.

5.6 Conclusion

This study explored the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on teaching practices and teacher-learner professional relationships in a rural school context. The semi-structured interviews and collage portraits presented an opportunity to explore teachers' narratives on how the orthodox teaching practices were considered to be ineffective due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how teachers had to adopt alternate pedagogical methods. Using the Hargreaves (2001) emotional geographies theoretical framework, I was able to discover the emotive responses of teachers from both schools. This study underscores that most teachers were uncomfortable with the new teaching practices they had to adopt to due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The key findings of the study indicated that the adopted teaching practices, along with the enormous obstacles, prevented the rural context teachers to cover the curriculum amid COVID-19. Findings highlight the ineffectiveness of the rotation timetable as a teaching strategy that was introduced by the Department of Basic Education in attempts to curb the spread of the virus in schools by bringing in a portion of a class or grade only on certain days. These findings imply that the effects of lockdown and adopted teaching strategies on the teacher- learner professional relationship were subjective from teacher to teacher. Most teachers expressed that the gap created by physical distance produced a crack in the emotional bonds they shared with their learners. Only one teacher felt that her relationship with her learners was not affected at all by the adopted teaching practices. Findings of the study also indicate that the shortage of LTSM (textbooks) was an obstacle experienced by both teachers and learners when grouping learners could no longer be used as part of traditional teaching practices due to COVID-19 regulations and the rotation timetable. The study findings underscore that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed contextual disadvantages that rural context schools face daily. These highlighted disadvantages prevented curriculum coverage during the lockdown and presented huge difficulties even when learners were phased back into schools. Findings argue that rural context schools could not adopt effective pedagogical strategies of teaching and learning during the lockdown due to contextual factors. Also highlighted is that these contextual factors negatively impacted on the professional relationships between teachers and their learners.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



24 June 2022

Siphesihle Nomvelo Ngubane (210521418)
School Of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear SN Ngubane,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004155/2022

Project title: The impact of coronavirus disease pandemic on teaching practices and teacher-learner professional relationships in a rural school context.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 28 April 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 24 June 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)

/dd

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 B: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1063

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Ref.:2/4/8/4029

Ms SN Ngubane
H57 Unit 6 Buthelezi Road
Hammarisdale
MPUMALANGA
3699

Dear Ms Ngubane

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS"**, 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 15 March 2022 to 02 March 2025.
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.

UMZINYATHI DISTRICT



Mr GN Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 29 March 2022

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO PRINCIPALS



UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants

Request for permission to conduct research project

Project title: *The Impact of Coronavirus Pandemic on teaching practices and teacher-learner professional relationships in a rural school context.*

Date: 14/04/2022

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Nomvelo Ngubane, a student in the School of Education specialising in Teacher Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu- Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus). I am conducting a research study as part of the requirement for Masters in Education degree. The research project title is “The impact of Coronavirus Pandemic on teaching practices and teacher- learner relationships in a rural school context” The study aims to explore teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during COVID-19 pandemic. It also intends to investigate how the teaching practices adopted amid COVID-19 have affected the relationships between teachers and learners.

I kindly request permission to conduct this research study in your school. This study is expected to use four participants in your school. Two novice teachers, who have a teaching experience of 0-3 years. Two experienced teachers with a minimum of 3 years teaching. One of the experienced teachers will be the Head of Department. Every

participant must have been teaching in the school from beginning of 2020 up to date. Participants in this research study will be required to participate in a semi- structured interview that is expected to last between 40- 45 minutes at a time suitable for each participant. Follow-up interviews may be conducted if necessary. Each interview will be voice-recorded. Another day will be scheduled with the participants to receive the transcribed interview notes. Participants will then use those notes to create a collage at a time convenient for them without the supervision of the researcher. All materials and guidelines on creating the collage will be provided. The data will not be made public in any way and will only be used for research purposes. The school and teacher's identity will not be made public. The data will be kept anonymous; it will not be possible for it to be linked to the name of the school.

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

My contact details:

Cell phone: 072 XXXX XXX

Email address: 210521418@stu.ukzn.ac.za

My supervisor: Dr F-Q.B. Zulu who is located at the School of Education, Pietermaritzburg. Tel 0332605723, Email: zuluf1@ukzn.ac.za

The UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details below.

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

Thank you for your cooperation.

Nomvelo Ngubane

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I, _____ (Name of the Principal) have been informed about the study entitled: The Impact of Covid-19 on teaching practices and teacher-learner professional relationships in a rural school context.

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 participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time

If I have any questions or concerns about the study or the researcher, 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

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS



UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

Project title: *The Impact of Coronavirus Pandemic on teaching practices and teacher-learner professional relationships in a rural school context.*

Date: 07/06/2022

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Nomvelo Ngubane, a student in the School of Education specialising in Teacher Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu- Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus). I humbly request you to participate in the research study titled: “The Impact of Coronavirus Pandemic on teaching practices and teacher-learner professional relationships in a rural school context”. The research study focuses on the impact of Covid-19 on teaching practices and teacher- learner relationships in a rural school context and aims to explore teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during Covid-19 pandemic. It also focusses on how the teaching practices adopted amid covid-19 have affected the relationships between teachers and learners.

This study aims to use four participants in your school. Two novice teachers, who have a teaching experience of 0-3 years. Two experienced teachers with a minimum of 3 years

teaching. One of the experienced teachers will be the Head of Department. Every participant must have been teaching in the school from beginning of 2020 up to date. Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may withdraw participation at any point without loss of benefit or treatment. The researcher may also opt to terminate a participant from the study due to obtaining identifiable information that may put the participant at risk.

If you are willing to participate in this study you will be required to participate in a semi-structured interview that is expected to last between 40- 45 minutes at a time suitable for each participant. Follow-up interviews may be conducted if necessary. Each interview will be voice-recorded. Another day will be scheduled with the participants to receive the transcribed interview notes. Participants will then use those notes to create a collage at a time convenient for them without the supervision of the researcher. All materials and guidelines on creating the collage will be provided. The data will not be made public in any way and will only be used for research purposes. The school and teacher's identity will not be made public. The data will be kept anonymous; it will not be possible for it to be linked to the name of the school.

If you become traumatised during the research study a psychological support for you at your best suitable time has been organised with SADAG Higher Health Helpline. A qualified Psychologist will be available for 24 hours. You can call at 0800363636 or send the message at 43336 or email: higherhealth@sadag.org

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

My contact details:

Cell phone: 072 XXXX XXX

Email address: 210521418@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Supervisor: My supervisor is Dr F-Q.B. Zulu who is located at the School of Education, Pietermaritzburg. Tel 0332605723, Email: zuluf1@ukzn.ac.za

The UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details below.

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

Thank you for your cooperation.



Nomvelo Ngubane

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I, _____ (participant) have been informed about the study entitled: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the teaching profession

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 participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time

I have been given information about the psychological support available for me if I become traumatised during the research study.

I hereby provide consent to: (Please circle response)

Audio-recording of interview proceedings	YES	NO
Make the collage as per the researcher' guidelines.	YES	NO

If I have any questions or concerns about the study or the researchers, 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

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Semi- Structured interview questions for primary school teachers.

Title: The impact of CORONAVIRUS Pandemic on teaching practices and teacher-learner professional relationships in a rural school context.

Research questions:

1. What are the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How have the teaching practices adopted amid COVID-19 affected the professional relationships between teachers and learners?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. This study is necessary for me to fulfil the requirements of my Master's Degree.

A. Biographical questions

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What teaching post level do you hold currently?
3. What education qualification do you have?
4. What grades and subjects do you teach?

B. What are the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1. How would you describe your teaching practices prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, January 2020?
2. What would you describe as changes in your teaching practices during the first hard lockdown in March 2020?
3. How would you describe your teaching experience during this period and how did this period affect your teaching practices?
4. Can you please share your teaching experiences with reference to one of the subjects that you are teaching? How were you teaching your subject during Covid-19 lock down? What resources were you using? What type of activities did you do in class?

5. Do you think there are any worth mentioning changes now since the schools have phased in all learners in class after such a long period? If so, can you describe those changes.
6. Please tell me as a teacher, do you feel these adopted teaching practices were received well by your learners?
7. How have all of these changes affected how you view yourself as a teacher?

C. How have the teaching practices adopted amid COVID-19 affected the professional relationships between teachers and learners?

1. What gives you most satisfaction in your work as a teacher?
2. Did you have any form of communication with your learners during the lockdown?
3. Please explain, how did being physically away from your learners during the lockdown affect your professional relationship with your learners?
4. How did the teaching practices adopted amid COVID-19 affected the professional relationships between teachers and learners? Please explain
5. In your experience how would you describe teaching practices adopted amid COVID-19

APPENDIX F: COLLAGE GUIDELINES

COLLAGE GUIDELINE

I will ask the participants to reflect back to the time during COVID-19. Considering the geographical context of their schools and the impact of the pandemic on them and their learners. When reflecting back, the two questions should be addressed in their reflections.

Key research- questions:

What are the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools during COVID-19 pandemic?

How have the teaching practices adopted by teachers in rural context schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic affected the professional relationships between teachers and learners?

Participants will be provided with a chart and all the needed stationary and magazines, newspapers and an example of what a collage looks like. After completing their interviews and using these eight steps, participants can follow these steps to create a collage portrait (Gerstenblatt, 2013).

- Listen to their recorded interview and writing down what they feel is important.
- Printing out pictures they will use for their collage
- Looking at and highlighting parts of their interview notes they have written down after listening to the recorded interview
- Looking at the magazines and newspapers, selecting images and cutting out pictures and text.
- Arrange the text and images
- Identify themes as they emerge
- Add colour, words, hand drawn imagery and continuously refer back to the notes, making additions of text and images to the collage as needed.

Researcher will collect the collage portraits a week after the interview has been done.

APPENDIX G: TURNITIN ORIGINALITY REPORT

Five Chapters

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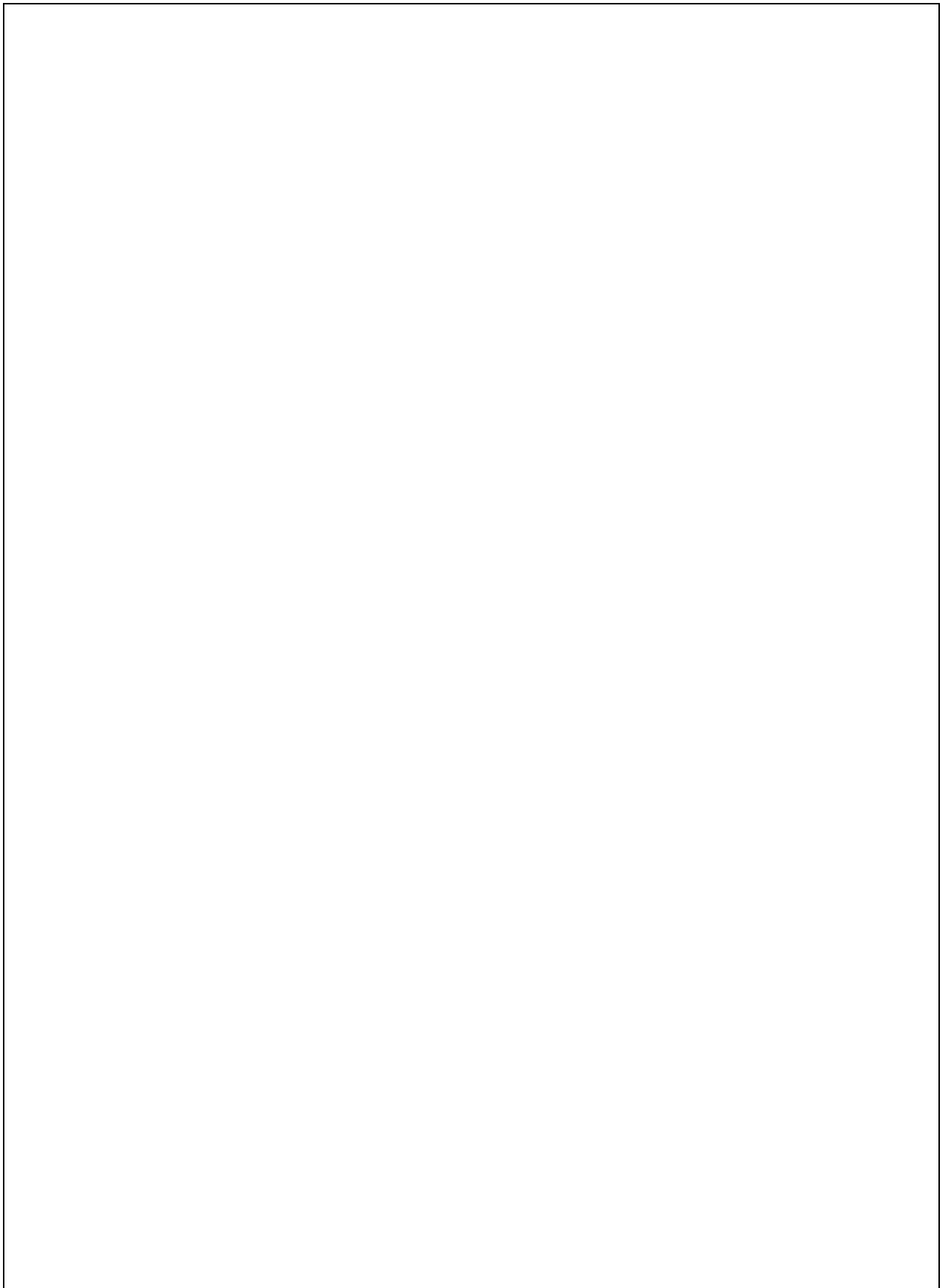
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