



Exploring educators' experiences during COVID-19: A case study of a primary school in Hammarsdale Township

Kopano Kupa

(223051330)

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree: Master of Social Science in Clinical Psychology

in the

DISCIPLINE OF PSYCHOLOGY

School of Applied Human Sciences, College of Humanities

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, South Africa.

April 2026

Supervised by

Dr Thabani Khumalo

Declaration

I, *Kopano Kupa (223031550)*, declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs, or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
 - a. Their words have been rewritten, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.
 - b. Where their exact words have been used, then their writing has been placed in italics and inside quotation marks and referenced.
5. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References section.

Signed:

STUDENT



25 August 2025

Kopano Kupa

SUPERVISOR



Dr Thabani Khumalo

25 August 2025

Acknowledgements

As I present this dissertation, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Thabani Khumalo, for his expert guidance and support throughout this research paper. His substantial contributions played a pivotal role in shaping and refining this academic endeavour and have helped me as an aspiring researcher. Thank you for your support.

To my previous supervisor, Dr Nana Buthelezi, thank you for starting this journey with me.

To my parents, Nape'a Maremo le Hunadi'a Ngwato (Mr and Mrs Kupa), thank you for your support and patience with me. Your wise words lingered in my mind in times of difficulty, as you would echo the Sepedi idiom "Kodimela moepa thutse gago lehumo leo le tšwago kgauswi (work hard queen termite digger, there is no wealth that comes easily)." I am because you are!

To my sister, Yolanda Kupa, kea leboga Mohlapa'a Nape le Hunadi! (clan names).

To myself, Boledi'a Nape, the younger version of myself who dreamed of being a clinical psychologist and an academic, look at you now! I am proud of your tenacious spirit and hard work throughout this journey. The world is your oyster, and you are the pearl.

Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020 caused widespread social and economic disruption, with nearly half of the global workforce at risk of losing their livelihoods. While many professionals transitioned to remote work, educators in under-resourced schools often lacked this opportunity due to socioeconomic constraints. Although the pandemic's broader societal effects, such as increased psychological distress, poverty, and domestic violence, are well documented, little is known about the well-being of educators in township schools. This study aims to explore educators' experiences during this time at a township school in Hammarsdale, KZN. A qualitative, exploratory research design was used, and face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five educators (three females and two males) from Emaxulwini Primary School, who had been employed since March 2020 or earlier. Participants were selected purposively, and data were analysed thematically. The findings suggest that COVID-19 deepened educational inequalities between affluent and disadvantaged schools. The findings reveal that teachers experienced emotional strain with minimal institutional support. Despite their commitment, teachers faced challenges adapting to changing teaching conditions and felt excluded from key policy decisions affecting their work. This study emphasises the importance of including teachers in policymaking and decision-making processes and providing psychological support during such crises. Such interventions may be implemented through programs similar to those designed for frontline workers to alleviate trauma and mental health issues that may arise from working under unfavourable or stressful conditions and to prepare them for similar future crises.

Keywords: COVID-19, educators, experiences, township, school, resilience, KZN.

List of abbreviations

ATP – Annual Teaching Plan
CFC – Child and Family Centre
COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CPD – Continued Professional Development
DBE – Department of Basic Education
DoE – Department of Education
HoD – Head of Department
HPCSA – Health Professions Council of South Africa
HSSREC – Human Social Science Ethics
KZN – KwaZulu-Natal
LER – Learner-Educator-Ratio
LTP – Limited Trimming Programme
RIG – Research Information Gateway
RTA – Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SACE – South African Council for Educators
SARS-CoV-2 – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus type 2
SDG – Sustainable Development Goal
SDL – Self-Directed Learning
STATS SA – Statistics of South Africa
TPCAK – Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge
UKZN – University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNICEF – United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
WHO – World Health Organisation

Table of Contents

Cover page	i
Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
List of Abbreviations	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	xii
List of Figures	xiii
 CHAPTER ONE	 1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research Aim.....	2
1.3 Objectives of the Study.....	2
1.4 Research Questions	3
1.5 Significance of the Study	3
1.6 Definition of Key Terms	4
1.7 Layout of the Research Report	5
1.8 Conclusion	6
 CHAPTER TWO	 7
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Introduction	7

2.2 International Studies on Educators' Experiences During COVID-19.....	7
2.2.1. Structural Deficiencies and Digital Inequality.....	8
2.2.2. Pedagogical Disruption and Curriculum Delivery.....	8
2.2.3. Educator Wellbeing: Burnout, Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Trauma	9
2.2.4. Inequalities Between Public and Private Schooling	10
2.3. Local Studies on Educators' Experiences during the Pandemic.....	10
2.3.1. Historical Context and Systematic Unpreparedness	10
2.3.2. Socioeconomic Context and Limits of Digital Learning	11
2.3.3. Township and Rural Schools: Infrastructure, Safety, and Access.....	12
2.3.4. Contact versus Distance Learning: A False Dichotomy	12
2.3.5. Educator Agency and the Gap in Local Research	13
2.4 Synthesis and Research Gap	14
2.5 The Theoretical Approach of the Research Study	15
2.5.1. Kumpfer's Transactional Resilience Model	15
2.6. Conclusion	17
 CHAPTER THREE	 19
METHODOLOGY	19
3.1 Introduction.....	19
3.2 Research Design.....	19
3.3 Research Paradigm.....	19
3.4 Research Methods.....	20
3.4.1 Sampling and Sampling Methods	20
3.4.2 Inclusion Criteria	21

3.4.3 Sampling Procedure	21
3.5 Data Collection Method	21
3.5.1 Data Collection Procedure	22
3.5.2 Data Transcription	22
3.6 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis	23
3.6.1 Data Analysis Procedure	23
3.6.1.1 Phase 1: Familiarising oneself with the data	23
3.6.1.2 Phase 2: Generating initial codes	24
3.6.1.3 Phase 3: Searching for themes	24
3.6.1.4 Phase 4 Reviewing themes	25
3.6.1.5 Phase 5: Naming and defining the themes	25
3.6.1.6 Phase 6: Drafting the final report	25
3.6.2 Establishing Trustworthiness in Research Study	26
3.6.2.1 Credibility	26
3.6.2.2 Transferability	26
3.6.2.3 Dependability	26
3.6.2.4 Confirmability	27
3.6.2.5 Reflexibility	27
3.7 Ethical Considerations	27
3.8 Conclusion	28
 CHAPTER FOUR	 30
RESULTS	30
4.1 Introduction	30
4.2 Findings of the study	31

4.2.1 Theme 1: Adaptations to Changes.....	31
4.2.2. Theme 2: Innovative Teaching: Multimodal Learning.....	34
4.2.3 Theme 3: Work-Life Balance: Multiple Roles	35
4.2.4. Theme 4: Social-Impact.....	37
4.2.5 Theme 5: Policymaking	39
4.3 Conclusion	41
 CHAPTER FIVE	 42
DISCUSSIONS.....	42
5.1 Introduction.....	42
5.1 Discussion of Findings.....	42
5.1.1 Adaptations to the Environment	42
5.1.2 Adaptations to curriculum	42
5.1.3 Adaptations to teaching.....	44
5.1.4 Innovative teaching.....	45
5.1.5 Work-life balance.....	46
5.1.6 Policymaking	48
5.2 Implications of the Findings on the Theoretical Framework.....	49
5.3 Conclusion	52
 CHAPTER SIX.....	 53
CONCLUSION.....	53
6.1 Introduction.....	53
6.2 Limitations of the Study.....	53

6.3 Recommendations.....	53
6.3.1 With regard to Clinical Practice	54
6.3.2 Concerning Policy	54
6.3.3 Future Research Studies	55
6.4 Conclusion	56
 References.....	 57
Appendices.....	68
Appendix A: Informed Consent.....	68
Appendix B: Interview Schedule	70
Appendix C: Ethical Clearance Letter	71
Appendix D: Gatekeeper Letter	72
Appendix E: Turnitin Similarity Report	73

List of Tables

Table 1 – Percentage of youth dropouts from 2015 to 2021.....	15
Table 2 – Main themes and sub-themes from the obtained data.....	31

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Kumpfer resilience framework.....	15
Figure 2a – Kumpfer's Transactional Resilience Model	15
Figure 2b – Sankey diagram illustrating codes	30
Figure 3 – Provincial curriculum provision and resources across provinces in South Africa	44

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic posed an unprecedented challenge to education systems globally; however, its impact was neither uniform nor equitable across schooling contexts (Soudien et al., 2021; Reimers, 2021). In South Africa, educators working in quintile 3 township schools faced the compounded challenge of sustaining teaching and learning while navigating severe resource constraints, minimal institutional support, and heightened psychosocial stress (Sayed & Singh, 2020; Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). Chingara (2022) describes the COVID-19 period as a “completely new ball game” for teaching, disrupting established pedagogical norms and forcing educators to adapt rapidly to unfamiliar instructional demands. While higher education institutions were able to transition relatively swiftly to remote teaching and learning modalities (Glietenberg et al., 2022), this shift raised critical questions regarding the suitability of such approaches for primary school educators, particularly those in under-resourced South African contexts. Ximba (2022) found that many educators lacked adequate technological infrastructure and faced significant challenges in facilitating teaching and learning under pandemic restrictions. These challenges were compounded by limited opportunities for continuous training and professional development in digital learning, especially within the Foundation Phase, where pedagogy is traditionally relational, interactive, and play-based (Plotka & Guirguis, 2022).

Furthermore, Nomtshongwana (2022) highlights that the absence of comprehensive planning for remote teaching, shortages of protective resources, and insufficient digital skills contributed substantially to teachers’ work-related stress during the pandemic. From an international perspective, Padmanabhanunni and Pretorius (2025) demonstrate that resilience plays a critical role in buffering educators against the negative mental health effects of pandemic-related stressors. Similarly, Sephton’s (2022) findings indicate that the disruption caused by COVID-19 destabilised traditional educational community structures, yet simultaneously created opportunities for schools to adopt more reflective and adaptive practices in response to crisis conditions. Quantitative studies further illustrate how school leaders in rural and marginalised contexts employed innovative strategies to address learners’ needs when physical school attendance was disrupted (White, Harmon, Johnson, & O’Neill, 2021). However, Mukuna (2020) cautions that online learning in low-resource settings was

hindered by numerous structural barriers, including poor parental involvement, incomplete learner tasks, insufficient personal protective equipment, limited network access, and a lack of learning devices.

Despite the growing body of literature on pandemic-era education, existing studies have largely focused on digital access, technological deficits, and structural constraints, often presenting educators' challenges in fragmented or uncoordinated ways (Soudien et al., 2021). What remains under-explored is a holistic, context-specific understanding of educators' lived experiences, particularly among Foundation Phase teachers in quintile 3 township schools, where infrastructural limitations, pedagogical disruption, and psychosocial strain intersect. As public health measures necessitated abrupt shifts in pedagogical practice, educators in under-resourced schools were required to adapt with little preparation, minimal training, and scarce technological support (Ardington et al., 2021). Within this context, teaching became not merely an instructional responsibility but an act of endurance and survival. Educators were compelled to draw on personal and professional coping mechanisms to sustain themselves and their learners amid prolonged uncertainty and adversity. It is within this challenge-laden domain that the present study is situated, seeking to explore educators' experiences of teaching and learning during COVID-19 at a quintile 3 primary school in Hammarsdale Township, with particular attention to how they navigated pedagogical shifts and persevered with little or no formal support.

1.2 Research Study Aim

This research examined educators' experiences during COVID-19 at a township school in Hammarsdale, KZN. The intention was to examine the challenges Emaxulwini educators faced during COVID-19. Emaxulwini is a public school in Hammarsdale township that serves most low-income households. Thus, by conducting this research, we aim to provide a rich understanding of how educators at the aforementioned school survived the COVID-19 calamities with little or no resources. This research will thus provide knowledge of public school experiences in a research-scarce field, helping inform policymaking and adding to the existing literature on public education.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were:

- To explore the experiences of educators at Emaxulwini Primary School during COVID-19.
- To understand the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning practices at Emaxulwini Primary School.
- To explore the support or coping mechanisms implemented to cope with the demands of teaching during the pandemic.
- To recommend best practices and processes to cope with future emergencies and pandemics within the school context.

1.4 Research Questions

- What were the experiences of educators at Emaxulwini Primary School on teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What do these experiences propose about the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning for the educators at Emaxulwini Primary School?
- How did the educators of Emaxulwini Primary School navigate the shift in work demands during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What coping mechanisms were employed by the educators of Emaxulwini Primary School during this time?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The onset of COVID-19 revealed the vulnerability of South Africa's educational system (Soudien et al., 2021). STATS SA (2025) states that over 925,000 children were not enrolled in 2020. There is a need to comprehensively understand the COVID-19 psychosocial experiences of Foundation Phase teachers in South African schools (Thilakdhari & Jairam, 2023). Similarly, Van der Berg and Spaul (2020, p.16) question the current status quo of education in South Africa by asking, "To what extent can teachers modify their teaching levels to accommodate the new reality of learners who have missed between 26 and 68 out of 204 school days, equivalent to roughly six and a half months of instruction?" The answers to these questions challenge teachers' experiences, especially in township schools, and the learning experience for such pupils. To contextualise the school of interest, Emaxulwini Primary School is a quintile three public school that serves a low-income population (School Click, 2025).

However, there is little empirical data on how teaching staff in disadvantaged schools in South Africa survived the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the significance of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of COVID-19's impact on South Africa's educational system in marginalised communities, particularly at Emaxulwini Primary School, in KZN.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

- **Anxiety** - an emotional response to an anticipated future threat (DSM-5-TR, 2022).
- **Compassion fatigue (CF)** - describes "a diminished ability to empathise or engage with clients, shown through emotional and behavioural responses resulting from repeated exposure to others' traumatic experiences" (Cieslak et al., 2014, p. 76).
- **COVID-19** - is an infectious coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (Hu et al., 2021).
- **Educator** - refers to "any person who teaches, educates, or trains other persons or who provides professional educational services" (EEA no 76 of 1998, p. 3).
- **Learning disparities** - or educational disparities - refer to the inequities in educational opportunities between privileged and marginalised groups. This includes the differences in learning experiences, academic achievements, and life chances (Conchran-Smith et al., 2016).
- **Learning loss** - refers to any reduced learning gain/knowledge or reversals in academic progress (Soudien et al., 2021).
- **Learning poverty** - The lack of ability to read and comprehend introductory text by age 10 (Azevedo et al., 2020).
- **Learning process** - the process where one acquires new knowledge or builds on previously learnt knowledge (Soudien et al., 2016).
- **Multimodal remote learning** - refers to "learning environments that present instructional content through multiple sensory modalities, such as visual, auditory, and written formats" (Sankey et al., 2010: p. 853 as quoted in Bouchey et al., 2021).
- **Online learning** refers to e-learning, education conducted through the internet, also known as "online learning", which involves learning that occurs remotely, rather than in person (Mpungose, 2020).
- **Psychological resilience** - a person's capacity to effectively cope and adjust despite challenges and difficulties (Kumpfer, 1999).

- **Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)** - entails the emotional distress which results from an indirect exposure to others, often seen in helping professionals (Levkovich & Ricon, 2022).
- **Self-Directed Learning** - entails a form of learning that allows students or learners to work independently (Daar & Nasar, 2021).
- **Self-efficacy** - an individual's efforts to understand or learn their world are based on the environment and that individual's belief in accomplishing the required tasks (Bandura, 1977).

1.7 Layout of the Research Report

The subsequent chapters of this research paper map the vulnerability of South Africa's educational system before COVID-19, the discrepancies between the private and public education systems, and the impact of COVID-19 on South Africa's educational sector. The paper also presents a research study on the educational experiences of educators from a marginalised school and how they survived COVID-19-related calamities in a resource-constrained work environment.

Chapter 1 of this research report outlines the pre- and post-COVID-19 educational climate. The chapter begins by providing an overview of South Africa's educational history. It explores relevant research domains, including the study's aims, research questions, and significance.

Chapter 2 reviews international and local studies on educators' experiences during COVID-19. This section focuses on educators' experiences, the support they received, and the policies implemented during COVID-19, further appreciating the scantness of existing literature on the research phenomenon. The chapter will end with an outline of the theoretical framework and its relevance to this research study.

Chapter 3 explains the qualitative research methodology implemented in the study, outlining the research paradigm and data collection methods, including analysis and thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2022).

Chapter 4 presents the findings obtained. This chapter presents quotes from interview responses to the research questions. Furthermore, results and themes will be presented from the research data.

Chapter 5 gives a detailed description of the results and what they entail—a discussion of the results presented, the research questions, and the available data. The results of this are compared with existing research on the topic. The chapter provides a discussion of the main themes, along with a link to the theoretical framework and research findings.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusion of the research paper. This chapter summarises the findings and provides an overview of the research study's coverage and its limitations. Furthermore, recommendations for clinical practice, policy and future research studies are provided.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter provides background on South Africa's educational system by outlining the challenges prevalent before and after the COVID-19 era. This chapter outlined the discrepancies in the South African educational sector, including challenges in private and public schools. The chapter concluded by outlining the study's significance and defining key terms used in the research. The subsequent chapter provides an overview of the existing research, drawing on international and local studies on educators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple challenges have emerged across government sectors, including health and education (Onyeaka et al., 2021). While these disruptions have been widely documented at macro and institutional levels, there remains limited critical engagement with how they were experienced at the micro-level — particularly within township schools in South Africa. This dissertation addresses that gap by focusing on educators' experiences at Emaxulwini Primary School, situating the study within a specific and under-researched context. The existing literature provides broad global and national perspectives, yet it often lacks the depth required to capture educators' lived realities in severely under-resourced schooling environments. By drawing on both international and local studies, this review not only contextualises the pandemic's educational impact but also highlights the uneven distribution of these experiences across socioeconomic divides and the need for context-specific inquiry. Critically, the review demonstrates that structural analyses, while illuminating, consistently underestimate the importance of educator agency, resilience, and localised adaptation; the very dimensions this study seeks to foreground.

2.2 International Studies on Educators' Experiences during COVID-19

2.2.1 Structural Deficiencies and Digital Inequality

The COVID-19 pandemic did not simply disrupt education systems; it exposed and amplified structural weaknesses that the assumption of functional normality had long obscured. Dhari et al. (2020, as cited in Maqsood et al., 2021) contend that many countries failed to provide sufficient educational resources, using Pakistan as an illustration of the difficulties of implementing digital learning at scale. While this highlights systemic limitations, the analysis remains largely descriptive and does not examine how those constraints differentially affect educators occupying different positions within socioeconomic hierarchies. A more critical engagement with this literature requires asking not only *what* structural deficiencies exist,

but *who* bears the burden of managing them daily; an issue that points directly to classroom teachers.

Onyeaka et al. (2021) advance this critique by foregrounding the problem of digital inequality, noting significant disparities in internet access across regions, including marked declines across parts of sub-Saharan Africa. While this lends empirical weight to the argument that online education is not a universally viable response to school closures, the authors stop short of examining how educators in poorly connected regions actually navigated these constraints in practice. Reimers (2021) similarly underscores issues of affordability and digital competency. Yet both accounts risk constructing educators as passive recipients of structural failure rather than as active agents who improvise, adapt, and persist under conditions of scarcity. This limitation is significant: an exclusive focus on structural impediments can inadvertently obscure the coping strategies and adaptive capacities that educators themselves deploy, precisely the dynamics that this study investigates.

Critically, the assumption embedded in much of this international literature, that digital tools represent the natural solution to pandemic-induced school closures, reflects a perspective shaped predominantly by high-income contexts. As Selwyn (2011) cautions, technology integration in education is never ideologically neutral; it is shaped by existing inequalities and, absent deliberate redistribution, tends to reinforce rather than reduce them. This caution is especially salient when evaluating the pandemic response in low-income and historically marginalised school communities.

2.2.2 Pedagogical Disruption and Curriculum Delivery

Beyond infrastructure, the pandemic generated distinct pedagogical challenges that the literature addresses with varying degrees of nuance. Plotka and Guirguis (2022) argue that play-based and interactive pedagogies, fundamental to early childhood education, cannot be effectively recreated in virtual environments, thereby complicating curriculum delivery in the Foundation Phase. This is a valid concern, but it draws an overly sharp binary between online and in-person learning, without adequately accounting for hybrid or contextually responsive approaches that many educators developed out of necessity. The assumption that online pedagogy must approximate or replicate face-to-face instruction misunderstands the adaptive capacity of experienced practitioners.

Ynon et al. (2023) extend this analysis by highlighting the role of institutional disengagement and role frustration among educators during the pandemic, suggesting that the

challenges were simultaneously technical, relational, and institutional. Their contribution is valuable insofar as it moves beyond infrastructure to examine educators' professional identities and their relationship to institutional support structures. However, the predominantly quantitative orientation of such studies, reliant on survey instruments and Likert scales, limits their ability to capture the textured, contextually embedded nature of educator experience. As Braun and Clarke (2013) observe, the richness of lived experience resists reduction to numeric indices, which is one argument for the qualitative methodology adopted in this study.

2.2.3 Educator Wellbeing: Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, and Secondary Trauma

The psychosocial toll of pandemic teaching has been extensively documented in the international literature, though not always with the contextual sensitivity it warrants. Levkovich and Ricon (2022) report elevated levels of compassion fatigue, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress among educators, linking these outcomes to the compounding demands of managing learner welfare, navigating technological transitions, and simultaneously maintaining curriculum delivery. These findings are consistent with the broader burnout literature (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), which identifies role overload, reduced autonomy, and inadequate institutional support as primary antecedents of professional exhaustion.

What is less explored in these accounts is the intersectional nature of educator vulnerability. Educators working in under-resourced settings do not merely experience these stressors more intensely; they experience them in the absence of buffering mechanisms, such as coaching, counselling services, reliable internet, and functioning devices, that their counterparts in well-resourced contexts can access. The distinction matters analytically: if burnout is partly a product of the gap between institutional demands and available resources, then closing this analytic gap requires examining not only symptoms but conditions. Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006) have argued that emotional labour is central to the teaching profession and is intensified during crises. Yet, this dimension receives insufficient attention in studies that focus primarily on technological adaptation. The neglect of emotional labour in pandemic-era educator research represents a significant lacuna, one that this study partly addresses by attending to the affective dimensions of educators' narratives.

2.2.4 Inequalities Between Public and Private Schooling

Comparative research across educational systems further illuminates the structural inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic. Bellei et al. (2022) document marked disparities in student engagement between public and private schools in Chile, attributing lower participation in public institutions to constrained technological access and less stable home learning environments. While this finding supports the claim that digital learning intensifies socioeconomic inequality, it risks a form of institutional determinism by implying that school type is the primary driver of outcomes. This framing overlooks the capacity of individual educators within public schools to sustain learner engagement through alternative, low-technology approaches, including telephonic instruction, printed worksheets, and community-based outreach.

The reliance on alternative communication modalities in public schools is often framed in the literature as a deficiency, a symptom of inadequate resource allocation. A more generous reading would interpret it as evidence of professional resourcefulness under constrained conditions (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This reframing is not simply rhetorical; it has practical implications for how policymakers and researchers conceptualise teacher capacity and professional development. If resilience and adaptation are systematically undervalued in the literature, the field risks designing interventions that address symptoms rather than building on educators' existing competencies, which they have already demonstrated.

In sum, while the international literature illuminates important dimensions of pandemic-era educational disruption, digital inequality, pedagogical challenge, psychological stress, and systemic inequity, it is constrained by its tendency toward breadth over depth, structural analysis over agentic insight, and high-income contexts over marginalised ones. These limitations underscore the rationale for close, qualitative inquiry in specific institutional and geographic settings.

2.3 Local Studies on Educators' Experiences during the Pandemic

2.3.1 Historical Context and Systemic Unpreparedness

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on South African education cannot be assessed in isolation from the country's historically constructed educational inequalities. The apartheid system's deliberate underfunding of Black schools — through the Bantu Education Act of 1953

and its successor policies — created structural deficits in township and rural schools that post-1994 reforms have only partially addressed (Soudien, 2007). When the national lockdown was imposed on 26 March 2020 under the Disaster Management Act No. 57 of 2002 (Landa, Zhou & Morongwe, 2021), these pre-existing inequalities were brought into sharp relief.

Mpungose (2020) defines e-learning as inherently dependent on internet connectivity, a resource that remains unequally distributed across South Africa's population. Soudien et al. (2021) are more direct in their assessment, arguing that the government was fundamentally underprepared to manage a transition to online learning at scale, particularly for schools in quintiles one to three. Department of Basic Education data support this view, indicating that large proportions of learners in these quintiles lacked access to devices and data during the lockdown (DBE, 2020). Ontong and Waghid (2020) situate the South African experience within a broader global disruption, yet their comparative framing, while adding theoretical breadth, risks underplaying the specifically historical nature of South African educational disadvantage. Unlike many of the countries surveyed in comparative literature, South Africa's educational inequalities are not simply the product of underdevelopment but of deliberate racial engineering, a distinction with significant implications for how policy responses should be designed.

2.3.2 Socioeconomic Context and the Limits of Digital Learning

South Africa's classification as a middle-income country conceals profound internal inequalities. The country consistently records some of the highest Gini coefficients in the world (World Bank, 2022), and these macroeconomic realities translate directly into the school system. Soudien et al. (2021) argue that the pandemic must be understood within this intricate socioeconomic landscape, in which access to educational resources is stratified along racial, class, and geographic lines.

Glietenberg et al. (2022) go further, contending that digital learning is largely inappropriate as an educational response in the South African context, given the scale of infrastructural and socioeconomic barriers. This is a strong claim, and it is worth subjecting it to critical scrutiny. The argument risks positioning technology as inherently unsuitable for contexts of poverty, rather than examining the conditions under which appropriately designed, low-bandwidth, and community-supported technological interventions might be viable. The distinction matters because a blanket dismissal of technology in low-income contexts could inadvertently reinforce a deficit perspective, denying under-resourced schools the opportunity

to develop digital competencies that are increasingly essential to economic participation (Czerniewicz et al., 2020).

The role of social capital in mediating educational outcomes during the pandemic is also addressed in the local literature, though often inadequately theorised. Soudien et al. (2021) note that inequalities in learners' social capital, their access to educationally supportive family environments, networks, and community resources, placed additional burdens on educators, who were expected to compensate for absent home-based support. This dynamic is especially acute in township schools, where poverty, household instability, and community-level trauma intersect to create layers of adversity that extend well beyond the purely pedagogical. Coleman's (1988) foundational account of social capital in education remains relevant here: schools embedded in low-social-capital communities cannot leverage the same informal support networks that complement formal instruction in more affluent settings, and this asymmetry intensifies educator responsibility without commensurate institutional support.

2.3.3 Township and Rural Schools: Infrastructure, Safety, and Access

Sayed and Singh (2020) offer a school-level analysis that is particularly pertinent to the present study. Examining township and rural schools specifically, they identify a cluster of infrastructural constraints that simultaneously impede safety compliance and disrupt curriculum continuity: overcrowded classrooms, inadequate sanitation facilities, limited access to personal protective equipment, and unreliable water supply. These conditions made even basic physical-distancing protocols functionally impossible to implement, creating a structural contradiction between public health requirements and school-level realities.

This analysis is important because it shifts attention from the question of digital access, which dominates much of the broader literature, to the more fundamental question of whether the physical conditions for safe schooling existed at all. In many township schools, the challenge was not primarily technological but material and spatial. Christie (2020) makes a similar point in her analysis of South African school infrastructure, noting that the legacy of apartheid-era underinvestment continues to manifest in building stock, sanitation, and classroom capacity in ways that are not visible in national policy documents. The pandemic thus did not simply create new challenges; it collided with pre-existing conditions that had never been adequately addressed.

2.3.4 Contact Versus Digital Learning: A False Dichotomy?

A recurring theme in local scholarship is the argument that digital or remote learning cannot replace contact education (Liu & Long, 2014; Nikoubakht & Kiamanesh, 2019; Mhlanga et al., 2022). This position is supported by substantial evidence from the South African context, where the social and relational dimensions of schooling, attendance monitoring, nutritional support through school feeding schemes, safeguarding functions, and peer socialisation are integral to the school's role in learners' lives and cannot be delivered digitally. However, the binary framing of this debate merits scrutiny.

A more productive analytic frame might be to ask not whether digital learning can replace contact education, but rather what hybrid configurations might retain the essential social and relational functions of the school while extending educational reach during periods of disruption. Blended learning models, which combine limited face-to-face instruction with structured offline tasks and community-based support, have shown promise in contexts of limited connectivity (Vosloo, 2012; Traxler, 2018). The risk of the contact-versus-digital debate, as currently framed in local scholarship, is that it forecloses creative problem-solving by framing pedagogical choices as exhaustive opposites rather than endpoints on a continuum along which context-specific solutions can be developed.

2.3.5 Educator Agency and the Gap in Local Research

Despite the substantive contributions of local scholarship, a consistent gap emerges: the literature tends to foreground institutional constraints and systemic failure at the expense of educator agency. When teachers in township schools are mentioned, they appear primarily as subjects of structural forces; as recipients of policy failure, victims of digital exclusion, or casualties of inadequate resource allocation. Their active responses to crisis, their improvisational pedagogical strategies, their emotional navigation of adversity, and the forms of resilience they demonstrated receive comparatively little attention.

This is not a trivial omission. As Hargreaves (1994) argues, teachers are not merely conduits for policy implementation; they are active interpreters of their professional context, whose values, identities, and relational commitments shape how policy is enacted in practice. In crisis conditions, this interpretive and adaptive role becomes even more salient. The absence of educator voices from the South African COVID-19 literature, particularly from township

schools, means that existing scholarship cannot adequately answer the question of how the pandemic was actually lived and navigated by those most directly affected.

2.4 Synthesis and Research Gap

A comprehensive reading of international and local literature reveals a consistent and significant pattern: while the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed severe structural inequities in education systems globally and in South Africa specifically, the dominant body of research is insufficiently context-specific and analytically skewed toward institutional and systemic analysis at the expense of micro-level, experiential inquiry.

International studies contribute valuable insights into digital inequality, pedagogical disruption, and educator well-being. However, they frequently fail to account for the qualitatively different conditions educators face in severely under-resourced settings. Their tendency toward quantitative design and broad comparison reduces the complexity of experience to measurable proxies. At the same time, their implicit grounding in high-income contexts limits their transferability to places like South African township schools. Local South African scholarship advances the analysis by situating the pandemic within the country's specific sociohistorical context and documenting the particular vulnerabilities of low-quintile schools. However, it too falls short of capturing the lived experiences and adaptive strategies of educators working within those constraints.

This gap is particularly consequential. Township schools are among the most vulnerable educational environments in the country, serving learners who carry the compounded burdens of poverty, historical marginalisation, and community-level adversity. However, the educators who teach in these schools, navigating all of this daily, remain largely voiceless in the academic literature. Without their perspectives, policymakers and researchers lack the granular, contextually grounded knowledge needed to design interventions that speak to the specific needs and realities of these communities.

This study, therefore, aims to address the gap by critically examining educators' experiences at Emaxulwini Primary School through a qualitative lens, contributing to a more nuanced and contextually anchored understanding of how pandemic-related disruptions intersect with structural inequality and educator resilience in township schooling contexts.

Table 1: Percentage of youth dropouts from 2015 to 2021

Indicator 4.1.2.A2: Percentage of youth aged 15-24 and 25-34 years who dropped out of school without completing grade 12

Figure 4.1.2.A2: Percentage of youth aged 15-24 and 25-34 years who dropped out of school without completing grade 12



Source: GHS Report 2023, DBE

The percentage of youth who dropped out of school without completing grade 12, has dropped for both age cohorts 15-24 years and 15-34 years, from 26.0% to 18.8% and 38.2% to 30.5%, from 2015 to 2021 respectively.

(Source: adapted from GHS Report DBE, 2023)

2.5 Theoretical Approach of the Research Study

2.5.1 Kumpfer's Transactional Resilience Model

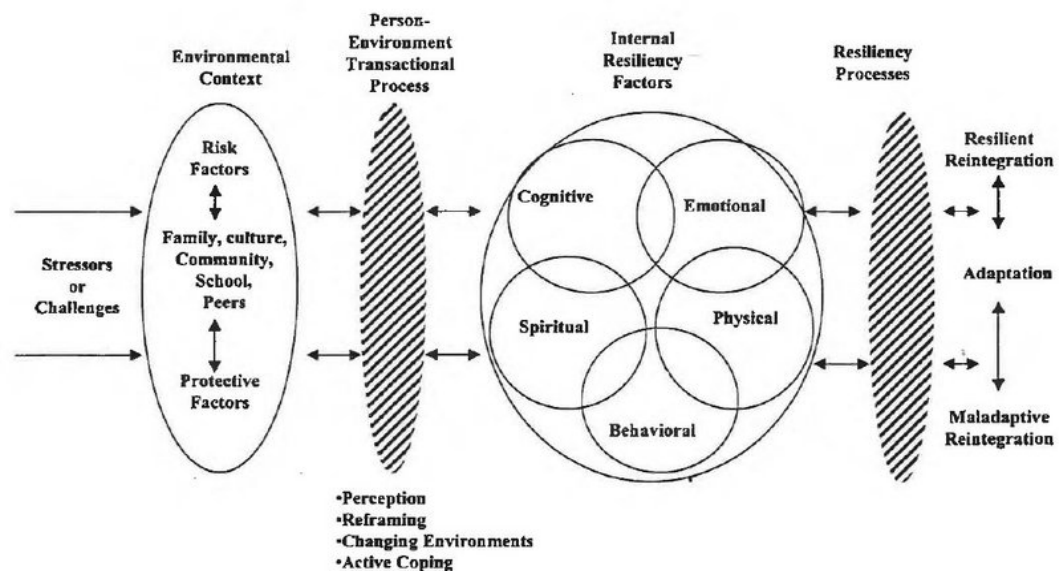


Figure 1: Kumpfer's Resilience Framework (Source: Kumpfer, K. L. (1999). Resilience and development: Positive life adaptations. In R. Glantz & J. Johnson (Eds.), *Resilience and development: Positive life adaptations* (p. 185).

Given the context of this study, educators navigating the convergence of a global pandemic, persistent post-apartheid resource deficits, and the socioeconomic pressures of a township community, the theoretical framework must be capable of accommodating both structural conditions and individual responses. Kumpfer's (1999) Transactional Resilience Model provides such a framework.

Kumpfer defines psychological resilience as "an individual capacity to adapt effectively despite risk and adversity" (1999, p. 181), and her model, which integrates social ecology, transactional processes, and developmental outcomes, offers a multi-level account of how individuals negotiate adverse environments. This is precisely the analytical purchase this study requires: not a framework that reduces resilience to personal traits, nor one that explains educator experience solely through structural constraints, but one that centres the dynamic interaction between person and environment.

The model comprises six interrelated constructs. The first, *stressors and challenges*, refers to stimuli that disrupt equilibrium (Kumpfer, 1999). In the present study, the primary stressor is the COVID-19 pandemic and its cascading effects on schooling, including school closures, curriculum disruption, and the emotional demands of managing learner welfare during a health emergency.

The second construct, the *external environmental context*, encompasses the balance of protective and risk factors in an individual's surroundings (Nel, 2014, as cited in Wissing et al., 2014). For educators at Emaxulwini Primary School, this context includes the school's physical infrastructure, the availability of community and family support, institutional backing from the Department of Basic Education, and the broader socioeconomic conditions of the township. These factors may function simultaneously as risks and protective resources, and their configuration varies considerably across individuals.

The third construct, the *person-environment interactional process*, captures how individuals actively or passively engage with their environment in response to threats and challenges (Kumpfer, 1999). This includes how educators perceive the stressors they face, the coping strategies they deploy, and the cognitive reframing they use to make sense of adversity. Critically, this construct positions educators not as passive recipients of structural conditions but as active agents in building their own resilience.

The fourth construct, *internal self-characteristics*, encompasses the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions of individual resilience. The cognitive cluster

includes intelligence, professional skill, self-esteem, and moral reasoning; the social cluster encompasses communication, problem-solving, and relational competence; the emotional cluster includes the capacity to manage difficult emotions, maintain hopefulness, and recover from setbacks; and the physical domain refers to health maintenance practices that support adaptive capacity (Wissing et al., 2014). Taken together, these dimensions suggest that resilience is not a single trait but a composite of interdependent resources that educators draw on differentially.

The fifth construct, the *resilience process*, refers to the coping and reintegration mechanisms through which individuals respond to stressors over time (Kumpfer, 1999). These processes may be rapid and short-term — managing a crisis day — or gradual and long-term, involving the consolidation of new professional identities and practices.

The sixth construct, *positive outcomes*, identifies the successful life adaptations that resilience produces (Kumpfer, 1999). This does not presuppose that all educators experience uniformly positive outcomes; rather, the model acknowledges the possibility of maladaptation where protective factors are insufficient, while foregrounding the conditions under which positive adaptation is achievable.

The relevance of this framework to the present study is threefold. First, it provides a vocabulary for examining the multidimensionality of educator experience, accounting for structural conditions, individual agency, and their transactions. Second, it avoids both the determinism of purely structural accounts and the naivety of purely psychological ones, holding both in productive tension. Third, it aligns epistemologically with the qualitative, experience-centred orientation of this research, which seeks to understand how educators subjectively navigate adversity rather than to measure their outcomes.

2.6 Conclusion

The international and local literature reviewed in this chapter converges on a central finding: the COVID-19 pandemic did not create educational inequality but sharply intensified pre-existing structural disparities. Regions already characterised by poor service delivery, constrained access to resources, and socioeconomic marginalisation experienced the pandemic's educational disruptions most severely, and their educators navigated these challenges with the least institutional support.

However, as this review has also argued, the existing scholarship underestimates the significance of educator agency, adaptation, and resilience — particularly in township school contexts where these qualities have been exercised continuously and largely without recognition. The scarcity of qualitative, contextually grounded research on township educators' experiences represents a genuine gap in the field, with practical consequences for the design of equitable education policy.

This study responds to that gap by applying Kumpfer's Transactional Resilience Model to a close examination of educators' experiences at Emaxulwini Primary School. The model's capacity to integrate individual, situational, and environmental dimensions of resilience makes it well-suited to capturing the complexity of these experiences. The following chapter outlines the methodological approach through which these experiences are explored.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the study methodology, which adopts a qualitative design guided by an interpretive approach. McMullin (2023,p.4) denotes that “qualitative research is an approach that explores how people perceive, understand, and engage with social worlds.” Qualitative research seeks to answer the ‘how’ and ‘why’ instead of a statistical inference of a phenomenon (Tenny et al., 2022). Qualitative studies are a type of research which explores an in-depth understanding of what people experience (McMillan, 2023). Thus, this research aimed to provide a rich understanding of educators' experiences at Emaxulwini Primary School during COVID-19. This section outlines the research design, population size, sample method, data collection procedures and ethical considerations observed throughout the study.

3.2 Research Design

Gelo et al. (200, p. 272) stipulate that a research design is a structured plan that aligns a research approach's philosophical foundations and methodological assumptions with its methods, ensuring that the research questions are answered credibly and validly. This paper follows an exploratory research design. According to Samanth (2024), exploratory research design is “a wide-ranging, purposive, organised, pre-planned approach focused on maximising the discovery of information leading to description and comprehension of an area of social or psychological life” (p.1). Consequently, this study will use a case study, a type of exploratory research. Muzari et al. (2022, p.16) assert that “a case study is an exploratory method which involves the in-depth investigation of a small sample, facilitating direct interaction with the researcher and participants.” We thus contend that this research design is appropriate for our sample size (N=5 educators) and research goals, which aim to capture educators' experiences during COVID-19.

3.3 Research Paradigm

The research paradigm used in this study is an interpretivist one. A research paradigm “reflects the researcher’s views about the environment in which they live or wish to remain. It comprises the overarching principles and conceptions that shape how a researcher perceives

the arena and interprets and behaves in it” (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022, p. 420). The interpretivist paradigm aims to develop an understanding of, or to explore, a specific experience in individuals or things. Thus, it was appropriate for the study, as we aimed to explore educators’ experiences during COVID-19. This paradigm helped us understand the depth of educators’ experiences by focusing solely on their knowledge of what transpired during the pandemic. This study examined educators’ experiences as they narrated them and derived meaning and patterns from the findings.

3.4 Research Methods

3.4.1 Sampling and Sampling Methods

Qualitative research uses non-probability sampling methods to obtain data; this study used purposive sampling, also called judgment sampling. Purposive sampling is “intended to select cases that are information-rich for thorough examination” (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013, p.125). Thus, this sampling method allows the researcher to align the participants with the research goals and questions. The aforementioned can be assured by choosing a sample population with the appropriate characteristics necessary for the study. The latter is known as expert sampling, a form of purposive sampling that involves selecting participants with specialised knowledge or experience in the research study area (Campbell et al., 2020). Our experts were educators at Emaxulwini Primary School. The sample for this study was recruited via email. However, due to the school's non-response, the researcher had to visit the school to recruit participants in person. This process was tedious and required the researcher to be patient, as participants were recruited on the spot.

The study used educators from Emaxulwini Primary School in Hammarsdale Township, KZN, narrowing the study to the exact locale and population of interest. The study used five (N=5) participants, educators at Emaxulwini Primary School, who have worked there since the beginning of COVID-19. According to Bryant and Charmaz (cited by Hennink and Kaiser, 2021, p.1), “theoretical saturation refers to the point when collecting additional data on a theoretical construct does not reveal further theoretical insights about the developing grounded theory.” Previous studies have indicated that saturation was achieved after collecting data from a sample size of five (5) in-depth interviews (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). This illustrates that data saturation is not a ‘one size fits all’ thus, the sample size does not play much

of a role. Instead, the focus is on the quality of the collected data (Fusch & Ness, cited in Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). The study reached data saturation after completing five interviews (N=5) with our participants.

3.4.2 Inclusion Criteria

The target population for this research study was educators from Emaxulwini Primary School. The educators were those employed at the school before or during the COVID-19 outbreak. The sample of educators was those currently working at the identified school at the time of data collection for this study. The sample included males and females aged 18 or older. The participants had a degree in Education (Bachelor's in Education or equivalent) and were registered with the South African Council for Educators (SACE). The participants were of South African nationality. The participants were African. The participants were fluent in both spoken and written English. Participants were also selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study.

3.4.3 Sampling Procedure

The sampling process began after acquiring gatekeepers' permission from the Department of Education in Pinetown District and ethical clearance from the UKZN HSSREC committee. An advertisement poster was sent to the school's email for distribution to potential participants. The participants were recruited by distributing an information letter describing the study, which was provided to potential participants at the identified school (see Appendix A). This information was thoroughly explained to the approached participants (educators). Those who agreed to participate completed and signed the informed consent form (see Appendix B). The researcher oriented the participants (educators) to the study and the research process to be followed. The ethical issues considered and addressed during sampling are discussed later in this section.

3.5 Data Collection Method

The study employed semi-structured interviews to gather data. According to MacLeod et al. (2023), interviews within a constructivist paradigm recognise the subjectivities of both participants and the researcher, thus viewing them as active contributors and co-creators of knowledge. MacLeod et al. (2023) argue that the nature of the semi-structured or unstructured

interview offers the research participant more flexibility in answering questions and, thereby, taking control. Therefore, using semi-structured interviews, the researcher can gather rich information as participants narrate their experiences, providing insights relevant to the study's research questions and objectives.

The interview schedule consisted of questions that probed their experiences and the changes that affected teaching practices during COVID-19, their coping mechanisms, and the support systems they employed. This interview schedule aimed to provide a clear understanding of what transpired in the identified school, the educators' coping mechanisms, and the support systems they had in place. During the interviews, the teachers were eager to participate in the study and share their experiences. They were oriented with the questions and a few obligations when answering, such as answering as audibly and coherently as possible.

3.5.1 Data Collection Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the study, participants were offered an informed consent form and informed of their right to withdraw at any time. They were made fully aware of their rights and responsibilities as participants (Samanth, 2024). For example, they were briefed about their rights to anonymity and confidentiality, and to voluntary engagement; their responsibility to read the instructions and ask for clarification if they did not understand; and to alert the researcher should they feel they were not well enough to proceed with the study. Issues concerning confidentiality and consent to audio-record the interviews were explained again. The semi-structured interviews consisted of seven open-ended questions (see Appendix B). There were no incomplete or unanswered questions. The interview lasted up to 2 hours per participant. The data collection period was a day during the week. During the interviews, teachers were also allowed to ask for clarification if they did not understand; however, the cohort of teachers could understand the study.

3.5.2 Data Transcription

Data transcription involves providing a written account of spoken words (Cleland, 2023). The researcher transcribed the audio recordings verbatim using a software application called ATLAS.ti. I initially listened to the audio recordings and typed the interview discussions verbatim. Upon completion, I listened to the audio recordings again as I read the transcript. I

proofread it and asked the participants if there was any confusion about what was transcribed in the interview. The participants used English throughout the interviews, so no translation from IsiZulu to English was required. The transcription took a month to complete all five (5) transcripts.

3.6 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

This study uses reflexive thematic analysis to analyse the data collected. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, as cited by Lester et al., 2020, p.97), “thematic analysis (TA) is a method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data, providing a detailed and organised data set”. However, this type of analysis was later refined to include the researcher's reflexivity in interpreting the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2019, as cited in Bryne, 2022, p. 1392) denote that “the reflexive approach to TA highlights the researcher’s active involvement in the creation of knowledge .” This data analysis method is mainly used in qualitative research studies to produce rich and descriptive data. The following section discusses the analytic process using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA).

3.6.1 Data Analysis Procedure

Braun and Clarke (cited by Lester et al., 2020) outline six steps in RTA: familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and norming themes, and producing the final report.

3.6.1.1 Phase 1: Familiarising oneself with the data

The first step involves becoming thoroughly familiar with the data, which entails transcribing the collected interviews, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and noting recurring ideas or themes (Lester et al., 2020). I listened to the recordings without taking notes to familiarise myself with the data. To avoid confusion, I moved from one recording to the next. I manually transcribed each interview and carefully played it back, pausing and replaying to ensure I recorded each data point verbatim. I then read the transcribed data to ensure I understood what was said and proofread as I listened. This process was quite extensive, especially for someone new to data analysis. Nevertheless, this may have been because the

participants often adopted an over-inclusive style, dragging the interview process; however, I usually ensured they did not digress from the question.

3.6.1.2 Phase 2: Generating initial codes.

The second step involved generating initial codes, which requires frequently identifying significant features in your data and collating data segments into each code (Lester et al., 2020). To do this, I used Atlas.ti software to generate initial codes. The codes generated were sixty-eight (68) initially. These codes included descriptive words of teachers' experiences during COVID-19, such as burnout, lack of support, unpleasant experiences, lack of motivation, and curriculum outcomes. The software generated an Excel spreadsheet containing codes and corresponding verbal extracts. I evaluated the codes related to the research topic and the participants' communications. The coding method I used in this study was semantic coding. Braun and Clarke (2006, cited in Bryne, 2022, p.1397) state that “semantic coding focuses on capturing explicit or surface meanings present in the data.” I spent some time defining each code clearly to ensure they accurately reflect what was presented or communicated solely by my participants. This step aimed to achieve a descriptive analysis of the data. A condensed Sankey diagram showing these codes is presented in the next chapter (Chapter 4 - Results).

3.6.1.3 Phase 3: Searching for themes

The third step involved searching for themes, which entails collating codes into potential themes and gathering data relevant to each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In this study, I achieved this step by identifying themes and examining all the codes in the data. I looked for an overarching theme by comparing which codes were synonymous or could relate to each theme. At the end of this process, I obtained five (5) main overarching themes, nine (9) sub-themes and data extracts from the interview transcripts. I assessed the themes and data extracts to ensure they aligned with the questions and research topic and reflected what the participants communicated. This process was undertaken to ensure the appropriateness of the data and, more particularly, to ensure that the analysis was inductive rather than data-driven.

3.6.1.4 Phase 4: Reviewing themes

The fourth step was reviewing themes, in which the researcher refines them by comparing them to determine which are more relevant, which collapse into each other, and which should be broken down into separate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). I achieved this by examining the relationship among the codes that inform the central theme(s) and sub-theme(s). I employed Patton's (1990) dual criterion to judge the categories, namely, internal homogeneity (within themes) and external heterogeneity (among themes), to determine whether the data correlates with the themes or if it is a distinct theme on its own (Byrne, 2022). After assessing these two categories, I realised that educators' experiences during COVID-19 were mainly adverse and described in different ways, either work-related, psychological or personal. Thus, I ensured these experiences were represented as distinct themes to avoid misrepresentation and to condense the information as a whole rather than across segments, thereby ensuring rich interpretations for each experience.

3.6.1.5 Phase 5: Naming and defining the themes

The fifth step included defining and naming themes, refining each theme and clearly articulating how it contributes to the overall analysis and interpretation of the data (Lester et al., 2020). This step essentially means identifying what each theme captures in your data and naming it. I achieved this by defining each theme to ensure readers could understand it. I used data extracts to support or convey the participants' responses about the addressed theme. Bryne (2022) argues that "data extracts can be presented as illustrative, providing a surface-level description of what the participants said..." (p.1407). I achieved this by using the data extracts as they were and relating them to the main themes and sub-themes.

3.6.1.6 Phase 6: Drafting the final report

The last step was to produce the report. Lester et al. (2020) denote that a crucial step in thematic analysis is presenting information which details the analytic process. This step is explained in chapters 4 and 5, respectively. I presented the themes and sub-themes in the 'discussion' section (chapter 5) to synthesise and contextualise the data, adopting an analytical approach to reporting.

3.6.2 Establishing Trustworthiness in the Research Study

The quality criteria of a qualitative study depend on trustworthiness. The latter poses the question of whether the findings can be trusted. Korstjens and Moser (2018) argue that the criteria for trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.6.2.1 Credibility

Credibility denotes “ how rigorously the study is conducted and whether the results accurately present the experiences and the research participants’ perspectives” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p.121). Credibility was achieved using two approaches: respondent validation and triangulation. Respondent validation, or member checking, is a process in which findings are returned to participants to confirm whether the data accurately reflect their understanding of a phenomenon and align with their lived experiences (MacLeod et al., 2023). The educators were given the transcripts to see whether the data were interpreted accurately. The other approach is triangulation, which involves using multiple perspectives on a particular subject or phenomenon (MacLeod et al., 2023). This approach ensures that multiple perspectives are presented and helps prevent significant oversight or omissions. This study aimed to achieve triangulation by using interviews and existing data. Data triangulation was used to cross-verify information. The aforementioned strategies were applied throughout the study to ensure we produced credible findings.

3.6.2.2 Transferability

Transferability entails the aspect of applicability. MacLeod et al. (2023, p.36) argue that transferability refers to “the researcher’s capacity to provide detailed descriptions, which enables readers to assess the extent to which the conclusions drawn in the study setting can transfer to other contexts.” This study aimed to achieve this through transferability judgment. For this study, this step was achieved by having the researcher and the supervisor read the findings to determine whether the results were relevant to their context.

3.6.2.3 Dependability

Dependability looks at the consistency of results. According to MacLeod et al. (2023),

“the assessment of dependability of research findings evaluates how the research was conducted, thus allowing the process to be reviewed or audited by another” (p.36). This study used thick description and an audit trail. Thick description refers to researchers providing detailed accounts of what they study and the context in which they study it (MacLeod et al., 2023, p. 37). The study sought to provide a thick description of educators’ experiences, enabling readers to understand how the findings and conclusions were interpreted. An audit trail was maintained to help readers evaluate the rigour of the research. This was achieved by being as descriptive as possible in the methodological process section discussed earlier.

3.6.2.4 Confirmability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) assert that confirmability is the second-to-last step in ensuring the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. Confirmability refers to neutrality, which entails the findings being grounded in data or other researchers confirming your findings through similar studies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). MacLeod et al. (2023) assert that “research within the constructivist paradigm is inherently subjective; however, researchers should provide enough detail on data collection and analysis to allow readers to comprehend how the conclusions were drawn” (p.36). This study achieved confirmability by documenting the research process and the themes and conclusions we derived from the phenomenon under research, allowing other researchers to confirm our findings. This was described in detail earlier in this chapter and subsequent chapters (results, discussion, and conclusion).

3.6.2.5 Reflexivity

The last step in the process of trustworthiness was reflexivity. Reflexivity can be ensured by examining your preconceptions and assumptions about the participants or the phenomenon under study to see how they affected the study process and findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This study's reflexivity was achieved through daily diary entries and reflexive notes before, during, and after data collection, and through the use of RTA.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study complied with HPCSA guidelines, ensuring non-maleficence, beneficence,

respect for participants' dignity, voluntary involvement, and the right to withdraw. The following ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study: informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, beneficence, non-maleficence, and voluntary participation. Informed consent entails a written document that asks individuals for permission to participate in a particular event or study (Muzari et al., 2022). The research participants provided verbal and written informed consent to participate. They were notified that the study findings could be used for publication. The HSSREC (Ethical clearance number: HSSREC/00006643/2024 and see Appendix C for the ethical clearance letter) and our gatekeeper (the Department of Education, KwaZulu-Natal Province) have issued a gatekeeper letter (see Appendix D) allowing us to conduct research at Emaxulwini Primary School in Hammarsdale township, KZN.

Confidentiality refers to the protection or privacy of information shared with you by either clients or other persons (Muzari et al., 2022). This study ensured participants' confidentiality by not sharing study details with anyone outside the research team. Should the study be publicised, participants' names were changed into pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality and anonymity for safety reasons. I ensured the anonymity of participants by using pseudonyms or random letter codes such as “Teacher KP” instead of writing full names. The letter codes are not their initials, but random letters selected to ensure anonymity.

Beneficence and non-maleficence are among the ethical considerations for the study; participants were notified of the availability of psychological services at the Child and Family Centre (CFC) if they recalled or felt that the study may have triggered stressful or traumatic experiences they had during COVID-19 (see Appendix D). The Child and Family Centre is at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg. It offers various psychological services to those in need, including counselling for individuals of different ages. Thus, if a participant feels distressed, they will be referred to CFC for the relevant intervention. Thus far, there have been no reported cases of COVID-19-related triggering or stressful ruminations after the interview process.

3.8 Conclusion

This study employed a qualitative research methodology and an exploratory research design to examine educators' experiences at Emaxulwini Primary School. Qualitative research

methods, including semi-structured interviews, were employed to collect detailed participant information, providing rich data to address the inquiry questions. Data collection and analysis methods, such as reflexive thematic analysis, were used to interpret the data collected. This study ensured trustworthiness through the evaluative criteria of confirmability, transferability, dependability, and reflexivity. Participants were informed of their rights, responsibilities, and the study's test procedures. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, nonmaleficence, and beneficence, were thoroughly explained and adhered to throughout the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings gathered from interviews with participants. The study explored educators' experiences during COVID-19 at a public school in Hammarsdale, situated in KZN. The study used semi-structured interviews with five educators (N=5) at Emaxulwini Primary School. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse and interpret the interview transcripts, allowing identification of emerging themes across the participants' responses. The following are the main themes from the interview discussions: adaptation to changes, innovative teaching, work-life balance, social impact, and policymaking. Below is a visual presentation of a Sankey diagram summarising codes derived from each interview response.

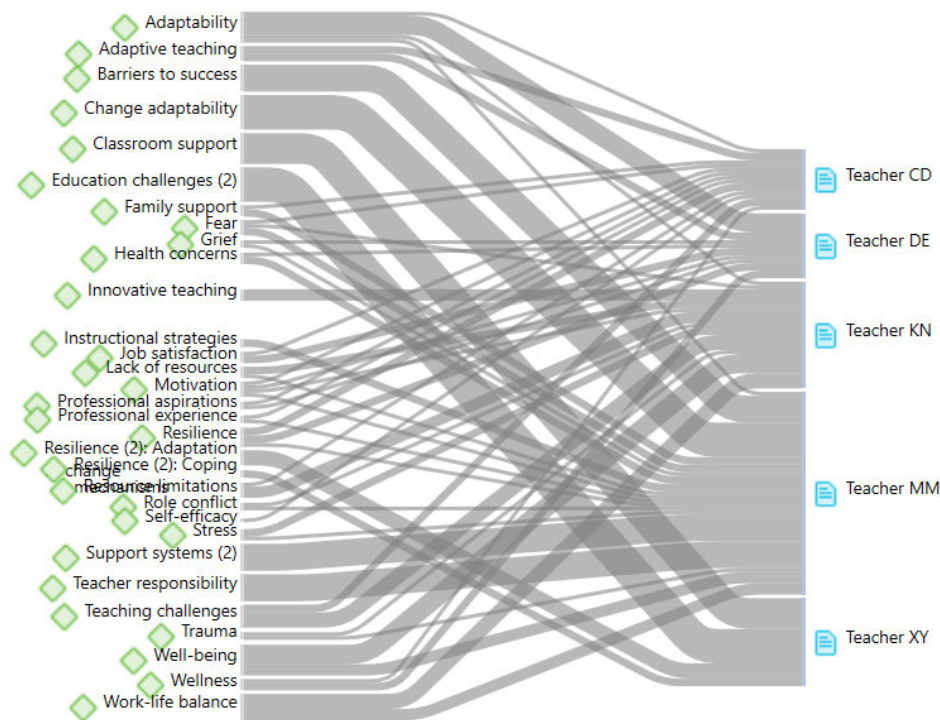


Figure 2: Sankey diagram illustrating the overlap of codes from the responses obtained from the interviews via Atlas.ti.

The table below presents the refined main themes and sub-themes derived from the collected data. These themes will be discussed in detail in the section below.

Table 2: Main themes and sub-themes from the obtained data

Main themes	Sub-theme 1	Sub-theme 2	Sub-theme 3
Adaptation to changes	Adaptation to the environment: COVID-19 pandemic	Adaptation to curriculum adjustments	Adaptation to challenges in teaching
Innovative teaching	Resource constraints	—	—
Work-life balance	Pandemic emotions	Teacher Well-being	—
Social impact	Social isolation/effects on social development in pupils	Parental involvement	—
Policymaking	Professional Development	Teacher collaboration	—

4.2 Findings of the Study

4.2.1 Adaptation to Changes

The themes revealed that educators felt the need to adapt abruptly to changes during COVID-19. This study refers to adaptation as the action or process of environmental change. Thus, the adaptation referred to in this study was categorised into three sub-themes: adaptation to the environment: COVID-19 pandemic, adaptation to curriculum adjustments, and adaptation to challenges in teaching.

a) Sub-theme: Adaptation to the Environment: COVID-19 Pandemic

This sub-theme highlights the challenges teachers faced in adapting to the environment. That is, adaptation to an environment with a new virus, COVID-19. Concerning this adaptation, Teacher KN reported that:

“ At the beginning of COVID, it was difficult as children, because we were also impacted, but we also had to play a crucial role in the teaching and learning. Our families and our friends were being buried, and we were not exempt from the pandemic, so psychologically, we were also affected. The stress and some teachers also contracted COVID, impacting us. ”

In addition, Teacher MM also added:

"Coming to work during COVID-19. It is not easy; I did not like it at all. I was always worried about what would happen if one learner had COVID. They tested them with a thermometer, but some learners' symptoms were not obvious. I was also worried about the number of people dying. ”

Both Teacher KN and Teacher MM experienced a previously safe environment (school) as a more threatening and anxiety-provoking environment.

b) Sub-theme: Adaptation to Curriculum Adjustments

This sub-theme highlights the adaptation to a modified curriculum that the DBE implemented as a remedial action to help recover the number of days lost during quarantine and to accommodate the alternating class group timetables initiated to restrict the spread of the virus.

Teacher DE reported:

“We had our teaching ways before COVID, but we had to be flexible during COVID. A limited time for teachers also meant a limited time for learners. So, if you had learners struggling in class, you had to consider them more during COVID. Many learners were struggling because we were using homework as part of continued learning at home. Moreover, they could only be corrected when their group attended again after a day or two. ”

Teacher MM also said:

"We had to teach people in different ways. I remember the focus was on meeting specific curriculum goals, which made it difficult for us to teach because we had a particular teaching style. Moreover, changing it was as difficult for us as for the learners."

Instructional strategies were modified to accommodate learners and teachers. Although this was implemented, one teacher reported that teaching was different even for learners in the same classroom because of the socioeconomic status that separated them. Teacher XY said:

"Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with limited access to technology or quiet spaces to study, struggled to keep up with the curriculum. This exacerbated existing inequalities in education, particularly for low-income learners and students with special needs. The disruption to normal schooling led to many curriculum adjustments. I had to condense or adjust lesson plans, leading to gaps in learners' learning."

These changes and inequalities outside the school environment permeate classrooms and affect the learners' learning ability. The latter was also evident in teachers' work ethic; they had to develop the skills to adapt and modify curriculum outcomes as the year progressed.

c) Sub-theme: Adaptation to Challenges in Teaching

The challenges in teaching took different forms based on educators' experiences; however, a common thread in their responses was that they lacked the skills and resources to do their jobs swiftly during COVID-19. As such, these educators reported the following experiences about the challenges of teaching at Emaxulwini Primary School:

In response to the changes and challenges experienced in teaching and learning at Emaxulwini Primary School, Teacher DE reported:

"It was mostly the teaching methods. Moreover, always keep a close eye on the government's updates. We always listened to the news to ensure we were not missing out on any updates for us as teachers." Teacher CD further reported, "looking up tips on simplifying my workload online. The kids did not have smartphones or tablets to use for

online learning. So, I decided to look it up online to make my work less strenuous. The shift was difficult at first, but I could adjust because the restrictions kept getting fewer and fewer.”

Teachers DE and CD reported their strategies for navigating teaching challenges during the pandemic. The old way of teaching was disrupted, and teachers had to learn new methods quickly.

Teacher XY said:

“Before COVID, we did not care about these technology things. We had to incorporate the new ways and the old ways. What we used to allow before, we did not allow during COVID. For example, our lessons were more about them listening to me as their teacher than engaging with each other. Engagement was somehow limited.”

The teachers above reported changes in both classroom settings and teaching methods. Despite limited resources, teachers were required to adopt new strategies to enhance learning. This included preparing for lessons by watching educational videos on social platforms such as YouTube and utilising a WhatsApp group created by the Department of Basic Education, initiated to distribute learning study guides for both teachers and learners.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Innovative Teaching: Multimodal Learning

Educators at Emaxulwini Primary School reported that one of the backlogs of teaching during COVID-19 was the lack of resources. This theme was reported to have prohibited effective teaching during COVID. The educators reported that although there were resource constraints during COVID-19, the suggestion of multimodal remote learning seemed somewhat difficult for educators and pupils at a public school such as Emaxulwini Primary School.

a) Sub-theme: Resource constraints

In this research paper, resource constraints refer to the lack of technological devices required for learning and teaching during COVID-19. The lack of resources affected multimodal learning and teachers and learners. This was reported by Teacher DE, who stated;

“ The impact was mostly on resources. We already did not have much, so COVID made things worse. We were under-resourced and had to make do with whatever we had. Teaching continued even with the challenges we had.”

Educators were aware of the disparities between private and public schools. One of the Foundation Phase teachers, Teacher CD, echoed that.

“... Teaching was not easy due to limited resources. Unlike private schools, where the learners had everything, we had to maximise teaching with the little that we had. We used to make learning as practical as we could.”

Similarly, another teacher reported relying on compensatory strategies due to limited resources. In her words, Teacher XY reported:

"Because normal learning and teaching were affected, we started to give the kids a lot of interactive exercises that also meant taking them home. ... We did not have or get the support other schools had through laptops or computers, which posed a challenge again.”

The teachers noted that teaching and learning in a resource-scarce school were difficult for both learning and teaching. However, they had to use compensatory strategies to enhance learning with limited resources, which sometimes had little or no effect.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Work-life Balance: Multiple Roles

As a result of COVID-19 calamities, teachers reported difficulty with work-life balance. They reported various issues balancing their work and personal lives. The teachers mentioned challenges in juggling multiple roles, such as being a teacher, a parent, a partner, and a person responsible for learners' hygiene to prevent the spread of coronavirus at school. The following sub-themes were derived under this central theme: pandemic emotions and teacher well-being.

a) Sub-theme: Pandemic emotions

The educators reported difficulty managing their emotions during the pandemic. For this section, we refer to ‘pandemic emotions’ as emotions experienced or influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, including fear, anxiety, grief, stress, and frustration. During the interview, four (4) out of the five (5) participants reported experiencing pandemic emotions. This suggests that 80% of participants experienced the emotions described above in response to COVID-19.

Teacher KN added to this notion by stating;

“Our families and our friends were being buried, and we were not exempt from the pandemic, so psychologically, we were also affected. Some teachers contracted COVID, which also impacted us.”

Teacher MM supported this and further reported:

“The workload was intense in a way that I struggled to cope. I was struggling to manage the group of learners we had to teach. I, however, managed to catch up.”

These experiences were further supported by another educator who reported that she experienced psychological trauma from teaching during COVID-19. Teacher XY echoed similar experiences by stating:

“...I do not think we got enough support psychologically from the government or even the Department of Health. I mean, we were affected by seeing our colleagues who contracted COVID, then, or even the kids themselves. Then, the next thing is that they are dead or late. Moreover, we even have to bury them. We were not even allowed to go to funerals. So, it was not easy.”

In response to the pandemic, the study found that teachers sought help from others to manage their emotional well-being better. According to Teacher DE, this is how they managed their pandemic emotions:

“I attended therapy privately because I lost a family member. My counsellor helped me deal with everything. She said I was struggling with work. I remember she called it work adjustment disorder. I do not remember the word well. It was related to me struggling with COVID, work and losing a family member. I used to use breathing exercises and calm myself down before work. It helped a lot. That is how I coped.”

Overall, the educators have highlighted the psychological impact of COVID-19 and the lack of resources or support to help them manage those emotions.

b) Sub-theme: Teacher Well-being

The educators reported concerns about their well-being during COVID-19. This concern was mainly about the need to continue working during dire times, with little support for their well-being. This study defined teacher well-being as teachers' overall well-being, consisting of

cognitive, psychological, physical, and social well-being. These crucial aspects are vital for maintaining a healthy and productive teaching environment. Teacher DE mentioned some of the difficulties of teaching during the pandemic as an educator who had to take care of his well-being and his learners by stating:

"The isolation and uncertainty brought on by the pandemic created mental health challenges for learners, who struggled with feelings of isolation, anxiety, and uncertainty about their future. Teachers often felt unequipped to support learners' emotional well-being and academic needs. Smaller classrooms made group projects, discussions, and informal interactions harder."

The educator commented on the physical strain of working long hours to prepare, the burnout from straining themselves after work, and the emotions they had to manage for themselves and for those they were teaching.

Teacher MM echoed this by commenting:

"Coming to work during COVID-19. It was not easy; I did not like it at all. I was always worried about what would happen if one learner had COVID. They tested them with a thermometer, but some learners' symptoms were not obvious. I was also worried about the number of people dying. ...I did not find working pleasant because it was a life-threatening time."

The uncertainty and constantly changing environment contributed to the unpleasant work environment, affecting educators' well-being.

4.2.4. Theme 4: Social Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound social impact on people. The impact also has a ripple effect on other areas, such as pupils' social isolation and social development, and on poor parental involvement.

a) Sub-theme: Social isolation/Effects on social development in pupils

During COVID-19, it was recommended that social distancing be maintained. Educators reported that the social impact of COVID-19 on teaching learners was often underestimated but had a significant impact on both learners and teachers, as most Foundation Phase learners lost out

on social development. In terms of teaching, learners had to rely on alternating class groups for continued classroom learning. Educators reported that the latter relied heavily on the schedule and the learners' memory of what they learned two or three days ago.

Teacher KN expressed this by stating:

“ We are a public school, we take many learners, and because of the social distancing, we were not allowed to have all learners in the class at the same time, so we had to divide the kids into different classes, or rather into groups, and put them in different classes, and if they did not fit in the classes, they had to skip a day in between to come to school, meaning child A will come on Monday, but on Tuesday child A is at home, child B comes on Tuesday, and then child A comes resumes or starts again on Wednesday. And then child B comes again on Thursday. ”

Teacher XY agreed:

“I think with the social distancing, we realised that the kids were getting much more bored. Moreover, even activities we could make fun of in teaching we can no longer make fun of because of social distancing. This affected their social development and their interactions with each other. Moreover, that also affected how they used to learn. Because when kids feel safer, they ask more questions. They are more interactive. That interaction was broken.”

The pandemic affected the teaching environment in various ways, both directly and indirectly, impacting teaching and learning. The burden on teachers to maintain multiple roles to ensure social distancing had a ripple effect on learners, in that their social development was also affected.

b) Sub-theme: Poor parental involvement

Teaching and learning during COVID-19 did not rely solely on classroom instruction and technology but also included parental involvement. In this study, parental involvement refers to parents' involvement in their children's learning, including helping with homework and assessments, and interacting with and collaborating with their children's class teachers. One teacher reported this by highlighting the challenges they experienced, which further exacerbated the challenges in completing learning outcomes.

Teacher XY reported:

"Because the normal learning and teaching were affected, we started to give the kids a lot of interactive exercises that also meant taking them home. However, we found that most kids faced challenges because their parents were illiterate. They could not read or write. Moreover, that was a problem because they did not have help."

This lack of parental involvement resulted in several issues, including learners falling behind on schoolwork, learning loss, and teachers facing a backlog due to a lack of cooperation between parents and learners.

4.2.5. Theme 5: Policymaking

a) Sub-theme: Professional Development

Educators at Emaxulwini Primary School often faced hurdles in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic because they felt unprepared for the situation. This theme was reflected in the lack of training regarding innovative teaching and multiple roles as teachers and individuals safeguarding pupils' health.

Teacher DE relayed this, mentioning that:

"It was difficult initially, but I adjusted after a few months. I have difficulty knowing which group had already covered a certain lesson because they used to alternate. However, I eventually caught on. Luckily for us, we did not have online teaching."

The educator explained the sudden change in teaching and how difficult it was to adhere to in the initial stages of COVID-19. These changes included alternating groups or timetables for learners, the use of technology, a condensed curriculum, the need to support learners emotionally in necessary situations, and the expectation of remaining competent at work.

Teacher MM reflected on their difficulties due to a lack of training programmes or any professional development given to educators during COVID-19:

"I winged it. It was not easy. I had to adjust to a lot. I used to fall behind with some of my workload. I sometimes had to ask my colleagues for help, and sometimes I had to take time. It was not easy. I used to practice some of my work the night prior in preparation for my next class."

The teachers at Emaxulwini Primary School seemed to have difficulty teaching and receiving training specifically for teaching during COVID-19. They were not adequately trained

for such a pandemic, or for navigating problems that arose during it, such as curriculum outcomes, how to teach using multimodal learning, how to reduce workload, and how to ensure effective learning for learners. This challenge had many implications, such as reducing the class average and questioning one's competence during such dire times.

b) Sub-theme: Teacher collaboration

To better manage the challenges at Emaxulwini Primary School, teachers held frequent staff meetings to discuss and address problems they encountered. This study describes teacher collaboration as teachers working together to support one another, plan, and advise each other on educational practices to enhance and foster effective teaching. Teacher MM reported the following in response to the support systems they had during COVID-19:

“We did not receive as much support as needed. For a school such as this one, in a township and with no resources, we had to use what we had, which was each other, as teachers. We just had staff meetings to address our problems, but other than that, we had no support system that helped us with teaching there.”

This indicates that, even though they did not receive external support, the school and teachers used staff meetings to instil and foster motivation and to enhance a supportive teaching environment. Additionally, Teacher XY closed the interviews with a statement that he believed would improve teaching practices in the future:

“I think with the pandemic, we should have learned from it that teachers should be included in the policy-making, as we are on the ground and experience more, right? We should be included in the policy changes because I think they are still outdated from back in the day. After all, I think they are still old from back in the day. So, it would be nice if they could review them and get our opinion on how we would like things to change and work, because a lot has changed. Also, I think with the pandemic, we learned that online teaching is the future, which they should consider. We must continue with it.”

The aforementioned statement suggests including teachers as stakeholders or frontliners in pedagogy and queries the status quo and existing policies about lower quintile schools. Are these policies inclusive of rural and township schools? Do they cater for the marginalised populations?

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter focused on data presentation from our participants' responses and on the analysis and interpretation of the data using thematic analysis. Several themes emerged from the responses and were narrowed down into categories and main themes. The data presented in this chapter were obtained from participants' responses to semi-structured interviews. It was evident that teachers in the aforementioned public school faced different challenges. Themes such as adaptation to environmental changes, curriculum adjustments and teaching challenges highlighted some prevailing issues at Emaxulwini Primary School. Different teachers addressed other problems in different ways. However, some difficulties were systematically the same amongst all teachers. It was evident that some teachers outsourced help to better deal with pandemic emotions such as grief, fear, frustration, anxiety, and stress, while some had to rely on their internal strengths, such as self-efficacy and external support received through teacher collaboration.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings from the interviews, focusing on educators' experiences during COVID-19 at a township school in Hammarsdale, KZN. The findings are drawn from participants' interviews and are discussed, analysed, and interpreted using thematic analysis. A body of literature will argue the significance or cross-examine the results with existing literature. This chapter will link the results with the theoretical framework.

5.1.1 Adaptation to the Environment: COVID-19 Pandemic

Based on findings, the teachers indicated that COVID-19 brought many changes, specifically to the schooling environment. Most teachers perceived this change as sudden and emotionally taxing. The teachers mentioned that this change occurred not only in the school as a workplace but also in their ability to adapt to working in such an environment. The results are consistent with research indicating that hybrid teaching requires teachers to thoroughly prepare for lessons, especially regarding teaching and learning materials (Ulla & Perales, 2022). The change in the school environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in shifts in teaching methods, adjustments or reductions in curriculum, different instructional methods, and independent learning (Self-Directed Learning). According to Stoloff and Goyette (2022), the COVID-19 pandemic brought uncertain, recurring changes, affording teachers little time to adapt and leading to a reactive dynamic. This relates to the study findings, which reported that the sudden changes brought by COVID-19 required teachers at Emaxulwini Primary School to adjust quickly. The sudden need for change led to many problems due to unprecedented contextual disruptions.

5.1.2 Adaptation to Curriculum Adjustments

Teachers reported that one of their experiences as teachers was centred on their ability to navigate curriculum adjustments during COVID-19. When the DBE implemented curriculum changes to make up for the days lost during quarantine, teachers were expected to know how to navigate this sudden change. Teachers reported difficulties with the condensed curriculum and

teaching strategies. These results correlate with a study by Dlamini and Zulu (2024), which reported that teachers struggled with curriculum implementation due to a lack of training and teaching strategies. Implementing curriculum adjustments led to the prioritisation of specific tasks and topics, resulting in curriculum gaps. Teachers reported difficulties prioritising specific tasks, as some learners were not as quick to grasp the content as their peers. This suggests there was low learner participation due to difficulties understanding specific topics.

According to Reddy (2022), reductions in school curricula mean that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds do not achieve the expected grade outcomes compared to those from affluent schools. The existing inequalities between public and private schools create a further gap in South Africa's educational system. Agreeably, the PIRLS report highlighted that the South African Systematic Evaluation found that learners in quintile five schools were much more likely to read at the Grade 3 level. In contrast, most learners in schools in quintiles 1, 2, and 3 performed below expected reading levels (Mullis et al., 2021).

The teachers in this study reported that one impact of curriculum adjustments during COVID-19 was that some learners failed to catch up. This suggested they were behind on specific topics, thus leading to learning losses in that intended grade. Teacher XY at Emaxulwini Primary School reported this by stating:

“Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with limited access to technology or quiet spaces to study, struggled to keep up with the curriculum. ... I had to condense or adjust lesson plans, leading to gaps in learners' learning.”

These changes and inequalities outside the school environment permeate classrooms and affect the learners' learning ability. Furthermore, the South African School Evaluation report (2022) supported these results by indicating that KZN schools relied on reading books and showed little compliance with the CAPS curriculum and the use of ICT. Although there were already programmes such as Jika iMfundo, a campaign in KZN Province created to improve learning outcomes and ultimately curriculum coverage, teachers reported difficulties prioritising curriculum coverage at the expense of learning quality (Bertram et al., 2021). Similarly, Maree (2023) reported that “many schools ignored the so-called limited trimming programme (LTP) and reverted to the annual teaching plan (ATP) to ensure a solid foundation for subsequent grades (p.253).

Below is the graph showing the Z-scores for curriculum provision and resource availability by province in 2022.

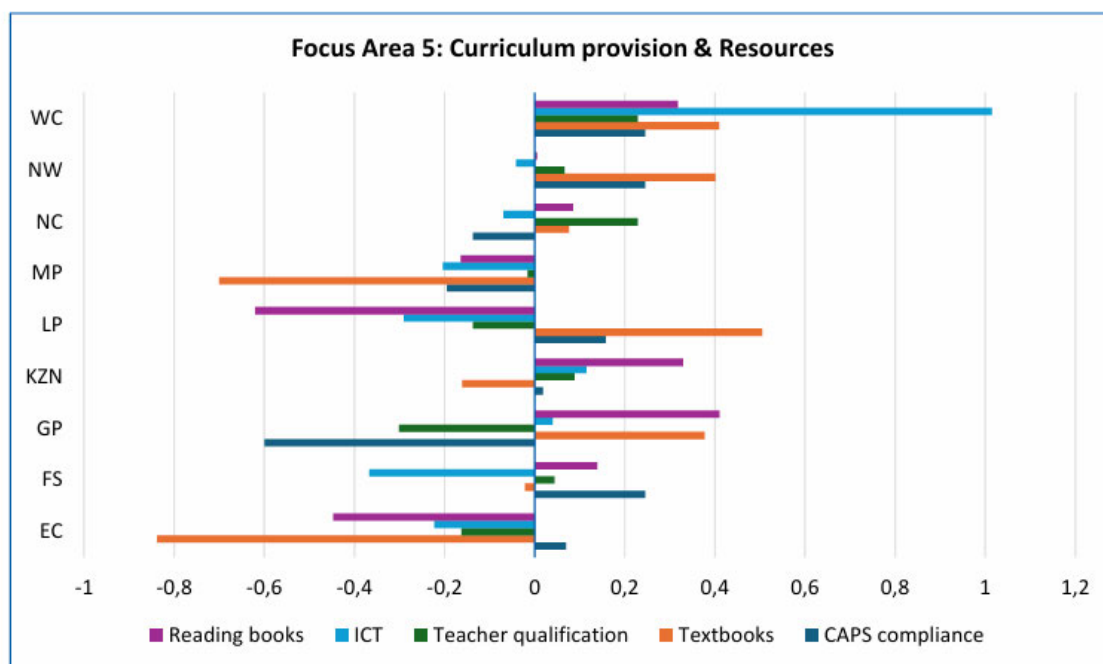


Figure 3: Provincial Curriculum Provision and Resources across provinces in South Africa

(Source: Graph from Department of Basic Education. (2024). South African Systemic Evaluation 2022 Analysis of Factors Influencing Learning Outcomes, p.48).

5.1.3 Adaptation to Challenges in Teaching

Traditional classroom teaching and learning have been used for many years and are effective across different schools serving different populations. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted teaching globally, and this disruption led to many other issues, including exposing the school's and pupils' ability to afford what seemed to be a luxurious way of teaching and learning. The teachers at Emaxulwini Primary School highlighted issues such as a lack of strategies to address learning losses resulting from quarantine and the use of small rotation groups in class. Ardington et al. (2021, p.1) reported that "in 2020, learners experienced a reduction of approximately 56%-60% of face-to-face instructional time because of school closures and staggered schedules, leading to learning loss."

The results revealed a similar problem: the recommended teaching strategies are not feasible for their learners. One teacher reported that they often assigned homework or take-home assignments as an extended way of learning; however, this strategy was ineffective for pupils whose parents were illiterate. In her words, Teacher XY reported:

"Because the normal learning and teaching were affected, we started to give the kids a lot of interactive exercises that also meant taking them home. However, we found that most kids faced challenges because their parents were illiterate. They could not read or write."

This lack of parental involvement further exacerbated teaching challenges. Despite teachers' efforts to address learning and teaching difficulties, it was evident that learners' social capital and socioeconomic status significantly influenced both the learning and teaching processes.

According to Ardington et al. (2021) after the first year of the pandemic, studies reported that "Grades 2 and 4 learners in non-fee-paying school in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Mpumalanga fell behind by about 57% and 70% of a school year reading their home language and roughly 62% and 81% of a school year behind in English reading (p.7)." The above studies support this study's findings, as teachers reported difficulties with learners who were not performing at an expected level or equivalent to their peer group, despite their efforts to help learners recover learning losses. Similarly, Wills and van der Berg (2024) reported:

Besides the changes to curriculum and assessment, few measures have been taken to address learning losses in South Africa. In 2016, the wealthiest 10% of learners were five times more likely to achieve reading proficiency by the end of Grade 4 than those in the poorest 70% of schools. By 2021, this gap had widened, with learners in the wealthiest schools being ten times more likely to read at grade level (p. 20)."

These findings highlight a further problem in our educational system and challenges for teachers working in underprivileged schools and communities.

5.1.4 Innovative Teaching: Multimodal Learning

According to Mullis et al. (2023), although it has been 30 years since the end of apartheid, Afrikaans- and English-speaking schools are still better resourced than schools in any other language. The study revealed that schools offering instruction in African languages are more likely to be categorised as disadvantaged, while approximately one third of English-medium schools are categorised as advantaged (Mullis et al., 2023). This is similar to the results obtained in this study. Our school of interest is classified as a quintile three school and is reported to have had difficulties with multimodal learning during COVID-19, as noted in the previous section. Teacher DE stated:

“The impact was mostly on resources. We already did not have much, so COVID made things worse. We were under-resourced and had to make do with whatever we had. Teaching continued even with the challenges we had.”

This reflects the challenges teachers faced during COVID-19 in a disadvantaged school. The introduction of digital technology seemed to be a luxury to many disadvantaged schools, already facing difficulties in acquiring learning or teaching resources for regular contact classes. Digital technology, or remote learning, was implemented to prevent and reduce the spread of the virus (Lestiyawati, 2020; Situmorang, Nugroho, & Pramusita, 2020). However, due to limited resources, schools like Emaxulwini Primary School faced challenges in conducting practical lessons during COVID-19. In contrast, Chamberlain et al. (2020) reported that teachers and learners in the United States responded creatively to challenges in remote learning, leading to more positive than negative outcomes. This was achieved through the availability of school resources and the learners' access to devices outside the school environment. However, Mullis et al. (2023) challenge this view, reporting that based on principals' responses surveyed in the Pirls study, 73% of the 9,842 South African schools were categorised as socioeconomically disadvantaged. Regrettably, Bohmer and Wills (2023) reported that, for most students, the learners' SES and school support for remote learning proved less effective than traditional classroom learning. Ultimately, this limitation in learning opportunities led to significant learning losses. This depicts the realities of the South African educational system that teachers must endure and navigate daily. For this reason, Konig et al. (2020) assert that:

“Prospective teachers should receive support in acquiring TPK and corresponding cognitive skills during their training years, thus preparing teachers for the digitalisation in schools can be considered an opportunity to be sought (p.619).”

5.1.5 Work-life Balance

The study revealed that working during COVID-19 resulted in a lot of psychological and occupational issues. Concerning psychological issues, teachers reported negative experiences which elicited negative emotions. We named these pandemic emotions, which refer to psychological issues or illnesses such as stress, anxiety, grief, and frustration. These emotions directly influenced their ability to persevere in the face of challenges. The results highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' mental health alongside challenges such as syllabus completion, work pressure, and teacher availability. Similarly, Nhamo et al. (2025) reported that “51.71%

teacher participants indicated that they strongly agreed with the notion that the pandemic negatively impacted their mental health (p.5).” Another study reported that teacher emotional labour has been closely linked to student and teacher performance (Buric, 2019; Buric & Frenzel, 2020; Frenzel, 2021).

The results of this study revealed that teachers’ resilience and self-efficacy contributed to perseverance during COVID-19. Cansoy et al. (2020, p.41) reported, "self-efficacy was identified as a factor predicting psychological well-being of teachers." He further reported that self-efficacy forms a component of psychological capital, which fosters psychological development in individuals (Cansoy et al., 2020). This psychological capital is believed to be strengthened by openness to difficulties and by striving for goals (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Thus, high self-efficacy makes it easier for individuals to cope with difficulties, adapt, and perform better (Bandura, 1977; Hobfoll, 2002).

This can be supported by the statement of Teacher MM, who reported

“... The workload was so intense that I struggled to cope. I was struggling to manage the group of learners we had to teach. I, however, managed to catch up.”

These experiences are an example of one’s self-efficacy and resilience. Teacher MM persevered despite her problems and seemed to believe in her ability to achieve the intended goals, even in the face of the outcomes.

According to Vancouver (2018, p.203), “self-efficacy can play multiple roles, some that negatively affect effort and performance and some that positively affect them. However, these roles are all useful for facilitating self-regulation.” This can be substantiated by Teacher DE, who reported:

“I attended therapy privately because I lost a family member. My counsellor helped me deal with everything. She said I was struggling with work. I remember she called it adjustment disorder. It was related to me struggling with COVID, work and losing a family member. I used to use breathing exercises and calm myself down before work. It helped a lot. That is how I coped.”

This suggests that initially, she struggled with the adjustment to COVID-19 work conditions. However, the impact was positive on her ability to do her work successfully through self-efficacy, outsourcing psychological services, and building resilience.

“Teacher self-efficacy has proven to be critically important within the school setting, as it not only helps prevent emotional strain and burnout, but also positively influences

students' academic success" (Klassen & Tze, 2014; Shead et al., 2016; Boujut et al., 2017, as cited in Oberg et al., 2023, p.7).

However, teachers' self-efficacy during COVID-19 remains an under-researched phenomenon. Despite their efforts to foster education and successfully achieve syllabus outcomes in dire situations, researchers have not yet examined teachers' experiences and resilience. According to Oh and Pyo (2023), "an individual's creative self-efficacy is not confined to successful performance in creative and innovative work in organisations, but also encompasses adaptive emotion regulation strategies, such as reappraisal, positive affect, and career satisfaction (p.9). Pressley and Ha (2021) further note that educators who reported higher self-efficacy were more open to new teaching methods and more persistent when facing challenges. This study showed that the teachers adjusted their teaching methods to accommodate multimodal learning during COVID-19.

5.1.6 Policymaking

The results highlighted the need for teachers to be included in policymaking for under-resourced schools or those serving underprivileged communities. They further argued that COVID-19 revealed what appear to be cracks or loopholes in policymaking, as these policies did not entirely cater to such schools. Their obstacles were not necessarily the same as those of other surrounding schools. Thus, the latter requires including teachers as stakeholders in school decision-making to develop solutions that specifically address their problems. The solutions or remedial actions suggested during COVID-19 were not feasible for most underprivileged schools, such as Emaxulwini Primary School. For instance, using online learning or technological devices was not a solution catering to their learners. This, in turn, reflected the lack of representation of specific schools in policymaking and in the remedial solutions suggested.

Pozo-Rico et al. (2020) reported that teachers who participated in a training programme to improve their ICT competency and support coping with stress and burnout avoidance showed significantly different results than those who did not participate. However, this contrasts with South African teachers who had no training during COVID-19, which may have exacerbated teacher stress and workload, as reported in this study's results. Evidently, "school and system policies also affect teachers' stress and could either facilitate or complicate their coping (Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021, p.941)." Thus, including teachers in programmes that better equip them with the necessary skills alleviates their problems and psychological stress. Sayed et al. (2021) reported that "teachers were not only lacking in professional support, but they were also not provided with

sufficient psychosocial support to manage their pandemic-related anxieties (p.142). Furthermore, Soudien et al. (2021) argue that the urgent need to respond to the pandemic did not allow for the development of an implementation plan or an educator and learner support system.

5.2 Implications of the Findings on the Theoretical Framework

The study can be linked to Kumpfer's transactional resilience model in the context of teachers' experiences during COVID-19. The themes revealed different concepts or constructs within the resilience model. This demonstrates the model's practical application.

As discussed in Chapter 2, resilience is the ability to bounce back after experiencing adverse events (Kumpfer, 1999, cited in Nel et al., 2014). Thus, this study has demonstrated the applicability of the theoretical framework to the data obtained. The following section provides an overview of its application in this research.

Firstly, the first construct refers to exposure to an adverse event or stressor, which, in this case, was the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the teachers, working during COVID-19 was unpleasant. The adjustment to the COVID-19 work environment seemed to have made it difficult to ensure effective teaching. Kumpfer (1999) reported that a stressor causes disequilibrium, indicating a shift in homeostasis. These changes were discussed or presented under the themes of COVID-19-related adjustments and teaching and curriculum adjustments.

Secondly, the environmental context comprises risk and protective factors specific to sociodemographic factors such as age, culture, place, and historical period. The study has presented data on how teachers in the same environment can experience context- and person-specific problems. Although the study's cohort of teachers was from the same school, most mentioned other problems outside the school environment that influenced their work performance. These were identified as family support, availability of peer support, and the type of community one resides in. These factors are considered risk factors for some participants and protective factors for others, thus suggesting the individualism factor of this construct in this theoretical framework.

Thirdly, the person-environmental transactional processes are mechanisms that either actively or passively counteract perceived threats, helping to turn a high-risk environment into one that is more protective. These processes involve perception, cognitive reframing, environmental modification and active coping (Kumpfer, 1999, p.185).” As discussed in Chapter 4, teachers often reported focusing on what they had (minimal resources) rather than worrying

about the lack of resources. These can be seen as a transactional process, particularly the concept of perception. The choice to perceive their problems by selectively perceiving only ‘parts’ of the environment has helped them think differently about their difficulties (process of cognitive reframing). The latter suggests that the teachers were actively modifying the situation (by adapting to hybrid or multimodal learning). The active coping process was demonstrated through continuous conscious attempts to deal with their work difficulties effectively, that is, working with what they had and constantly seeking alternatives, which made teaching more effective.

Fourthly, internal self-characteristics are considered factors that contribute to resilience. These include cognitive, spiritual, behavioural, physical, and emotional factors. The cognitive factors include competency, planning ability, job skills, insight, self-esteem, intelligence, and flexibility (Kumpfer, 1999). In this study, teachers revealed difficulties with being competent in multimodal teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of training programmes to equip them made teaching difficult. The lack of knowledge in using specific apps, such as Google Classroom, YouTube, or WhatsApp, to facilitate lessons or tasks remotely exacerbated difficulties. Furthermore, teachers reported having to quickly adapt to new teaching and learning norms, which, in turn, required greater flexibility. Adapting to changes and integrating what they were trained for and pedagogical content knowledge with technology suggests adaptability (Maree, 2022). Another factor in this construct is the spiritual dimension, which concerns one’s belief in a higher power or entity. This factor serves to motivate and ground individuals. The study revealed that teachers often turned to religion for spiritual support.

The emotional factor reflects characteristics, such as hopefulness, ability to restore self-esteem, recognition of feelings, emotional management skills, and the ability to control difficult emotions such as anger and depression (Kumpfer, 1999). The study revealed that 80% of participants (4 out of 5 teachers) reported difficulties with their psychological well-being during the pandemic. Although the teachers reported that they were hopeful and resilient despite their adversities, they also reported what we termed ‘pandemic emotions’- which refers to emotions influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. These emotions were described as grief, stress, compassion fatigue, frustration, and anxiety. Only one out of the five participants reported having sought out psychological services due to difficulties with adjusting and coping with work demands. The remaining four participants reported that they persevered and were not able to seek psychological help.

A study further highlighted the need for practical guidance in early childhood teaching and professional support systems to address individual teachers' needs (Zhang et al., 2019). Similarly,

one can argue that the teachers in this study required substantial support as primary school teachers in a disadvantaged school. Thus, Kumpfer's Resilience Model highlights the importance of emotional factors in assessing resilience or the practical demonstration of experiences in adverse teaching environments.

The social competency cluster consists of one's ability to function effectively across different environments, including social skills, problem-solving, talents, communication, and peer resistance skills (Kumpfer, 1999). The study's findings revealed that teaching during the pandemic required adapting to a continuously changing environment and engaging in active teaching. This required teachers to adapt to teaching strategies and to develop solutions to their problems. Furthermore, the study revealed that COVID-19 isolation and school closures affected learners' social development. This is on teaching as learners were reported to struggle with communication and comprehension. As a result, teachers had to factor in learning loss during instruction constantly. This is a construct of the social competency cluster, as they had incorporated problem-solving skills in their environment. Similar studies reported that "extended school closures have disrupted social bonds and led to numerous challenges such as heightened health issues, poverty, economy, food insecurity, and digital divide" (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020, p.890).

The Physical Well-Being domain consists of one's physical strengths, including health maintenance skills and good health, which better help the individual adapt swiftly and less uncomfortably to a stressful environment (Wissing et al., 2014). In this study, only one of the five teachers (20% of the participants) reported a chronic illness, which appeared to have hindered effective teaching. Similarly, Tengilimoğlu et al. (2022, p.8) reported: "COVID-19 fear level of employees living with chronic disease was higher than moderate." These results are consistent with the teacher well-being theme discussed in Chapter 4 (results section). Teachers reported fear that their well-being was not prioritised during the pandemic due to the government's lack of psychological and medical support. Thus, this theoretical framework considers one's physical aspects in explaining teachers' experiences during COVID-19.

The fifth domain comprises the resilience process, which comprises the coping mechanisms the individual learns through exposure to stressors that help them reintegrate (Kumpfer, 1999). These may be long-term or short-term resilience or stress/coping processes that help one bounce back. The results of the study revealed that teachers had to resort to compensatory strategies, including thoroughly preparing for lessons, printing worksheets to compensate for the lack of technological devices, and relying on peer supervision or staff meetings to make up for the lack of teaching training during the pandemic. Teachers reported using the aforementioned

compensatory strategies to cope with their challenges. The application of this theoretical framework illustrated the strategies teachers used to cope with teaching challenges during the pandemic, thereby highlighting their experiences and fostering resilience.

Lastly, the resilient integration domain consists of the successful life adaptation or outcomes that one has acquired, which led them to be resilient (Kumpfer, 1999). As discussed earlier in this chapter, most teachers reported that they could survive the dire situations they encountered and adapt successfully. The latter refers to resilience. The results suggest that the teachers were resilient enough to endure their teaching challenges and adapt to the environment successfully. However, a minority of the participants reported difficulties in successful adaptation. As mentioned earlier in the Discussion section (Chapter 5), Teacher DE reported that she initially struggled with adjusting to work demands and was diagnosed with adjustment disorder. This led to difficulties in managing pandemic-related emotions and work demands. Consequently, one aim of this study is to examine teachers' experiences of teaching at a township school during the pandemic. Similar results were reported in a study by Tshabalala (2023), which found that despite the challenges faced by rural school teachers, they demonstrated high self-efficacy and resilience.

The abovementioned section has practically demonstrated the suitability and use of Kumpfer's Resilience Model in this study. Its suitability for exploring teachers' experiences at a township school with limited resources was demonstrated through a thorough application of the model to examine how the teachers survived the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, indicating successful adaptation amidst adversities, a concept which Kumpfer perceived as 'resilience.' This is considered the final step in the resiliency process, indicating successful adaptation. Thus, one can confidently conclude that the implications of this theoretical framework were linked throughout the discussion section to argue for its relevance or applicability in this study.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter analysed and interpreted the collected data about the theoretical framework and previous studies. It discussed the study's findings, revealing the following themes: adjustment to COVID-19 changes, adjustment to curriculum adjustments, adjustment to teaching, work-life balance, social impact, and professional development. These themes were discussed in relation to existing literature to argue the significance of the data obtained. This chapter concluded with a visual presentation of our theoretical framework and a discussion of the implications of the findings for it.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises an exploration of teachers' experiences during COVID-19 at a township school in Hammarsdale, KZN. The chapter aims to provide a concluding segment of the study, recommendations for future research studies, and the study's implications for clinical practice and policy. This exploration was set to provide additional knowledge to the paucity of literature on South African township schools and educators' experiences during COVID-19. The aforementioned mapped out what seemed to be prevailing challenges in our educational system, which are the disparities between affluent (advantaged) schools and disadvantaged schools, the sociopolitical factors, such as policy implementation in these two contrasting school environments, and the impact of learners' social capital on effective learning or access to quality education. The study found that township teachers at Emaxulwini Primary School faced various problems that hindered effective teaching, including a lack of training, professional development, and technological resources. In addition, the study showed the challenges that directly and indirectly affect South Africa's educational system in a macrosystemic lens. This section will present the study's limitations, recommendations for clinical practice, and policy recommendations for future studies.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

The research study was conducted at only one public school in Hammarsdale due to the research methodology and the area of interest. Thus, the findings are restricted to a public school in Hammarsdale, in KZN. However, different results might have emerged if the study had been conducted in different areas within the same district. Consequently, the results cannot be used for generalisation or transferability purposes for schools in different areas with different socioeconomic factors.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are offered for addressing teachers' experiences at a township school in Hammarsdale, KZN. These recommendations aim to help foster effective teaching and learning for all, but more importantly,

for underprivileged schools and communities facing unique challenges that require unique solutions. Thus, these recommendations are intended as guidelines based on the information and results collected during the research study to inform clinical practice, policymaking, and future research.

6.3.1 Recommendations with regard to Clinical Practice

It is recommended that the government include mental health services in the Disaster Management Act/annual budget in order to sponsor psychological services for frontliners during and after pandemics. This will assist the relevant individuals with psychological/mental health problems that may arise as a result of working in dire situations/pandemics. Teachers in this study reported experiencing psychological issues and mental health problems during COVID-19; thus, the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Health can create initiatives or programmes to help teachers cope with the aftermath of exposure to severe illness, outbreaks, or pandemics. Prioritising teachers' well-being will directly aid in effective teaching in schools. Yang et al. (2023) highlight that "Korean teachers relied on both contextual support and collaborative professional practices, which eventually led to collective resilience" (p.11). This study thus highlights the importance of prioritising resources and support systems that enhance teachers' resilience in school environments.

Furthermore, psychological interventions such as group therapy can be used to alleviate mental health issues in a shared space. According to Fricker and Alhattab (2021), counselling for learners is needed to reduce the emotional impact of COVID-19. The exposure to a national disaster that led to a high rate of mortality and trauma requires the government to implement school counsellors in disadvantaged schools as a way to tailor individualised therapy, which deals with person-specific problems.

6.3.2 Recommendations concerning policy

The research findings revealed a lack of cooperation between policymakers and teachers. Some implementations were not feasible for underprivileged schools like Emaxulwini Primary School due to their unique problems and other social capital factors. Thus, including teachers as stakeholders in policymaking would help develop effective policies that address the challenges specific to each school, without adopting an overarching approach that is not feasible for most public schools. The following recommendations are suggested:

- It is recommended that the government incorporate digital learning in rural and public education to create and facilitate multimodal remote learning for the development of both learners and educators. Maree (2022) argues that using ICT in schools equips learners with lifelong learning skills that are useful beyond school contexts and will be beneficial in later years in their careers. As such, we recommend that the government invest in ICT and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) in schools to encourage both learner and teacher professional development.
- Prioritise uplifting public or rural education systems through a budget meeting its target needs. This may be accomplished through a whole-school approach that allows policymakers to target needs for learners, educators, and the school as a whole.
- Further research may be done in schools to look at common issues in underprivileged schools, and draft goals and needs per the institution or school, rather than using overarching goals for schools in general.
- Continued professional development (CPD) or programmes must be undertaken for educators to orient them on new trends or forms of teaching, such as multimodal learning, even post the COVID-19 era.

6.3.3 Future Research Studies

This study is solely concerned with the experiences of educators at Emaxulwini Primary School during COVID-19 - more specifically, the difficulties they faced in ensuring effective teaching during COVID-19, the support or coping mechanisms they used, and the impact of such changes in learning practices on their well-being. Thus, the study did not include schools in the same or neighbouring areas. Future research may examine the long-term effects of COVID-19 on teachers and learners to understand its impact in township schools, compare the aftermath of COVID-19 over an extended period, and determine how these individuals recovered from the educational breakdown. Furthermore, practical solutions can be implemented to lessen or eliminate the negative impact of COVID-19 in public schools. Future studies may also look into the prevalence of compassion fatigue (CF) and secondary traumatic stress (STS) of teachers in underprivileged schools in South Africa. Future studies may expand to a national or provincial scale to assess and quantify the number of educators who experienced psychological issues and further use psychometric measures to assess resilience and long-standing effects of psychological trauma.

6.4 Conclusion

This paper confirms that COVID-19 had a significant impact on teaching and learning, revealing many inequalities in the educational sector. It was apparent that teachers, as frontliners guiding and managing teaching and learning processes, faced many problems outside the school environment. Despite these difficulties, teachers were still expected to produce good results, meet curriculum requirements, and foster effective teaching and learning. From the results, it can be concluded that 1) teachers had difficulties adjusting to the COVID-19 work environment. This was evident in the need to play multiple roles outside their profession as teachers; they were expected to enforce and ensure that learners adhered to COVID-19 restrictions in a school environment, such as using sanitisers in the classroom and maintaining social distancing on school premises. 2) Teachers had to balance work-life commitments and personal life during the pandemic. This suggested that teachers had to deal with psychological issues such as grief at losing close persons who passed away due to or during COVID-19, anxiety of working in a high-risk environment, and the stress and frustration of teaching in an under-resourced school. These challenges affected teachers' well-being and functioning. 3) Teachers reported the social impact of COVID-19 in teaching and learning, due to less interaction amongst pupils. The study revealed that learners' communication skills and social development were affected, resulting in greater developmental delays. These made teaching challenging, as teachers did not have the luxury of correcting or focusing solely on a syllabus topic for an extended period. The latter was reported to have led to learning losses and learning poverty. 4) Teachers reported further difficulties with professional competency. Due to a lack of prior training on how to deal with teaching issues related to COVID-19/natural disasters, teachers felt incompetent in carrying out specific lessons and dealing with COVID-19-related matters. Although they reported reduced syllabi, specific difficulties hindered effective teaching and learning in underprivileged schools.

The study has given an overview of teachers' experiences at a township school in Hammarisdale, KZN. This study presented data to support future research on the psychological factors and resilience of teachers in underprivileged schools. Overall, the study used a theoretical framework that provides a clear overview of factors that better explain whether teachers successfully coped with the challenges of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

References

- Alves, R., Lopes, T., & Precioso, J. (2021). Teachers' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: factors explaining professional well-being. *International Journal of Educational Research and Innovation (IJERI)*, 15, 203-217. <https://doi.org/10.46661/ijeri.5120>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed, text rev.: DSM-5TR). American Psychiatric Association.
- American Psychological Association. (2018, April). *Resilience*. In *APA dictionary of psychology*. Retrieved July 19, 2025, from <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>
- Ardington, C., Wills, G., & Kotze, J. (2021). COVID-19 learning losses: Early grade reading in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development* 86(102480), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102480>
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>
- Barrington, K. (2020). The impact of coronavirus on public schools. *Public School Review*.
- Bellei, C., Contreras, M., Ponce, T., Yanez, I., Diaz, R., & Vielma, C. (2022). The fragility of the school-in-pandemic in Chile. In F. M. Reimers (Ed.), *Primary and secondary education during COVID-19: Disruptions to educational opportunity during a pandemic* (pp. 79–103). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81500-4>
- Bertram, C. A., Mthiyane, C. C. N., & Naidoo, J. (2021). The tension between curriculum coverage and quality learning: The experiences of South African teachers. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 81. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102353>
- Böhmer, B., & Wills, G. (2023, December). *COVID-19 and inequality in reading outcomes in South Africa: PIRLS 2016 and 2021* (COVID-Generation Working Paper). Stellenbosch University. https://resep.sun.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2023-12-22 Bohmer_Wills_PIRLS_inequality.pdf
- Bouchey, B., Castek, J., & Thygeson, J. (2021). Multimodal Learning. In J. Ryoo & K. Winklemann (Eds.), *Innovative Learning Environments in STEM Higher Education*

- (pp. 35-54). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-58948-6_3
- Brislin, R. W. (1976). *Translation: Applications and research* (R. B. W. Anderson & R. W. Brislin, Eds.). Gardner Press.
- Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quantity*, 56(3), 1391-1412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., & et al. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 25(8), 652-661. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>
- Cansoy, R., Parlar, H., & Turkoglu, M. E. (2020). A Predictor of Teachers' Psychological Well-Being: Teacher Self-Efficacy. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences* 12(4), 41-55. <https://doi.org/10.15345/iojes.2020.04.003> .
- Centre for Development and Enterprise. (2015). Teachers in South Africa: Supply and demand 2013-2025 (CDE Indepth Report). Centre for Development and Enterprise. <https://www.cde.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Teacher-Supply-and-Demand-2013-2025-Full-Report-March2015-CDE.pdf>
- Chamberlain, L., Lacina, J., Bintz, W. P., Jimerson, J. B., Payne, K., & Zingale, R. (2020). Literacy in Lockdown: Learning and Teaching during COVID-19 School Closures. *The Reading Teacher*, 74(3), 243-253. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1961>
- Cieslak, R., Shoji, K., Douglas, A., Melville, E., Luszczynska, A., & Benight, C. C. (2014). A meta-analysis of the relationship between job burnout and secondary traumatic stress among workers with indirect exposure to trauma. *Psychol Serv*, 11(1), 75-86. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033798>
- Czerniewicz, L., Agherdien, N., Badenhorst, J., Belluigi, D., Chambers, T., Chili, M., De Villiers, M., Felix, A., Gachago, D., & Gokhale, C. (2020). A wake-up call: Equity, inequality and COVID-19 emergency remote teaching and learning. *Postdigital science and education*, 2(3), 946-967. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00187-4>
- De Jong, L., Meirink, J., & Admiraal, W. (2019). School-based teacher collaboration: Different learning opportunities across various contexts. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 89(2019), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102925>

- Department of Basic Education. (2024). South African Systemic Evaluation 2022 Analysis of Factors Influencing Learning Outcomes. *Department of Basic Education*: Pretoria.
- Disaster Management Act No. 57 of 2002. (South Africa). *South African Government*. <https://www.gov.za/documents/disaster-management-act>
- Dlamini, T. C., & Zulu, F.-Q. B. (2024). Curriculum implementation challenges and responses during the COVID-19 pandemic in a rural secondary school in South Africa. *African Journal of Career Development*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajcd.v6i1.73>
- Donohue, D., & Bornman, J. (2014). The challenges of realising inclusive education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 34(2), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.15700/201412071114>
- Du Plessis, P., & Mestry, R. (2019). Teachers for rural schools – a challenge for South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(Supplement 1), S1-S9. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39ns1a1774>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.aktas.20160501.11>
- Flick., U., Von Kardoff., E., & Steinke., I. (2004). *A companion to qualitative research*. Sage Publications.
- Foxcroft, C., Roodt, G., & Abrahams, F. (2013). The practice of psychological assessment: Controlling the use of measures, competing values, and ethical practice standards. In K. Foxcroft & G. Roodt (Eds.), *Introduction to Psychological Assessment in the South African Context* (pp. 109–124). Oxford Press Southern Africa.
- Frenzel, A. C., Daniels, L., & Burić, I. (2021). Teacher emotions in the classroom and their implications for students. *Educational Psychologist*, 56(4), 250–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2021.1985501>
- Fricker, T., & Alhattab, S. (2021, July 22). *Learners in South Africa are up to one school year behind where they should be* [Press release]. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/learners-south-africa-one-school-year-behind-where-they-should-be>
- Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (2012). Reviving teaching with ‘professional capital’. *Education week*, 31(33), 30–36.

- Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408–1416. <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR20/9/fusch1.pdf>
- Gelo, O., Braakmann, D., & Benetka, G. (2008). Quantitative and qualitative research: Beyond the debate. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 42, 266–290. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-008-9078-3>
- Glietenberg, S. H., Petersen, N., & Carolin, A. (2022). Teacher educators' experiences of the shift to remote teaching and learning due to COVID-19. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1189>
- Grobler, A. (2022). Teachers' experiences of parents' involvement in Foundation Phase learning during COVID-19. *Perspectives in Education*, 40(2), 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593x/pie.v40.i2.3>
- Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2021). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests *Social Science & Medicine*, 292(2022), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Hidalgo-Andrade, P., Hermosa-Bosano, C., & Paz, C. (2021). Teachers' mental health and self-reported coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ecuador: A mixed-methods study. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 14, 933–944. <https://doi.org/10.2147/prbm.s314844>
- Hu, B., Guo, H., Zhou, P., & Shi, Z.-L. (2021). Characteristics of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19. *Nature Reviews Microbiology*, 19(3), 141–154. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41579-020-00459-7>
- Isenbarger, L., & Zembylas, M. (2006). The emotional labour of caring in teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(1), 120–134. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.07.002>
- Jansen, J. (2013). Personal reflections on policy and school quality in South Africa: When the politics of disgust meets the politics of distrust. In Y. Sayed, A. Kanjee, & M. Nkomo (Eds.), *The search for quality education in post-apartheid South Africa: Interventions to improve learning and teaching*. HSRC Press.

- König, J., Jäger-Biela, D. J., & Glutsch, N. (2020). Adapting to online teaching during COVID-19 school closure: Teacher education and teacher competence effects among early career teachers in Germany. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4), 608-622. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1809650>
- Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice* 24(1), 120-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092>
- Kumpfer, K. L. (1999). Resilience and development: Positive life adaptations. In R. Glantz & J. Johnson (Eds.), *Resilience and development: Positive life adaptations* (pp. 178-224). Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Landa, N., Zhou, S., & Marongwe, N. (2021). Education in emergencies: Lessons from COVID-19 in South Africa. *International Review of Education*, 67(1-2), 167-183. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-021-09903-z>
- Lestiyanawati, R. (2020). The strategies and problems faced by Indonesian teachers in conducting e-learning during COVID-19 outbreak. *CLLiENT. Culture, Literature, Linguistics, and English Teaching*, 2(1), 71-82.
- Levkovich, I., & Ne'Emani, H. (2022). 'Childhood in the shadow of prison bars': How school counsellors cope while counselling children of incarcerated parents. *Children & Society*, 36(6), 1139-1155. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12562>
- Levkovich, I., & Swisa, A. (2022). Shared traumatic reality: Coping among educational counsellors living and working in Israeli communities on the Gaza border. *Journal of Loss & Trauma*, 27(6), 565-582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2021.2012032>
- Louw, D. A., Louw, A. E., & Kail, R. (2014). Basic concepts of child and adolescent development. In D. A. Louw & A. E. Louw (Eds.), *Child and adolescent development*. (2 ed.) (pp. 3-50). Psychology Publications.
- Luthans, F., & Youssef, C. M. (2004). Human, social, and now positive psychological capital management: Investing in people for competitive advantage. *Organisational Dynamics*, 33(2), 143-160. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2004.01.003>

- Maqsood, A., Abbas, J., Rehman, G., & Mubeen, R. (2021). The paradigm shift in the educational system's continuity in the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic: Mental health challenges and reflections. *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences*, 2, 100011. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crbeha.2020.100011>
- Maree, J. G. (2022). Managing the Covid-19 pandemic in South African schools: Turning challenge into opportunity. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 52(2), 249-261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463211058398>
- McMullin, C. (2023). Transcription and qualitative methods: Implications for third sector research. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 34(1), 140-153.
- Mdoda-Zide, L. (2023). Teachers' pedagogical strategies in under-resourced rural schools in South Africa. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (EHASS)* 4(12), 20-31. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20234123>
- Mhlanga, D., Denhere, V., & Moloi, T. (2022). COVID-19 and the key digital transformation lessons for higher education institutions in South Africa. *Education Sciences*, 12(7), 464. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12070464>
- Mpungose C.B. 2020. Emergent transition from face-to-face to online learning in a South African University in the context of <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-020-00603-x>
- Mpungose, C. B. (2020). Emergent transition from face-to-face to online learning in a South African University in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 7(1), 113. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00603-x>
- Msila, V. (2005). The education exodus: The flight from township schools. *Africa Education Review*, 2(2), 173-188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146620508566299>
- Mukuna, K. R., & Aloka, P. J. (2020). Exploring educators' challenges of online learning in COVID-19 at a rural school, South Africa. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 19(10), 134-149. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.10.8>

- Mullis, I. V. S., von Davier, M., Foy, P., Fishbein, B., Reynolds, K. A., & Wry, E. (2023). *PIRLS 2021 International Results in Reading*. Boston College, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center. <https://doi.org/10.6017/lse.tpisc.tr2103.kb5342>
- Muzari, T., Shava, G. N., & Shonhiwa, S. (2022). Qualitative research paradigm: A key research design for educational researchers, processes, and procedures: A theoretical overview. *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(1), 14-20. <https://indianapublications.com/Journals/IJHSS>
- Naseer, S., Khalid, S., Parveen, S., Abbass, K., Song, H., & Achim, M. V. (2023). COVID-19 outbreak: Impact on global economy. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.1009393>
- Nel, L. (2014). Theories on character strengths, resilience, hope, and self-determination. In M. P. Wissing, J. C. Potgieter, T. Guse, T. Khumalo, & L. Nel (Eds.), *Towards Flourishing: Contextualising Positive Psychology* (pp. 123–128). Van Schaik Publishers.
- Nhamo, G., Kunene, H. P., & Mashula, N. (2025). COVID-19 and school teachers in South Africa: Interfacing SDG3 (Health and Wellbeing) and SDG4 (Quality Education). *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 12, 101655. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.101655>
- Nomtshongwana, T., & Buka, A. M. (2023). Teachers' Experiences on Stress during COVID-19: A South African Case Study. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 4, 1-17. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2022411>
- Nomtshongwana, T., Buka, A. M., & Nqabeni, N. (2020). Strategies to Cope with Teachers' Stress During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic: A South African Case Study. *African Journal of Social Work*, 10(3), 25–33. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.202345310>
- Oh, S., & Pyo, J. (2023). Creative self-efficacy, cognitive reappraisal, positive affect, and career satisfaction: A serial mediation model. *Behavioral Sciences*, 13(11), 890. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13110890>
- Ontong, K., & Waghid, Z. (2020). Towards cultivating a critical pedagogy of 'Splace': A response to teaching practices in higher education amidst COVID-19. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346085383_Towards_cultivating_a_critica

[l_pedagogy_of_splace_a_response_to_teaching_practices_in_Higher_Education_am
idst_COVID-19](#)

- Onyeaka, H., Anumudu, C. K., Al-Sharify, Z. T., Egele-Godswill, E., & Mbaegbu, P. (2021). COVID-19 pandemic: A review of the global lockdown and its far-reaching effects. *Science Progress*, 104(2), 00368504211019854. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00368504211019854>
- Padmanabhanunni, A., & Pretorius, T. B. (2025). The resilience of South African school teachers during the pandemic: The interrelationship between resilience, fear of COVID-19, and psychological distress. *Traumatology*, 31(2), 262. <https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000519>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Pervin, N., & Mokhtar, M. (2022). The interpretivist research paradigm: A subjective notion of a social context. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 11(2), 419–428. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v11-i2/12938>
- Plotka, R., & Guirguis, R. (2022). Distance learning in early childhood during the COVID-19 crisis: Family and educators' experiences. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01384-5>
- Pozo-Rico, T., Gilar-Corbí, R., Izquierdo, A., & Castejón, J.-L. (2020). Teacher training can make a difference: Tools to overcome the impact of COVID-19 on primary schools. An experimental study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(22), 8633. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17228633>
- Pressley, T., & Ha, C. (2021). Teaching during a pandemic: United States teachers' self-efficacy during COVID-19. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 106(103465). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.10346>
- Reimers, F. M. (2021). Learning from a pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 on education around the world. In F. M. Reimers (Ed.), *Primary and secondary education during Covid-19: Disruptions to educational opportunity during a pandemic* (Vol. 1, pp. 475). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81500-4>

- Sacks, D., Bayles, K., Taggart, A., & Noble, S. (2020). COVID-19 and education: How Australian schools are responding and what happens next. *PwC Australia*.
- Samanth, M. (2024). A brief introduction to research methodology. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, 12(5).
- Sayed, Y., & Singh, M. (2020). Evidence and education policy making in South Africa during Covid-19: Promises, researchers and policymakers in an age of unpredictability. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1), 20–39.
- Sayed, Y., Singh, M., Bulgrin, E., Henry, M., Williams, D., Metcafe, M., Pesambili, J., & Mindano, G. (2021). Teacher support, preparedness, and resilience during times of crises and uncertainty: COVID-19 and education in the Global South. *Journal of Education*, (84), 125–152. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i84a07>
- School Click. (2025, February 3). *Emaxulwini Primary School*. Retrieved June 17, 2025, from <https://schoolclick.co.za/emaxulwini-primary-school-fees-application-form/>.
- Sephton, A. M. (2022). *Exploring school adaptations to the challenges of educating in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic*, Murdoch University.
- Soudien, C., Reddy, V., & Harvey, J. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on a fragile education system: The case of South Africa. In F. M. Reimers (Ed.), *Learning from a pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 on education around the world* (Vol. 1, pp. 303–325). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81500-4>
- South Africa. (1998). *Employment of Educators Act, No. 76 of 1998*. Government Gazette. <https://www.gov.za/documents/employment-educators-act>
- Spaull, N., & Van der Berg, S. (2020). Counting the cost: COVID-19 school closures in South Africa and its impact on children. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 10(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v10i1.924>.
- Statista. (2025). *Number of schools in South Africa in 2024*. Statista Research Department. <https://www.statista.com/statista/1262871/number-of-schools-in-south-africa-by-sector/>
- Stoloff, S., & Goyette, N. (2022). Hybrid teaching in schools: Pedagogical innovation and professional well-being in a time of pandemic. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 11(3), 1. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v11n3p1>

- Tengilimoğlu, D., Gönüllü, U., Işık, O., Tosun, N., Zekioğlu, A., Tengilimoğlu, O., & Younis, M. (2022). The problems experienced by employees with chronic disease during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(1), 578. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19010578>
- Tenny, S., Brannan, J. M., & Brannan, G. D. (2022). Qualitative study. *National Library of Medicine: National Center for Biotechnology Information*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470395/>
- Thilakdhari, J., & Jairam, V. (2023). Psychosocial experiences of Foundation Phase teachers in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. *South African Journal of Education*, 43(s1), S1-S18.
- Tshabalala, N. (2023). Exploring factors influencing teachers' self-efficacy at rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Studies in Psychology*, 3(2), 30-36. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijspsey.v3i2.928>.
- Ulla, M. B., & Perales, W. F. (2022). Hybrid teaching: Conceptualization through practice for the post COVID19 pandemic education. *Frontiers in Education*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.924594>
- UNICEF South Africa. (2021, July 23). *Learners in South Africa up to one school year behind where they should be*. UNICEF South Africa. Retrieved April 17, 2025, from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/learners-south-africa-one-school-year-behind-where-they-should-be>
- Van der Berg, S., & Spaull, N. (2020). *Counting the cost: COVID-19 school closures in South Africa & its impact on children* (Research on Socioeconomic Policy (RESEP), Issue.
- Van der Berg, S., Van Wyk, C., & Selkirk, R. (2020). *Schools in the time of COVID-19: Possible implications for enrolment, repetition, and dropout*. Department of Economics, University of Stellenbosch.
- Van Lancker, W., & Parolin, Z. (2020). COVID-19, school closures, and child poverty: A social crisis in the making. *The Lancet Public Health*, 5(5), e243–e244. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30084-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30084-0)

- Vancouver, J. B. (2018). Chapter six - self-efficacy's role in unifying self-regulation theories. In A. J. Elliot (Ed.), *Advances in motivation science*, 5, pp. 203-230. Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.adms.2018.01.005>
- Venketsamy, R., & Hu, Z. (2022). Exploring challenges experienced by foundation phase teachers in using technology for teaching and learning: A South African case study. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists*, 10(2), 221-238. <https://doi.org/10.17478/jegys.1085660>
- Weiten, W. (2014). *Psychology themes and variation: South African Edition* (2 ed.).
- White, S., Harmon, H., Johnson, J., & O'Neill, B. (2022). In-the-Moment Experiences of Rural School Principals in the COVID-19 Pandemic. *The Rural Educator*, 43(2), 47-59. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55533/2643-9662.1322>
- Wills, G., & van der Berg, S. (2024). COVID-19 disruptions and education in South Africa: Two years of evidence. *Development Southern Africa*, 41(2), 446-465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2024.2311711>
- Wissing, M. P., Potgieter, J. C., Guse, T., Khumalo, T., & Nel, L. (2014). *Towards flourishing: Contextualising positive psychology*. Van Schaik Publishers.
- Ximba, C. S. (2022). *Educators' perceptions of digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic at a quintile-three primary school in Gauteng*, [University of Johannesburg].
- Yang, M., Oh, Y., Lim, S., & Kim, T. (2023). Teaching with collective resilience during COVID-19: Korean teachers and collaborative professionalism. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 126. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104051>
- Ynon, G. C., Sharabi, M., & Hillel, A. (2023). Professional crisis or temporary burnout? Teachers' experiences towards the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Education Studies*, 16(2), 13-22. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v16n2p13>
- Zhang, Q., Yin, J., Chen, H., Zhang, Q., & Wu, W. (2019). Emotional labour among early childhood teachers: Frequency, antecedents, and consequences. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 34(2), 288–305.

AppendixA: Informed Consent

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE

Note to researchers: Notwithstanding the need for scientific and legal accuracy, every effort should be made to produce a consent document that is as linguistically clear and simple as possible, without omitting important details as outlined below. Certified translated versions will be required once the original version is approved.

There are specific circumstances where witnessed verbal consent might be acceptable, and circumstances where individual informed consent may be waived by HSSREC.

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 11 September 2023

Greeting: Emaxulwini Primary School Teachers

My name is Kopano Kupa from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. I am currently enrolled for a Masters of Social Science in Clinical Psychology.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research on exploring educators' experiences during COVID-19. The aim and purpose of this research is to understand how you experienced the pandemic, how did COVID-19 affect the teaching practices at your school and which support systems were employed to help you deal with the difficulties of COVID-19. The study is expected to enroll five (n=5) educators at Emaxulwini Primary School, in Hammarsdale. It will involve the following procedures: recruitment via a poster in the staff room and upon agreement, there will be interviews that are an hour for each candidate. The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be an hour, the study will take at least 3-5 days. The study is not funded by any organization.

The study may involve the following risks and/or discomforts with certain questions regarding your teaching experiences during COVID-19. However, our line of questioning does not tamper on personal or intrusive questions that are likely to traumatize you. We hope that the study will create the following benefits of adding to the lack of research on township schools and how teachers in such school environments survived the pandemic, and we hope the study will provide future recommendations for policymakers to consider when catastrophic events such as COVID-19 occur in future and how policies may accommodate township schools. Please note that the study will not benefit participants directly and as such no monetary or compensation should be expected from participating.

Due to the nature of the research study and questions, we do not foresee any potential risks. However, should we encounter any risks or discomfort from the participants, they will be referred to the Child and Family Centre (CFC), which is situated at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, for further intervention with the relevant professionals.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (031 260 4557).

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

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus Govan

Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness
(Where applicable)

Date

Signature of Translator (Where
applicable)

Date

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

As we discussed during the consent form

- What were your experiences as an educator at Emaxulwini Primary School before and after the COVID-19 pandemic in teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How do you think COVID-19 affected teaching and learning?
- How did you, as an educator at Emaxulwini Primary School, navigate the shift in work demands during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How do you think we could have supported you in advancing teaching and learning in your school during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Is there anything you would like to add or that you may want me to know?
- Before we conclude, do you think you need to see a professional regarding the experiences you encountered during COVID-19?
- **Do you have any questions?** If you have no questions, I promise to share a copy of the final research report with you, the school, and the Department of Education.

Appendix C: Ethical Clearance Letter



18 June 2024

Sejamagoba Kopano Kupa (223051330)
School of Applied Human Sc
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear SK Kupa,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00006643/2024

Project title: Exploring educators' experiences during the coronavirus pandemic: A case study of a primary school in Hammarsdale Township.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 30 January 2024 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.

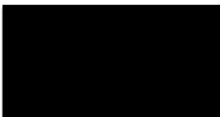
Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 18 June 2025.

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.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health 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 D: Gatekeeper Letter



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 1051

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Mrs B.T. Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7554

Miss Kopano Kupa
15 Pepworth Road
SCOTVILLE
PIETERMARITZBURG
3201

Dear Miss Kupa

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"EXPLORING EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES DURING COVID-19: A CASE STUDY OF A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN HAMMARSDALE TOWNSHIP;".** 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 **14th August 2023 to 31st December 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 Mrs Buyi Ntuli 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.

Mr GN Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 14 August 2023

Appendix E: Turnitin Similarity Report

Exploring educators' experiences during COVID-19

ORIGINALITY REPORT

13 %	%	%	13 %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper	11 %
2	Submitted to Regenesys Business School Student Paper	<1 %
3	Submitted to University of South Africa Student Paper	<1 %
4	Submitted to University of the Free State Student Paper	<1 %
5	Submitted to West Virginia State University Student Paper	<1 %
6	Submitted to The Independent Institute of Education (IIE) Student Paper	<1 %
7	Submitted to Two Oceans Graduate Institute Student Paper	<1 %
8	Submitted to Northcentral Student Paper	<1 %
9	Submitted to Rush University Student Paper	<1 %
10	Submitted to University of Cape Town Student Paper	<1 %
11	Submitted to Newman College Student Paper	<1 %
12	Submitted to University of Southern California Student Paper	<1 %

13	Submitted to Winston-Salem State University Student Paper	<1 %
14	Submitted to Hellenic Open University Student Paper	<1 %
15	Submitted to University of Witwatersrand Student Paper	<1 %
16	Submitted to Palm Beach State College Student Paper	<1 %
17	Submitted to Victoria University Student Paper	<1 %
18	Submitted to Australian Catholic University Student Paper	<1 %
19	Submitted to Jackson State University Student Paper	<1 %
20	Submitted to Liberty University Student Paper	<1 %
21	Submitted to De Montfort University Student Paper	<1 %
22	Submitted to New Design University Privatuniversität GesmbH Student Paper	<1 %
23	Submitted to The University of the West of Scotland Student Paper	<1 %
24	Submitted to Bindura University of Science Education Student Paper	<1 %

Exclude quotes

Off

Exclude matches

Off