

Teachers' professional relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of a primary school

by

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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

PIETERMARITZBURG

2023

DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment / partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Education, in the Graduate Programme in Teacher Development Studies,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Lauren Jacobs declare that

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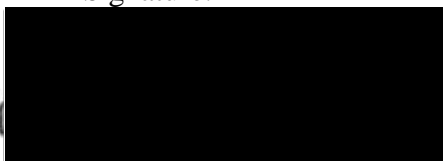
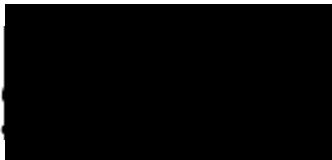
9 February 2023

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Name of Supervisor: Prof Carol Bertram

Signature:



DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mum, Lorna Jacobs for her support, encouragement and love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am eternally grateful to my supervisor, Professor Carol Bertram, for her patience and support throughout the study.

I thank my participants as well for their time and experiences which they kindly shared with me.

Many thanks to Dr. Mervyn Turton for his knowledge throughout the study, in spite of his busy schedule.

Lastly, I would like to thank Mrs -Amod for always been available to help when necessary.

ABSTRACT

When schools closed due to the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in March 2020, teachers were not able to teach as usual, and lost their face-to-face connections with colleagues and learners. This research study focused on a primary school located in KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg. It aimed to explore teachers' professional relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic, the support the school management team (SMT) provided them, and how teachers provided support and guidance to colleagues.

The study is a case study of a public primary school. There were six teachers and two SMT members who participated in the study. Hargreaves' three characteristics of teacher expertise, emotional practice of teaching, professional judgment and professional capital served as a conceptual framework to analyse the data. Data was generated through interviews and collages. It showed that teachers were required to adapt or acquire technological skills to upload content for learners to access. Teachers feared how the curriculum would be covered. The findings revealed a difference of opinions among teachers and SMT members about the support that the latter provided the former during the pandemic. The SMT believed they provided adequate support to all teachers during the lockdown in March and when schools reopened in July 2020. The majority of teachers also felt the support they received from the SMT was suitable, while some teachers felt they received no support.

ABBREVIATIONS

ATP	Annual teaching plans
DBE	Department of Basic Education
HOD	Head of department
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
PPE	Personal protective equipment
SGB	School governing body
SMT	School management team
WiFi	Wireless fidelity
SLTs	Senior Leadership Team

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The study focused on the professional relationships between the school management team (SMT) and teachers during the COVID-19 period, in a public primary school. The background, research problem, aims and research questions of the study are outlined in this chapter. The methodological approaches to the study are also discussed. The chapter concludes with an outline of the chapters that follow.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In March 2020, the State President of South Africa announced that the country would be on level 5 lockdown, and therefore schools would be closed from the 14th of March 2020. This was done in order to allegedly reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Due to the lockdown regulations, schools closed, which resulted in schooling coming to complete halt for the duration of the lockdown, which ended on the 8th of June 2020. This necessitated various types of support being provided to learners to enable them to continue with their learning. The support provided depended on the resources available at the school, community, and home. There were a few choices available for learning such as online learning, self-learning, and support from family members (Soudien et al., 2021).

The white paper on Education and Training (1996a) states how public funding was to be distributed among different types of schools, which make up five levels. According to Du Plessis (2020), schools falling within quintiles 1-3 are found in poorer communities, and thus these schools receive more state funding as they do not charge school fees. Quintile levels 4 and 5 are schools that are located in better-resourced communities which charge school fees, thus these

schools receive little or no state funding. This funding model has created a bi-modal education system, which means that approximately 20% of schools (quintile levels 4 and 5) are well resourced, as they charge school fees (Spaull, 2013). In these quintile level 4 and 5 schools, teachers were able to prepare lessons that learners could work on independently, and the teachers could offer online teaching or a combination of both (Soudien et al., 2021), as the teachers and their learners had access to laptops or tablets, as well as internet connections. Teachers in schools where learners had access to the internet, were able to adapt their normal face-to-face teaching methods to the online teaching platforms in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In quintile level 1-3 schools, most learners did not have access to devices like laptops, nor data and internet connections. Teachers in these non-fee-paying schools tried to provide online learning, such as on WhatsApp groups, to ensure learners continued with their work, however, this provided further challenges. Some learners couldn't afford data to access the WhatsApp groups on a regular basis, while others didn't have laptops or smartphones (Mukute et al., 2020).

During the school closures, teachers had to plan lessons that covered the curriculum, monitor the progress of learners, and create assessments that could be administered online. During this time, teachers were also struggling personally with the difficulties stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as feelings of fear of the unknown, anxiety and stress; however, every attempt was made to continue delivering on the teaching commitments.

During the pandemic, the South African government set up websites, television programs on state channels SABC 1 and 2, DSTV channels, while radio programs were created to assist learners with subjects such as Mathematics, mathematical literacy, English and Science. The government tried to assist learners through the above methods, however, some learners may have

lacked the knowledge to access the Department of Education websites, or due to poor TV signals in rural areas, were unable to watch the TV programs set up to assist them. Teachers may have lacked the skills to create and manage online platforms due to inexperience or lack of equipment. These are issues mentioned by Dube (2020) in his study on rural school children's ability to access online learning during COVID-19.

After a few months lockdown level 5 came to an end, therefore the Department of Education implemented a staggered return to school of learners. In South Africa, schools started reopening: learners in grades 7 and 12 returned to schools in June 2020, followed by grades 6 and 11 who returned to classes in July of the same year. All these changes, namely the closure of schools and the staggered return to school, required schools to adapt their structures to accommodate the "new normal", as stated by the education sector brief (2020).

When the pandemic occurred, life changed in many ways: there was a period when the country was placed under level 5 lockdown and most organisations including schools, factories, restaurants and places of worship closed, while various restrictions such as mask wearing, social distancing in public and a ban on alcohol and cigarette sales were put in place. The level 5 lockdown was eventually eased and there was a return to normality with restrictions such as social distancing, mask wearing, and this was referred to as the "new normal".

Alea et al. (2020) in their study concluded that teachers' ability to handle online platforms was challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic. A further challenge for some teachers was the management of online teaching platforms, as they had little or no experience in working with technology at this pace, and the COVID-19 regulations necessitated that they overcome this new challenge urgently (Fataar, 2020). This was an important learning curve for teachers who were not technologically proficient, and this highlights Mahaye's (2020) assertion that teachers need to be trained in the skills and techniques of computer-based learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that schools had to close resulted in several changes in a short space of time, due to government-imposed regulations on the public, including schools. These changes put pressure on teachers and school management teams to comply with government changes rapidly. The demands of these changes and the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated a change in mindset in teachers. These changes further required adapting the curriculum especially for subjects such as Creative Arts and Physical Education requiring physical activity, which was no longer allowed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The COVID-19 restrictions had a huge impact on human lives and the teaching environment was not spared, necessitating drastic measures and changes to be implemented (WHO, 2020; Prather et al., 2020). All schools were affected in some way by the pandemic, and as such, my study aims to explore how relationships among staff at Hope Fields Primary (pseudonym) were affected. As an educator at the school, my own experiences led me to explore the support that staff required and received during the pandemic.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Hope Fields Primary is the focus of the study. It is a public school located in an affluent suburb of Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. The school is categorised as a quintile level 5 school, made up of 34 teaching staff and 780 learners. The school has one Grade R class and three classes in the other grades. However, during the pandemic, the need for social distancing required more classes to be added from grade 2 to grade 7, which resulted in more teachers being employed. The school offers a library lesson from grade 1 to grade 7, however, due to COVID-19 the

library had to close. The school has a computer classroom which was closed prior to the pandemic. The school also has large sporting facilities which are utilised for various sporting activities; however, their use was limited during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to COVID-19, the school Heads of Departments (HODs) interacted and communicated regularly with staff. However, with the outbreak of the virus, normal operations changed as schools were closed abruptly, along with other sectors of the economy and society. These sudden changes put pressure on the School Management Teams (SMT) and the Department of Education (DoE) to manage the academic calendar and academic activities. This sudden closure of schools made face-to-face communication between the teachers and SMT impossible.

Hope Fields Primary School was also closed and used an online platform called d6 to share messages with parents. The d6 application can be downloaded on a cellphone or computer with an internet connection, and is designed to simplify school-parent communication regarding general notices, finances and administration.

At the school, one HOD is responsible for several teachers. The foundation phase HOD has 12 teachers within her phase, while in the intermediate phase the HOD has 7 teachers, and in the senior phase the HOD has 15 teachers. HODs employed social media such as WhatsApp groups to keep the teachers under their responsibility informed about any new developments in the school, such as changes in the curriculum or requirements of the DoE, as well as for meetings.

All teachers faced the harsh realities of lockdown, such as being confined to one's home, limited contact with peers and the SMT, and the pressures of having to cope with the negativity and uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the level 5 lockdown, and even when it was eased, people were unable to see or socialise with family and friends. Likewise, teachers could

no longer physically interact with colleagues who provided guidance and emotional support, as well as sharing ideas; this affected everyone's way of life and mental health.

COVID-19 required schools to adapt to change. This may have resulted in a possible increase in teachers' need for support, as well as the SMTs facing possible limitations in providing this during lockdown, which could have affected teacher-SMT relationships.

The preponderance of articles on COVID-19 in South Africa, focus on the needs or effects of the pandemic on learners, such as Soudien (2021), Van der Berg et al. (2020) and Hoadley (2020); however, there is dearth of research on how the lockdown and school closures impacted teachers' relationships and collegiality in the country. My study aims to provide insight into this phenomenon in a public primary school.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to:

- Understand professional relationships among staff at Hope Fields Primary.
- Determine professional challenges that teachers at Hope Fields Primary faced during the COVID-19 lockdowns
- Determine the support that the Hope Fields Primary SMT provided to teachers during the COVID-19 lockdowns.
- Determine the effects of COVID-19 on teachers' relationships with their colleagues at Hope Fields Primary, and between them and the SMT.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I aim to answer the following questions

1. What professional challenges did teachers face because of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What support did the school management team (SMT) offer teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How did teachers' relationships with colleagues and the SMT change during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.6 METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative case study using an interpretivist paradigm approach. A case study involves an in-depth investigation of a situation which explores certain occurrences (Cohen et al., 2007; Rule et al., 2011; Macdonald et al. cited by Bassey, 1999; Punch cited by Tight, 2010; Yin cited by Zainal, 2007). The context of my study is a quintile level 5 primary school. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the relationship between teachers and SMTs changed as result of the lockdown and the rapidly occurring educational changes. The case study explored the relationships between the SMT and teachers, and the support that the former provided the latter during the COVID-19 period.

The data generation methods included semi-structured interviews, and each participant also created and submitted a collage. The collage focused on the experiences of the participants, how their professional relationships were impacted during COVID-19, and the support they received

from the SMT. Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews guided by questions (Appendix 2). This ensured that the interviewer guided the interviewees and stayed within the topic of study.

The population of this study consisted of the 34 teaching staff at Hope Fields Primary School. The sample size was eight participants, which included two members of the SMT and six educators. The sampling strategy for this study was a stratified sampling. Stratified convenient sampling is where the study population is grouped based on certain factors, which can include occupation or gender (Taherdoost, 2016; Acharya et al., 2013). The participants were selected based on the following criteria: three teachers who had been at the school for four years or more, three teachers who had been at the school for two years or less, and two members of the SMT. There are five SMT members within the school: the principal, the deputy principal, and the three other HODs. The SMT members were all informed and participants were selected based on availability, time constraints, and willingness to participate.

Members of the SMT were included in the study to eliminate the possible bias which could be formed by only including teachers in it. This ensured that the perceptions of teachers as well as of the SMT were investigated, as their experiences of their professional relationships during COVID-19 may have differed.

The data was analysed both inductively and deductively. Deductive categories were drawn from Hargreaves (2021) with regards to the changes brought about by the pandemic and how it affected teaching in Canada, which is explained further in Chapter 2. Hargreaves (2021) explored the world of teachers and learners, and how COVID-19 affected teaching. In the study by Hargreaves (2005), which investigated teachers' emotional responses to educational change,

he concluded that emotional geographies help identify the supports for and threats to basic emotional bonds. When emotional geographies are fragmented due to distance, this can cause damage to relationships between teachers and the SMT, particularly in instances of crisis management that require new skill sets, which can also be ascribed to the experience of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter One: This chapter introduces the topic and provides the study background, research problem, study objectives, research questions, and the study rationale.

Chapter Two: This chapter covers the literature review, which explores various studies carried out on the effects of COVID-19 on education. It further explores Hargreaves (2021) concepts which informed the data analysis.

Chapter Three: This chapter looks at the methodology and research design adopted in this study. The sampling methods and data collection tools are discussed, as well as the data methods and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four: This chapter presents the findings of this study.

Chapter Five: This chapter concludes this study as well as supplies recommendations

1.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to present a brief outline of the study, regarding how professional relationships at Hope Fields Primary School were affected during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the support provided to teachers by the SMT. The next chapter focuses on the literature review of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focused on studies that have been conducted on the closure of schools, how the school's quintile level determines the learning resources available, and the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' work and personal lives. It further explores the roles and responsibilities of the school management team (SMT) and the Department of Basic Education in providing teacher support. This chapter will also include a discussion on the conceptual framework.

2.2 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND TEACHING

COVID-19 was first reported in the city of Wuhan, China in 2019 and the virus rapidly spread globally causing widespread destruction of lives and livelihood (Prather et al., 2020). In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, as many people all over the world had lost their lives (Prather et al., 2020; Nwokeocha, 2021). In the same month, the State President of South Africa announced that the country would be on lockdown, which implied that schools and businesses would shut down indefinitely.

During this period, all schools were closed and face-to-face education was suspended. Schools remained closed from the 14th of March until the 8th of June 2020. There were online platforms and educational programs that tried to bridge the gap, however, several months of the academic year were lost. When schools were allowed to reopen again, the Department of Education implemented a staggered return of learners. Learners in grades 7 and 12 returned to schools in June 2020, followed by grades 6 and 11 in July, as stated in the education sector brief

(2020). These changes required schools to adapt their structures to accommodate the “new normal”. There are several definitions of this new term “new normal”. Corpuz (2021) notes that the “new normal” involved working from home, a blended learning approach, and the wearing of face masks.

Due to months of the schooling year being lost due to the pandemic, the Education Department revised the curriculum in order for learners to progress to the next grade. The annual teaching plans (ATPs) were revised, subjects such as Creative Arts and Physical Education had to be completely changed due to COVID-19 restrictions, and social distancing and mask wearing were enforced at schools when they reopened (Circular S3, 2020).

According to the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (RSA, 1996b), which determines the funding of schools, public funds are allocated to the poorest schools. All schools in South Africa are categorized by quintiles, and this determines the level of funding that they receive (Du Plessis, 2020). The quintile level 1-3 schools, which have fewer resources, receive more funding from government, while quintile level 4-5 schools receive a smaller portion of funding. In quintile level 1-3 schools, which lacked resources to migrate to online platforms, learning came to a standstill for the duration of the lockdown, while most quintile level 4-5 schools devised strategies such as online platforms to ensure schooling continued.

During the COVID-19 lockdown period, schools with fewer resources were less likely to be able to provide support to learners compared to their well-resourced counterparts (Dube, 2020; Mukute et al., 2020). The schools that were able to provide learners with support during the lockdown period, used various online learning platforms and WhatsApp groups (Dube, 2020; Mukute et al., 2020). Regardless of the school they attended, learners were able to access

government programs set up to help them during the COVID-19 lockdown (Dube, 2020 ; Mukute et al., 2020).

2.2.1 TEACHING AND LEARNING BEFORE COVID-19

Prior to the COVID -19 pandemic, teachers were able to observe learners in a classroom setting, and were in a position to identify those with barriers to learning; thence, they could properly support those who struggled academically. However, the onset of the pandemic presented a challenge to teachers due to physical distancing, thus they could no longer provide support to learners in the same way, as they were not physically present to notice when learners struggled with work that was uploaded.

This was especially felt by learners facing barriers to learning. Learning barriers can be intrinsic, such as a dyslexia or ADHD, or they can be extrinsic, such as poverty or emotional issues. These factors may have caused learners to suffer during the pandemic, and lockdown in particular, as teachers were not physically available to support these learners. This implied that in a number of ways teachers were no longer present to help to develop their learners holistically, as they did prior to the lockdown.

2.2.2 DURING THE PANDEMIC

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were no longer able to impart their knowledge to and interact with their learners in a classroom setting. According to Fullan (2016), professional capital for teachers involves three components, which include human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. Teachers' social capital, which refers to their colleagues within their school or

at other schools, were no longer available physically to support each other, discuss content or school-related matters, share ideas, give advice, or provide emotional support which they could do pre-pandemic.

Professional capital is the knowledge that teachers have to share with learners. Hargreaves (2021:1850) states that “The professional capital that accrues in teaching comes from investment of human and material resources in teaching.” During the lockdown, some of the teachers’ professional capital was not transmitted to learners due to them being under pressure to adapt the curriculum to online platforms. This may have left teachers feeling uneasy about the information that had to be made available; this was particularly evident among teachers who lacked technological skills. This could also have led to teachers feeling less adequate in their role as educators in this new online learning classroom, especially without guidance and support from the SMT (Hargreaves, 2021).

2.3 DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING RESPONSES TO SCHOOL CLOSURES IN SOUTH AFRICA

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government set up radio and television programs with the aim to support learners during the lockdown period. These programs during the day on SABC 1, 2, as well as on radio channels, provided learners with content on different subjects taught in schools by trained individuals studies by Dube (2020) and Mukute et al. (2020) show that learners, especially in rural areas, may have not been able to access this support, due to not having a radio or television, or as a result of connection problems due to poor service.

The concept of self-directed learning (SDL) became crucial during the pandemic. The definition of self-directed learning is “a process in which individuals take initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (Knowles 1975:18). Self-directed learning involves individuals being responsible for their own learning, which was crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some schools provided online learning platforms for learners to access, while others required learners to complete worksheets and workbooks. In both scenarios, learners needed to complete the activities, be disciplined, and set aside time to complete the tasks or take part in online classes.

2.3.1 ONLINE LEARNING

Online learning became a possible solution to the lockdown restrictions for quintile level 4-5 schools. Online learning is a method of learning where students learn in a virtual environment. In some quintile level 4-5 schools, teachers were encouraged to prepare lessons that learners could work on independently, offer online teaching, or a combination of both (Soudien et al., 2021). Dube (2020) mentioned factors that affected online learning: while some schools were able to access and manage online platforms, the challenge for many learners was due to financial circumstances. Their financial constraints meant that they were unable to buy data, did not have devices suitable to access online platforms, and faced connectivity problems due to living in informal areas where internet connection is poor (Dube, 2020).

Some schools were unable to access online platforms, therefore, it was difficult for teachers to engage with their learners for the duration of the lockdown (March to June 2020). Some quintile level 4-5 schools allowed parents to access an online platform at the school premises and download study material for their children.

Hargreaves (2005) states that there are different stages of teacher career development, and this was critical during the pandemic, as some teachers may have been more open to learning to use new technologies, which would reflect their developmental stage. Teachers in the early stages of their career have more energy, enthusiasm, and are adaptable compared to teachers in the later stages of their career, who are, according to Hargreaves (2005 : 979), “typically more relaxed, experienced and comfortable about their job.” In some cases, this could have impacted how teachers handled the shift from classroom to online platform teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

2.3.2 WHATSAPP GROUPS

Many schools could provide support for their learners through the WhatsApp communication platform. Teachers created WhatsApp groups to help learners cover work that they had missed during the COVID-19 lockdown, however, this posed further challenges like learners not having data to access the WhatsApp groups on a regular basis, or those in rural areas having connectivity problems or no mobile devices suitable to use this platform (Dube, 2020; Mukute et al., 2020). At times, teachers struggled to manage as some of them lacked laptops to type out the work for learners to access on WhatsApp, or learners also did not have laptops to do the work required (Dube, 2020; Mukute et al., 2020).

2.4 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TEACHERS' WORK AND PERSONAL LIVES

The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on human lives, and the teaching environment was not spared, necessitating drastic measures and changes to be implemented (WHO, 2020; Prather et al., 2020). Despite the huge challenges that teachers and learners faced during this period, classes continued in an attempt to reduce the loss of teaching time. Teachers prepared lessons that had to be completed daily by learners with family support and guidance wherever possible. In this section, I will describe studies conducted on teachers' well-being during the pandemic.

In a study conducted in 2020 in Hong Kong, teachers not only had the pandemic to deal with, but widespread protesting and violence. All these challenges required teachers to adjust their thinking and instruction to reflect the needs of learners. The researchers in this study used semi-structured interviews, which included seven female and three male teachers; the findings of the study revealed that challenging times can lead to depression, anxiety, and other unpleasant feelings, and that the school management should find ways to support teachers (Wong et al., 2020). They also concluded that it is important that teachers are given autonomy to adapt content and instruction to prioritize student well-being over academic performance (Pearson et al., 2005 ; Wong et al., 2020). This study is relevant here as it focused on teachers and how they adapted to the circumstances that they faced, while the researchers used a semi-structured interview which was applied in my own study.

In a study conducted in England that focused on the impact of COVID-19 on 24 teachers from 11 primary and 13 secondary schools, the findings revealed themes such as uncertainty, finding a way forward, and changing your thinking to adjust to the pandemic (Kim et al., 2020). The study reported that teachers worried about learners in unsafe home environments, the importance of

teachers' relationships, and teachers' roles changing due to COVID-19. The study further revealed teachers' reflections on the situation being described as "... like a rug had been pulled from under you" (Kim et al., 2020), causing so much unexpected changes to which they had to adapt. The themes revealed in the findings are common concerns that teachers shared during the COVID-19 pandemic: they felt unsure about the future and how they would adapt their teaching, among other worries they had. The study related to this current one, as the focus was on the support that teachers received during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as how they felt.

Another England-based survey in which 8,000 teachers took part, focused on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the well-being of teachers. This survey reported that the lockdown and reopening of schools had the potential to impact their working lives (Allen et al., 2020). Teachers at private schools had to provide content for learners online, due to online programs being made available to these learners during the pandemic. Meanwhile, teachers at schools where online facilities were not available, may have had lower stress levels in comparison because they were not required to provide content for online platforms. Head teachers may have had more responsibilities during the pandemic, such as providing support to teachers and making decisions based on the ever-changing policies. This study was relevant as it focused on teachers and also provided the viewpoint of the SMT, as they had new responsibilities during the pandemic.

In a study conducted in Germany by König et al. (2020), the focus was on how teachers adapted to the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants in the study consisted of 165 early career teachers in the area of Cologne. The researcher created a Likert scale item to measure social contact, as well as teachers' conceptual, situational, and personal knowledge using an existing standardised test. The findings of the study showed that some teachers faced challenges in providing online learning, due to limited knowledge about it.

Teachers who were not technologically savvy struggled during the pandemic, trying to create online platforms which had to be updated on a regular basis for learners to access. Most teachers in the study reported that they still managed to stay in contact with the learners. This study was relevant as it focused on teachers and how they had to adapt to change during the pandemic.

In a study that focused on the burnout of Filipino teachers who were fearful of COVID-19 and remote teaching during the pandemic, the sample size included 1,069 grade K and 12 teachers in Mindanao, Philippines. The respondents were chosen regardless of gender, age or religion. Data was collected using Google link (survey). One method used to compare data was the Likert Scale, while another instrument used was a modified online teaching burnout tool from a study by Panisoara et al. (2020). The results indicated that fear is a significant factor that affects burnout. The study suggests that there are other factors that are associated with burnout linked with remote teaching. Fisher (2011) pointed out that burnout may be a result of poor working conditions, low student interest, weak administrative support, and an excessive number of tasks (Carreon et al., 2021). This is relevant to my study as it focused on the possible issues that teachers faced during the pandemic.

Another study that also took place in the Philippines focused on teachers' knowledge of the pandemic and ability to adapt to online learning. Data was collected using Google forms which were emailed to teachers, and random sampling was applied. The number of responses received was 2300, from universities and different schools. The results showed that all teachers remained in contact with their learners, although some were not proficient at adapting to online platforms, and that the teaching community was willing to adapt to new ways of imparting knowledge, provided their institutions supported them (Alea et al., 2020). The study is relevant as it focused

on teachers and their knowledge or ability to continue doing their teaching job, in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hargreaves' (2021) earlier mentioned a study in Canada focused on the impact of the pandemic, including teachers' losses, gains and transformations. The study concluded that all those involved in schools should be more inclusive of teachers' professional judgments. The author also recommended: an improvement in teachers' technological skills, by ensuring these form part of the studies to become an educator; providing coaching support to school leaders to improve their judgment; and rethinking current parent-teacher relationships to improve communication. This study is relevant to my study as it focused on the challenges and adjustments that teachers had to make during the pandemic.

A study conducted in Colombia focused on the impact of the pandemic in urban and district schools. A survey was used in the study and the sample size consisted of 434 respondents. The district leaders of schools were chosen for the study. The findings revealed that teachers experienced higher levels of emotions due to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. These emotions ranged from isolation, fear, and anxiety that teachers experienced on a daily basis. They expressed the personal and job-related demands placed on them, as well as the difficulties that they faced while trying to cope. The professional demands, such as providing online content and staying in contact with their (younger) learners, posed a challenge. In some cases, teachers were the only support system available for learners (Palmer et al., 2021). This study was relevant as it focused on the impact of the pandemic on teachers.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which affected teachers in Africa and globally, placed pressure on teachers to ensure that learners received content online; this required that teachers who lacked

the skills to manage online platforms gain new skills. The regulations during the pandemic affected countries all over the world and led to the closure of schools, affecting about 1.6 billion children (Nwokeocha, 2021).

Teachers also faced different emotions as the COVID-19 pandemic brought changes in a short space of time, such as the lockdowns that required a complete shutdown of normal life, job losses for many as companies had to downsize or shut down completely, mask wearing that had huge psychological and social impacts, and the fear of the unknown. Most importantly, the pandemic in itself claimed the lives of many people's loved ones, and was a threat to one's own life.

The pandemic had an impact on everyone including teachers and SMT, and a number of international studies highlighted how the former were affected by it, yet continued caring about the needs of their learners. Teachers struggled but adapted quickly to online learning to ensure that learning continued. Those in South Africa did as well, however, in quintile level 1-2 schools, learning came to a standstill in some schools, but when schools reopened, teachers made sure learning resumed. Internationally as well as in South Africa, the SMTs also had to adjust to the pandemic and the closure of schools. They had to continue trying their best to provide support to teachers and ensure that learning continued.

2.5 THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM

In South Africa, a school management team (SMT) consists of the formal positions within a school structure, which include the principal, the deputy principal, and heads of departments.

The SMT has a very important function in the management of a school, as they are required to provide leadership in terms of policy, adapt the curriculum, and support teachers. Leadership, according to Yukl (2002), refers to the ability of managers to inspire those around them to achieve goals, and as such, the SMT is mandated to support teachers in bridging learning gaps (Hoadley, 2020).

Leadership according to Nkabinde (2012) involves a balance of management and vision, and a leader must bring their vision to pass. Blasé et al. (2000) further suggested that a leader should make suggestions, give feedback, and provide professional development to the teachers at their school.

The role of a school principal is very important in terms of leadership within a school (Mestry et al., 2013). They create an appropriate environment for organizational conditions (Harris et al., 2013). Principals have the right to make decisions and create policies within a school (Bush, 2003). Moreover, they can give teachers a voice by giving them the space to make decisions that affect their work (Kruger & Steinman, 2013).

Heads of Departments (HODs) are the intermediates between the school principal and staff. HODs have responsibilities within the school and are accountable for their position of authority. The role of an HOD includes mentoring staff, promoting excellence in teaching, ensuring that adequate academic planning occurs, working with students, and excellence in professional activities (Rhodes University, 2012)

HODs have an impact on learners, staff, and school (Busher et al., 1999), but they have their own teaching times as well as administrative and management duties. HODs are required to provide

guidance and support to teachers, perform administrative tasks, hold regular meetings with teachers, and pass on information from the SMT.

2.5.1 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED TO TEACHERS BY THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM

According to Mestry et al. (2013), the role of a principal is to provide leadership and management of the school. Principals create the climate of the school, which impacts how teachers and senior management interact (Glanz, 2006). The principal has the authority to make decisions regarding policies implemented in the school and develop the school according to government policies (Bush, 2007). Principals decide on strategies appropriate for their schools, while HODs are responsible for ensuring the information filters through to teachers and eventually learners (Bush, 2003). Principals can further facilitate teachers' independence and professional growth, by allowing them the space to make decisions that affect their work (Kruger & Steinmann, 2003).

The HODs are part of the SMT, however, they establish a close working relationship with teachers and should hold regular meetings with them, while maintaining policy and professionalism at the school (Redman, 2006). They interact with both teachers and the school principal. The HODs should meet with the principal on a regular basis and pass directives from him or her to the educators within the school. They should also be involved in teaching both extra- and co-curricular activities, be aware of staffing and managing when necessary, deal with administration, communicate with staff, and stand in when the principal and deputy principal are unavailable (Government Gazette, 2022, September 9).

Integral to high standards of teaching and learning, good collegiality, and interactions with the SMT, is the development and maintenance of emotional understanding (Powell et al., 2008).

This refers to any situation that may create polarisation such as hierarchical power relationships (Chapman et al., 2005). A pandemic such as COVID-19, can distort the emotional as well as cognitive aspects of communication between teachers and SMT. The pandemic put pressure on everyone, including teachers and SMT, and their perceptions and views of situations, leading to possible breakdowns in communication.

2.6 DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION AND TEACHER SUPPORT

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is responsible for the implementation of government policies in schools. The DBE oversees education systems in high schools and primary schools, ensuring that adequate training and skills development take place to optimise policy and teaching implementation (Mansfield-Barry et al., 2017). The national DBE is made up has seven departments, each responsible for the following: curriculum policy, support, monitoring, planning; information as well assessments; finance, administration, teachers, human resources, policies; office of the Director General; educational enrichment services; planning, delivery, and oversight unit. The structure within the DBE responsible for supporting teachers is the curriculum policy structure, which is responsible for supporting teachers and monitoring the curriculum. Teachers should also receive support from subject advisors, who should provide guidance regarding the different subjects.

During the pandemic, all schools were informed that masks and sanitiser would be distributed to them, however, challenges occurred such as theft or delay of personal protective equipment (PPE). Some schools received fewer resources than they were led to believe or none at all, which resulted in unions urging teachers not to return to work in 2020 until all PPE had been sent to

Their schools, according to the news outlet news24 (2020, May 24)

2.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THE IMPACT ON THE CORE CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS' WORK

The conceptual framework used is based on the study by Hargreaves (2021), which focused on four changes affecting teaching during the pandemic. Which has these affected teachers' work in various ways. In his study, Hargreaves (2021) argued that there were three core characteristics of teachers' work and work culture that would be affected by these changes, as listed below. These concepts were used to analyse and interpret the data generated in this study.

1. Teacher expertise - teachers need to develop expertise in at least three aspects: teaching digitally, teaching outdoors, and enabling learners to become self-directed learners.
2. The emotional practice of teaching – finding purpose and motivation and being required to use their professional judgment.
3. Professional capital – teachers' professional capital will change.

2.7.1 TEACHER EXPERTISE

During the pandemic, children had to learn from home as schools closed due government regulations; learners, therefore, had to take ownership of their learning “Self-determination is ultimately about much more than the self-management that is entailed in being self-directed” (Hargreaves 2021:1844). Teachers had to develop expertise in how to teach learners to be self-directed.

Teaching involves organising systematic learning, either through face-to-face or online education. During the pandemic, in some schools teachers were required to provide online content, manage the online platforms, and assess learners online. Some teachers who were not technologically savvy had to quickly overcome this challenge, while others may not have had the

same challenge. According to Hargreaves (2021), the onset of the COVID -19 pandemic changed circumstances for teachers, as they had to adjust the way in which the curriculum was transmitted to learners: lessons were no longer provided through face-to-face interaction, thus compelling teachers to create online-friendly content for learners to access.

This was indeed the case in South African schools: teachers attempted to bridge the learning gap as best they could, by providing learning through platforms such as d6, Google classrooms, WhatsApp groups, etc.

2.7.2 EMOTIONAL PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching is an emotional practice, not just a cognitive and intellectual one (Hargreaves 1998; 1845). The concept of emotional geographies examines the world of teachers and their relationships with each other, within spatial and experiential patterns of closeness and/or distance in their interactions and relationships (Hargreaves, 2000). Emotional geographies of schooling and human interaction can result in emotional understanding and misunderstanding in teaching, which help create, conjure, and illustrate the feelings and emotions that teachers experience.

Most articles in South Africa have focused on the impact of COVID-19 on learning, and engaged with the well-being of learners or the curriculum (Van der Berg et al., 2020; Dube, 2020; McCluskey et al., 2021; Mahaye, 2021; Schwartz et al., 2021). Fewer articles, however, were focused on how the pandemic affected teachers' well-being or the support that they needed (Jones et al., 2021; König et al., 2020).

When reviewing the literature about the well-being of teachers, especially in South Africa, particular consideration was given to studies that looked at the relationship between the school management team (SMT) and teachers, and the support that was provided during the COVID-19

pandemic. Teachers were unable to interact with colleagues on a regular basis, while the interactions between HODs and teachers were sporadic, due to the lockdown restrictions.

2.7.3 TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL

Hargreaves (2021) argues that the school closures and pandemic, in general, will impact teachers' professional capital, which comprises their social, human, and decision-making capital. In this study, I mostly focused on the changes to social capital, which pertains to the capital that is shared among teachers, regarding knowledge and ideas about teaching, and enhances their profession. The changes that the pandemic brought about help us to identify the supports for and threats to the basic understandings among teachers that arise, from forms of distance or closeness in people's interactions or relationships (Hargreaves, 2000). The demands on teachers due to the COVID-19 pandemic presented major challenges, and this became more pronounced during a crisis where peers were expected to learn and get support from each other, management, and the educational system.

Teachers' basic understandings were particularly challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during the lockdown period. In this study, teachers' relationships with the SMT during the pandemic were explored. Further exploration will be conducted on the concept of the four changes that the pandemic brought about, and how these have impacted teachers' expertise, emotions, and professional capital.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a very challenging time for everyone. This was particularly evident in schools as no one was prepared for the challenges that the pandemic would bring. This literature review explored the roles of the various players in the school education system, and how they interact with each other. The SMT's role was to lead and facilitate school initiatives during COVID-19, and their major focus was the safeguarding of the school's teaching time.

The key issues addressed are the core characteristics of teaching namely professional capital, emotional practice as well as expertise. This chapter also included a brief discussion of the conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The study explored the relationships between teachers and SMT in Hope Fields Primary School during the COVID- 19 pandemic. The research design and methodology are critical in research and encompass the key issues around how the study was conducted. This chapter discusses the research design and methodology in detail. The study design, data collection methods, inclusion criteria, and limitations of the study are also discussed in detail in this chapter.

The study focused on Hope Fields Primary School situated in an affluent area. The medium of instruction is English however the majority of the learners who attend the school are not English home language speakers. The school has a diverse teaching staff and the majority are female. Prior to the closure of schools, staff collaborated and had formal and had informal meetings to converse regarding school matters while during the lockdown and when schools reopened it was difficult to continue the face to face contact as the fear of contracting COVID-19 made it impossible although communication continued through technology but on irregular basis.

3.2 STUDY DESIGN

This study applied a qualitative case study within an interpretivist paradigm approach. According to Merriam (2022), a qualitative study involves exploring the emotions of people in a situation, as qualitative researchers are interested in multiple realities.

An interpretivist paradigm qualitative case study approach is a form of research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources (Baxter et al.,

2008). An interpretivist paradigm was applied for the study as there are a number of interpretations regarding an event/situation and this paradigm's objective is define how people see their world or events in their environment. As a researcher I aimed to explore and understand the support SMT provided during COVID-19 pandemic, a situation which affected both teachers and the SMT.

An interpretivist paradigm aims to understand a situation and focuses on beliefs to gain knowledge on social interaction therein (Myers, 2008). The study followed an interpretivist approach as I focused on the emotions and experiences of individuals during the COVID-19 lockdown period, which put teachers in a situation where they had no prior knowledge of how to navigate teaching, deal with their own emotions, or life during a pandemic. In my role as a researcher at the school, I further aimed to understand the situation from educators' perception and the role that the SMT played, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Baxter (2008) states that a qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within its context, using a variety of data sources. A paradigm can be defined as the "basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation" (Guba et al., 1994:105). In terms of understanding a situation through a person, you can get their perspective of it, however, reality is subjective and constructed (Merriam, 2022).

A case study involves proper inspection of an event/_circumstance (Cohen et al., 2007; Rule et al., 2011; Macdonald et al. cited by Bassey, 1999; Punch cited by Tight, 2010; Yin cited by Zainal, 2007). Cohen et al. (2000) believes that a case study aims to explore participants' thoughts and feelings regarding a situation.

Merriam (1998:27) distinguishes between different ways in which the term 'case study' is used in qualitative research, and argues that conflating these leads to confusion; these three ways are

as follows:

- The *process* of conducting a case study (*studying* the case);
- The *unit of study* (the *case* that is studied); and
- The *product* of this type of investigation (the final written *document*).

According to Stakes (1995) an intrinsic study is best suited for researchers who have a honest interest in an case. An intrinsic study was conducted as the study focused on the support SMT provided at Hope Fields Primary School during the COVID-19 pandemic. An intrinsic case study is appropriate as the study intended to find out about the support the SMT provided and the participants described their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic which provided insight into how the perceptions of staff of Hope Fields Primary school are formed.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The data collections methods applied for the study included a semi-structured interview and collage. The interview served as suitable method for self-expression for participations while collages provided participants the opportunity to deeply reflect on experience, feelings and perceptions the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

According to Barribell (1994), semi-structured interviews allow for exploration of perceptions and probing for further explanation. Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews guided by questions (Appendix 2). This ensured the interviewer directed the participants to stay within the topic of study. The semi-structured interviews also gave the participants the space to speak freely and share their views.

While the research questions are the following:

1. What professional challenges did teachers face because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. What support did the school management team (SMT) offer teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How did teachers' relationships with colleagues and the SMT change during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Barribell (1994) suggests things that a researcher should do in an interview for the benefit of the process, such as being knowledgeable of topics related to the study and creating a positive impression when building rapport, by starting off with pleasantries. Uncomfortable questions should be asked later in the interview.

Once a sample was selected, an interviewing schedule was drawn up based on the availability of the participants. I allocated a number to each of the participants, and according to this I worked through the interviews depending on their phase within the school, as times differed according to phase. Teachers have responsibilities within the school such as sports for foundation teachers from 12.30 to 1.30, intermediate and senior teacher have sports between 2pm and 3pm therefore interviews had to be scheduled around teachers availability.

All interviews took place during a normal school day. Participants were asked 23 questions and the interview took approximately an hour to complete.

The main strength of a semi-structured interview was the fact that participants got the opportunity to express how they felt regarding the topic, without being completely limited, as within the topic of study.

Possible weaknesses of semi-structured interviews are poor interaction between researcher and participants, or the latter becoming too emotional to continue with the study when it involves sensitive topics such as abuse, etc.; however, these were not experienced in this study.

Making time was a concern as participants have responsibilities within and outside the school; a few times interviews had to be rescheduled due to participants having been unexpectedly assigned duties.

3.3.2 COLLAGE

Another method of data collection that was employed in this study, was a collage to capture the participants' experiences during the COVID-19 period. A collage is a set of materials put together to create a final product with different possible meanings; materials include magazine cuttings, pieces of fabric, or found objects glued together to create art (Gersh-Nesic, 2017; Pillay et al., 2019).

This method allowed participants to explore and reflect on their emotions and self (Pillay et al., 2019). The collage focused on the participants' experiences, how their professional relationships were impacted during COVID-19, and the support that they received from the SMT. It was undertaken only after all the interviews had been concluded, as collages require sufficient time to complete. The participants were free to choose how they presented their feelings using pictures and/or words in whatever way they liked.

The strength of collages is the fact that participants could work on their collage at home or in their own space away from the researcher; this allowed them the space to creatively explore a topic in a deep introspective manner. For participants who found this reflection to be difficult, counsellors and lifeline details were provided to them, if necessary.

One of the limitations of using a collage was time, as it requires a level of commitment and time to complete. A difficulty that some participants experienced was the feeling that they were not creative, which resulted in them taking much longer to complete their collage.

3.4 SAMPLING STRATEGY

The population of a study consists of all the possible participants who may take part in it. In this study, the population came from Hope Fields Primary School, which has a teaching staff of 34 teachers. In a qualitative study, it is usual to sample a small number of participants. Stratified sampling is where a population is grouped based on certain factors, which may include occupation or gender (Taherdoost, 2016; Acharya et al., 2013). The sampling strategy for this study was stratified random sampling. I focused on this sampling method as I wanted to ensure that my study was valid, and since I am an educator at the school, I wanted to avoid any possible bias that could result because of my role as a researcher and teacher there. The participants were randomly selected based on the fact that they met certain criteria, such as teachers who had been at the school for four years or more, or else two years or less, and there needed to be members of the SMT included. The criterion of time teaching at the school was used to ensure that there was representation from the junior and senior teachers. Senior teachers who had been at the school for a longer period may have had different experiences with school management, and may not be amenable to change due to their duration of familiarity with the staff and school. Junior teachers who had been at the school for less than three years may still have been familiarising themselves with the staff and school, and may be more amenable to change.

The sample in my study was stratified in the following manner:

Group A: Teachers who have been at the school for 4 years or more

Group B: Teachers who have been at the school for 2 years or less

Group C: SMT members

The sample size was eight participants, based on the groups as follows: three participants from group A, three from group B, and two from group C. To eliminate the possible bias which may

be caused by only including participants who were not part of SMT, they were included in the study. This ensured that the perceptions of teachers as well as of the SMT were investigated, as the two groups' experiences of their professional relationships during COVID-19 may differ.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The methodology of data analysis that was used is both inductive and deductive. I first organised data using thematic data analysis, which enables themes and patterns to emerge (Cohen et al., 2007; Srivastava et al., 2009). The concepts of Hargreaves' (2021) four pandemic changes that have affected the nature of the three core characteristics of teaching, was used to analyse and interpret the data obtained in this study. These three core characteristics of teaching include teacher expertise, the emotional practice of teaching, and professional capital.

3.6 RESEARCH QUALITY

The trustworthiness of this study was strengthened by using peer checks and triangulation to validate information. Peer checks involve getting peers that are separate from the study to view data with a clearer or distanced overall view, while triangulation entails crosschecking all data gathered using a number of sources (Rule et al., 2011; Bassey, 1999).

3.7 LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study included time, as teachers have responsibilities within school such as administration as well as extramural activities, which sometimes require educators to travel to other schools for sports matches. I worked around such issues, by changing the dates and times of interviews according to the availability of participants.

3.8 ETHICS

Permission was sought from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Ethics Committee,

relevant gatekeepers, and the Department of Education before the study commenced. All the participants signed a written consent form to take part in the study. They remained anonymous and were only identified by a number assigned to them (Guillemin et al., 2004). Participants were informed that taking part in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage (Guillemin et al., 2004).

All interviews and collages remained confidential. A counsellor was made available to participants who became overwhelmed by the study (Ellis, 2017). The counsellor could assist participants telephonically or in person, by making an appointment depending on the availability of the participants/counsellor. Participants' collages were only used in the study if their written consent was given (Pillay et al., 2019).

3.9 CONCLUSION

The focus of the study was the school where the researcher is part of the teaching staff. This research relied on the participants' experiences and perceptions as the data for the study are the key areas addressed in this chapter . The approach chosen acknowledged that there are more truths which are possible when dealing with a qualitative study, as people's perceptions of experiences may differ. This chapter has focused on the design, ethics and data analysis. Data analysis is discussed in greater depth in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the methodological approach employed in this study to address the three research questions. The focus of this chapter is the presentation and analysis of data. The data was first analysed using thematic analysis. The research questions guided the interview questions and collages. This chapter will present a thematic analysis of the data.

Key research questions

1. What professional challenges did teachers face because of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What support did the school management team (SMT) offer teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How did teachers' relationships with colleagues and the SMT change during the COVID-19 pandemic?

4.2 BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPANTS

Teacher 1

She is a foundation phase teacher in her 50s, has been teaching for 30 years, and has been at the school for 5 years. She is married with two adult children. She has previously served as a member of the SMT at her current school. She enjoys teaching because she says '*you get to learn new things*'.

Teacher 2

She is a foundation phase teacher in her late 30s, has been teaching for 15 years, and has been at the school for 2 years. She is married with three children. Shortly after been hired at her current

school, the school had to close due to the lockdown. The participant contracted COVID-19 and she had to be away from school when school's reopened due to health complications post COVID-19. She feels that teaching gives her purpose.

Teacher 3

She is a foundation phase teacher in her early 40s, has been teaching for 15 years, and has been at the school for 8 years . She is married. She said that enjoys seeing her learners grow.

Teacher 4

She is an intermediate phase teacher in her mid-40s, has been teaching for 12 years, and has been at the school for 2 years. She is married with two children. She said that she just loves teaching.

Teacher 5

He is an intermediate phase teacher in his late 20s, has been teaching for 7 years, and has been at the school for 3 years. He is married and has keen interest in sport. He said that he enjoys the transition that learners go through as they grow.

Teacher 6

She a senior phase teacher in her early 30s, has been teaching for 14 years, and has been at the school for 5 years. She is married with one child. She says that enjoys watching her learners grow.

SMT 1

The participant is a member of the SMT, in her early 30s, and teaches a language to grade 5 and 6 learners. She is married with three children. She has been at the school for 8 years. She enjoys being part of a team as a member of the SMT.

SMT 2

The participant is a member of the SMT, in his early 30s, and teaches a language to grade 6 learners. He has been at the school for 8 years. He is married with two children. He believes his personality is well suited for leadership.

A similarity that is observed is that all participants have a passion for Hope Fields primary school. They also share the desire to mould children and shape their futures.

A key difference in the responses received is the SMT members are leadership focused while the educators focus on the passion they have for child development and education as a whole.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF THEMES

The data was generated from eight participants, consisting of six teachers and two members of the SMT at Hope Fields Primary school. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and collages. The interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai software, which I reviewed carefully as automated transcription is not always correct. I examined the collages several times to gain understanding from them, as well as participants providing insights into their choice of words and pictures, by verbally explaining them.

4.3.1 THEME ONE: EXTRA ADMINISTRATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There was consensus among all the participants regarding the administration and responsibilities that COVID-19 brought onto teachers during the closure and reopening of schools in 2020. When schools closed at the end of March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers at some schools were required to create and upload online content for learners, while other schools experience a complete shutdown during the lockdown.

On the 5th of March 2020, the first COVID positive case was reported in Pietermaritzburg. Later in the month of March, with the fear of schools closing, the SMT at Hope Fields Primary School

encouraged teachers to get parents' contact numbers in order to create WhatsApp groups; the intention of this was to keep parents informed about any relevant information or necessary class work to be done if the school closed. This became the sole responsibility of teachers to maintain, by keeping parents informed of the school's closure and reopening, providing activities for learners to complete, and answering parents' questions.

The school was made aware that COVID-19 could cause schools to be closed indefinitely; the SMT devised a plan to create a drive-through service at the school, as it could possibly close at that time. The drive-through involved parents parking outside the school and fetching work for their children at the school. Teachers had to create, photocopy, and staple booklets to be handed out to parents. Teachers sat at a table near the school parking area according to grade, and parents got out their cars to collect the booklets and guidelines on how to use the d6 application. This application allows parents or guardians to access lessons and activities.

The information created by teachers per subject had to be user friendly, with lessons containing activities and a memorandum so that parents could check learners' answers. The school introduced the application at the start of the pandemic, therefore, staff had to quickly adapt to it. They had to use their personal computers to type out documents at home with sufficient content to cover classroom time per subject, while covering the curriculum, which had to be uploaded within a week of being informed about d6, and what was required per subject.

Different online platforms such as Zoom, d6, WhatsApp groups, and Google classroom were used to ensure that learners continued learning from home. Meanwhile, the school used d6 to manage the curriculum, administration, communication, and finance, as it is an application designed to simplify school-parent communication.

When schools were allowed to reopen in July 2020 under restrictions, grade 7 learners were the first grade that were able to go back to class, and slowly other grades returned too. Due to

COVID-19 restrictions, only small groups were allowed in the classroom at a time. For example,

a class of thirty learners had to be divided into two groups, with fifteen learners (orange group) attending on one day and the other fifteen (blue group) the next day. If the orange group attended school on Monday, then the blue group would attend on Tuesday, the orange group again on Wednesday, and so forth; this rotation occurred till the end of the week. Learners were given a timetable of the rotations to prevent any confusion, which was also uploaded on the d6 application.

This was how rotational learning took place when schools reopened in July 2020. Teachers were required to provide learners with work for the days when they were not at school. When learners were at school, teachers had to maintain a social distance of 1.5m and ensure that learners wore their masks, as this was the new procedure to be followed. Learners had to be reminded often to social distance and wear their mask.

The following teachers agree with the above regarding the extra responsibilities teachers had when school's reopened such as ensuring learners wear their masks and administration increased.

Teacher 2 stated the following in the interview:

“I had to teach wearing a mask, something that I was not able to do. And it was very difficult to teach through a mask ... I had great difficulty in managing my time..”

The teacher felt she had to guard the children throughout the day like the COVID” police”, which added to the workload of teaching.

Teacher 3 affirmed in the interview that:

“Admin doubled, we had to teach one concept twice... I didn't have enough time to cover all [the] content with them.”

Teacher 4 confirmed in the interview that there were ‘extra duties’, such as keeping record of the ‘COVID register’:

“The first thing we did was stand at the gate [as] learners’ temperatures [had] to be taken at the gate, there was a questionnaire we had to ask each and every learner in your class, you have to ask the learners these questions pertaining to COVID”

The teacher had to constantly remind the learners to social distance, which added to their daily duties at school.

Teacher 5 added that:

“... [the school] used rotational teaching. So teachers, learners will come in half the classon one day and the next half on another day. So it was repetition of teaching. “

Teacher 6 further suggested that:

“there was a lot of preparation in terms of admin work, lesson planning, and getting homework, activities, extra activities prepared for the learners,.. So the workload was a lot.”

4.3.2 THEME 2: THE NEED TO DEVELOP NEW SKILLS TO USE TECHNOLOGY

Most of the teachers and SMT members said that technology was something that they had to learn or improve their skills in, as the school used an application called d6.

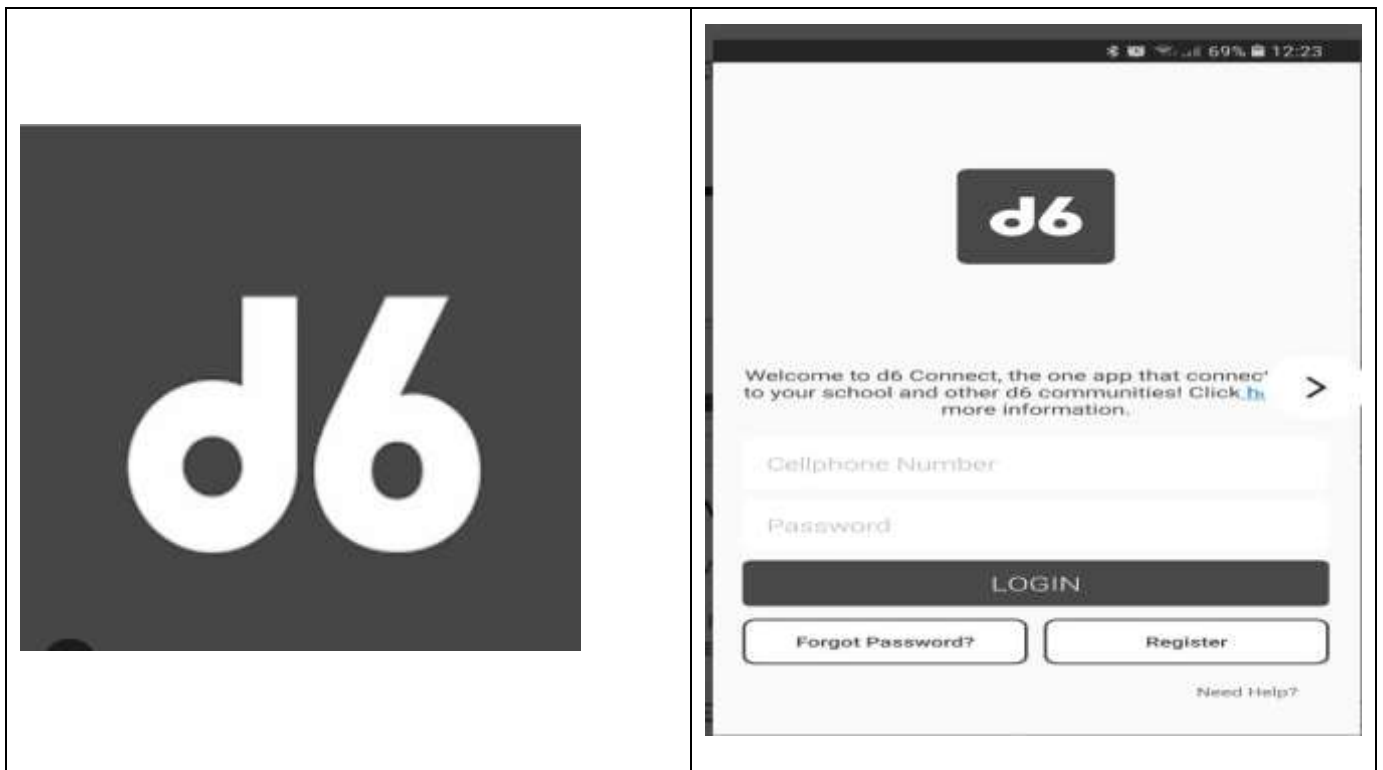


Figure 1: D6 application

Technology was not part of the curriculum for teachers at Hope Fields Primary School prior to COVID-19, which put mature teachers in a situation where they had to adapt quickly to uploading content on an application that they had never used before. However, teachers still had to ensure that learners received the content for their respective subjects. Teacher 1, 2, 3 and 5 agreed technology was a skill they had to acquire during the pandemic.

Teacher 1 stated in the interview that they had to become ‘techno savvy’:

“Being an older teacher, and not using that more often. Yeah, I had to become. techno savvy or techno wise”

Teacher 2 was of the view that:

“I had to learn technology, something that I was very challenged at before COVID. So working with Zoom, having Zoom meetings, creating lesson plans, sending them via WhatsApp groups, and Google Classroom [was very challenging]...”

Teacher 3 was of the opinion that:

“I had to learn about technology in all the different platforms.”

Teacher 5 believed that:

“We didn't have the face-to-face interaction with learners. So [the] majority of the work had to be sent online via WhatsApp to parents. So we used Google classrooms, Microsoft features as well. And yeah, so those, those were the things mainly just the use of technology.”

SMT1 noted that technology was an existing skill she had that just need to be *“brushed up”*

4.3.3 THEME THREE: TEACHERS HAD A FEAR OF HOW TO “COVER CONTENT”

All the participants were concerned about how the curriculum would be covered, as so much of the school year had been affected by COVID-19. When schools reopened and learners were put into groups (orange or blue group), those with siblings were put in the same groups to limit transport issues. Some learners had been keeping up to date with uploading their work on d6, and were able to cope with the curriculum when they returned to school. However, the curriculum

had to change according to the annual teaching plans (ATPs) - a document laid out by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) giving teachers guidelines on the implementation and minimum core content and skills to be taught; these were changed due to COVID-19 requirements, such as mask wearing and social distancing. Subjects such Creative Arts, which require learners to perform or work in pairs, had to completely stop during COVID-19. Due to time constraints, English assessments were also trimmed (in grade 5) and there were concepts that had to be removed. Nevertheless, teachers were trying to cover enough content to ensure that learners were prepared and had the necessary concepts for the next grade.

Participants below shared the view that curriculum coverage was a concern. Teacher 1 stated that ‘content coverage’ was a concern, as there wasn’t enough time to complete all the work:

“I think as to how you're going to cover all that content at that time.

Teacher 3 was worried about ‘academics’ as learners missed out on work during the lockdown, and when they returned, there was so much to do; however, there was a gap that was impossible to fill. Teachers could only teach for four hours per week due to rotational learning, while COVID-19 protocols also took some time out of the day for tasks such as taking temperatures and sanitising. Teacher 3 mentioned the following:

“We could only like teach five hours, and then the children's concentration was like depleted.”

“ there was a lot of gaps in the teaching and the learning “

Teacher 4 expressed fears about the curriculum in this way:

“And my fear really, was that these children would not get the full curriculum that they were supposed to get in [a] year.

Teacher 6 was also concerned about curriculum coverage and the ‘mindset of learners’ when they returned to classes:

“As an educator, your first and foremost thought would be your learners and curriculum coverage.”

“And also the mindset of learners when they would return to school?”

4.3.4 THEME FOUR: DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE SUPPORT SMT PROVIDED TO TEACHERS

The two members of the SMT who were part of the study shared about how they supported teachers; however, not all the teachers shared the same view. They also noted the kind of support that they had received from the provincial Department of Education, which was mostly PPE that was required for sanitising the school, and masks.

SMT 1 and 2 agree that they received support from the Department of Education when schools reopened

SMT 1

“It was adequate considering the timeframe they actually had to plan for all of it. When school opened, the department did make sure we received the print[ed] documents”

SMT 2 said the following:

“They did try in terms of procuring PPE”

SMT 1 said that she provided practical and emotional support to the teachers within her phase. In her collage (Figure 2), she illustrates a drive-through at the school after the lockdown, where teachers prepared booklets for each subject that they taught and parents collected these. The SMT managed the entire process, which is one way in which they provided support. However,

this is an example of supporting learning and learners, and not teachers specifically.

The same participant also noted that the SMT knew that it was important to provide emotional support to staff. She said that the SMT provided support to staff on how to use the technology that they now needed to use. SMT 1 explained how they provided this support in the following way:

“... how to use Zoom, how to do your WhatsApp group, how to upload stuff, how to turn your Word document to a PDF,..., like uploading work, uploading work either on WhatsApp, email, so that it actually gets to the parents. How to form your Zoom, those are [some of the points of] the guidance using some of the social media platforms.”

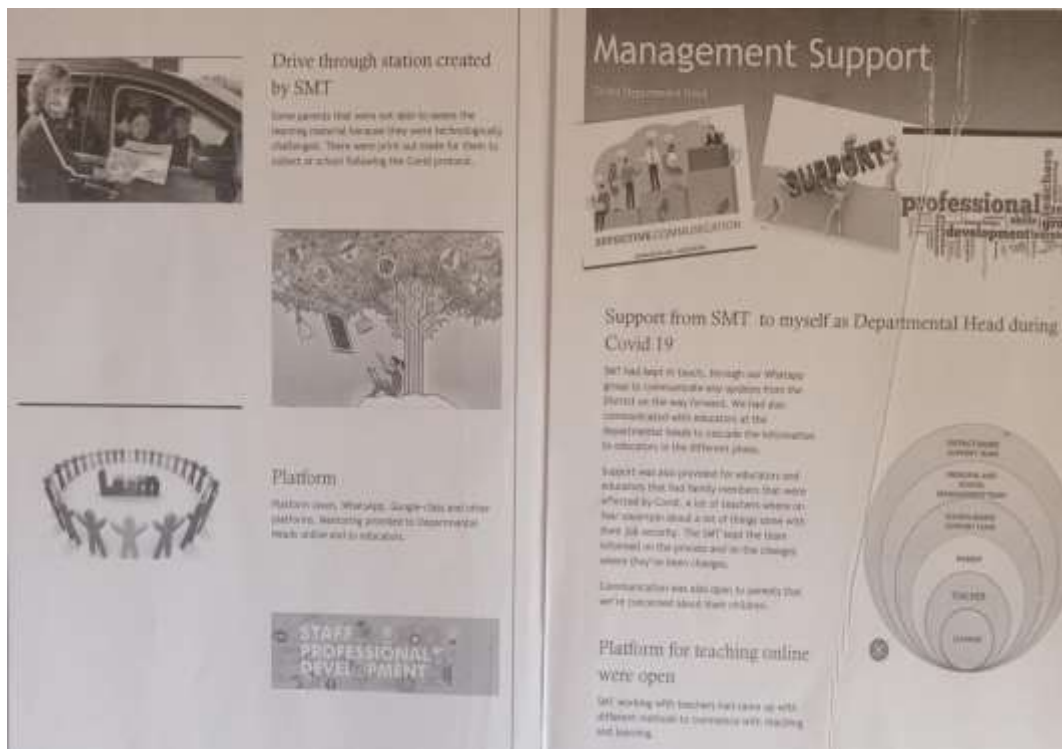


Figure 2: Collage created by SMT 1

The support that SMT 1 provided took the form of regular meetings with teachers to keep them

informed regarding the changes that were taking place during the pandemic, while still maintaining social distancing among staff (Figure 2).

SMT 1 chose the above pictures for the collage as they all relate to the support that she provided to teachers within her phase. The picture of the lady standing by the car reminded her how everyone had to wear masks and also sanitize. The picture of people holding hands signified to her how everyone at school worked to ensure learning continued during the lockdown and when schools reopened.

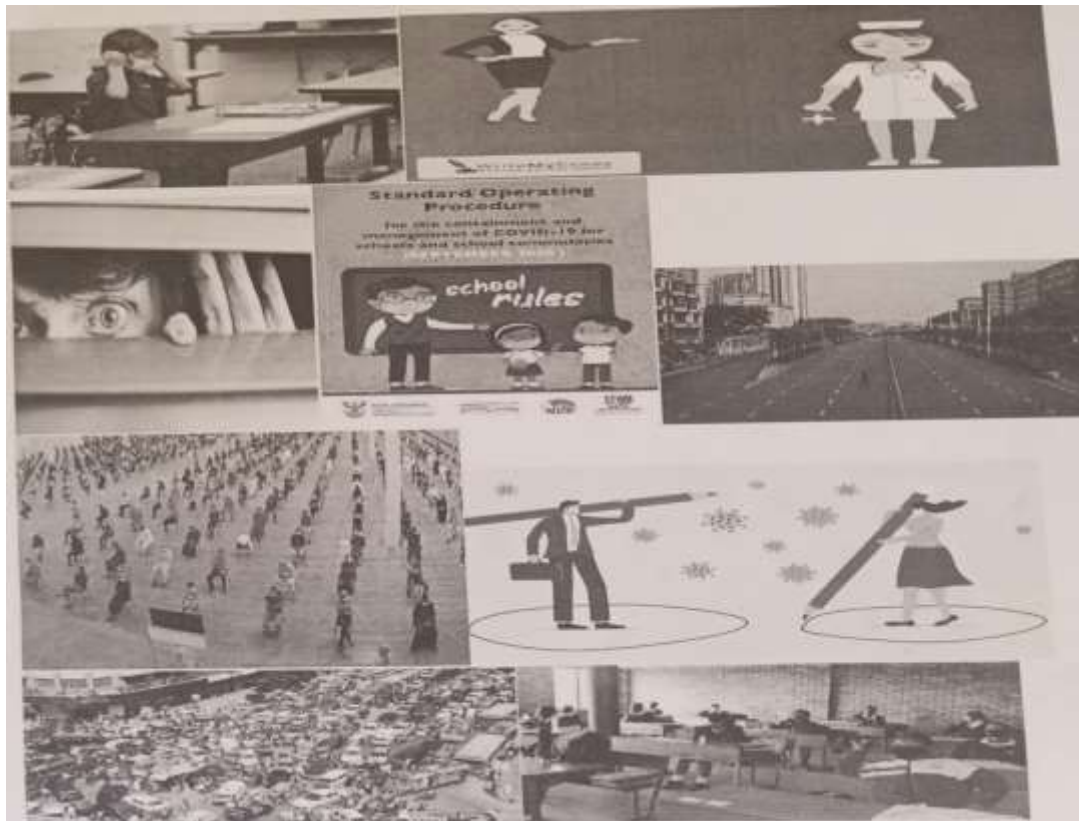


Figure 3: Collage created by SMT 2

SMT2 stated in the interview:

“Working on, we also had to have sort of meetings, [those] informal meetings that basically we had to take back minutes [for] over WhatsApp.”

During the lockdown, SMT 2 kept in contact with teachers in his phase and even had meetings over WhatsApp, to ensure they were kept informed about when schools would reopen, and what teachers could do while waiting for this to happen.

“I did encourage teachers to stay alert, to still keep up with their planning, [to] use the time to set up their files, because to me, it was indefinite. When our [side] we didn't really have definitive answers ourselves.

I actually visited a teacher who she was part of our school, we did visit, obviously, from socially distance, and she wasn't that bad. And unfortunately, she didn't make it out.”

In the above quote, SMT 2 recalled how they went to visit a teacher who had contracted COVID-19, and although they were scared, they made the effort to see her at her home. She seemed fine so it was major shock to all staff when she died. The situation became even scarier after seeing how a person could be fine one day and gone the next.

Four of the teachers in the study felt that they had been supported by the SMT during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sometimes, this support was of a practical nature, regarding teaching resources and revised policy documents, while at other times it was emotional.

Both Teacher 4 and Teacher 6 noted that they received the revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATP), while Teacher 6 said that she had experienced emotional support from the SMT:

“In terms of the SMT, I believe we had a lot of support in terms of meetings and providing emotional support, like [questions such as] ‘How are you feeling?’ ‘How can I help you?’ ‘What can I do?’ And there [was] always an open door policy”

Teacher 6 provided insight about the support that she received during the COVID-19 pandemic from the SMT, using words in her collage like ‘meet regularly’ and ‘helpful’, as well as a picture of one person holding another person around the shoulder (Figure 4). This picture is significant as it demonstrates her experience of how the SMT were supportive during the pandemic.

The collage also has words like ‘self-care’, ‘unity’, and ‘taking care’ which indicated the emotional support that she experienced.

The words and pictures were used to reflect the open door policy offered by the SMT. This collage seems to reflect that there was a focus on procedures, sharing information and having meetings regularly, as well as on emotional support.



Figure 4: Collage created by Teacher 6

Teacher 3 felt ‘hope’ in her collage when explaining the support that teachers received from the SMT (Figure 5)

The words in her collage reflected the common words, such as ‘keep your distance’, ‘self-isolation’, as well as the word ‘hospital’, as the participant was in hospital at the time of the school closure.

She explained how the principal provided support to teachers

“The principal kept sending out messages to check if we all were ok, [to give us] the support [we needed], and we used to have meetings in the multi-purpose room. The principal would sit us down and say, ‘This is what’s going to happen. This is the next step. This is what I require from you guys. If anybody’s struggling, come see me’.



Figure 5: Collage created by Teacher 3

Similarly, Teacher 2 felt that she had received very little support, and this is evident in the collage through the choice of words like ‘negative’, ‘fear’, ‘death’, ‘insecure’, ‘anger’; however, she did include positive words like ‘future’, ‘love’ and ‘hope’ (Figure 7).

Despite the use of the word ‘rejection’ demonstrating a lack of the support from the SMT, the participant was determined to connect with the learners, as she was new at the school at the time of the school closures. The word ‘anger’ was used because this teacher contracted COVID-19 after schools had reopened, and was accused of coming to school while awaiting her COVID test results. She also stated in the interview that I don’t trust anyone”, since the teacher had had a negative experience with the SMT and staff since contracting the virus. Her negative perception was reflected in her choice of words.



Figure 7 Collage created by Teacher 2

It is important to note that there are five members of the SMT at Hope Fields Primary School. Each HOD has their own leadership style, and the way in which they would support teachers in their phase is different, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The views on the support that each teacher received would differ, as they had different HODs and the level of support needed was different.

4.3.5 THEME FIVE: TEACHERS' DIVERSE VIEWS ABOUT HOW THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES HAD CHANGED

The teachers' views about how their relationships with colleagues had changed differed. Some teachers were of the belief, during the lockdown as well as when schools reopened, that there was no change, while others felt isolated from their colleagues, and one teacher developed a negative attitude.

Teacher 4 and SMT 1 shared the view that relationships with colleagues hadn't changed.

Teacher 4, who stated:

"I still continued speaking to the people in my grade, and people that really needed something to do or [I] needed something from, I would still communicate [with] them."

Teacher 4 continued to communicate with colleagues through WhatsApp and in person, while maintaining social distance.

SMT 1 also commented that collegial relationships had not changed, as the rapport before COVID-19 had just continued as usual when school reopened.

However, three teachers felt that they were quite isolated. Teacher 3 explained that she didn't see any of colleagues as everyone was so busy with administration. Teacher 6 felt that everyone was in their private spaces and worked in isolation. She explained that because COVID regulations still existed at the time and everyone still had fear, staff stayed in their own spaces and worked on their own.

Meanwhile, Teacher 2 stated that 'I don't trust anyone'; she had just started at the school when had schools closed due to the pandemic, and had also contracted COVID-19.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presented five themes from the data. The first theme reflected teachers' views that their administration and responsibilities had increased. The second theme that emerged was the need to develop new skills to help teachers use technology, especially since the lockdown required them to be technologically savvy. The most common new skill that most teachers had to learn was the use of technology, as the school used an application called d6, which required them

to upload work for learners to access, and the participants were not familiar with it. The third theme was a fear of how to 'cover content': one common fear that the participants shared was being unable to cover the curriculum due to the closure of schools. The fourth theme was around the different perceptions of the support that the SMT provided to teachers. The SMT members stated that they had supported teachers by assisting them with emotional support, ATPS, and practical tips on how to upload documents; however, some teachers stated that they had only received ATPS as support. There were two teachers of the view that they had received no support at all. The last theme was around the different views that teachers had about how their relationships with colleagues had changed; the views among teachers varied, with some feeling that there had been no change. Others believed that everyone isolated from each other, while one felt a negative view towards colleagues since the onset of COVID-19.

The study dealt with professional relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, all participants' views are valid and need to be taken into consideration. There were, however, two teachers who felt that they were not supported, and this could be due to the fact that they required more emotional support, or because both of them were older teachers and required guidance with technology.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter uses the findings presented in Chapter 4 to respond to the research questions of the study, as well as presents recommendations based on the support that teachers received during COVID-19 from the SMT. I drew conclusions based on the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and teachers' submitted collages. The study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What professional challenges did teachers face because of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What support did the school management team (SMT) offer teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How did teachers' relationships with colleagues and the SMT change during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In this chapter, I will respond to these research questions, and also draw connections with Hargreaves' (2021) contention that there are three core characteristics of teachers' work that were impacted by the pandemic. The first is teacher expertise, as teachers needed to develop expertise in at least three aspects, namely teaching digitally, teaching outdoors, and enabling learners to become self-directed learners. The second is the emotional practice of teaching: teachers finding purpose and motivation, and being required to use their professional judgement. The third is professional capital, which refers to teachers' collaboration and sharing of knowledge with colleagues.

5.2. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

What professional challenges did teachers face because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Three of the themes reported in Chapter 4 focus on teachers' professional challenges. The data from this study indicated that the majority of teachers had extra administration and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic; they also had to learn new technology and were concerned about curriculum coverage.

During the school closures from March–June 2020, Hope Fields Primary School used an online platform called d6, where teachers created and uploaded work and activities for their respective subjects, which learners could access and complete. Teachers had to take learners' temperatures daily, recording these and any symptoms that learners may have had. They also had to ensure learners wore their mask, which was extremely difficult as mask wearing is uncomfortable, and having to teach with a mask became difficult. This additional work is reported by teachers in other studies in other countries (Kim, Oxley et al., 2021; Fray et.al 2022).

When schools reopened, teachers taught a single concept twice, as learners were divided into two groups to reduce the numbers within a classroom, due to social distancing requirements. This added to teachers' workload.

Kim and Asbury's (2020) study focused on how the first six weeks of the pandemic was a challenge for many teachers in the UK. Their findings stated that teachers' workload increased, which included administrative duties and other added responsibilities in the classroom, due to COVID protocols. Teachers in Australia had to reinvent lesson plans to allow for different forms of lesson delivery (Fray et al., 2022), which included WhatsApp, Google classroom, d6, etc. A South African study by Maree (2022) mentioned some challenges in the public schooling system, such as maintaining social distance between learners at school. The studies are similar as they

all state how teachers' workload increased, since teachers' work had to also include maintaining social distance and an increase in administrative tasks, apart from classroom tasks.

The pandemic created a situation where teachers had to expand their knowledge of technology in order to teach learners remotely. According to Hargreaves (2021), teachers needed to improve their expertise in teaching digitally. The data confirmed that teachers were required to increase or learn new technological skills, so that they could teach digitally. A study by Dube (2020) which focused on learning in rural school, showed that technology was a challenge just as it was for teachers at Hope Fields Primary School. However in rural schools there were further challenges such as poor network connection and not enough devices for teachers or learners.

The majority of teachers and both SMT members agreed that technology was a new skill that they needed to learn, or one that they had to improve on. This was a challenge some teachers as they weren't used to the d6 application, since it had never been used at the school before. They also had to become familiar with uploading content that was user friendly, and this content was needed in a short space of time.

Four teachers were distressed about how the curriculum would be covered, due to time lost during the closure of schools. The school work that should have been covered wasn't taught, which led to a learning gap for some concepts. Teachers tried to fill these gaps, but there is evidence that there were learning losses for many children. The ATPs were revised resulting in some concepts not being taught due to time constraints. Ardington et al.'s (2021) study provided insight into the learning losses for grade 2 students in 2020, which was over 60%. The ATPs were revised in terms of removing certain learning concepts or physical activities such as social distancing, which was required, but this didn't result in less work for teachers and teaching had to be duplicated.

Hargreaves (2021) argues that teaching is an emotional practice, and the data shows that four out of the six teachers were concerned about the loss of learning time. Interestingly, this concern about curriculum coverage was not raised by UK teachers in Kim and Asbury's (2020) study of the first six weeks of lockdown. Rather, they were concerned about the vulnerable children who did not have sufficient food or data, due to their parents losing their jobs.

What support did the school management team (SMT) offer teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A key aspect of the work of teaching is interaction with colleagues, which Hargreaves (2021) describes as social capital. The two SMT participants felt that they had provided sufficient support to the teachers, and four teachers in the study believed that they had received this support, while two teachers felt they hadn't.

Two teachers felt that they received no support from the SMT during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the teachers who felt that she hadn't received support, contracted COVID-19 and was unable to return to school when schools reopened, as she was still sick. Her interaction with the SMT was negative, resulting in a possible negative attitude towards them.

Three other teachers received support in the form of ATPs, while another couldn't remember the support that she had received, but did remember the principal sending messages during the lockdown.

SMT 1 felt that she had supported teachers by managing the process of a drive-by service at school, where teachers prepared and handed out booklets to parents. She had also assisted and mentored teachers with using Google, Zoom, and WhatsApp. She said that she had always provided emotional support.

SMT 2 felt that the support provided took the form of regular meetings with teachers, to keep everyone up-to-date regarding the changes that were taking place.

In a UK study, a difference noted was the coping strategies applied by the teachers during the pandemic included exercise, DIY, and using a meditation app. The Senior Leadership Team members (SLTs) wanted to support other staff but were finding this difficult to balance with the other demands (Kim et al., 2021). In this study, SMT members believed the support they provided was sufficient. While a similarity in both studies was SLT/SMT had to implement last-minute government guidelines.

How did teachers' relationships with colleagues and the SMT change during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Teachers' views varied regarding the changes in their relationships with colleagues as a result of the pandemic. The majority felt that there was a change in their relationships with colleagues. According to Hargreaves (2021), social capital is one of the components of professional social capital, which is the knowledge and ideas shared among colleagues. Teacher 4 recalled that colleagues within her grade still continued interacting and communicating and this helped with any confusion faced, as there was so much different information given about the curriculum.

Teachers 1 and 4 both believed that not much had changed in their relationships with colleagues, while teachers 3 and 6, as well as SMT 1 felt that everyone was isolated. Teacher 2 had a negative attitude towards her colleagues due to contracting COVID-19. She, on the other hand, felt that no one was sensitive to her situation at the time. SMT 2 found that it was a challenge to interact with colleagues, as mask wearing made reading the emotions of colleagues difficult.

The concept of emotional geographies examines the world of teachers and their relationships and interactions with each other, within spatial and experiential patterns of closeness and/or distance (Hargreaves, 2000). Finally, Teacher 5 believed that everyone had become more compassionate

and tried to support each other, as everyone had fears or were uncertain about the future.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings show that teachers had several challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, which included more administration, responsibilities, learning how to use new technologies, and not knowing how the syllabus would be covered. In the future there should be programs in place to familiarise staff with technology, while current platforms could be slowly introduced.

It is clear that all teachers need to become more proficient in using technology, and there should be ongoing staff development in this regard. Also, there should be plans/programs to bridge any gaps that teachers may have as a result of the pandemic and the closure of schools. Furthermore, schools need to be better prepared to meet the needs of staff, if possible.

The SMT did provide support to teachers in terms of distributing the ATP and providing emotional support . However, there was a difference of opinion among the SMT and some teachers regarding the support that the former provided the latter, which depended on the support that teachers may have required at the time. This support may not have been possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it was a time of uncertainty for everyone.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affected professional relationships at a primary school, how the SMT supported teachers, and how the pandemic changed the way teachers interacted with each other.

The majority of the teachers and SMT shared the view that the SMT had provided support to them, while the SMT members also described how they had supported them. However, there

were two teachers who were adamant in their belief that the SMT provided little or no support. Therefore, the findings show that teachers experienced different levels of support from the SMT. There would be individual interpretation of course, especially when dealing with the emotions and experiences of people, as they experience situations differently.

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APPENDIX 1: CONSENT LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS



Participant's Consent Form

4 August 2022

Dear Sir / Madam

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

I am currently registered at UKZN for a Master's degree, and as part of my studies, I have to complete a research report. I have chosen to investigate teacher and SMT relationships during the COVID -19 pandemic at our school.

I would like to ask you a few questions about your experience of teaching during the school closures and explore the relationships between the teachers and SMT during the COVID -19 pandemic. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. Another method this study will employ is a collage which is materials put together to create a final product, materials include magazine cuttings, pieces of fabric, or found objects glued to create art which can be completed at your convenience.

You will be identified with a code number and your name will not appear on any form and all the information you give about yourself will be strictly confidential.

You are completely free to take part or not to take part in the study. If you decide that you do not want to be part of the study, this will not be held against you. If you would like to take part in the study, please sign the form below to allow us to proceed to schedule a convenient time to conduct the interview, which can take place via WhatsApp, Zoom, telephone or face to face.

If you would like to withdraw from the study at any point for any reason, please feel free to do so and no questions will be asked.

The study will be ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. In the event of any problems and concerns you may have about any aspect of this research you may contact me on 0744467342 or e-mail: lauren.manuel153@gmail.com or my supervisor at [BertramC@ukzn.ac.za/](mailto:BertramC@ukzn.ac.za)

You can also contact the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research and Ethics

Committee: Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee Administration

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

P/Bag x 54001

Durban 4000

KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Tel: 27 31 260 4557

Fax: 27 31 2604 609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

If you have any questions or queries or would like more information about the study, please contact me, Lauren Jacobs on telephone number 0744467342 or e-mail: lauren.manuel153@gmail.com.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely

Lauren

Declaration

I(Full name of the participant)
hereby confirm that I have been informed about the study entitled: **Teachers’ professional relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of a primary school.**, by Ms. Lauren Jacobs the researcher. I understand the purpose and nature of the research project and I consent to participate in the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any given time without any negative consequences. I understand that the information I give will be treated confidentially and my anonymity will be protected. If I have any queries and concerns about my rights as a participant or about any aspect of the study or the researcher, I may contact the UKZN Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

I hereby consent to:

Audio record my interviews : Yes / No

Utilize a collage for data : Yes/No

Signature of the participant

Date

I understand what the study is about and agree to participate in the study. My consent is subject to the following:

- The results will in no way disclose the identity of the participants
- The results can be used or published for benefits in the education field.

Signature

Date:.....

APPENDIX 2: DATA GENERATION INSTRUMENTS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

List of questions

A. Introductory Questions

1. What grade do you teach?
2. How long have you been teaching this grade?
3. What do you enjoy about teaching Grade X?
4. What are the challenges that you encounter in teaching?
5. How many years have you been a teacher?

B. Questions on perceptions regarding closure of schools

6. How did you feel when you heard that the school was closing in March 2020?
7. What was your greatest fear regarding the school was closing in March 2020?
8. How did Covid-19 school closure during 14 March – 8 June 2020, affect your work as a teacher?
9. How did the Staged return of learners (starting with Gr 7 and Gr 12) after the Covid-19 school closures during 14 March – 8 June 2020, affect your work as a teacher?
10. Did all learners in your school return every day, or on rotation after the Covid-19 school closures during 14 March – 8 June 2020?
11. How did the return of all learners after the Covid-19 school closures during 14 March – 8 June 2020 affect your work as a teacher?

C. Questions on shortcomings / inadequacy related to demands of teaching during Covid-19 pandemic

12. How did the pandemic make you feel about the adequacy of your teacher expertise? (For e.g., demotivated, incompetent, empowered)
13. What new skills or expertise did you need to learn during the Covid-19 pandemic to fulfill your role as a teacher?
14. How did the physical distancing required from learners, colleagues and parents affect your professional work?

15. Did it affect the way in which you collaborate and network with colleagues? In what ways? Can you describe a specific incident?
16. How has Covid-19 changed your teaching practices and professional work?
17. Covid brought about new mandates and policy decisions (about school closures, holidays, trimmed curriculum, assessment protocols) made by government and the DBE. How did you respond to these?
18. How did these new mandates and policy decisions make you feel? (Political distance)

D. Questions on support related to demands of teaching during Covid-19 pandemic

19. Did you feel that teachers were a part of decision-making in your school? Were you able to use your professional judgement in responding to these policies or did you simply have to follow the mandates? (Political distance).
20. What kind of support did you get from your HOD and from the SMT during the school closure?

Can you describe a specific incident of support from your HOD and from the SMT?
21. What role do you think SMT should play in supporting teachers?
22. What has been your experience with your SMT since the Covid-19 pandemic started?
23. What support do you still require from your SMT during this year?
24. What do you think are the greatest challenges that you and your colleagues faced during Covid-19 pandemic?
25. Do you consider the support you received during the Covid -19 pandemic adequate for your purposes? If yes, in what ways. If no, why not.

E. Question on teaching prior to Covid-19 pandemic

26. How did you find the school environment/atmosphere before the Covid-19 pandemic?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SMT

A. Introductory Questions

1. How long have you served on the School Management Team (SMT)?
2. What are the challenges that you encounter in serving on the SMT?
3. What do you enjoy about serving on the SMT?

B. Questions on perceptions regarding closure of schools

4. How did you feel when you heard that the school was closing in March 2020?
5. What was your greatest fear regarding the school closing in March 2020?
6. How did Covid-19 school closure during 14 March – 8 June 2020, affect your functioning/ role as part of the SMT?
7. How did the Staged return of learners (starting with Gr 7 and Gr 12) after the Covid-19 school closures during 14 March – 8 June 2020, affect your role as part of the schools SMT?
8. How did the return of all learners after the Covid-19 school closures during 14 March – 8 June 2020 affect your affect your role as part of the schools SMT?

C. Questions on shortcomings / inadequacy related to demands of the role of SMT during Covid-19 pandemic

9. How did the pandemic make you feel about the adequacy of your ability to perform your role as part of the schools SMT? (For e.g., demotivated, incompetent, empowered) (moral distance)?
10. What new skills or expertise or strategy adaptations did you need to learn/ or make during the Covid-19 pandemic to fulfill your role as part of the schools SMT?
11. How did the physical distancing required from learners, colleagues and parents affect your role as part of the schools SMT? (Physical distance)?
12. Did it affect the way in which you support with the school teachers? In what ways? Can you describe a specific incident? (Physical distance)?
13. How has Covid-19 changed your strategy to fulfill your role as part of the schools SMT?

14. COVID brought about new mandates and policy decisions (about school closures, holidays, trimmed curriculum, assessment protocols) made by government and the DBE. How did you respond to these as part of the schools SMT?
15. How did these new mandates and policy decisions make you feel as part of the schools SMT?? (Political distance)?

D. Questions on support related to demands of teaching during COVID-19 pandemic

16. Did you feel that teachers were a part of decision-making in your school? Were you able to use your professional judgement in responding to these policies or did you simply have to follow the mandates? (Political distance)?
17. What kind of support did you give the teachers during the school closure as a member of the schools SMT?
18. Can you describe a specific incident where you gave the teachers support during the school closure as a member of the schools SMT?
19. What role do you think SMT should play in supporting teachers?
20. What has been your experience with your teacher's expectation from the SMT since the Covid-19 pandemic started?
21. What do you think are the greatest challenges that you and your colleagues faced In trying to fulfill your role as a SMT member during COVID-19 pandemic?
22. Do you consider the support you received during the COVID -19 pandemic adequate for your purposes? If yes, in what ways. If no, why not?

E. Question on SMT relationships prior to COVID-19 pandemic

23. How did you find the school environment/atmosphere especially in terms of the SMT relationships and teacher before the Covid-19 pandemic?

APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



30 August 2022

Lauren Jacobs (221049795)
School Of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear L Jacobs,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004306/2022

Project title: Teacher's professional relationships during the coronavirus pandemic: A case study of a primary school

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 10 June 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

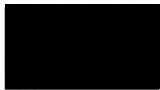
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further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

This approval is valid until 30 August 2023.

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

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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

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

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX 4: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PERMISSION LETTER



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lambede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1051

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Mrs B.T. Ntuli

Ref.: 2/4/8/7317

Ms Lauren Jacobs
18 Harrison Avenue
LINCOLN MEADE
3201

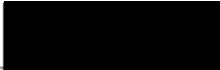
Dear Ms Jacobs

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY OF A PRIMARY SCHOOL.."** 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 **05 July 2022 to 31 March 2025**.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT


Mr G.N. Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 05 July 2022

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

APPENDIX 5: TURNITIN REPORT

Full document

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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