

RESEARCH REPORT

Foundation Phase teachers' experiences of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase.

Masters
In
Education
at the
University of Witwatersrand

By Tarumbidzwa Manikai

Student Number: 459807

Supervisor: Dr Cameron Martin

Date 15 March 2024

Declaration

I, Tarumbidzwa Manikai, declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.



Tarumbidzwa Manikai

15th day of March in the year 2024

Acknowledgement

Firstly, I would like to praise and thank the Almighty God. Who by his grace I was able to overcome the difficult days when all felt impossible. His presence gave me courage to never give up but to continue with the journey to the end.

I would like to acknowledge and give thanks to, my amazing and dedicated supervisor; Dr C Martin, for his patience, guidance and support, without his dedication and positive encouragement I would not have completed the research report.

My special thanks go to Mr and Mrs Pasipanodya (my parents) who installed in me determination to always strive for success in all that I do.

Thank you to my whole family for your prayers and words of encouragement. To my nephew Tatenda who supported me with positive encouragement. To my husband and my children; Chiedza, Simba and Kudzai for their positive support and understanding during my research and writing my research report.

Finally, this research would not have been possible without the input of the six foundation phase teachers who participated in my research. Thank you all for your massive input.

Abstract

The World Health Organisation (WHO) upgraded the COVID – 19 outbreak to a pandemic status on the 11th of March 2020. In response to this global initiative, the South African Government announced a state of disaster on the 15th of March 2020. This was immediately followed by the closure of South African schools on the 18th of March 2020, to minimise the infection rate in the country. The national closure of schools affected the education sector greatly. The re-opening of schools was agreed on by the Department of Education, under stipulated conditions that all teachers had to adhere to the Standard Operating Procedure guidelines. One of the Standard Operating Procedures guidelines was the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom, which in turn resulted in numerous challenges for the teachers, inclusive of foundation phase teachers, regarding the teaching of language and literacy. This necessitates the desire to investigate the experiences of the teachers regarding teaching of language and literacy, and the pedagogical strategies utilised to address these challenges. This research study sought to investigate the foundation phase teachers' experiences regarding compulsory mask wearing whilst teaching language and literacy. A qualitative case study approach was used, and data collected via semi-structured interviews. Six foundation phase teachers were interviewed, two from each grade ranging from grades 1 – 3. Two primary schools in Johannesburg North were chosen, one government and the other independent, so as to obtain diverse and balanced views pertaining to research participants' responses. The theoretical framework used to guide this study was the Chomsky LAD theory, which emphasised that language acquisition in children initiates in the brain using what Chomsky (1986) calls a "language acquisition device" LAD. The key findings were grouped into four themes. From theme one, the challenges encountered when teaching phonics revealed how the use of compulsory mask wearing in the classroom obstructed the teachers' conventional teaching methods regarding language and literacy in the foundation phase. Theme two illustrated the impact on communication and teaching language and literacy during compulsory mask wearing period. Theme three illustrated the importance of facial expression to teaching language and literacy, and theme four illustrated that innovative strategies were essential when teaching during COVID – 19. Overall, the research study findings revealed that the compulsory mask wearing had a negative impact on the foundation phase teachers, with regards to teaching

language and literacy pedagogy. It is therefore recommended that the South African Department of Education must consider the inclusion of the teachers in the drafting and compiling of such regulations which need to be implemented in the classrooms with regards to teaching in the future.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction to the Report	9
1.1 Introduction	9
1.2 Background to the Study.....	9
1.3 Problem Statement	11
1.4 Purpose Statement	13
1.5 Research Questions	14
1.6 Rationale.....	14
1.7 Conclusion	16
Chapter Two: Review of Literature	18
2.1 Introduction	18
2.2 Theoretical Framework	18
2.3 Teaching language and literacy in South Africa	20
2.4 The effects of Masks on language acquisition	24
2.5 Linking mask wearing to inclusivity challenges	29
2.6 The strategies to cope with mask wearing	30
2.7 Conclusion	31
Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design	32
3.1 Introduction	32
3.2 Research Design	32
3.2.1 Research paradigm	32
3.2.2 Qualitative research.....	33
3.2.3 Research Site and Participants.....	34
3.2.4 Sampling.....	35
3.3 Data Collection Process.....	36
3.4 Data Collection Instruments.....	37
3.4.1 Semi-structured interview:	37

3.4.2	Audio recording:.....	38
3.5	Data Analysis	38
3.6	Compliance with Ethical Standards.....	41
3.6.1	Validity	41
3.6.2	Research Bias	41
3.6.3	Trustworthiness	42
3.7	Conclusion	43
Chapter Four:	Data Findings	44
4.1	Introduction	44
4.2	Responses to the Semi-Structured Interview questions.....	44
4.3	Thematic Analysis.....	50
4.3.1	Familiarization with the data	50
4.3.2	Generating Initial Codes	51
4.3.3	Searching for themes.....	53
4.3.4	Review of Themes	56
4.3.5	Defining and Naming Themes	57
4.4	Conclusion	61
Chapter Five:	Discussion	63
5.1	Introduction	63
5.2	Discussion of Themes.....	63
5.2.1	Theme one: Challenges when teaching phonics.	63
5.2.2	Theme two: Impact on communication and teaching language and literacy during compulsory mask wearing period.	67
5.2.3	Theme Three: Importance of facial expression when teaching language and literacy	70
5.2.4	Theme Four: Strategies used when teaching during COVID -19	73
5.3	Conclusion	75
Chapter Six:	Conclusion.....	77

6.1	Introduction	77
6.2	Relating Overall Findings to the Research Questions.....	77
6.3	Significance of the Study	82
6.4	Recommendations for Future Research	84
6.5	Limitations of the Study.....	86
6.6	Personal Reflection.....	86
6.7	Conclusion	88
	References.....	89
	Appendix A.....	97
	Appendix B: Ethics clearance letter from Ethics Committee.....	100
	Appendix C: Letters to participants.....	101
	Appendix D: Sample of Transcript.....	105

List of figures

Figure 1: Chronological timeline of events.....	40
---	----

List of tables

Table 1: Qualifications and Teaching experiences	36
Table 2: Example of interview transcript taken from Part 1: Teacher experience and qualifications.	51
Table 3: Initial codes for interview with Teacher A	51
Table 4: Initial codes for interview with Teacher B	52
Table 5: Initial codes for interview with Teacher C	52
Table 6: Initial codes for interview with Teacher D	52
Table 7: Initial codes for interview with Teacher E	53
Table 8: Initial codes for interview with Teacher F	53
Table 9: Initial responses of the six teachers, colour coded according to similar themes	54
Table 10: The defining, refining and naming process.....	57

Chapter One: Introduction to the Report

1.1 Introduction

On the 11th of March 2020, The World Health Organisation (WHO) upgraded the COVID - 19 outbreak to a pandemic status. As part of a global initiative, the South African government had to implement measures to stop the spread of COVID - 19 in the country. Some of the implemented measures were social distancing; implementation of curfews to restrict people's movement thus controlling viral spread; rotational learning; and mask wearing in schools (Department of Basic Education (2022)). Whilst these measures were a welcome initiative towards curbing the viral spread, these measures presented challenges which affected the learning process of the overall South African education sector, inclusive of learners and educators in the foundation phase. These challenges were placed atop numerous pre-existing challenges to education and the learning process. This chapter will look to contextualise these challenges and how they were impacted in the COVID – 19 environment.

1.2 Background to the Study

Prior to the COVID – 19 outbreak, the South African education system faced a number of challenges. Low literacy levels, overcrowding, socioeconomic and access to basic running water at schools (Spaull, N. & Van der Berg, S. 2020) to name but a few. The 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) statistics highlight that 78% of Grade 4 learners “could not read for meaning in any language” (Spaull, N. 2023, p.1). Pretorius and Spaull, (2022) go further and explain that the literacy crisis is instigated by the lack of acquiring the building blocks of literacy in the foundation phase Grades 1 and 2 accordingly. Therefore, according to Spaull, N. & Van der Berg, S. (2020) “The learning deficits resulting from COVID-19 are likely to further exacerbate this problem and widen overall inequality in South Africa” (p.7). The challenges facing the South African education sector prior to COVID – 19, were among

the many problems that the South African Government had to deal with during the COVID – 19 outbreak.

The South African Government announced a state of disaster on the 15th of March 2020, whereby Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma the Minister of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs declared a national state of disaster under the Disaster Management Act of 2002 (Government Gazette 43096, 15 March 2020). One of the measures to curb the spread of the COVID - 19 virus was the closure of schools on the 18th of March 2020, so as to minimise the infection rate in South Africa, since schools were considered as high-risk areas. Therefore, the education sector was greatly affected nationally by this announcement.

Strategic decisions were taken regarding the re-opening of schools during the pandemic (Hoadley, 2020). Out of the 151 countries which imposed strict school closures, South Africa was the 56th country to respond to the call for re-opening of schools, during the COVID – 19 pandemic (Gustafsson and Nuga, 2020). The Minister of Education, Ms. Angelina Matsie Motshekga, instructed the schools to follow a detailed guideline document for re-opening dubbed the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Prevention Containment and Management of COVID - 19 in Schools and School Communities (Department of Basic Education, 2022). The SOP provided several rules that schools had to follow to limit the spread of COVID - 19 virus. However, these rules presented challenges to the education process (Department of Basic Education, 2022). All learners were to be scanned, and temperature records kept, hence reducing the learning time in the classroom due to the need to pre-screen all learners in the morning, during the day and at day-end (Hoadley, 2020). Less time was left for teaching in the classroom and therefore the curriculum was not completed. The learners had to sit apart with a distance of 1.5 meters between them in the classroom and the playground area (Department of Basic Education, (2022). The rotational learning to combat this rule was introduced resulting in the interruption of consistent learning. Learners were coming to school on alternative days, and this was highly disruptive to the progress of learning in foundation phase (Hoadley, 2020). Further, the compulsory wearing of masks was imposed as per the SOP as part of the school (Department of Basic Education, 2022). This posed challenges to educators who had to teach during the COVID – 19 specifically within the foundation phase.

The progress of the learners was affected as schools had to adhere to the timetabling model and the operation of schools with half the capacity enforced on the schools by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Timetabling models adopted by most schools as the rotational system (Hoadley, 2020), which required the learners to come to school on different days of the week. The aforementioned was forced on schools to maintain the social distancing requirements of 1.5 meters stated in the SOP (Gustafsson and Nuga, 2020). The challenge of absenteeism also increased because some parents feared the exposure of COVID - 19 at schools. Playground rules changed, and no physical games were allowed, in order to maintain the social distance of 1.5 meters apart when playing outdoors. (Gustafsson and Nuga, 2020). Maintenance of hygiene was top of the requirements for the re-opening of schools. Therefore, all schools had to have sanitizers or washing stations with clean water for the learners to always wash their hands (Department of Basic Education Standard, 2022). The use of masks was mandatory to everyone at schools, according to the DBE Standard Operating Procedure for COVID - 19 section 5.2.5 (Department of Basic Education, 2020).

The aforementioned rules in turn resulted in a multitude of hindering challenges towards the delivery of conventional teaching methods in the entire education sector, inclusive of the foundation phase (Matete, et al., 2023). In a bid to document these challenges, there is therefore a need to explore the experience of teachers in the foundation phase, particularly the effect of imposed mask wearing on conventional teaching methods.

1.3 Problem Statement

Of all the challenges that came with the COVID - 19 SOP, the focus of this qualitative case study is the mandatory use of masks in classrooms, particularly, to report on the experiences of the teachers who taught in the foundation phase during COVID - 19, and how these experiences affected conventional teaching methods by teachers. This is argued in the knowledge by Charney, Camarata, and Chern (2021) who pose that wearing masks can have an impact on speech understanding, which in turn influences the process of language development in the foundation phase, where language

teaching involves the ability for the learners to be able to visually discriminate the different phonological sounds of the alphabet letters (Charny, Camarata, and Chern, 2021).

The development of a child in an early childhood education (foundation phase) environment is reliant upon the student's ability to understand and communicate in a language with teachers and peers (Kalinowski, et al., 2020). Early childhood education is a tool to provide the exposure of language, literacy skills, and numeracy skills by allowing physical and social interaction to increase the growth and development of the child. The exposure to language development initiates in the brain using what Chomsky (1986) calls a "language acquisition device" (LAD). The LAD is explained by Chomsky (1986) as a storage unit in the brain. This unit is loaded with rules and principals of the universal rules of language acquisition. The LAD is activated when the child is exposed to a natural language. There are different stages of language development that children go through (Indrayani and Jember, 2016). There is the pre-lingual period which involves unspoken languages. Infants have their own language to communicate for example "babbling in babies" (age 0 – 1 year). The development whereby the first words are spoken but not in full sentences is called early – lingual period (age 1 - 3 years). The differentiation period occurs from age 3 – 6 years. The children are more organised, their words and sentences are more advanced. This is believed to be the most important stage, because the growth of vocabulary, plurals and complex consonants are developing, since at this stage, the children are eager to share their experience and perceptions with those around them (Indrayani and Jember, 2016). Hence, the inadequate early exposure of language development will influence the child's readiness to enter formal school. Carbon & Serrano (2021) cited by Neal, M.A. (2023) goes further and explains the importance of the early stages of the childhood development; as critical opportunities to learn language skills which encapsulates learning letters, sounds and also building on their social emotional skills.

Expressions and gestures play a key role in facilitating interpersonal communication, comprehension, and the delivery of intended messages (Mheidly, et al., 2020). The interaction between people using oral or physical gestures is a challenge. If one's facial expressions are obstructed, the sound or voice might not be clear. This therefore affects the pronunciation of words and their meaning. Therefore, it is important that

the ability of seeing, understanding people's expressions and communication material during conversations is not impacted. According to Carbon & Serrano (2021) for effective communication to occur children dependent on clear verbal and efficient non-verbal communication from their peers and teachers. Therefore, the use of compulsory masks in the classroom had an impact on the effective communication between children and the teacher.

1.4 Purpose Statement

This qualitative case study looks to explore how educators dealt with educational challenges around teaching language and literacy during the compulsory mask wearing period. Specifically, it seeks to explore what pedagogical strategies were used by foundation phase teachers in the addressing of these challenges. Masks impair the auditory signal from the sender, and more importantly, so is the visual signal (Spitzer, 2020). Whilst the face masks were used as a protective measure to prevent the transmission of COVID - 19, the challenges and experiences therefore in the teaching of language and literacy, in particular foundation phase must be fully explored (Matete, et al., 2023). The face-to-face communication in the classroom between the teacher and the learner completely changed because of the compulsory mask wearing (Spitzer, 2020). Bassok et al., (2021) cited by Neal, M.A. (2023) highlighted the challenges that teachers had to face during the COVID – 19 which affected their quality of instructional teaching. Bassok et al., (2021) conducted a qualitative case study in the form of a survey under the Study of Early Education: Louisiana (SEELA). Through this survey the teachers who responded explained that they experienced difficult with wearing the mask when teaching words, numbers and even reading a story to the children in the classroom. Through all of these new rules and regulation, teachers still had to teach and get through the curriculum. The SOP had some suggestions, for example the use of “face mask breaks” while teaching, as well as considerations when supporting learners with specific needs by advocating the use of face-shield or a clear mask when teaching learners who are deaf and hard of hearing. However, the teachers were the ones on the front line who had to make real pedagogical decisions about how best to educate their learners. This case study thus seeks to shed light on what some of these decisions were and reflect on the experiences of the teachers who

taught in the foundation phase during COVID - 19. This will help prepare a better response for educators and policy makers in the face of potential future outbreaks, or disasters.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research question is proposed for this study:

1. How did compulsory mask wearing in classrooms influence teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase?

The following sub-questions will help guide the research in addressing the main question.

- 1.1 What were pre-covid strategies to teaching language and literacy in foundation phase?
- 1.2 What were the effects of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy at foundation phase?
- 1.3 What new or altered strategies were created or used in language and literacy teaching?

1.6 Rationale

I am a foundation phase teacher with 7 years teaching experience, observing and assessing learners in the pre-school grades (Grade 000 to Grade 00). I have observed how the two-year COVID - 19 pandemic has negatively impacted on the early childhood development. Through the observations, I have observed learners who have shown a great deal of weak speech development. Some of the learners showed a lack of language and speech development to a point, whereby professional intervention was needed to develop the skills. Teachers had to find new strategies to teach the language skills in the classroom to combat the use of masks in the classroom.

Based on the literature reviews there has been research about how masks affect speech intelligence and face cues to the teaching of language and literacy in the classroom. Barrick (2021) goes further and explains the important role faces play in transmitting social information and recognising crucial information from others. Therefore, the compulsory mask wearing measures imposed during the COVID – 19 pandemic, according to Pörschmann, et al. (2020), affected the human face to face communication. The transmission of the sound from the speaker was lost in transmission because of the covering of the nose and mouth with a mask. Pörschmann, et al. (2020) cited Matthews, et al (2002) who refers to the effect of mask wearing that it obscures the lip reading of the listener, thus creating a disadvantage on the learners with impaired hearing in the classroom. Lalonde, et al (2022), also expressed the negative impact of face masks on speech understanding with regards to lip-reading and the reduction of transmission on high-frequency acoustic speech content.

The implementation of the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom had an impact on the role of inclusive education in South Africa. The major role of inclusive education in the South African department of education is to reduce the exclusion of learners in schools and in doing so ensure the full participation of all learners in the learning process with success. Therefore, the implementation of the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom did not take that major role of inclusive education into consideration. The access to good quality education without exclusion for the children was compromised, during the implementation of the COVID - 19 regulation measures. Pörschmann, et al. (2020) goes further and explains in the study conducted using a “dummy head with a mouth simulator”, to highlight how the voice radiation and what they referred to as the “speech intelligibility” (SII) is affected by the mask wearing in the room. The forementioned digs deeper to the fact that the learning process of the different learners in the South African classroom were affected by the use of compulsory mask wearing in the classroom. The compulsory mask wearing in the classroom exacerbated the challenges of inclusivity in the classroom. Hornsby (2004) defines speech intelligibility and explains it has *“a quantification of the proportion of speech information that is both audible and usable for a listener. Basically, an SII of 0 implies that none of the speech information, in a given setting, is available (audible*

and/or usable) to improve speech understanding. An SII of 1.0 implies that all the speech information in a given setting is both audible and usable for a listener. Generally, there is a monotonic relationship between the SII and speech understanding. That is, as the SII increases, speech understanding generally increases. The method for calculating the SII is described in the ANSI S3.5 (1997) standard titled “American National Standard Methods for Calculation of the Speech Intelligibility Index ”(p.10).

According to UNICEF the removal of barriers to learning protects the vulnerable and the marginalized group of people in the society. Therefore by eliminating any barriers to education will ensure that no children are left behind or excluded in the return to school and learning during COVID – 19 (UNICEF, 2023). The research is motivated by the need to explore both the experiences of teachers under non-conventional teaching conditions such as the pandemic and how they overcame the challenges while teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The COVID - 19 pandemic necessitated the need for educators to derive strategies to still ensure the smooth transition under the COVID – 19 disaster. These alternative coping mechanisms by teachers’ further aid to inform other stakeholders in the education sphere such as teachers or policy makers.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the background of how young children acquire language and develop speech. The focus of the research will be on how educators dealt with the educational challenges caused by compulsory mask wearing in schools, and specifically seeks to explore what pedagogical strategies were used by foundation phase teachers in the addressing of these challenges. Chapter two will outline the theoretical framework used for the research study and discuss the literature review, which addressed how language and literacy is learned and taught within South African foundation phase. Chapter two will also highlight on the issues of mask wearing in schools. Chapter three will cover the methodology, explain the qualitative research paradigm adopted for the research focusing on the case study. The data collection in the form of semi-structured interviews were conducted and the ethical standards and

compliance addressed in the research report will be explained in detail in chapter three. Chapter four will give a detailed outline of the data findings by focusing on the three main research questions detailed in chapter one. The responses of the six teachers are grouped into categories under eight headings and each heading will be discussed in detail in Chapter four. Chapter five will look into the four themes and findings in relation to the literature review and the theoretical framework of Chomsky LAD theory. The summary of the research study is covered in chapter six, where the key findings, significance and limitations, recommendations and my personal reflection is discussed.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

Chapter one introduced the context and background of the study and provided a brief introduction into language development in children. Chapter two seeks to explore, the theoretical framework underlying the study and how language and literacy were taught pre-covid, using the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). This is done in the form of a literature review, which will also explore the different challenges caused by compulsory face mask wearing in the classroom.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

According to Merriam (2009) a theoretical framework is the frame and underlying structure of your study. Merriam (2009) goes further and cites Maxwell (2005) who defines theoretical framework as “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research” (p.33). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) voice out that the theoretical framework under a qualitative research study is an important aspect of the research process. The reasons been that the theoretical framework guides the research questions, methodology, the interpretation and discussion of the findings of the study.

The theoretical framework for this qualitative case study is based on Chomsky LAD theory. Noam Chomsky is a renowned linguist who challenged the view of psychologist B.F. Skinner a behaviourist. B.F. Skinner believed that language learning happened through “operant conditioning” via a stimuli (Cowie, 2017). Chomsky argued that language acquisition in children initiates in the brain using what Chomsky (1986) calls a “language acquisition device” LAD. Chomsky (1986) defines the LAD as a storage unit in the brain. The unit contains a set of rules and principles of the universal grammar of language acquisition. Cowie (2008) cited by Sobecks (2020) suggest that the certain sections of the brain have the language ability and the Broca's area region

of the brain is the section where speech production is localized. Chomsky referred to the LAD as inborn. Therefore, children possess an innate language framework which includes the universal grammar giving them capacity to understand and acquire language easily (Lightbrown and Spada, 2000 cited by Forutan & Mehrpour, 2015). The LAD according to Cowie (2008) cited by Sobecks (2020) is “a normal part of development, and as children grow, “switches” are activated to further their learning” (pg.9). However, the LAD according to Chomsky (1986) is activated when a child is exposed to a natural language. Therefore, when children increase their input data knowledge of the language their language ability increases (Behme, 2008 cited by Sobecks, 2020). Furthermore, the exposure of a child to language development occurs when a child is exposed to language grammar and speech patterns, as alluded to by Sobeck (2020). The Chomsky LAD theory is thus chosen accordingly, as theoretical grounding in the investigation of how compulsory mask wearing in the classroom during COVID - 19 affected language learning, when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. When teachers taught language and literacy the mask obscured the language grammar and phonological aspect. Therefore, not allowing the learners to gain the exposure to the vocabulary and language grammar been taught. The exposure of language to the learners according to Chomsky builds on the innate knowledge found in the LAD. Chomsky LAD theory goes further to highlight that there are two major periods which he called the “critical period” and “sensitive period. These periods are part of the LAD respectively. The critical period according to Cowie (2017) cited by Raut (2023) is the “restricted period” this is the window period when language acquisition can happen. In other words the inputs to the LAD must be received during this period in order to acquire pertinent competence. If no inputs are received according to Cowie (2017) cited by Raut (2023) “that level of competence is permanently lost (pg. 29).” This implies that children have the capacity to acquire first language and this is accessible from birth to puberty and alluded to the LAD in the brain (Forutan and Mehrpour, 2015) This is crucial to this study because the foundation phase teachers’ had to teach language and literacy to learners from Grade one to Grade three whereby the building of the foundation blocks of language learning is taught. Therefore the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom affected the critical period of language building in the learners during COVID – 19 with regards to the challenges they had teaching phonics in the foundation phase. The Chomsky LAD theory will also be able to explain the impact of communication and teaching language

and literacy in the foundation phase, through what Chomsky refers to as the “sensitive period”. The sensitive period according to Cowie (2017) cited by Raut (2023) is put in the time range of ages one to seven years old where the development of language is obtained naturally and easily. The forementioned aspect will be able to explain the importance of teaching language and literacy in foundation phase in order to gain proficiency in the language be it first or second languages. The Chomsky LAD theory will be able to analysis the foundation phase teachers’ experiences of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase.

2.3 Teaching language and literacy in South Africa

Rosenblum (2008); Lewkowicz and Hansen-Tift (2012) allude to the attribute that “Learning language poses a formidable challenge for young language learners, requiring them to integrate information across both auditory and visual domains in order to effectively process the language occurring in their surrounding environment “ (p.2).

According to the Department of Basic Education, the National Curriculum Statement states the policy on curriculum and assessment in the schooling sector. In order to improve its implementation, subject statements, learning programme and subject assessment guidelines in Grade R-12 were replaced with a single CAPS document for each subject. The CAPS curriculum is driven by the following principles: “social transformation, active and critical learning, knowledge and skills of a high standard and progression regarding the content and context taught” (DHET, 2011, p. 4).

According to the Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) which addresses issues on poverty, unemployment and inequality in South Africa, the democratic government of South Africa took over an education system which had high inequalities, poverty levels and discriminatory practices (DPME, 2020, p. 47). These issues contributed to the lack of early childhood exposure to language learning development because not all children were given the opportunity to go to school and learn (DPME, 2020, p. 47). Therefore, under the CAPS curriculum the South African government had to introduce social transformation as one of the key principles to help

address the aforementioned issues which caused imbalance in the education sector (DHET, 2011, p. 4). Under the social transformation the curriculum would address the sensitive issues, race, language, age, disability and a few more factors by pushing for equal education for all learners in the country. The introduction of English and other official languages as a tool for teaching in the classrooms gave a certain platform of equality which was not based on race but diversity (Ridge, 2004). According to DPME (2020) removing the issue of race as the right to attending school was a main focus under the social transformation principle. There was a need to increase the access to Early Childhood care in order to improve the learning outcomes in the education system on the language learning platform. Beside only tackling the transformation fact under the CAPS document, the principle of learning was encouraged to be active and critical. Meiklejohn et al. (2021) agrees and highlights that any intervention for the improvement of fluency and vocabulary in South African schools must be active and engaging purposefully. The achievement of knowledge and skills must be of a high standard, complex and therefore grade and subject standards are stipulated in the CAPS document. Overall, the CAPS document for foundation phase outlines the assessment requirements and teaching guidelines of the different subjects provided in the foundation phase.

With the introduction of CAPS in the schooling sectors this offered a more detailed document to guide the learning and teaching of the language subject. There are two levels of language proficiency which play an important part in learning a language. The first is the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and is described as the “everyday, conversational level of language proficiency that children acquire naturally in their interactions and experiences within their families and social environment” (Landsberg, Kruger, and Swart, 2016. p161). The CAPS document allocates the time for interaction and language experience in the foundation phase as eight to seven hours for the home language and two to three hours for the additional languages. More hours are allocated for the home language, because the four major language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are integrated in the thinking and reasoning, language structures and use. Lightbown (2014) argues that allocating teaching time is important because the greater the exposure to the language for the learners the more beneficial it is in learning the language.

The second level of language proficiency according to Cummins (2000) is Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is described as the “language for learning that is developed in the formal school setting” (Joubert et al. 2013). Through various exposures to different planned lessons, group activities and individual processing language is learnt. The CAPS document specified the different exposures that a teacher can practice, which starts from Grade R (Department of Basic Education, 2011). According to CAPS in Grade R the principles of integration and play-based learning help to build language enriching opportunities (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The teacher is required to take opportunities for incidental learning through activities such as free-play, block construction and teacher directed activities. The teacher directed activities include story ring and morning ring times. Story ring time gives the teacher an opportunity to bring together all the learners on the carpet and read aloud a story to them (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The learners actively listen and build on their vocabulary. It is through retelling the story by the learner which builds their narrative structure. Labov, (1972); Moffett, (1968) define as “a verbal recapitulation of a past experience or more simply, a telling of what happened”. Hudson & Shapiro (1991), Johnston (1982) highlighted the important role narrative structure plays in developing language, because it involves massive linguistic and cognitive skills. The morning ring is directed by the teacher and is the first activity in the morning, which brings the learners together and builds on co-operation has a class (Hudson and Shapiro, 1991). The activities during the morning ring include greetings, news, weather, and sound games. Through all the above activities specified in the CAPS document the teacher is vocally active and involved in the “language for learning” of the learner (Hudson and Shapiro, 1991).

A literacy perspective is highlighted in the CAPS document for Grade R which encourages language development through discussions, communication and using open ended questions to boost their language. The daily programme in Grade R is described by CAPS as “the timetable which comprises three main components, namely teacher-guided activities, routines and child-initiated activities or free-play” (DHET, 2011, p. 20). The daily programme provides the teachers in Grade R with the opportunity to structure their lesson plans to offer an extra boost to those learners struggling with a certain skill. This can be done by encouraging questions which extend the learners thinking, problem solving and reasoning. This all according to the CAPS

document provides opportunities for flexible balanced rich language development. The importance of flexible balanced rich language is strongly highlighted in the CAPS document that “young children learn best through movement (kinesthetically) and then through interacting with concrete materials (three-dimensional learning) before engaging with tabletop and paper and pencil activities (two dimensional representational activities)” (DHET, 2011b, p. 21).

Grade one to three have a more detailed language programme which outlines the concept of literacy. Landsberg (2016) defines literacy as “the understanding and use of an ever-expanding range of symbols”. The symbols referred to are alphabetical letters, numerals, pictographs, and contexts in the form of technology and music. Therefore, literacy does not apply to writing and reading skills only but encircles all communication skills (Gunning, 2010; Joubert, Bester, Meyer, and Evans, 2013).

CAPS highlights the criticality of developing children’s listening and speaking and the skills need to be developed fully (DHET, 2011, p. 10). Thus, in the CAPS document there are focus times to provide the children in foundation phase the opportunity to begin the day with oral work in the form of a whole class activity. The children must be given the time to talk and report on news of the week. The time allocated to Oral includes Listening and Speaking Activities that target specific skills at least twice a week. The CAPS document thus provides daily/weekly listening and speaking skills and a list of other essential listening and speaking skills. The allocation of oral time for the foundation phase is supported by Draper and Spaull (2015) who argued that the literacy in South Africa is in a crisis because of the reduced levels of oral reading fluency (ORF). ORF is described by Hasbrouck and Tindal (1992) as the combination of accuracy and the rate the learner is reading. The teacher listens to the learner reading a book and observes the accuracy of the reading and records the number of correct words per minute.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for the Foundation Phase divides the requirements for Reading into Shared Reading (including Shared Writing) Group Guided Reading, Paired / Independent Reading, Phonics (including Phonemic Awareness). Shared Reading (and/or Shared Writing) usually happens in the first 15 minutes of the Reading and Writing Focus Time. The teacher works with the whole

class. Shared Reading will happen on two to four days a week using a single, enlarged text for the whole class such as Big Books, posters and pictures or a text on an overhead transparency or individual fiction and non-fiction texts for each child. Although there will normally be only one text used per week, the texts selected for each grade should increase in length and complexity across the year and across the grades. Children will be introduced to a range of stories, poems, rhymes and plays as well as information and graphical texts (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p.11).

The focus of the above passage from the CAPS document highlights the role the teacher plays in teaching literacy and language in the foundation phase. Most of the engagement of the teacher with the children involves oral reading the text to the children. The children must be able to listen and understand what the teacher is reading in the text in order for them to gain from the reading activity for the week. According to De-Temple et al., (2003) the frequency of adult interaction and story reading builds language development in learners. Therefore, the use of masks in the classroom by the teacher reduces the frequency of the interaction needed to build on the language of learning in the classroom. The need for the approach of teaching to be oracy centred is supported by Graham (2017) in the article from the University of Reading. The focus of the study was on early language learning and the impact of teaching and teacher factors on the progress of two hundred and fifty-two children, in learning the French language in England. The study highlighted the importance of the oracy approach which focused on encouraging and exposing the learners to the lexical and grammatical knowledge of the French language through listening and speaking. The amount of exposure to the language through instructed settings is of importance to the learning of any language. Graham (2017) goes further to argue that children acquire “grammatical structure” of the language by exposure alone.

2.4 The effects of Masks on language acquisition

Most reading experts agree that there are five main components to the teaching of reading; Phonemic awareness; Word recognition (sight words and phonics); Comprehension; Vocabulary; Fluency. Each of these components needs to be taught explicitly and practiced on a daily basis. (Department of Basic Education, 2011. p.14).

CAPS calls to attention that phonemic awareness must begin early as Grade 1 to develop speech and the recognition of sequence of sounds. According to CAPS phonemic awareness is “the ability to distinguish between the separate sounds of the language” (DHET, 2011c, p. 133)

Heilman (1976, p. 2) defines phonic instructions as “a facet of reading instruction which leads the child to understand that printed letters in printed words represent the speech sounds heard when words are pronounced; involves the actual teaching of which sound is associated with a particular letter or combination of letters”. Without the understanding of this relationship, a student will struggle to learn how to read. Crosson, A.C., and Silverman, R. D. (2022) explains the above mentioned five components in detail highlighting that phonological and phonemic awareness, sight words and decoding help children strengthen their development of literacy especially in English. Various activities are highlighted in the CAPS document to enhance language development. The use of rhymes and clapping out syllables in names are some of the activities which can develop language in learners. Listening to the beginning sound of different words is also promoted in CAPS to enhance language development in learners. The above builds on the phonic awareness of the learner. Myles and Mitchell (2011) cited by Graham (2017) conducted a study of learners in England ranging from ages five to eleven to highlight the role the teacher plays in the development of the phonic relationship between letter-sound. They argued that vocabulary development in a language is influenced by the raw input of the teacher, which is the frequency of the language lessons presented. This provides the learners with the opportunity to encounter the linguistic skills, through reading and listening to stories in the language being taught. The forementioned highlights the importance of the teacher’s role when teaching language and literacy in the classroom. The teacher is in the forefront of the deliverance and the introduction of compulsory mask wearing in the classroom would disrupt the teachers role to teaching the required content of language and literacy. With that in mind this study will focus on the understanding on how educators overcame these challenges.

The exact phonic teaching procedure is not explained in CAPS but different programmes are offered to guide phonic teaching in schools; such as teaching one to

two new sounds each week and consonant and vowel combinations. Introducing one to two new sounds per week is one of the programmes used in teaching phonics in Grade 1 (DHET, 2011, p.15). The most frequent sounds are taught first. When teaching the sound take into consideration the formation of the letters, for example a teacher can teach the letter c sound before a because the formation of the letter is easier. The teaching of the letter sound and handwriting are encouraged to be linked together while teaching under this phonics programme. In higher grades in foundation phase, the consonant letter-sound relationship is taught. The combination of consonant and vowel is used for example; pair and pear and the complexity increases throughout the year and the grades (DHET, 2011, p. 16). CAPS highlights the use of consonant blending in shared reading which empowers the learners to read by recognising a combination of consonant digraphs which they are familiar with. This is explained in detail below from an extract from the CAPS document

“.... Uses consonant blends to build up and break down words (e.g. r and l blends- black, fl-op, sl-ip etc.). Recognises common consonant digraphs (sh, ch and th) at the beginning of a word (e.g. sh-ip, ch-ip, th-ink). Groups common words into sound families. Reads phonic words in sentences and other text” (Department of Basic Education, 2011. p.71)

Heilman (1976) explains that when teaching phonics the children must be given the opportunity to discriminate between letter and sound. Heilman (1976) introduces the argument that it is important to teach the learner consonant letter-sounds before teaching vowel letter-sounds. In support of this argument are the following four reasons. The reading sequence in English is left to right and therefore the learner must analysis the sound of the word from the beginning, this will help them when they encounter words beginning with consonants. The third reason is that consonant letter-sound present a more consistent relationship than vowel letter-sound. The learner will be able to learn the sound of the consonant and able to apply it when they encounter other words. The fourth reason is that the learners read with meaning, the learners will only need the initial syllable of an unknown word to solve the word. An example to illustrate the fourth reason in support of the use of consonant letter-sounds is shown by Heilman (1976) has c=k in cat, cake, cup, cap, cut, could, can, cold, cry, call, clean, cage. d has d sound in did, doll, don't, day, do, dog, dish. The teachers role in the

classroom in teaching the phonic words is significant to a point that the teacher's sounding of the letters or the consonant must be clear and precise to build on the correct pronunciation for the learners to be able to understand the relationship between the letter and sound relationship. Therefore, highlighting the limitations that compulsory mask wearing in classroom created in the teaching of language and literacy in the foundation phase.

The use of compulsory masks in the classroom does affect the phonemic awareness development, and the broader practices of teaching in the classroom. The redirecting of learners in the classroom to wear their mask properly also interrupted the flow of teaching by teachers. There was a need to introduce frequent mask breaks, where the learners will be taken outside to take down their mask to breath. The breaks also impacted on the teaching in the classroom, because everyone had to step out to social distance outside to have the mask break (Khandelwal and Apodaca, 2022).

Jack and Schyns (2015) explain the importance of the human face with regards to human communication. The human face is a powerful tool in human communication. It provides the observer with emotional, physical and social status. Even when two individuals speak different languages, they can still effectively communicate through facial expressions. Neal, M.A. (2023) citing Barrick (2021) highlights also the significance of the face as means of communicating crucial social information between people. Therefore, the use of compulsory masks in the classroom for a foreign speaking learner trying to learn the native language used in the class is disadvantaged. The learner will not be able to use facial expression to learn and understand what the teacher is teaching and vice versa. Spitzer (2020) brings to our attention, the large role emotions play in the social interactions, which learning and teaching are culturally relevant social interactions in the classroom and outdoor play at school. According to Henrich (2016) learning has evolved and is a transmission of cultural knowledge in the human brain. The perceptual and cognitive processing in the human brain is boosted by negative affect. While, positive affect triggers holistic processing. These different processing styles play a part in the learning and teaching in the classroom and perceived by the emotions shown on the face (Curby, et al., 2012). Johnson, et al., (2010) further explains that smiling on a human "broadens cognition" which boosts creative thinking. The smile by the teacher plays a significant

role in the classroom with regards to the learners' cognition processing of the material being taught. Therefore, the use of masks covering the mouth region on the face obscures the teachers' emotions and facial expression. Thereby, interfering with the boosting of creative thinking on the learner in the class. Spitzer (2020) highlights that a true smile brings about positive emotions. For a true smile to be expressed by someone the lower region of the face must be visible. The use of face masks in the classroom has the opportunity to only show the "frowning" expression which is visible on the upper region of the face. Even if a learner shows an expression of surprise, it can be preserved as a negative emotion. Spitzer (2020) summaries that the decrease of emotional expression especially the positive emotion, may interfere with the smooth classroom actions. The major part of learning and teaching is expedited by emotions. Therefore, the use of face masks covering the lower region of the face is likely to cause some conflict with pedagogy. This is reiterated under the qualitative multiple case study conducted by Neal, M.A. (2023) who cited Bassok et al. (2021) stating that "COVID – 19 pandemic impeded the abilities of young children to see facial expressions, and as a result hindered their social experiences and language/literacy development" (p.6).

In Malawi research was conducted to explore the impact of COVID - 19 on primary education and the policy responses to especially the compulsory mask wearing in classroom. Chiwaula (2021) explains that the Malawi government recommended that all teachers, learners and staff working in the school environment must wear a mask covering the nose and the mouth at all times. The implication of the recommendation was some learners could not afford the face masks and others had health issues and could not wear the mask. These obstacles on their own created a barrier to learning for those learners, they were excluded from the classroom. The main focus of inclusive education is to allow all children the access to good quality education no matter their socio-economics background. So therefore, the implementation of the compulsory mask wearing as a measure to curb COVID – 19 virus by the government of Malawi did not take into consideration the implications on the disadvantaged learner found in the classroom. The study went further but did not explain the specific effects of mask wearing in the classroom to the delivery of the teaching methods by teachers.

2.5 Linking mask wearing to inclusivity challenges

Soudren, Reddy and Harvey (2021) highlighted the impact of COVID - 19 on the South African education system as fragile focusing on the structure of the system itself. The implementation by the government to close the schools was one of the systemic level measurements to reduce the spread of the COVID - 19 according to Soudren et al (2021), however, the disadvantaged learners suffered more because, the school closures meant the loss of learning days and educational opportunities. While other advantaged schools were able to switch to online learning. The socio-economic conditions affected the disadvantage learners.

The government implemented ways to mitigate the disruption by keeping the education system on track with the basic formal requirements of learning which was a challenge. The consideration done by the government and the impact on the learners in disadvantaged or rural schools, therefore is yet to be fully explored in the document. Macupe, (2021, p.5) explains that the “effects of the lack of inclusion of all learners from poor backgrounds, resulted in that Grade 1 learners in many of the disadvantaged schools were not given the opportunity to learn during the COVID - 19 pandemic.” According to an executive director of the SADTU cited by Soudren, Reddy and Harvey (2021), the forementioned will have a negative effect on the reading skills of the Grade 1 learners.

The history of South Africa’s socio-economic structure was highlighted during COVID – 19. The inequality in the education sector was shown by the lack of support for the educators with regards to what to teach during the online lessons. Mukute, Francis, Burt and De Souza, (2020), explain that there were improvements in the educational sector which need to be explored to further invest in the different innovation to teaching so that there is no exclusion of any learners even those at the disadvantaged schools, when faced with a pandemic. The experiences of teachers to teaching during COVID – 19 in the classrooms is not discussed and therefore pointing out the research gap for this study. The easing of the restriction in South Africa meant that there was need to ease the learners back to school through providing masks and hand sanitisers and educational workshops. One of the emergency operating procedure implemented in

South Africa was, the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom, to insure safety for all at school. (Mukute, Francis, Burt and De Souza, 2020).

2.6 The strategies to cope with mask wearing

There are some international studies that provide insight into how educators dealt with the problems faced with wearing mask during lessons. Khandelwal and Apodaca (2022) highlighted in their article that the state of Mexico had the strictest COVID - 19 protocols during the pandemic. The re-opening of schools was only for elementary schools and with a low capacity. The teachers in the elementary school had to face some challenges while teaching. The article highlights the different strategies that teachers used in the classroom to combat the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom.

The use of masks had an impact on the sound projection and the speech of the teacher and the learner. Therefore, both the teacher and the learner struggled with hearing the voice of the speaker while wearing a mask, because the sound was muffled. Lalonde, et al (2022) goes further and explains how the face masks introduced in the classrooms during the coronavirus pandemic disrupted and reduced the “transmission of high-frequency acoustic speech content” (p.1). In order to overcome this obstacle the teachers projected their voice a bit louder so that the learners would be able to hear them better. One teacher in the research article titled; The Impact of Mask Mandates on K-12 and higher-Ed Teaching, explained that their school gave them a microphone and that helped with the voice projection and hearing aspect for the learners. According to Khandelwal and Apodaca (2022) the wearing of KN95 mask was a strategy used by some teachers. KN95 masks had a strong filtration that prevented the breathing in of droplets which were infectious. The teachers explained that this particular mask made talking easy and they would project their voice to improve on the transmission of the speech.

The wearing of face masks was uncomfortable especially for the teachers and learners who had asthma. They found the face masks caused breathing issues and at times they would find it hard to breath throughout the mask. Khandelwal and Apodaca (2022) explained that the introduction of mask breaks at public schools in Mexico was a

strategy used by teachers to give everyone some time to take their mask off and breath normally. The issue of managing mask wearing in the classroom was an interruption to the teaching programme, because the teacher would have to stop teaching to redirect the learners who were not wearing their mask properly. Teachers in the article by Khandelwal and Apodaca (2022) claimed that normalizing the mask wearing at the very beginning of the re-opening of school was crucial to maintain and manage the importance of keeping the face mask mandate. It was also observed that the engagement and participation of learners in class discussions was lacking. In order to boost the participation in the classroom the teachers highlighted that they would call out the learners names to answer a particular question. This type of strategy helped in encouraging full participation in the class discussion even for the learners who were a bit shy and less willing to engage.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out how language is learned and taught within South African foundation phase based on the CAPS document. Further, the chapter gave background context on the development of learners especially in foundation phase with regards to language, numeracy, and literacy acquisition; as well as the associated factors that may hinder this development, therefore. The enforced wearing of mask as one of the mechanisms to curb the transmission of the COVID - 19 virus drastically changed the conventional teaching methods in the overall South African education sector inclusive of the foundation phase. There is therefore a need to fully explore the experiences of teachers with regards to mask wearing, as well as how they had to adapt their conventional teaching methods accordingly. Whilst the literature review gave background context, the ensuing chapter provided a structured research methodology towards exploring the experience of teachers with regards to mask wearing; and hence address the research questions of this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this study was to report on the foundation phase teachers' experiences of compulsory mask wearing while teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase during COVID - 19. Merriam (2009) explains that research can be defined in many different ways but in all the definitions there is the "notion of inquiring into investigating something in a systematic manner." In order to conduct our investigation and inquiry into to our research questions set, chapter three explored the methodology and research design used to investigate the research questions set in Chapter One. Crotty (1998) explains methodology as a strategy and Scotland (2012) explains further that it is "concerned with why, what, from where, when and how the data is collected and analyzed." A qualitative research strategy was adopted, whereby the data collection was in the form of semi-structured interviews. The ethical protocol was adhered to in order to protect the participants of the research. The ethical standards and compliance were addressed in the research report.

3.2 Research Design

The overall framework, methods and strategies used in the research are outlined in this section. This would provide a guideline in the data collection and analysis used.

3.2.1 Research paradigm

According to Scotland (2012) a research paradigm consists of three components: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology focuses on the reality, relating to the evidence to be accepted. One has to ask the question "What is real", is the topic under research real (Mertens, 2009). The question "what the nature of knowledge is and how do I come to know that the knowledge is true" is describe under epistemology, (Mertens, 2009). There is need as a researcher under epistemology to show objectivity, by remaining neutral when getting to understand the different experiences of the participants in order not to compromise the collection of data. The ontological and epistemological for this study were subjectivism and interpretivism respectively.

According to Schutz (1970), p. 274, subjectivism takes into consideration people's subjective experiences. Which means that "the major goal is to gain a better understanding of how people construct, modify and interpret the social reality in which they live" (Pervin, N., and Mokhtar, M, (2022), p. 425). Interpretivism is a "response to the over-dominance of positivism" (Grix, 2004, p.82). Under the interpretivism epistemology the understanding of reality is affected by our social beliefs, values, norms and the society we preside in. The third component of the methodology is highlighting the different research methods one can adapt and include the means of collecting data on the reality that they have chosen to research on (Scotland, 2012). This research study thus adopted a qualitative research approach. That would confidently allow the researcher to collect the data which will help capture the reality of the research through semi-structured interviews, and is outlined as shall be illustrated.

3.2.2 Qualitative research

Patton (1985) cited by Merriam (2009) defines qualitative research as

"... an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting-what it means for participants to be in that setting; what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting-and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting.... The analysis strives for depth of understanding" (p.14).

Therefore, qualitative research is the gathering of information directly from the participants to get an understanding of why the different actions were taken. Merriam (2009) describes the interests of qualitative researchers as "how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds and attribute meaning to their experiences". Merriam (2009) goes further and highlights the ontological assumptions of qualitative researchers as socially constructed, because there is no singular reality but multiple realities. The research report was done using an interpretive paradigm to discover the

pedagogical strategies used by foundation teachers to overcome the compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy. The interviewing of different teachers in the foundation phase using semi-structured interviews explained the perspective of the teachers with regards to the behaviour and actions taken in the classroom by the teachers. Grix (2004) goes on and explains that under the interpretative epistemology the focus is on a phenomenon which is real.

Case Study

Merriam (2009) defines a case study as being part of the qualitative research, highlighting its main focus is that of finding understanding and meaning. According to Merriam the researcher is “the primary instrument of data collection and analysis” (p.39), where the researchers concern is “insight, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis”(p.42). Cresswell (2007) cited by Merriam (2009) defines a case study as “case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system overtime, through detailed in-depth data collection..” (p. 73). Therefore, the research used a qualitative case study approach, which gave the researcher an opportunity to explore the insight into the experiences of the six foundation phase teachers to the effect of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy.

3.2.3 Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted via one instrument; semi-structured interviews. Face-to-face interviews were done with research participants, who were teachers from two primary schools in Johannesburg North. The interviews were scheduled according to the teacher’s availability after school. The participants were six teachers from the foundation phase. Three teachers from an independent school and three teachers from a government school. This was to add diversity and scope of thought to the data. The teachers were from Grade 1, 2 and 3, in the Gauteng province to get a broader view of the teachers who taught in the foundation phase during COVID - 19.

3.2.4 Sampling

Purposeful sampling was necessary to the research as the information required was from a specific context. The focus of the study was to report on the experiences of the teachers who taught in the foundation phase during COVID. Therefore, it was significant to sample and only teachers in the foundation phase were selected.

Patton (2002) argues that “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling” (Merriam, 2009, p.77). Purposeful sampling was used in the research report, because it provided a criteria-based selection and “information-rich” case to help understand the phenomenon. The six educators were selected from the foundation phase Grades 1, 2 and 3 in the two primary schools who were teaching during the COVID - 19 pandemic. The teachers were able to provide different rich experiences which were valuable to the findings. The pedagogical strategies which the foundation phase teachers used to combat the use of compulsory masks when teaching language and literacy in the classroom were analyzed in depth. Table 1 illustrates a summary of the qualifications and teaching experiences of the Teachers A – F.

Teacher	Educational Qualifications	Teaching experience	Previous Grade taught in the foundation phase	Grade taught during COVID -19
A	Bachelor of Education (BED)	15 years	Grade R	1
B	Senior Primary Teachers Diploma Further Diploma in Education (University of Johannesburg) Bachelor of Education	33 years	Grade 1, 2	2
C	Diploma in Teaching ACE management certificate (University of Pretoria)	8 years	Grade 4-6	3
D	Diploma in Education BSc Special Needs Certificate from Harvard Making Thinking Visible	23 years	Grade 2, 6 & 7	2

	BEd (Honours) WITS, Specialising in E-Learning Certificate from the University of Johannesburg- Identification and Innovation for Dyslexic Children			
E	Bed Foundation(Sub major in Early Childhood Development)	8 years	Grade 3	Grade 1
F	BEd in Foundation Phase BEd Honours Specialising in Inclusive Education	6 years	Grade 2, 3	Grade 2

Table 1: Qualifications and Teaching experiences

3.3 Data Collection Process

Data collection was collected from two schools. An ethical clearance from the authorities of the two primary schools was obtained. Permission was obtained from the Principal on behalf of the School's Governing Body and the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). This allowed me to approach the principals of the school who allowed me to interview the six educators. I approached the six teachers to gain their permission to participate in the research, after a brief summary detailing the goal of the research. Interviews were conducted with the relevant participants and each semi-structured interview included an interview schedule and the teachers were allocated between 30 to 45 minutes. The interview was conducted in their classroom after school when it was quiet and private. Sixteen open-end questions were pre-written and typed and were used to guide the interview. The participant were asked the questions while been audio recorded. After the recording the researcher manually transcribed the audio recording in detail.

The research commenced once all the ethical clearances and consent forms were completed and received.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection was in one part and therefore the following instruments were used.

3.4.1 Semi-structured interview:

DeMarrais (2004) describes an interview as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p.55). A semi-structured interview is a conversation which includes a mixture of questions listed in no specific order. This type of interview will offer the researcher flexibility and will be able to be open to different ideas which may appear while interviewing the participant. The semi-structured interviews were divided into two broad sections. The first section A focused on the demographics of the teachers which included, qualifications, background experiences and their different grades they taught during COVID – 19. The second section B, had the various questions like the experiences of the teachers prior and during COVID - 19, the effects of the compulsory mask wearing on their teaching of phonics and vowels, also the engagement of the learners, the importance of facial expression when teaching language and literacy. Lastly it covered the different effects of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy. Table 3.1 is an example of semi-structured questions which were asked during the research. See Appendix A.

The semi-structured interviews were used for this research because they gave the participants the opportunity to explain in depth their experiences. The researcher was able to prepare the questions in advance which were aligned with the research study, but also allowed for follow up questions to extract further explanations from the participants. The semi-structured interviews although use open-ended questions can be a disadvantage, because there is an increase of risk pertaining to research bias and low validity. The participants may give answers which they think you need to hear. These weaknesses of semi-structured interview was kept in mind during the research.

The six participants, Teachers A – F, were interviewed. Each teacher was allocated between 30 – 45 minutes for their interview. This was done in their classrooms where it was quiet, empty and private. The main focus of the interview was to get insight into

the teachers' experiences to the effects of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase, during COVID - 19. The detailed transcriptions of each teacher's semi-structured interview are illustrated in Appendix B.

3.4.2 Audio recording:

The six foundation phase teachers selected from grade one, two and three were audio recorded during their individual interviews. The audio recording of the interviews will preserve the information in its original state. This gave the researcher the opportunity to listen back at the interviews and critic their interviewing skills. The audio recorded information was transcribed, interpreted, and analyzed. Participants were asked to give their written consent before the research began. Their responses was treated confidentially. The data collected from this study was stored in a password protected computer and will be kept for 5 years.

3.5 Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) describes data analysis as a process that will allow the researcher an opportunity to consolidate the data collected and answer the research questions. A simple descriptive data analysis was used for this research. The responses helped draw up a conclusion for the research report. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a thematic analysis provides an opportunity for the researcher to interpret and describe the emerging themes and patterns found in the data collected. This helped answer the questions who, what and when and was well suited for this research because it helped identify the effects of mask wearing in the classroom when teaching language and literacy.

Braun and Clarke (2006) lists six steps to conducting thematic analysis approach.

1. Familiarising yourself with your data

The researcher must be fully engulfed and actively involved in the data. Firstly, the researcher must be able to transcribe the interviews, read through the transcripts

and listen to the recordings of the interviews. The forementioned will provide the researcher an opportunity to familiarise with the data before analysis.

2. Generating initial codes

To describe the data collected one has to generate codes, which are the relevant and interesting features found in the data. Thoroughly reading through the transcripts different phrases, sentences must be highlighted, using different colours. This will help group the features observed in the data to enrich the content.

3. Search for themes

According to Braun and Clarkes (2006) themes are more broader than codes. While filtering through the data the identification of patterns is key in order to create themes. The data which is relevant are combined according to themes which will be overarching.

4. Reviewing themes

A though review of the themes created must follow and the researcher has the opportunity to sort out the initial themes by combine or splitting the themes. This will help highlight the meaningful data in the themes, and select the main themes.

5. Defining and naming themes

The themes selected from the data can be defined and refined. This can be done by creating categories to further analysis the themes. The categories must be clearly named and capture the characteristics of the theme. This will help consolidate the focus of the research, validity and findings

6. Producing the Report

The themes must be aligned with the focus of the research questions and report. The report must be detailed and with supported evidence convey the research question. Therefore, the data analysis must justify and provide validity of the analysis.

The analysis of the data is based on an inductive approach, involving a thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a thematic analysis provides an opportunity for the researcher to interpret and describe the emerging themes and patterns found in the data collected. Through their responses the participants of the research brought to the surface different categories with regards to the research area. Therefore, a thematic analysis was adopted so as to outline the different categories which were brought to the surface, in a structured manner, to enable readability. Figure 1 illustrates the chronological timeline of events.

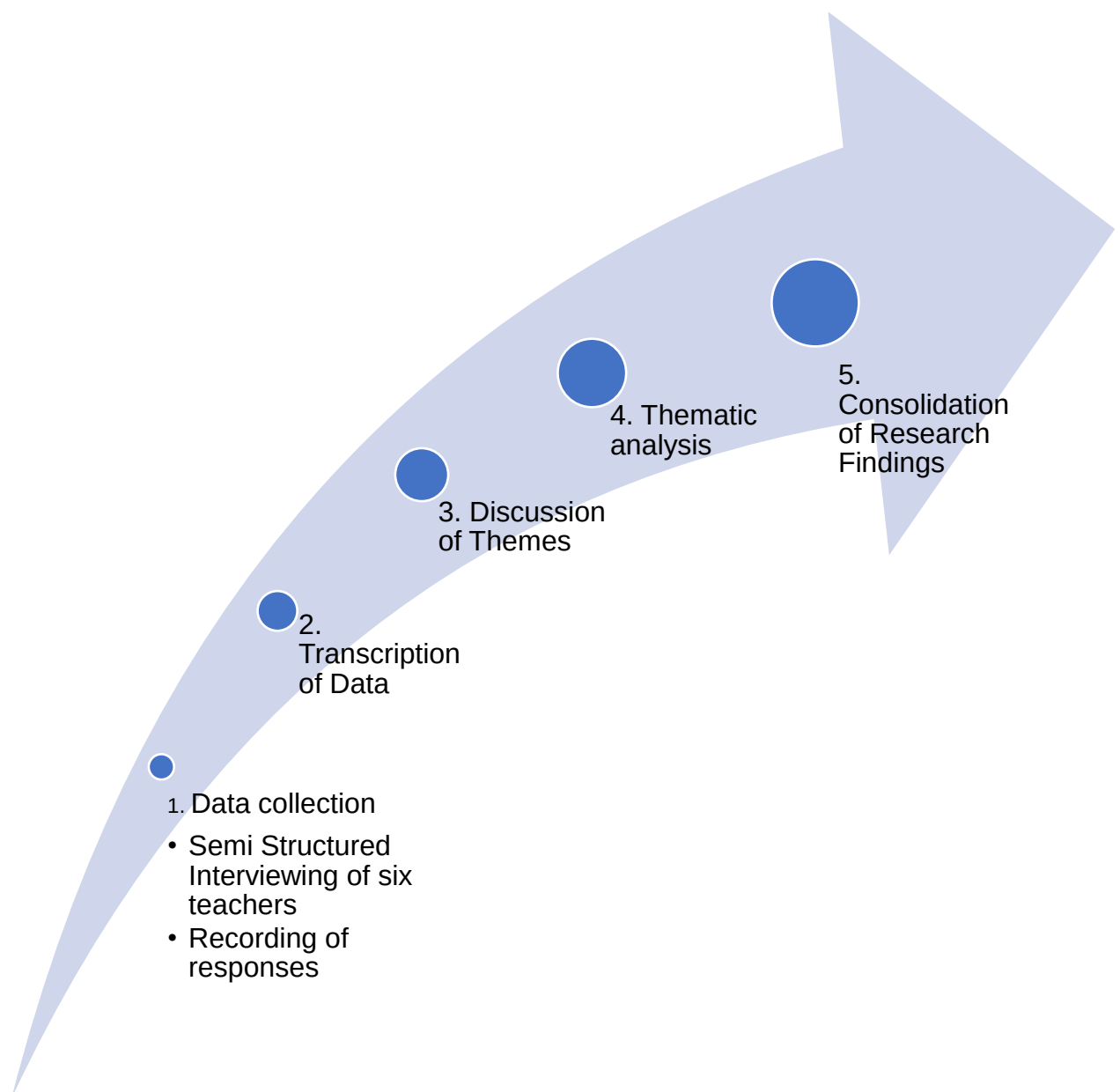


Figure 1: Chronological timeline of events.

3.6 Compliance with Ethical Standards

A clearance certificate from the University of Witwatersrand was obtained. Consent forms were obtained from the six teachers who were the participants and from the principals of the two different schools approached. A Government Department of Education form was completed to ask for permission from the department of education to conduct the research in the two schools chosen. The identities of the schools and participants who participated in the research were protected and anonymity and confidentiality were assured.

Validity and trustworthiness were considered using the Guba & Lincoln (1994) criteria. Also the research bias of the researcher was considered.

3.6.1 Validity

Validity according to Muhammad et al (2008) is “.....to do with description and explanation, or whether or not the given explanation fits a given description..”.p.40. Therefore, under the qualitative research paradigm which was used for this study, it allowed me the researcher the opportunity to spend more time in the field and use different data collection methods to justify the findings. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. These sort of data collection methods gave me the opportunity to allow the participants to elaborate their experiences in their own words, I has the researcher was able to give a full description and explanation of the participants experiences. Patton (2001) elaborates further and highlights that the use of different methods of data collection will strengthen the research study, through what she referred to as “triangular”. Therefore, the use of interviews and audio recording increased the validity of the research study.

3.6.2 Research Bias

According to the Oxford Dictionary:

“bias is a systematic distortion of statistical results due to a factor not allowed for in their derivation.”

Thus research bias reduce the distortion of the research findings. Norris (1997) goes further and explains that a human element has an impact in any kind of research be it qualitative, experimental or quantitative research. Research bias take into consideration the human aspect involved in the research process that is the researchers ability, personal experiences or beliefs.

Through this research the potential biases that I had was that I work in one of the participant schools and I am a teacher working in the Foundation Phase field so I might have pre-knowledge of the topic and this might influence the data collection. Using interviews as a data collection process I made sure the questions being asked were not leading. The questioning in the interviews did not influence the participants description of their experience. Working at one of the participant school, did not have a bias effect because the participant were chosen from the grade phases which I did not teach and had no contact with. Has I work in a different section of the school which is completely separate from the main school because I am a pre-school teacher. The forementioned aspects helped reduce the impact of research bias but not to completely remove the bias effect.

3.6.3 Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in the research Guba & Lincoln (1994) point out the four criterion as; dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability

Dependability according to Lincoln & Guba (1994) is connected to confirmability and credibility. A research study must hold consistency at its core. The research if done in the same way by someone else using the exact participants must yield the same result. Therefore consistency and repetition is important. The methodology chapter has outlined the methods and strategies used to answer the research questions set in Chapter one. The chapter has detailed the different interviews conducted.

Credibility according to Polit & Beck (2014) is focused on the truth of the study; that is having confidence in the research study findings. To gain the confidence there must have been extended interviews engaging with the participants and evidence of journals detailing the engagement. Six semi-structured interviews were designed to help engage with the participants fully.

Transferability according to Shenton (2004) it is the applicability of the findings from one study to another. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the honors is in the researcher's hands to make sure that the applicability is shown through the contextual information. The details of the organization, participation, data collection methods, how long the data collection is going to take is all outlined in this chapter on methodology.

According to Shenton (2004) confirmability is "the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity" (p72). The researcher must highlight the ideas and participants views in the findings and not the researchers own view of the research study. Therefore, one has to outline the limitations and the researchers position in the research. Throughout the research detailed notes of the interviews were kept.

3.7 Conclusion

Chapter three has highlighted the focus of the study which was to explore the foundation phase teachers' experiences of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The semi-structured interviews are the data collection method which were used in this study. The data analysis methods and ethical protocols followed were highlighted. The use of interviews and audio recordings helped the participants (the teachers) to describe and explain their experiences using their own words and this gave us an understanding of the pedagogical strategies used by foundation teachers to overcome the compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy during the COVID - 19 pandemic.

Chapter Four: Data Findings

4.1 Introduction

The research is guided by the three main research questions detailed in Chapter one, which focus on the experiences of the teachers to the effects of compulsory mask wearing to teaching Language and Literacy in the foundation phase during COVID - 19. In order to gain understanding of the experiences of the teachers in the foundation phase to the above effects of COVID - 19 on their teaching, data was collected from six different teachers. The six foundation phase teachers were chosen from two different schools for grades one, two and three. This was done in order to detail different teacher experiences. The semi-structured interviews (in the form of sixteen interview questions) guided the collection of the data whereby each teacher was allocated 30 to 45 minutes per interview. The responses from the six teachers are documented using the Teachers Response Code (TRC) which is used as a means of referencing the teachers semi-structured interview responses. The transcripts of the interviews are attached in Appendix B and labelled as follows Transcript A, B, C, D, E, and F respectively. The responses of the six teachers are grouped into categories as shall be illustrated in the sections below.

4.2 Responses to the Semi-Structured Interview questions

Upon conducting the interviews, the responses thereafter from the Teachers were grouped into categories under the following headings:

1. Migration towards digital learning to explain the movement from campus teaching to digital learning.
2. Challenges experienced prior to and during the COVID – 19 to detail the learning barriers that the teachers’ observed before and after COVID – 19.
3. COVID regulations effects on the teaching process in the classroom - to look at how the regulations implemented during COVID – 19 pandemic had an effect on the teachers’ teaching process in the classroom.
4. Phonics – The importance of phonics when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase.

5. The regulation of COVID – 19 regulations implemented in the classroom affected cooperative learning in the foundation phase during groupwork.
6. Other ways mask wearing affected teaching language and literacy – to explain various other ways the compulsory mask wearing affected language and literacy teaching in the classroom.
7. Lessons learnt and strategies developed during the impact of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy.
8. Strategies continued after the COVID -19 pandemic.

Migration towards digital learning

During lockdown one half of the participants continued with teaching from day one, they were trained on the different online platforms, examples given were zoom, google meet, google class. For some there was no teaching on campus and they followed the instructions from the department of education that they should use WhatsApp platform to continue communicating with their students.

“We continued from day one, We got trained to use google class, google meet, we were given choices to use Zoom or Google meet.” (interview Transcript D, point 79-80, p.3)

Challenges experienced prior to and during the COVID – 19

The main challenges raised by the teachers prior to COVID - 19 were students not speaking the home language and some minor medical barriers such as the lisp and poor eyesight.

“..... the learners come from outside the country (they are foreigners from Mozambique, Zimbabwe) The problem, was the language and our home language at the school is Setswana the learners could not speak Setswana...”(interview Transcript B, point 24, 25... p.1)

“learners could not speak Setswana” (interview Transcript B, point 25, 26, p.1) “..things like a lisp, you know I’m correcting things like that...” (interview Transcript E, point 22-23... p.1)

“I had only one student who presented with poor eye sight” (interview Transcript B point 30, p.1) and he would squint his eyes when he was trying to read what was written on the board or being presented by the teacher in the form of a chart.

During COVID -19 the major challenge highlighted was that communication between the teacher and the learners was affected with the compulsory wearing of mask in the classroom. *“we could not communicate well with the learners...” (interview Transcript C, point 28, p.1)*

“The children could not understand me and when they talked, I could not hear what they were saying with the mask on. Because we could not allow them to take off their mask...” (interview Transcript C, point 26, p.1).

The Teachers observed that it was very difficult for the learners who experienced difficulties in Speech and language. Teacher D explained that there was a learner in their class who they had recommended for Speech and Language Therapy because he presented with difficulties in articulation and language skills even prior to mask wearing. However, the parents were convinced that it was because of the mask wearing and were adamant that the learner should not receive the support of Speech and Language Therapy. Teacher D went on further to explain that, *“He relied on the facial expressions of the teacher and how the teacher’s lips are moving for him to actually understand the information being delivered by the teacher” (interview Transcript D, point 29, p.1).*

COVID regulations effects on the teaching process in the classroom

The COVID - 19 regulation for the educational sector affected the conventional teaching practices in schools. Crowding was a major issue in Grade one and two. There was no rotational learning compared to the Grade three. Teacher C highlighted that there was the introduction of rotational learning because in the Grade three classes the number of children were in the range of fifty children per class. So, in order to follow the COVID - 19 regulations imposed by the South African government, of social distancing in the range of 1.5 meters the school had to introduce rotational learning.

“...I meant they are coming on different days in their groups because the number of children in the class was many we could not accommodate them all in the classroom so we divided them into two groups. Some would come on Monday, other group on Tuesday, the first group will repeat on Wednesday and the second group on Thursday,....” (interview Transcript C, point 41-43, p.2)

“we did not make progress in our teaching” (interview Transcript C, point 40, p.2)

Phonics

According to Graham (2017) the need for phonics, and the audibility of the sound when one is speaking is of importance while teaching especially language and literacy. The learners in foundation phase need to see the movement of the mouth while the teacher is forming the sound or pronunciation of the word for them to be able to say it (Heilman, 1972). The need for the learners to be able to see and hear simultaneously is of importance in learning phonics and developing their spelling skills. The effective utilization of phonics whilst teaching language and literacy were affected by the enforced compulsory mask wearing on the foundation phase learners.

“....the children couldn’t see and hear simultaneously so they had to just base it purely on their hearing”. (interview Transcript E, point 47-48, p.2).

“...seeing the movement of the mouth is important for language and literacy I did find that some of the learners struggled to get the correct sounds out because here in grade one we do a lot of sounds before we do letter names.” (interview Transcript E, point 39-42, p.2)

The learners could not see the full facial expression of the teacher while they were teaching either the phonics or the vowels. The participants explained that without facial expression it is difficult to teach punctuation during language and literacy lessons, especially reading skills.

“what I struggled with is that without the facial expression it was difficult to teach punctuation in reading, because punctuation and expression are linked. A child has to

know that there is an exclamation mark and the tone of the voice defers.”(interview Transcript D, point 95-98, p.3).

The mask wearing “muffled the voice” and sound of the teacher while teaching. This caused a challenge for the teachers when teaching spellings and new concepts to the learners. Teacher F explained that teaching phonics and awareness of language skills was 100% affected by the wearing of mask in the classroom. The reason being that the teacher combines spelling and blending of letters to form words.

“teaching a lot of spelling and the sound, blending and the most important is that the children need to be phonologically aware to hear what the sound is and make connection to the letter”(interview Transcript F, point 99-101, p.3). Therefore, the sound will be affected by the mask.

“.. obviously with the mask covering the mouth it’s hindering the sound” (interview Transcript F, point 102-103 p.3).

She went further and gave an example that the pronunciation of TH“*...the proper sound maybe you are saying TH the sound but then they hearing f sound so yeah wearing the mask was quite a challenge then when you’re teaching a lot of the spelling for the phonological...*” (interview Transcript F point 103-105, p.3).

The face shield was used to enhance the teaching of phonics, vowels and the facial expression by the teachers, however it had its flaws for example the majority of teachers found it irritating. While Teacher F explained that the face shield was better than wearing a mask while teaching phonics and vowel. The children were able to see the teacher’s expressions, maybe they were able to hear a little bit better even though it still blocked the sound a bit when speaking.

“...maybe they can hear a little bit better even though it’s still blocking the sound a bit of that sound it’s better than a mask ...” (interview Transcript F, point 135-136, p.4).

Cooperative learning in the Foundation phase

Cooperative learning is a tool used in the classroom by teachers to promote social engagement among diverse groups of learners. This promotes and encourages learning and respect among the groups of learners (Attle & Baker, 2007; Slavin, 2004). According to Gillies (2007), learners depend on and support each other during the variety of tasks they must complete in the group setting. Therefore, this is referred to as cooperative learning. This type of learning requires the group of learners to work in pairs or group of fours. Cooperative learning as a pedagogical method of teaching for the teachers was affected by the impact of COVID – 19 regulations. The SOP implemented by the Department of Education in South Africa required the teachers to maintain social distance in the classroom of 1.5 meters. The required activities to promote cooperative learning in the foundation phase, for example group work could not be implemented or used in the classroom, as explained by Teacher F.

“During COVID obviously we couldn’t do groupwork children were not allowed to interact to be in each other’s spaces and there were some activities....” (interview transcript F point 109-110, p.3).

The forementioned had an impact on the pedagogical teaching of language and literacy in the foundation phase. According to Bond and Castagnera (2006) learning is amplified when a child is teaching another child because it promotes cooperation among the learners and exchange of ideas. This is supported also by Slavin (2013) who highlights that cooperative learning as a pedagogical teaching tool develops thinking skills.

Other ways mask wearing affected teaching language and literacy.

The disruption of communication of the speech and the projection of the voice of the teacher or the learner by the mask while speaking was a major factor that was highlighted by most of the teachers. This raised problems that if the learners could not hear the teachers’ words clearly and vice versa then the skill of communication and interaction between the learners and the teacher is affected by the wearing of a mask.

Teacher D described that teaching language and literacy; *“is not just words”(interview Transcript D, point 39, p.2)* and the sounds which need to be taught, but *“also includes gestures, and lots of collaboration”*. (interview Transcript D, point 39-40, p.2).

Lessons learnt and strategies developed during the impact of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy.

The COVID – 19 pandemic required the teachers to change their ways of teaching and develop new strategies to continue the teaching in the classroom. The use of routine and individualizing classroom sitting arrangement were used as strategies to reduce the exposure to COVID – 19. The teachers voiced out that they were forced to resort to using more technology in the classroom and not relying on their voice only. as a strategy.

“...that I realized that we could use a lot of technology more I did not need to rely on my voice only” (interview Transcript D, point 69-70, p.2)

Strategies continued after the COVID - 19 pandemic.

The use of blended lessons has continued, and the teachers explained that technology is used more in the classroom, but not the use of video recordings.

“Yes, I am still using some of the strategies. The video recording not so much but technology I now use it more often.” (interview Transcript D, point 76, p.3).

4.3 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted and utilized as described in Chapter three. This was used as a tool to guide the discussion of the findings from the data collected. The thematic analysis will be used guided by the six steps of Braun and Clarke (2006).

4.3.1 Familiarization with the data

To familiarize one with the data is the first step. This was done by conducting semi-structured interviews with the six teachers and manually transcribing each interview. By doing so the researcher became well versed with the participants and the data. The

semi-structured interviews were divided into two broad sections. The first section A focused on the demographics of the participants. Which included the background, experiences, qualifications, and the foundation phase grade they taught during COVID - 19 pandemic. The second, section B of the semi-structured interviews were various questions, focused on the impact of COVID - 19 on teaching language and literacy. Table 2 below is an example of the semi-structured interview transcript for Teacher A. The full transcript of all the teachers can be viewed in Appendix D.

Table 2: Example of interview transcript taken from Part 1: Teacher experience and qualifications.

<u>Interview Transcript Teacher A</u> Question 1: How long have you been teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase? When did I start, First I was in grade R for 10 years and I started teaching Grade 1 in 2019. Question 2: What qualifications do you hold? The only qualification I hold now is a BEd in Education

4.3.2 Generating Initial Codes

To describe the data collected one must generate codes according to Braun and Clarke (2006), which are the relevant and interesting features found in the data. Different phrases, sentences were highlighted, using different colours by thoroughly reading through the transcripts. They were grouped to enrich the content. The initial coding for the six teachers are highlighted in the following tables 3 - 8. Appendix B details the full transcripts. The abbreviation TRC stands for Teacher Response Code.

Table 3: Initial codes for interview with Teacher A

Key phrase	Similar TRC locations	Code
<i>".....usually when you say something the children must look at you and what you are trying to say to them."</i>	A55,A60, A61, A62, A64, A71, A72, A73, A83, A84, A85	Challenges when teaching phonics and vowels while wearing the mask
<i>"...you want the children to concentrate, others they were taking out their mask and you are busy trying to make them"</i>	A12, A13, A14, A30, A31, A33, A34, A35, A36, A37, A56, A57, A63, A74, A75, A95, A96, A98, A99, A100, A109, A116, A133, A134, A156,	Engagement of the students during language and literacy lessons during the compulsory mask wearing period

<i>understand what you are teaching ...</i>		
---	--	--

Table 4: Initial codes for interview with Teacher B

Key phrase	Similar TRC locations	Code
<i>"... the learners were not able to hear the phonic sound of the letter I am teaching ..."</i>	B45, B47, B48, B61, B67, B68, B79, B80, B87, B114	Challenges when teaching phonics and vowels while wearing the mask
<i>"...home language at the school is Setswana the learners could not speak Setswana...."</i>	B24, B25, B26, B27, B36, B37, B39, B40	How the usage of home language while teaching was a barrier to learning

Table 5: Initial codes for interview with Teacher C

Key phrase	Similar TRC locations	Code
<i>"...easy to communicate with the learners... I was audible and they were also audible." during COVID-19 "I could not hear what they were saying with the mask on..."</i>	C15, C27, C29, C96, C101 C52, C77, C80, C88, C89	Prior and during COVID-19
<i>"... Children should see your mouth when you are saying some words..."</i>	C57, C58, C59, C60, C62, C82,	Challenges when teaching phonics, language skills while wearing the mask

Table 6: Initial codes for interview with Teacher D

Key phrase	Similar TRC locations	Code
<i>"... affected because for some phonics you want to say to the child take your tongue out or put your tongue to the top of your mouth and do this for them to pronounce, something correctly and we could not do that..."</i>	D43, D46, D55, D56, D61, D66	Challenges when teaching phonics, language skills while wearing the mask.
<i>"the facial expression and mouth are very important in</i>	D29, D34, D40, D55, D71, D85, D87, D93, D94, D96, D97, D100	The importance of facial expression to teaching

<i>teaching language and literacy...</i>		
--	--	--

Table 7: Initial codes for interview with Teacher E

Key phrase	Similar TRC locations	Code
<i>"...I would wear a shield instead of a mask so that they could see my mouth moving during language lessons..."</i>	E38, E39, E40, E43, E47, E51, E58, E59, E60, E65	Challenges when teaching phonics, language skills while wearing the mask.
<i>"...so important, it's a big part of children being able to process you..."</i>	E68, E69, E70, E107	The importance of facial expression to teaching

Table 8: Initial codes for interview with Teacher F

Key phrase	Similar TRC locations	Code
<i>"...few children that were still battling to communicate and socialize..."</i>	F18, F19, F20, F21, F24, F25, F26, F29, F30, F31, F35, F42, F53, F80, F82, F85, F109, F143, F144, F145, F155, F188	Prior and during COVID -19
<i>"covering your face you're covering your voice they cannot hear you clearly..."</i>	F73, F74, F77, F79, F103, F104, F105, F122, F123, F125, F126, F141, F142, F146, F148, F211, F212, F213, F215, F231	Impact on your teaching of language and literacy

4.3.3 Searching for themes.

The next step according to Braun and Clarke (2006) is to capture the interesting patterns of the data connected to the research questions. Therefore, the different initial responses of the six teachers were highlighted with different colours and looked at together to identify the significant common themes of the questions. Table 9 shows the six teachers who were interviewed, and their initial responses are highlighted with different colours to indicate similar themes.

Table 9: Initial responses of the six teachers, colour coded according to similar themes

Code: Challenges when teaching phonics, language skills while wearing the mask					
Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D	Teacher E	Teacher F
usually when you say something the children must look at you and what you are trying to say to them	Let's say I am teaching the phonic sound of the letter B, I say to the learners look here and I say the sound "b"	Children should see your mouth when you are saying some words	some phonics you want to say to the child take your tongue out or put your tongue to the top of your mouth and do this for them to pronounce, something correctly and we could not do that..."	I would wear a shield so that they could see my mouth moving	So obviously with the mask covering its hindering the proper sound you are saying
Code: Prior and during COVID -19					
Whereby you have to teach them in Setswana that's when the difficulty arises	One boy who presented with poor eye sight.	easy to communicate with the learners... I was audible and they were also	Students with difficulties you always have those in all the classes I have taught	Not really so much , only things like a lisp.	Few children that were still battling to communicate and socialize
Had to use the sign language because they could not even understand especially when you put on the mask	I could not hear the responses of the learners when I asked questions because of the mask.	We had a challenge; I could not hear what they were saying with the mask on.	We were recommending speech to address certain speech and language difficulties	More and more children were referred to speech therapy	Socializing communicating or expression themselves was challenging

Code: The importance of facial expression to teaching

Because the mouth was covered by the mask and the children could only see your eyes and no facial expression	It is very important because I would use facial expression to manage behaviour in the classroom	The children understand well when they are looking at your face	The facial expressions I use a lot in my teaching that was also affected, and I had to adjust a lot of things.	I felt like the mask almost restricted them from getting the full view of the teachers' personality	you want them to see your emotions as well while teaching and they did not get to see that
The children could not hear you if you are screaming under the mask, I had to bang the table to get their attention.	The mask was covering my nose and mouth but still they could see my eyes. I was talking through my mask and using gestures with my eyes	The students needed to show their facial expression while I was teaching them but because of the mask they couldn't	the facial expression and mouth are very important in teaching language and literacy	it's a big part of children being able to process you	They can read from your facial expression if the teacher is happy or upset and having your mask on they couldn't really see the facial expression

Code: Engagement of the students during language and literacy lessons during the compulsory mask wearing period

you want the children to concentrate, others they were taking out their mask	Some of them were participating	The children were positive, even though sometimes they would not clearly hear what I was saying because of the mask	Class management during literacy teaching it was negatively affected	They were fine.	There was still engagement, but not as much
--	---------------------------------	---	--	-----------------	---

Code: Impact on your teaching of language and literacy					
They need to look at how you move your mouth when you say the sounds	When we are talking while wearing a mask some people cannot hear you clearly	The speech was affected because I was wearing a mask. The children would not understand the instructions which you were giving them	Teaching language for me is not just words, it is a lot of other things; gestures, lots of collaboration. I felt that we were limited on things we had to do	Some of the learners struggled to get the correct sounds out, and having the masks in the way caused problems in terms of what they were actually hearing versus what they were writing down	covering your face, you are covering your voice they cannot hear you clearly
Code: Strategies used when teaching					
I demonstrated more by using 3D images	Writing on the chalkboard, gestures and a chart	No strategies	Used a lot of technology and not to rely on my voice only, e.g video recording lessons and better planning	I think the routine	Individual desk set up for the classroom

4.3.4 Review of Themes

The preliminary themes identified from step three of Braun and Clarke (2006) are reviewed and analysed, based on the following main research question in the report, outlined in Chapter one as follows:

- *How did compulsory mask wearing in the classroom influence teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase?*

This main research question is further supported by the three sub-questions, outlined in Chapter one as follows:

- *What were pre-covid strategies to teaching language and literacy in foundation phase?*
- *What were the effects of compulsory mask wearing in teaching language and literacy at foundation phase?*
- *What new/altered strategies were created or used in language and literacy teaching?*

The collection of all the data related to each preliminary theme is done to create broader themes which are discussed in the next step.

4.3.5 Defining and Naming Themes

The preliminary themes were defined by creating codes and highlighting the data that is related. This helped to further analyze the preliminary themes. The themes were refined by grouping them together to consolidate the focus on the research findings.

Table 10: The defining, refining and naming process

Item	Theme name	Group definition	Initial Codes
1.	Challenges when teaching phonics	The obstruction of speech, phonic sounds and the projection of the voice by the mask while teaching. These were highlighted by the teachers.	Usually when you say something the children must look at you and what you are trying to say to them. Let's say I am teaching the phonic sound of the letter B. I say to the learners look here and I say the sound 'b'.

			Some phonics you want to say to the child take your tongue out or put your tongue to the top of your mouth and do this for them to pronounce something correctly and we could not do that. Children should see your mouth when you are saying some words. I would wear a shield so that they could see my mouth moving. They need to look at how you move your mouth, when you say the sounds. Some of the learners struggled to get the correct sounds out and having the masks in the way caused problems in terms of what they were actually hearing versus what they were writing down.
2.	Impact on communication and teaching language and literacy during compulsory mask wearing period	The group gives insight into the impact on communication and engagement of the learners when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase while wearing a mask	Had to use the sign language because they could not even understand especially when you put on the mask. I could not hear the responses of the learners when I asked questions because of the mask

			We had a challenge I could not hear what they were saying with a mask on. The children could not hear you if you are screaming under the mask. I had to bang the table to get their attention. The children were positive even though sometimes they would not clearly hear what I was saying because of the mask When we are talking while wearing a mask some people cannot hear you clearly. The speech was affected because I was wearing a mask. The children would not understand the instructions which you were giving them. Covering your face you're covering your voice they cannot hear you clearly. Few children that were still battling to communicate and socialise
--	--	--	--

			Socialising, communication or expressing themselves was challenging. You want the children to concentrate, others they were taking out their mask. There was still engagement but not so much.
3.	Importance of facial expression to teaching language and literacy	The group gives insight to the effects of compulsory mask wearing on facial expression.	Because the mouth was covered by the mask and the children could only see your eyes and no facial expression. It is very important because I would use facial expression to manage behaviour in the classroom. The facial expression and mouth are very important in teaching language and literacy. The facial expression I use a lot in my teaching that was also affected and I had to adjust a lot of things. I felt like the mask almost restricted them from getting the full view of the teachers' personality.

			You want them to see your emotions as well while teaching and they did not get to see that It's a big part of children being able to process you.
4.	Strategies used when teaching during COVID-19	The group gives a perception of the different strategies which the teachers used with regards to compulsory mask wearing in the classroom while teaching.	I demonstrated more by using 3D images. Writing on the chalkboard, gestures and using a chart. Used a lot of technology and not to rely on my voice only, e.g. video recording lessons and better planning. I think the routine Individual desk set up for the classroom I took the teaching outside. I did take off my mask and even the face shield at some point.

4.4 Conclusion

Chapter four sought to outline how data was collected, and the research findings. Six teachers were chosen for the research based on their knowledge and teaching experiences in the foundation phase (Grades 1 – 3). Semi-structured interviews were conducted for each teacher and their responses were manually transcribed. The data

was grouped into different categories based on the similarities of the teachers' responses to the questions. The following chapter (Chapter Five) will conduct a thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006) six steps on the data collected. The thematic analysis will be able to guide the discussion of the emerging themes from the data.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four outlined the findings of the data collection, from the six teachers who were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Chapter five will discuss the themes and findings in relation to the review of literature.

5.2 Discussion of Themes

The study was focused on the foundation phase teachers' experiences of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase during the COVID – 19 pandemic. The thematic analysis of the data thus resulted in the following four main themes, which are discussed as shall be illustrated:

1. Challenges when teaching phonics.
2. Impact on communication and teaching language and literacy during compulsory mask wearing period.
3. Importance of facial expression to teaching language and literacy.
4. Strategies used when teaching during COVID – 19.

5.2.1 Theme one: Challenges when teaching phonics.

According to CAPS (DHET, 2011c, p. 133) phonemic awareness is:

“the ability to distinguish between the separate sounds of the language.”

CAPS goes further and explains that the phonemic awareness must be encouraged at the beginning of the foundation phase and especially in Grade one, in order to help the development of the learner's language skills. The language skills include speech and recognition of the sequence of sounds. Therefore, phonic instructions are of importance in the development of language skills. According to Heilman (1976, p. 2) phonic instructions build the stepping stone to learning how to read. The forementioned, does agree with Chomsky LAD theory which alludes that children have

a remarkable ability to acquire language with ease, because of the innate ability to learn language (Sobecks, 2020). Chomsky (1986) refers to this innate ability as the “Language Acquisition Device”(LAD). The Chomsky LAD theory explains further that all children are born with a universal grammar which includes vocabulary, grammar and principle rules of language acquisition.

“a facet of reading instruction which leads the child to understand that printed letters in printed words represent the speech sounds heard when words are pronounced; involves the actual teaching of which sound is associated with a particular letter or combination of letters”.

The teachers faced challenges when teaching vowels and phonics due to compulsory mask wearing. Phonics are an essential component of teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The compulsory mask hindered the sound and the visual signs of the teacher when teaching phonics and vowels. The learners were affected negatively because they were not able to see and hear simultaneously which created a challenge when teaching phonics for the teachers’.

The teachers were asked if the usage of phonics or awareness when teaching language skills was affected by the wearing of mask in the classroom and it was observed through the responses that the major concern of the teachers’ was that the mouth of the teacher was covered by the mask. The learners according to the teachers’ responses voiced out that they were struggling to understand the combination of the letter and the sound. The movement of the teachers’ mouth was important for the learners to be able to cope with the correct pronunciation of the sound of the letter begin taught. The key characteristics of the Chomsky LAD theory is that there are two periods when the language acquisition device is activated so that competence in the language is obtained. The crucial period is called the critical period whereby certain concepts must be learnt to develop competence in that language, and the sensitive period is when language is acquired naturally and leads to competence in the language. Therefore, the use of compulsory mask wearing had a negative impact on these crucial periods of language acquisition in the foundation phase language and literacy lessons. Especially when the teachers had to teach phonics, grammar and spellings.

Teacher E emphasised that definitely the teaching of phonics was affected by the compulsory mask wearing to the point that even the spelling test results at the end of the year were affected and were not so strong as the previous years.

“.... the children couldn’t see and hear simultaneously so they had to just base it purely on their hearing”. (interview Transcript E, point 47-48, p.2).

“...their spelling and the spelling results that we were getting towards the end of the year weren’t as strong as they had been in previous years because of them not being able to use the hearing and seeing in unity”. (interview Transcript E, point 49-51, p.2.)

Teacher E went further and explained that the sound of the phonics or vowels being taught by the teacher is a crucial focal point when teaching phonics in the foundation phase. The learners in the foundation phase, had to rely heavily on their hearing while learning phonics because of the compulsory mask wearing. This, therefore, was a challenge for the teachers’ when teaching language and literacy. The sound coming from the teachers’ mouth was obscured during the crucial teaching process of phonological awareness of the sound and the name of the letter. Therefore, negatively affecting the teachers’ when teaching language and literacy and the disadvantaged learners who had hearing difficulties who relied on visual signs from the teachers’ mouth during the language and literacy lessons. The forementioned had an impact on the implementation of inclusive education in the classroom by the teachers. They had no platform to address the different learners in their classroom when teaching phonics.

“...so what happens with the learners that maybe had a slight hearing issue ...”(interview Transcript E, point 48-50, p.2).

“We have different kind of learners in our classroom there are those who are auditory, and those who need to see your lips and your face while you are teaching for them to understand. The learners who needed to listen and look at you when you are teaching found it challenging and it took time for them to understand what you were teaching” (interview Transcript C, point 81-85, p.2).

The compulsory mask wearing during the period of COVID – 19 had a drastic negative impact on the teachers pedagogical teaching of language and literacy in foundation phase. Teachers found it difficult to teach phonics with the compulsory mask and according to the teachers in this research they fell back to what they were accustomed to, that is to pull down their mask when teaching the phonemic awareness in the foundation phase. Their reasoning was that they needed to be inclusive of the different learners in their classroom while teaching language and literacy. Therefore, implementing inclusivity in the classroom.

“....I often had to pull down my mask so that you know my children can hear me or they can see my expression it’s not an easy thing to do when you teaching with the mask.....especially when you’re teaching spelling and maybe you are explaining a concept...” (interview Transcript F, point 122-125, p.3-4).

“it’s a mission for them to hear what you’re saying and its often muffled all in the mask so it was just yeah a big challenge for me.” (interview Transcript F, point 125-126, p.4).
“... I remember having sometimes I had to move away from the children and lower down my mask so that they could see what I was sayingI felt that they were not getting what exactly I was saying” (Transcript D, point 54-56, p.2).

According to Teacher D there is need when teaching the pronunciation of a word, letter or sound to demonstrate to the learners by asking them to watch the movement of your mouth and tongue. The compulsory mask wearing restricted the teachers in this regard and it was a challenge to teach the correct pronunciation of the phonic.

“...tongue out or put their tongue to the top of their mouth and do this for them to pronounce something correctly and we could not do that.” (interview Transcript D, point 47-48, p.2)

Teacher F went further and explained that the teachers experienced challenges when teaching spellings while wearing a mask over their mouth. It was difficult to teach the sound and the blending of letters with the learners not able to understand the phonemic awareness which is the core point of the language skills when teaching spellings in foundation phase.

“teaching a lot of spellings and the sound, blending and the most important is that the children need to be phonologically aware to hear what the sound is and make connection to the letter” (interview Transcript F, point 100-102, p.3).

“...the proper sound maybe you are saying TH the sound but then the hearing f sound so yeah wearing the mask was quite a challenge then when you’re teaching a lot of the spelling for the phonological...” (interview Transcript F point 103-105, p.3).

Teacher C, D, E and F gave detailed responses to the challenges of teaching phonics during the period of compulsory mask wearing. They clearly indicated the drastic negative effect the mask had on the pedagogical teaching of language and literacy for the foundation phase teachers. The phonemic awareness according to CAPS is important for the learners in the foundation phase as it develops their language skills which includes speech and this according to Teacher C, D, E and F was affected by the compulsory mask wearing during the period of COVID – 19. In inclusive education the teachers have the power to make a difference in the group of learners in their classroom by addressing the needs of the learners and offering the right support to implement inclusivity in the classroom. During the period of compulsory mask wearing this was impacted and also difficult for the teachers to implement or practice inclusive education in the classroom.

5.2.2 Theme two: Impact on communication and teaching language and literacy during compulsory mask wearing period.

According to Pörschmann, et al. (2020, p.3663),

“...face masks covering the mouth and nose cause transmission loss, reducing the energy radiated by the speaker”.

The compulsory mask wearing had a negative impact on the teachers with regards to their communication skills within the classroom while teaching language and literacy. All the teachers explained that there was a loss of transmission when communicating

the content of the lesson to the learners. Almost all the learners in their classrooms complained of the same challenge that they were struggling to comprehend the words or sentences in the teachers' conversation. The aforementioned supports the notion of Pörschmann, et al. (2020, p.3663), which highlights that face masks obstructing the mouth and nose cause transmission loss. The teachers experienced the loss of transmission when delivering the content to the learners while teaching language and literacy. Therefore, affecting the teachers' delivery of instructions to the learners while they were wearing the compulsory mask. The teachers highlighted that this was a huge set back while teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The Chomsky LAD theory alludes that it is crucial that the children gain popular exposure of the universal grammar of the language they are learning in order to gain proficiency in the language acquisition. Therefore, the loss of transmission of the correct content to the learners to build on their universal grammar they already possess will negatively impact on their language acquisition development competence. According to Chomsky (2015) the LAD allows the child an innate knowledge to develop a language which the child gains exposure to.

“if I am saying a word to the children in my classroom while wearing a mask, the word did not come out loudly, so the learners could not hear or understand the word I was pronouncing”. (interview Transcript B, point, 60-62, p.2)

“.....the children sometimes would not understand the instructions which you were giving and you had to repeat yourself again and again”. (interview, Transcript C, point 53-54, p.2)

The loss of transmission in the communication also played a role in how the teachers' conducted their teaching style in the classroom. The conventional way of teaching was disrupted by the use of compulsory mask while teaching in the classroom. The teachers' highlighted that the learners struggled with engagement, concentration and focus in the classroom during language and literacy lessons. According to Teacher A in response to the question “how was the engagement of the students during language and literacy lessons during the period of compulsory mask wearing”, the explanation highlighted that the concentration levels of the learners were erratic.

“.....they are taking out their mask and you are busy trying to make them understand what you are teaching..” (interview, Transcript A, point 95-96, p.3).

While Teacher B, C and F mentioned that the learners would participate, but not as much as prior to COVID – 19. The engagement in the lessons included asking and answering questions if they did not understand the content. However, the teachers needed to continually repeat the same instructions, as a strategy while teaching language and literacy.

“there was still engagement, but not as much as now when we are not wearing masks...” (interview, Transcript F, point 152, p.4)

Teacher F observed that the learners were more anxious and this affected their participation in the answering and contribution to discussions.

“The socializing, communicating and expression of themselves” (interview Transcript F, point 24, p.1) was limited or non-existent.

Teacher D indicates that one has to take into consideration that when teaching language and literacy the focus is not only words. But it incorporates, collaboration and gestures. According to Teacher D, there was limitation imposed on the teachers' by the SOP guidelines for example maintaining the 1.5 meters for social distance and the compulsory wearing of masks in the classroom. This affected the use of groupwork as a teaching tool when teaching language and literacy. Resulting in a negative impact on how the teachers would conduct their language and literacy lessons, for example individual reading by the learners to the teacher.

“...teaching language for me is not just words it is a lot of other things; it's a lot of gestures; lots of collaboration in all the subjects but for languages I felt we were limited on things we had to do..... this had a negative impact on my teaching of language and literacy.” (interview, Transcript D, point, 39-41,43. p.2).

Teacher F summarizes clearly the impact of compulsory mask wearing on teachers' while teaching language and literacy, by highlighting the following point;

“covering your face you’re covering your voice and they cannot hear you clearly”. (interview Transcript F, point 73-74, p.2).

The forementioned is within agreement with the statement of Pörschmann, et al. (2020) indicating that during the compulsory mask wearing period the teachers were negatively impacted while teaching language and literacy lessons. The wearing of masks exacerbated the challenges of inclusivity in the classroom, not all the different teaching styles for the different learners found in our South African classroom were able to be catered for by the teachers since they had to adhere to regulation of the compulsory mask wearing while teaching in the classroom. The forementioned is in agreement with Chomsky LAD theory which states that the LAD is like a switch and needs to be activated in order for further learning to occur in the language acquisition process, so that the universal grammar that is innate is able to refine the patterns of the language being taught (Cowie, 2008). Therefore, the compulsory mask wearing negatively affected inclusivity in the classroom because not all learners were catered for with regards to language learning. The pedagogical teaching methods were negatively impacted by the compulsory mask wearing and adding on to the negative impact on the learners engagement during language and literacy lessons. The use of teaching methods which involved collaboration and gestures by the teachers’ were impacted by the compulsory mask wearing also.

5.2.3 Theme Three: Importance of facial expression when teaching language and literacy

According to Jack and Schyns (2015, p.R621)

“One of the richest and most powerful tools in social communication is the face”

Jack and Schyns (2015) explain the importance of facial expressions with regards to human communication and how it evokes the emotional, physical and social status of a person. Barrick et al (2021) cited by Neal (2023) goes further and explains “covering the lower half of the face reduces the ability to communicate with others and interpret the verbal and nonverbal communications of those whom we interact.” (p.1)

Therefore, the removal of the facial expression of the teacher while teaching language and literacy had a negative impact on teaching language and literacy has explained by Teacher D.

“The biggest thing was the groupwork been taken out and the facial expressions; I use a lot in my teaching that was also affected and I had to adjust a lot of things. But groupwork was the biggest thing for me.” (interview Transcript D, point 34, p.2).

The teachers were specific when explaining about how they use a lot of facial expressions in their teaching this was affected and they had to make major adjustments to their teaching practice.

The foundation phase teachers must be understood according to the teachers as a phase where the teachers lay the foundation, for the formal learning of the learners. So therefore, facial expression on the teacher is important for the benefit of the learners learning process. The introduction of new concepts are taught in the foundation phase and any obstruction to the learning process will have a negative impact.

“I think it is very important, they need to understand it is when we lay foundations or understanding a passage and you need to be able to look the way you want them to express themselves especially when they are to understand a passage reading when it is a sad story and when it is a happy story it should be a happy story,”(interview Transcript D, point 92,93,94,95, p.3).

Teacher D went further and explained that without facial expression it is difficult to teach punctuation during language and literacy lessons, especially reading skills.

“what I struggled with is that without the facial expression it was difficult to teach punctuation in reading, because punctuation and expression are linked. A child has to know that there is an exclamation mark and the tone of the voice defers.”(interview Transcript D, point 95-98, p.3).

The teachers were asked how important do you think expression on the teachers face influence the learners response to the teaching, the responses where all neutral. To the fact that facial expression on the teachers face plays an important role in guiding the learning which takes place in the classroom. The learners concentration and behaviour in the classroom decreased as highlighted by Teacher A and B, this was linked to the lack of the use of facial expression by the teacher, because of the compulsory mask wearing. The learners behaviour was affected as explained by Teacher A, who said that they had to resort to banging the table to get the learners attention at times. While prior to COVID – 19 the teacher had to only change their facial expression and the learners would response positively and quickly.

“... needed to bang the table or use a sign to show that you are not happy and they needed to keep quiet.....the children could only see your eyes and no facial expression”(interview, Transcript A, point 150-152, p.4)

Teacher C alluded to the fact that facial expression plays a part in the expression of emotions by the teacher to the learners and vice-versa. This according to Teacher E creates boundaries and allows the teacher to communicate with the learners without even using their voice.

“.....create boundaries so being able to communicate without using your voice is a big thing.” (interview Transcript E, point 108-109, p.3)

Teacher F also brought up the issue of emotions. She explained that

“...you want them to see your emotions”. (interview Transcript F, point 75, p.2), while speaking and also you obscure your facial expressions to the learners. The learners are not able to gauge if the teacher is happy, sad or playful with them as a result of the compulsory mask wearing. Which is supported by the literature review of Khandelwal and Apodaca (2022, p.2) *“students had difficulty reading and expressing facial expressions when everyone was masked.”* that indicated there was difficulty experienced by the students in expressing ones emotions during the compulsory mask wearing period.

The various response of the teachers to how important do they think expression on the teachers face influence the learners response to the teaching, is supported by the statement by Jack and Schyns (2015) and supported by Barrick et al (2021) on the powerful nature of facial expression for communication between two or more people and teaching in the classroom. This is in agreement with Chomsky LAD theory, which alludes that children gain from the massive exposure from their environment language exposure. Which in this case is through their teachers or their peers in the classroom. The exposure according to Chomsky is crucial to help the child master the universal grammar rules using their innate device which is referred to as the LAD by Chomsky (1986). Therefore, the facial expression of the teachers were obscured by the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom and negatively impacted on the communication in the classroom in language acquisition.

5.2.4 Theme Four: Strategies used when teaching during COVID -19

According to Khandelwal and Apodaca (2022, p.9);

“therefore, it is our recommendation that consistency and following through with K-12 students is a must for classroom management, and wearing a mask is no different than any other rule that is taught at the beginning of the school year.”

The need to introduce the rules to the learners at the very beginning of school is a strategy used during COVID – 19, that encouraged consistency and good classroom management as explained by Khandelwal and Apodaca (2022).

The teachers developed new strategies when teaching according to their responses to the question, if there were any strategies they used when teaching in the classroom during COVID – 19. Routine and demonstrating by writing on the board were strategies applied by Teacher A, B and E. Rearranging the classroom and individualizing the system for example, every learner had their own individual desk and stationery was raised by Teacher F. Teacher F went further to explain other strategies, when asked how did mask wearing in the classroom generate new teaching practice. Teacher F explained that moving the teaching and learning outside was a strategy she applied to

work around the compulsory mask wearing during COVID – 19 and also to increase the ventilation aspect recommended in the SOP guidelines.

“that’s one working mostly outside, because of the ventilation I took the teaching outside trying my best to make my lessons outside orientated” (interview, Transcript F, point 217-218, p.6).

The movement to digital and technological teaching in the classroom was a huge strategy applied. Teacher D explained that there was need to introduce the use of technology to teaching in the classroom and reduce depending on the use of the teacher’s voice to teach. The use of video recording lessons in the classroom was a strategy used by Teacher D, to combat the compulsory mask wearing period. The learners according to Teacher D will have the opportunity to watch the video recording in the classroom and able to see exactly what is being taught by the teacher. Because the teacher will not need to wear a mask while video recording and therefore, the teacher’s projection of their voice when speaking and the phonic sounds could be understood clearly.

“I could do like a video recording while not wearing a mask and they could look at the video recording and be able to see exactly what I am saying” (interview, Transcript D, point 70-71, p.2)

According to Teacher D this pushed the teacher to be innovative and organized in their lesson planning.

“developed better planning strategies” (interview, Transcript D, point 72, p.3)

To sum up the strategies which the teachers used during the period of COVID – 19 while teaching language and literacy, they were asked if they took off their mask at any time when they were teaching. The neutral responses from the majority of the teachers was yes and the reasons varied. Health reasons, and out of frustration that the learners could not hear what they were saying when teaching, especially phonics.

“I did and even the face shield at some point..” (interview, Transcript F, point 200, p.5)

“yes, generally out of frustration.”(interview, Transcript E, point 98, p.3)

“yes I did. Because I have a chronic disease called High Blood pressure..” (interview, Transcript A, point 162, p.5)

5.3 Conclusion

Chapter five detailed the four key main themes as highlighted from the research findings. The four main themes are namely; (1) challenges when teaching phonics; (2) impact on communication and teaching language and literacy during compulsory mask wearing period; (3) importance of facial expression to teaching language and literacy and (4) strategies used when teaching during COVID – 19, were discussed in detail.

The findings under theme one agree with the literature review of CAPS (DHET, 2011c p.133) on its definition of phonemic awareness. Which discusses the importance of phonics in the development of language skills. Throughout the findings the teachers voice out that the use of compulsory mask wearing in the classroom negatively affect their teaching of language and literacy pedagogy. Especially focusing on phonics. Matthew et al (2002) and Pörschmann, et al. (2020, p.3663) support and agree with the findings discussed under theme two; the impact on communication and teaching language and literacy during the compulsory mask wearing period. The teachers highlighted that there was a loss of transmission when communicating the content of the lesson to the learners and especially the disadvantaged learners in the classroom who depended on lip reading of the mouth. This therefore, agrees with Pörschmann, et al. (2020, p.3663) who pointed out that “...*face masks covering the mouth and nose cause transmission loss, reducing the energy radiated by the speaker*”. The forementioned agrees with the findings that the compulsory mask wearing obstructed the mouth of the teachers and drastically impacted on the teachers when teaching language and literacy.

Jack and Schyns (2015) agrees with the findings under theme three. The teachers explained that facial expression is an essential skill used by the teachers when delivering lessons for language and literacy in the foundation phase. Facial expression

boosts the understanding of punctuation and brings the story to life during reading skill lessons. Therefore, the compulsory mask wearing had a negative impact on the facial expression as a tool for teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. Khandelwal and Apodaca (2022) agrees with the findings under theme four. The literature explained that the compulsory mask wearing impacted on the sound projection and speech of the speaker. Supporting what the teachers alluded to in the findings that they had to come up with innovative strategies to combat the compulsory mask wearing while teaching language and literacy in the classroom.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study is to investigate the foundation phase teachers' experiences of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. Chapter six will give a detailed summary of the key findings from the report and discuss them in relation to the research questions highlighted in Chapter one. The significance and limitations with regards to the scope of the study will be discussed including recommendations for future research study. Further, a personal reflection detailing the journey and the overall conclusion of the study will be presented.

6.2 Relating Overall Findings to the Research Questions

The scope of this study was fixed on one main research question, supported by three sub-questions. The findings will be discussed in connection with the following questions:

What were pre-covid strategies to teaching language and literacy in foundation phase?

The main aim of the question was to establish the different ways the teachers in the foundation phase taught language and literacy in their classrooms prior to COVID – 19. This was to give a clear view of the different methods the teachers used when teaching language and literacy in foundation phase classrooms. In findings one, the teachers described that there is need for learners to grasp the understanding of phonics when teaching language and literacy. In order to do so the learners must be able to see and hear simultaneously when the teacher is teaching in the classroom. Prior to COVID – 19 the learners were given the opportunity under the conventional teaching strategy to see the teacher's mouth movement and hear the pronunciation of the word, letter and sound while the learners were able to watch the movement of the teachers' mouth and tongue has an instrument of teaching. This was demonstrated when the teachers were explaining that the learners must be able to look at what the teacher is doing and hear what they are teaching during language and literacy. This includes

when teaching punctuation marks, whereby the use of facial expression is used. The learners are able to understand the meaning of a punctuation mark, when the teacher demonstrates it when reading a passage during literacy lessons. In findings three, blending letters together to form words was used to teach language skills to build on the spelling skills. The teachers explained that with the compulsory wearing of masks during teaching in the classroom, the learners found it challenging during spelling assessment to gauge the single sounds and blending sounds of the words in the spelling assessment or test.

Therefore, throughout the findings the teachers experienced challenges with regards to the delivery of the pedagogical teaching of language and literacy. The teachers' voiced out that they were drastically impacted by the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom with regards to their pedagogical teaching of language and literacy. The compulsory mask wearing obstructed the mouth of the teachers' when teaching. This was mentioned as a major challenge to pre-covid strategy teaching methods. This moves us to the second sub-question.

What were the effects of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy at foundation phase?

The loss of transmission when communicating caused by the use of compulsory mask wearing had a negative impact on teaching language and literacy at foundation phase. According to the findings, the learners found it challenging to understand the content been taught by the teachers because the sound of the teacher's speech was muffled. The teachers observed that learners kept voicing out that they were not able to hear what the teachers were saying, and this also affected the engagement in the classroom during lessons. The engagement of the learners in the classroom was negatively affected impacting on the teachers' class management during language and literacy lessons. The learners presented with lack of concentration and reduced responsiveness to questions during discussions.

There were limitations on the teachers with regards to teaching equipment while teaching language and literacy in the classroom. According to the CAPS guidelines of teaching language and literacy there is need for the learners to be able to use gestures and collaboration methods. The teachers were limited in that sense that the

compulsory mask wearing obstructed the mouth and this affected their deliverance of their language and literacy lessons when teaching. The teachers' highlighted that learners were therefore faced with a challenge with lack of exposure to the language and literacy because of the compulsory mask wearing. The SOP guidelines for example encouraged mask breaks and this also had a negative impact on the curriculum. The mask breaks affected the teachers lesson planning with regards to the time allocated for language and literacy. They could not allocate enough time in their planning to allow the learners to gain enough exposure to language and literacy skills. The learners were also found to be anxious because of the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom. The removal of facial expression also played a role in the lack of engagement in the classroom by the learners. This finding is supported by Jack and Schyns (2015) who highlighted the powerfulness of facial expression on the social communication between people.

The challenges faced by the teachers when teaching phonics was explained by the third findings, which indicated the importance of the learners to grasp the phonological aspect of the alphabetical letters. To help boost their understanding and development of their language and literacy skills. The obstruction of the teacher's mouth was highlighted as a stumbling block for the learners when teaching letter sounds and the pronunciation of the words. Furthermore, the teachers explained that this affected the different learners who they find in the South African classrooms and the inclusivity of the classroom was compromised. Also the teachers highlighted that it was difficult to teach spellings and blending words. Teacher E explained that spelling assessment results recorded at the year end of 2021 were low. This moves us to the third sub-question.

What new or altered strategies were created or used in language and literacy teaching?

There was need to find alternative strategies which are creative in order to teach language and literacy during the use of compulsory mask wearing period. Under the findings, minor strategies were used by the teachers to combat the exposure to COVID – 19, for example routine, moving the teaching outside, rearranging the classroom and individualizing the stationery. The major findings was the movement to digital and technological teaching in the classroom. The teachers used different platforms to

deliver language and literacy lessons which included video-recording. This eradicated the major challenge that learners faced of struggling to understand what the teacher was saying. The learners were given the opportunity with the introduction of technology in the classroom to hear and see simultaneously while watching a video-recording. Which gave the teachers a platform to design lessons which were more interactive and engaging through the video-recording and the use of technology. The second major findings was that some teachers used face shields when teaching phonics and this helped with the pronunciation of sounds and the projection of the teacher's voice when speaking. Although, the face shield was a positive strategy when teaching language and literacy, the teachers highlighted that out of frustration when teaching phonics, they would cheat and also remove their face shield and mask as an alternative strategy. This helped the learners to be able to hear and see the movements on the teacher's mouth when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. This brings us back to the main research question.

The main research question was: *How did compulsory mask wearing in classrooms influence teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase?*

The sub-questions helped to address the findings for the main question. The first major findings indicated the factor that the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom affected the teachers' pedagogy when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The major effect was the obstruction of the teachers mouth by the mask which affected the voice projection while teaching language and literacy. This also impacted on how the learners received the content taught during language and literacy lessons in the classroom. Therefore, affecting the teaching of language skills for example phonics and vowels to the learners in the foundation phase. The communication and the transmitting of the language and literacy lesson content by the teachers clearly was impacted by the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom.

Through the findings the learners struggled with understanding the content been taught by the teachers because of the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom. These findings are supported by CAPS which describe that there is need for the teachers to teach clearly and daily the five components to reading which include phonemic awareness. This, according to CAPS, boosts the learners listening skills as they will be given an opportunity to learn the sounds and words required when teaching

language and literacy. The reading of instructions enables the learners to gain understanding of the relationship between letter, sound and speech. The forementioned was affected by the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom and the teachers found it difficult when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The oral reading of the text by the teacher is part of the teaching of literacy and language according to the CAPS document. The compulsory mask wearing affected this important aspect of teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. According to Meiklejohn et al (2021) the most important principal of CAPS is that the teachers must be able to prepare lessons that boost the learners engagement and active learning in the classroom. The compulsory mask wearing drastically impacted this major role that the teachers play when teaching language and literacy in foundation phase. There was less interaction between the teacher and learners during the language and literacy lessons. Therefore affecting how the teachers could encourage phonic awareness to build the learners reading skills. Detemple et al (2003) agrees with the finding that compulsory mask wearing in the classroom had an impact on the interaction between the teacher and the learner. Since according to Detemple et al (2003) interaction is a building block in developing language skills in the learners through story reading.

The forementioned point is indicated in the third findings where the compulsory mask wearing affected the interaction between the teacher and learner by the obstruction of the mouth by the mask. Facial expression when teaching language and literacy plays a major role. In the findings the teachers indicated that in order to teach language and especially literacy the teachers facial expression plays an important role in developing the learners understanding of punctuation in the reading of content or books. The use of the different punctuation marks can be fully understood by the learners if the teachers are able to demonstrate their meaning to the learners using their facial expressions. Therefore, the teachers found that the use of compulsory mask wearing in the classroom limited them on this aspect.

6.3 Significance of the Study

The research study focused on the foundation phase teachers' experiences of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The research findings will be beneficial to the following beneficiaries: the foundation phase teachers; Heads of foundation phase; and the Department of Education SOP policy makers.

The Teachers: The findings of the research study will provide the foundation phase teachers with important information on combating the effects of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The research findings provide the foundation phase teachers with practical experiences from the six teachers who were interviewed and how they dealt with the use of compulsory mask wearing in the classroom. The findings highlighted how the teachers moved to digital means by teaching online using google classroom. The teachers also used transparent visors when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. These findings will provide the teachers with practical tools to use when faced with pandemics or disasters that require teachers to wear the compulsory mask when teaching language and literacy. The major effect of compulsory mask wearing in the classroom during the COVID – 19 period was the effect on the teachers' experience on teaching language and literacy pedagogy in the foundation phase. The awareness of the importance of teaching phonics and oral reading to develop language skills and literacy; is explained in the findings by the teachers' responses. The compulsory mask wearing in the classroom obstructed the mouth of the teacher and this is found in the findings when the teachers specify that the mask covering the mouth hinders the clear transmission of the teacher's speech when teaching the content for language and literacy. The pre-literacy components which include phonic awareness were highlight in the findings as focal points, which enhance the development of speech and listening in the foundation phase. The literature review of the CAPS (2010) for the development of language and literacy agrees with these findings. CAPS (2010) explains that listening to the different sounds and words is part of the requirements when teaching language and literacy in building phonic awareness in the foundation phase. This valuable information can be used and reaffirmed by the foundation phase teachers when planning language and literacy lessons especially phonics. The teachers can

use the information to focus on the important role the teachers play in developing phonic awareness as supported by Myles & Mitchell (2011) in the literature review.

The Heads of Foundation Phase: The research findings will provide the Heads of Foundation phase with evidence of the experiences of Teachers in the Foundation Phase on the effects of compulsory mask wearing in the classroom particularly when teaching language and literacy. The information will bring to light the negative impact of the compulsory mask wearing on the foundation phase teachers' experiences when teaching language and literacy pedagogy. How this also affected the students who they had to teach in the foundation phase classrooms. This will lead the Heads of Foundation Phase to look into effective ways to support the Foundation Phase Teachers in their role of teaching language and literacy if faced with a pandemic in the future. The heads may provide the Foundation Phase Teachers with multiple different sources to use in their classroom when teaching literacy. So that they are more versatile in their teaching of language and literacy in the classroom. The sources can be text, visual pictures, either printed copies or electronic. This is supported by the literature review of Soudren, Reddy & Harvey (2021) who alluded that the lack of learners opportunities of learning during the COVID – 19 period had a negative impact on the foundation phase learners reading skills.

The Department of Education policy makers: The findings will be beneficial to the policy makers during disaster or pandemics. The information from the findings highlight that there is need for the inclusion of teachers by the disaster policy makers. By doing so it allows the teachers to add their inputs to the regulations and this will boost the implementation of the regulations in the classrooms. According to the findings the teachers found the implementation of the SOP guidelines challenging when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. Therefore, the teachers restored to removing their masks out of frustration. The information would help the policy maker to manage the drafting of regulations with the positive input of the stakeholders who are going to be implicated by the regulations.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The significance of the findings was detailed above and this lays the foundation for the discussion of the recommendations for further or future research.

The six teachers all mentioned that the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom affected their teaching of language and literacy pedagogy. Especially the pre-literacy tools which include phonics awareness which are the supporting blocks to exposing the learners to reading, under literacy. The findings from the research indicated that the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom had a drastic impact on the teachers' teaching of language and literacy pedagogy. Which involves reading, speaking, writing, and listening skills. The teachers' communication and transmission of the above content were negatively impacted by the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom. Therefore, affecting the different approaches used by the teachers when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The teachers were grounded and had to find innovative ways to continue the teaching in their classrooms with the compulsory mask wearing. The first recommendation would be the use of recorded lessons, books and big picture story books to be included in the foundation phase. The learners will be able to listen to the story while following the illustrations and words without the teacher reading but facilitating the shared reading time. The investment in staff development in Kagan cooperative learning (Kagan, S. (2015) will help boost the teachers with a tool that teaches different structures of interacting with the learners to build learning skills. Using structures that encourage paired learning and cooperative learning in the classroom, the skills learnt can be applied in the classrooms if ever faced with a pandemic in the future. Also, further research can be done to the benefit of Kagan cooperative learning in the foundation phase.

The teachers had to teach under the rules and guidance of the SOP guidelines. When the regulation were implemented by the South African Government and the department of education had to implement the COVID – 19 regulations as directed by the policy makers. The COVID – 19 regulations were enforced on the teachers and they had to deal with the reality of the situation in the classroom. The SOP guidelines to the teachers which included the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom. The stakeholders of the regulation did not take into consideration how the teachers were

going to be able to action the SOP guidelines. The SOP guidelines had a drastic implication on the language and literacy pedagogy in the foundation phase where the findings highlighted that there was a lot of dependence by the teachers on the face to face teaching in the classroom. Therefore, with the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom the teachers were faced with a new teaching environment which needed training to be able to teach around the SOP regulations. The draw up of the SOP guidelines excluded the teachers' input to gauge the practicality of implementing the listed regulation in the classroom without affecting the pedagogical teaching methods. Beside all these the teachers in the research findings had to face the reality and taught in the classroom under unknown circumstances. The teachers according to the findings had no prior experiences of implementing the SOP guidelines and it was challenging and overwhelming according to their experiences. Therefore, in the research findings the teachers resorted to what they were accustomed to and lowered or removed their mask when teaching language and literacy to allow the learners to be able to understand the content been taught. This raises the question that when the SOP regulations were drafted by the stakeholders there was need for the inclusion of the teachers in the input of the guidelines and how they were to be implemented in the classroom. The recommendation would be for the South African Department of Education to consider the inclusion of the teachers in the drafting and compiling of such regulations which need to be implemented in the classrooms with regards to teaching in the future.

The final recommendation will be that there is need to firm up digital technology in the classroom to be part of the curriculum. This became distinct in the findings of the research under the "Migration towards digital learning". The forementioned, contributed to levelling the platform of teaching language and literacy within the schools that used technology in their classrooms. The findings clearly highlighted the benefit of firming up the digital technology in the classroom, as it was a positive move towards the continuation of teaching and delivering education during the pandemic.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

In this research study the size of the sample and logistic limitations were experienced. Firstly, the population sample was small; only six teachers were interviewed for the research study. The teachers were chosen from two different schools in the Gauteng province, the Johannesburg North area. This was a small percentage to use as a representation of the teachers' experiences in the Gauteng Province and the area of Johannesburg North schools. However, the research did allow the researcher to get detailed, informative data from the teachers to be able to conduct an in-depth analysis.

Secondly, during the data collection there were logistic challenges regarding time constraints since the interviews were re-scheduled several times. Reason being that the teachers did not keep the original scheduled time because they had to work around their teaching time schedules. This delayed the collection and transcribing of the data.

The third limitation can also be attributed to the transcribing of the audio recordings of the interviews, which were done manually by the researcher. This could have been affected by human errors which must be considered.

6.6 Personal Reflection

I started on this journey due to a strong belief that the wearing of masks during COVID – 19 pandemic had a negative impact on the speech development in early childhood learners in South Africa. Through my observation as a pre-school teacher, I felt that the two years of COVID – 19 pandemic affected the language and speech development in the early childhood development stages. For me, this journey was going to be an eye opener to the effects of mask wearing on the development of speech in early childhood learners. However, to my surprise the research report educated me on the fact that the mask did not only affect the speech development of learners but also did have a major impact on the teachers and their pedagogical teaching methods in the classroom.

Through the process of completing my research report, I have learnt and grew with regards to identifying a research problem which is backed up by literature. Also able

to create an argument for the research problem and structuring a methodology in solving the problem. Through it all, I have learnt the art of compiling a research study which fuses both literature review and data collection. The process has allowed me the opportunity to learn and grow with regards to identifying and solving complex research problems. Through the process I have also gained the art of time management and independent study. The knowledge of collaborating with my supervisor, lectures and administration staff with regards to meeting the deadlines and timelines agreed upon by the faculty. My writing skills have improved and strengthened to a point that I am able to explain my thoughts and link by ideas in a cohesive manner which has filtered into my daily reporting skills as an educator.

My findings in this report, gave me an insight to the importance of the teacher's role when teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The laying of the foundation of language skills and literacy in the foundation phase, is important in the speech development of a learner. Without this crucial foundation the learners are sure to face challenges in their schooling career. The need for the teachers to always consider the different learners in their classroom when teaching is for the benefit of inclusivity. Also how the impact of the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom had a negative impact on teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. The use of the "mouth" as a powerful instrument of conventional teaching practices for the teachers was also highlighted in the findings and this was affected by the compulsory mask wearing while teaching language and literacy. My theoretical understanding of the development of speech through language and literacy in the foundation phase was strengthened. I now realise the importance of the need for all teachers to be exposed to the background theoretical knowledge of the child development with regards to language and speech. Another factor being how teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase enhances the development of the learners' speech and language skills. This has enhanced by practice in my classroom with the increase of literacy exposure during our story time reading.

I personally feel that the exposure to technology in the teaching practice is the future of teaching and there is need for the South African Department of Education to push for the need for technology to be the core subject of the teacher training programmes. As highlighted in the findings that the exposure to technology in the classroom

benefited the continuation of teaching with regards to teaching in the foundation phase.

6.7 Conclusion

The research study set out to investigate how the foundation phase teachers dealt with educational challenges around teaching language and literacy during the compulsory mask wearing period. The review of literature showed the drastic negative impact of compulsory mask wearing in the classroom when teaching. It also looked at the effect of compulsory mask wearing on the conventional teaching methods in the South African education, inclusive of the foundation phase. This enlightened the need to explore in depth the teachers' experiences and their challenges around teaching language and literacy during the COVID -19 period.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six foundation phase teachers. Their detailed responses of their experiences highlighted the impact that compulsory mask wearing in the classroom had on their teaching of language and literacy. Thematic analysis was used as a guide in analysing the data collected and four findings were presented. The study scrutinized the effects of compulsory mask wearing in the classroom with regards to teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase. Highlighting that the compulsory mask wearing in the classroom caused the obstruction of the pedagogy when teaching language and literacy. The teachers' experienced challenges when communicating and transmitting the content while teaching language and literacy. This brought forth the need for future research into the negative impact of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase.

References

- ANSIS3.5 (1997) standard titled "American National Standard Methods for Calculation of the Speech Intelligibility Index". p.10
- Attle, S., & Baker, B. (2007). Cooperative learning in a competitive environment classroom applications. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 19(1), 77-83
- Behme, C & Deacon, H. S. (2008). "Language Learning in Infancy: Does the Empirical Evidence Support a Domain pecific Language Acquisition Device?" *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 21, no.5, 2008, pp. 641-71. Crossref, doi: 10.1080/09515080802412321
- Bester, M., Meyer, E., Evans, R., & Phatudi, N. (2015). *Literacy in the Foundation Phase*. (I. Joubert , Ed.) Pretoria : Van Schaik Publishers.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2019). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Bond, R., & Castagnera, E. (2006). Peer support and inclusive education: Anunderutilized resource. *Theory into Practice*, 45(3), 224- 229.
- Bottalica, E. M. (2020). *Speech and Hearing Science*, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Champaign.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysisin qualitative research in psychology. 3, 77-101.
- Caniato, M. M. (2021). *Applied Acoustics*. Free University of Bozen Bolzano, Italy.
- Carbon, C.-C., & Serrano, M. (2021). The Impact of Face Masks on the Emotional Reading Abilities of Children—A Lesson From a Joint School–University Project. *I-Perception*, 12(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20416695211038265>
- Carvalho, S., Rossiter, J.,Angrist, N., Hares, S & Silverman, R. (2020) Planning for School Reopening and Recovery After COVID-19. An Evidence Kit for Policymakers. Centre for Global Development
- Charney, S. A., Camarata, S. M., & Chern , A. (2021). Potential Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Communication and Language Skills in Children. *American Academy of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery*, 165 (1), 1 - 2
- Chiwaula, L.W. (2021). The Impact of COVID19 on Primary Education in Malawi exploring policy responses and practices.

- Chomsky, N. (1986). *Knowledge of language its nature, origin, and use*. New York: Praeger
- Chomsky, N. (2007). *Language and mind* . New York, USA: Cambridge .
- Chomsky, N. (2015). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. The MIT Press.
- Cowie, F. (2008). "Innateness and Language", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = [<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/innateness-language/>](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/innateness-language/).
- Cowie, F. (2017). "Innateness and Language", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2017 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed), URL = [<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/innateness-language/>](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/innateness-language/).
- Cresswell , J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage .
- Cresswell , J. W. , & Maietta , R. C. (2002). *Qualitative research* . In D. C. Miller & N. J. Salkind(Eds.), *Handbook of social research* (pp. 143 – 184). Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage .
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, C.A. Sage.
- Crystal, D. (2010). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Bangor: Cambridge University Press .
- Curby, K. J. (2012). Face to Face with emotion: holistic face processing is modulated by emotional state. *Cognit. Emotion* (26). 93-102.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language power and pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the crossfire*. Clevedon, UK. Multilingual Matters.
- DeKeyser, R. D. (2003). Implicit and explicit learning & *Handbook of second language acquisition* . London:Blackwell, 313–348.
- DeMarrais, K. (2004). *Qualitative Interview studies: Learning through experience*. 51-68.
- Department of Basic Education, S. (2011). *Curriculum and Assessment policy statement, Grade R-3, English home language*, pp4, 11, 14, 16, 21, 71, 133.
- Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), *Twenty year review South Africa 1994 - 2014*.
- De Temple, J & Snow, C.E. (2003). *Learning words from books*.

- Draper, K. & Spaull, N. (2015). Examining oral reading fluency among Grade 5 rural. *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5, 44–77.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v5i2.390>. , 44-77.
- Dube, L. (2020) edufundi.org.co.za The Impact of COVID-19 Regulation on Teaching and Learning
- Forutan, A. & Mehrpour, S. (2015). Theories of First Language Acquisition. Department of Foreign Languages & Linguistics, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran. English Department, Farhangian University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran. American Institute of Science. Vol. 1, No. 2, 2015, pp. 30-40.
- Gillies, R. M. (2007). Cooperative learning: Integrating theory and practice. New York: Sage Publications.
- Government Gazette 43096, 15 March 2020
- Graham, S. C. (2017). Early Language Learning: The Impact of teaching and Teacher Factors. . 922-958.
- Grix, J. (2004). *The Foundation of Research*. New York: Macmillian.
- Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gunning, T. (2010). *Creating literacy instruction for all students. 7th ed.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gustafsson, M. (2020). Rules governing within-classroom physical distancing and reduced class size. An international comparison and enrolment data analysis to assist the South African debate, Mimeo. 12 August.
- Gustafsson, M. & Nuga Deliwe, C. (2020). How is the COVID-19 pandemic affecting educational quality in South Africa? Evidence to date and future risks. Retrieved from https://cramsurvey.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/07/Gustafsson.-Nuga.-How-is-the-COVID-19-pandemic-affecting-educational-quality-inSouth-Africa_-1.pdf
- Harris, D. and Larsen, M. (2019). The effects of the New Orleans post-Katrina market-based school.
- Hasbrouck, J.E & Tindal, G. (1992). Curriculum-Based Oral Reading Fluency Norms for Students in Grades 2 through 5. TEACHING Exceptional Children. *Sagepub*, 41-44 doi:10.1177/004005999202400310.

- Hausser, R. (2004). What if Chomsky were right? *Journal of Child Language*, 31 (4), 919-922. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s030500090400635x>
- Heilman, A. (1976). *Phonics in Proper Perspective. Third Edition.* . The Pennsylvania State University, . .
- Henrich, J. (2016). The secret of our success, . . *Princeton University Press*.
- Hoadley; Ursula. (2020). Schools in the Time of COVID-19: Impacts of the pandemic on curriculum.
- Hornsby. B.W.Y. (2004). The Speech Intelligibility Index: What is it and What's it good for? *The hearing journal*, October 2004, Vol 57, No.10; page 10
- Hudson, J., & Shapiro, L. (1991). Effects of task and topic of children's narrative. In A. McCabe and C. Peterson (Eds.). *New direction on developing narrative structure* (pp. 89-136). Hillsdale,
- Indrayani, N., & Jember, I. (2016). Language Development at Early Childhood. *International Conference on Education (ECO) Proceeding*, (pp. 279 - 289). University of Muhammadiyah Jember.
- Jack, R.E, & Schyns, P.G. (2015). The Human Face as a Dynamic Tool for Social Communication. *Curr Biol.* 2015 Jul 20,25(14):R621-34.
- James, S. (2012). Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: Relating, Ontology and Epistemology kto the Methodology and methods of the scientific. *Interpretive and Critical Reasearch Paradigms*.
- Johnson, K. J. (2010). Smile to see the forest: Facially expressed positive emotions broaden cognition, cognit, *Emotion* 24. 299-321.
- Johnston, J.R. (1982). Narratives: A new look at communication problems in older language disordered children. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 11, 144–155.
- Joubert, I. B. (2013). *Literacy in the Foundation Phase, 2nd ed.* Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Kagan, S., & Kagan, M. (2015). *Kagan Cooperative Learning: Dr. Spencer Kagan and Miguel Kagan*. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing.
- <https://sirblois.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/cooperative-learning-activities.pdf>
- Kalinowski, Egert, Gronostaj, & Vock, (2020); Opfer & Pedder, (2011); Parkhouse, Lalonde, K., Buss, E., Miller, M. K., & Leibold, L. J. (2022). Face masks impact auditory and audiovisual consonant recognition in children with and without hearing loss. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 874345.

- Lu, & Massaro, (2019), To improve teaching quality, teacher growth, teaching practices and student learning, professional teacher development activities (PD)
- Khandelwal, M., & Apodaca, T. (2022). Impact of Mask Mandates on K-12 and higher-Ed Teaching along with the Recommendation for Mask-Wearing during an Infectious Disease Outbreak. . *Educ. Sci.*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12080509> .
- Kugelmass, J. W. (2007). Constructivist Views of Learning: Implications for Inclusive Education.r
- Landsberg, E. K. (2016). *Addressing Barriers to Learning A South African perspective*,. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the Innercity*. Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press
- Lewkowicz, D. J., and Hansen-Tift, A. M. (2012). Infants deploy selective attention to the mouth of a talking face when learning speech. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci.* 109, 1431–1436. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1114783109
- Lightbown, P.M., Spada, N. (2006). *How Languages are Learned*. OUP
- Lightbown, P. M. (2014). Making the minutes count in L2 teaching. *Language Awareness*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2013.863903>., 3-23.
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Mackenzie, N. M & Knipe, S. (2006). *Research dilemmas: paradigms, methods and methodology*. *Issues In Educational*.
- Macupe, B. (2021). Pandemic cripples learners' futures. *Mail and Guardian*, January 22 to 28, 2021, p. 5.
- Mandela, N. (2018). Nelson Mandela Foundation Education Initiatives. <http://www.nelsonmandela.org>
- Matete, R., Kimario, A., & Behera, N., (2023). Review on the use of eLearning in teacher education during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Africa. *Heliyon*, 9(2), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e13308>
- Matthews, I., Cootes, T. F., Bangham, J. A., Cox, S., and Harvey, R. (2002). "Extraction of visual features for lipreading," *IEEE Trans. Pattern Anal. Mach. Intell.* 24(2), 198–213
- Maxwell , J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage .

- Meiklejohn, C. W. (2021). 'A review of South African primary school literacy interventions from 2005 to 2020'. *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 11(1), a919. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v11i1.919> Co.
- Mertens, D. (2009). *Transformative Research and Evaluation*. London: The Guilford Press.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative Research a guide to design an impementation. Revised and expanded from Qualitative Search and Casestudy Application in Education*. San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mheidly, N., Fores, N. Y., Zalzale, H., & Fares, J. (2020). Effects of face masks on interpersonal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic .
- Moffett, J. (1968). Teaching the universe of discourse. New York. NY: Houghton Mifflin.
- Muhammed, B., Muhammed, T. & Muhammed, A. (2008). Reliability and Validity of Qualitative and Operational Research Paradigm. 37.
- Mukute, M. Francis, Burt, B. and de Souza, B. (2020). Education in Times of COVID-19: Looking for Silver Linings in Southern Africa's Educational Responses. *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education*, Vol. 36, 2020
- Murphy, V. (2014). *Second language learning in the early school years: Trends and contexts*. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.
- Myles, F. & Mitchell, R. (2011). Learning French from ages 5, 7 and 11: An investigation into starting ages, rates and routes of learning amongst early foreign language learners. . *ESRC End of Award Report, RES-062-23-1545*.
- Neal, M. A. (2023). Early Childhood educators' perceptions of the affect of Facemasks on the social-emotional and language/literacy development of their students (Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University).
- Norris, N. (1997). Error, Bias and Validity in Qualitative Research.
- Patton, M. (1985). Quality in qualitative research: Methodological principles and recent developments. *Invited address to Division J of the American Educational research association. Chicago*.
- Patton, M. (2001). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods (3rd Edition)*. CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation methods (3rd edit)*. CA: Sage.

- Pervin, N., & Mokhtar, M. (2022). The Interpretivist Research Paradigm: A Subjective Notion of a Social Context. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 11(2), 419-428.
- Polit, D. F. & Beck, C.T. (2014). *Essentials of Nursing Research:Appraising Evidence for Nursing Practice (8th ed)*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins .
- Pörschmann, C. L. (2020). The Impact of face masks on voice radiation. . *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 148, 3663 (2020); doi: 10.1121/10.0002853/<https://asa.scitation.org/toc/jas/148/6>.
- Pretorius, E., & Spaull, N. (2022). A New Era of Reading Research in South Africa coming of age and Accounting for Empirical Regularities. In Spaull, N. & Pretorius, E. (Eds) *Early Grade Reading in South Africa* Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Ridge, S.G.M. (2004). Language Planning in a rapidly changing multilingual society: The case of English in South Africa. Publication: *Language Problems & language planning*, 2004, Vol 28, issue 2, p.199.
- Rosenblum, L. D. (2008). Speech perception as a multimodal phenomenon. *Curr. Dir. Psychol. Sci.* 17, 405–409. Doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8721.2008.00615.x
- Raut, E. (2023). *Language Acquisition Device (LAD)*. Department of Humanities, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, IL 60616, USA.
- Schutz, A. (1970). *On Phenomenology and Social Relations: Selected Writings*. Ed. Helmut R. Wagner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: *Relating, ontology & epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, Interpretive and critical research paradigms*.
- Skinner, B. F. (1954). *Havard Educational Review*, 24, 86 - 97.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research Projects . *Researchgate net*.
- Slavin, R. E. (2004). When and why does cooperative learning increase achievement. *The Routledge Falmer Reader in Psychology of Education*, 1, 271-293
- Slavin, R. E. (2013). *Cooperative learning and achievement: Theory and research*.
- Sobecks, B. (2020). *Language Acquisition Device and the Origin of Language*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. *Brain Matters* Volume 2.
- Spaull. N. (2022). 2023 Background Report for the 2030 Reading Panel. Cape Town www.readingpanel.co.za/resources accessed 2022-09-14.
- Spaull. N. (2023). 2023 Background Report for the 2030 Reading Panel. Cape Town

- Spaull, N. & Van der Berg, S. (2020). 'Counting the cost: COVID-19 school closures in South Africa and its impact on children', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 10(1), a924. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v10i1.924>
- Soudren, C, Reddy, V & Harvey, J. (2021). The Impact of COVID-19 on a fragile Education System: The case of South Africa. Reimers (ed.), F. M., *Primary and Secondary Education During Covid-19- Chapter 12*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81500-4_12
- Spitzer, M. (2020). Masked education? The benefits and burdens of wearing face masks in schools during the current Corona pandemic. *Department of Psychiatry, University of Ulm, Leimgrubenweg 12-14, D-89075 Ulm, German.*
- Ukrainetz, T.A. (2006). Teaching the narrative structure: Distinctive features of narrative discourse. p. 337.
- UNICEF, (2023). Education in a Post-Covid World towards a Rapid Transformation. Published by UNICEF, 3 United Nations Plaza.
- Venn, J. J. (2007). *Assessing students with special needs*. University of Virginia: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Appendix A

Table 3.1	
<u>Section A- Demographics</u>	
<u>Participant's Name:</u>	
<u>Question</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1. How long have you been teaching language and literacy in foundation phase?	
2. What qualification do you hold?	
3. Did you teach a foundation grade during COVID?	
4. May you give a background of your teaching experience?	
<u>Section B</u>	
5a. Prior to mask wearing did you observe any students who had difficulties with communicating their ideas/ general communication?	
If yes please elaborate	
5b. What was the experience after mask wearing?	
5c. How did COVID regulations affect your teaching process in general?	
6. How did the compulsory wearing of mask in the classroom have an impact on your teaching of language and literacy?	

7. Was the usage of phonics or awareness when teaching language skills affected by the wearing of mask in the classroom?	
8. Did you experience challenges during activities which required collaboration or group work?	
8b. Elaborate further.	
9a. Did you face any challenges when teaching phonics and vowels while wearing the mask?	
9. Did you ever try using the face shield while teaching phonics or vowels?	
10. Please describe how mask wearing had an impact on the way you taught or communicated with the learners?	
11. How was the engagement of the students during language and literacy lessons during the compulsory mask wearing period?	
11b. During COVID are there any strategies you used when teaching in the classroom?	
12. Now that the pandemic is under control and compulsory mask wearing is no longer compulsory, are you still using all these strategies? If not why?	
13. What lessons did you learn due to the impact of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy?	
14. How did mask wearing in the classroom generate new teaching practices?	

15. How important do you think expression on the teachers face influence the learners response to the teaching.

16. How did face mask wearing influence your facial expression while teaching?

Appendix B: Ethics clearance letter from Ethics Committee



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2023ECE003M

PROJECT TITLE

What were the pedagogical strategies used by foundation phase teachers to overcome the compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy.

INVESTIGATOR

Tarumbidzwa Manikai

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

WSOE

DATE CONSIDERED

06 FEBRUARY 2023

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

EXPIRY DATE

Date of submission of the Research Report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

17 FEBRUARY 2023

CHAIRPERSON

Dr. Batseba Mofolo-Mbokane

cc: Dr. Dr Cameron Martin

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

Date

23 / 02 / 2023

Appendix C: Letters to participants

Participant Information Sheet-Teacher's Interview



21- 11-2022

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Information letter regarding participation in a research study

My name is Tarumbidzwa Manikai, and I am a registered Masters student in the School Of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I am required to conduct a research project in which I would like your participation. I am conducting research on what were the pedagogical strategies used by foundation phase teachers to overcome the compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy during the covid 19 regulations. I am under the supervision of Dr Cameron Martin. The research project aims to examine how educators dealt with the educational challenges caused by compulsory mask wearing in schools, and specifically seeks to explore what pedagogical strategies were used by foundation phase teachers in the addressing of these challenges in two selected school in Gauteng, Johannesburg North. The research will entail me collecting data from 6 teachers. All 6 teachers will participate in individual interviews. I would like to invite you to take part in an individual interview. The interviews will take around 45 to 60 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record the interview using an audio recording device.

There will be no costs to you if you participate in this study. Furthermore, no teacher will receive any benefits from participation and there are no disadvantages or penalties of any kind should you choose not to participate or withdraw from this study. Please note that you may withdraw at any time or not answer any questions if you do not want to. The interviews will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for any names or any identifying information, and the information s/he gives to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else other than my supervisor. The interviews will be held afterschool in a secluded classroom or in an office away from public audible range, your response will not be shared

with anyone outside of the interview room and the interview will be conducted in English to assist with the data collection process. A pseudonym (false name) will be used when discussing each teacher's participation in the final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point during this process, I will stop the interview and we can resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you (optional). The data collected from this study will be stored in a password protected computer and will be kept for 5 years. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0)11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,
Researcher: Tarumbidzwa Manikai
459807@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr Cameron Martin
cameron.martin@wits.ac.za

Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG



16/08/2023

Title of project: The effects of compulsory mask wearing on teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase.

Name of researcher: Tarumbidzwa Manikai

I,, agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
--	-----	----

I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
---	-----	----

I agree that the interview/focus group/other activity may be audio recorded	YES	NO
---	-----	----

I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
--	-----	----

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
---	-----	----

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on

YES

NO

..... (signature)

..... (name of participant)

..... (date)

..... (signature)

Tarumbidzwa Manikai..... (name of researcher/person seeking consent)

..... (date)

Appendix D: Sample of Transcript

1

Transcript A (TRC- every line is represented by a number ranging from A1 to A164)

Question 1: How long have you been teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase?

When did I start, First I was in grade R for 10 years and I started teaching Grade 1 in 2019.

Question 2: What qualifications do you hold?

The only qualification I hold now is a Bed in Education

Question 3: Did you teach a foundation grade during COVID?

Yes I did;

May I ask which grade you taught? Grade 1

Question 4: May you give a background of your teaching experience

I told you that I started in Grade R', then now in Grade R that's where you enjoy yourself and everything, those kids they understand, they understand really. Because it is not like in grade 1 where you have to push and say this. In grade R that's where we play, we learn through play, we usually played a lot for them to be able to understand and now the trouble comes when they come to grade 1 where by play has to stop and they have to learn how to read and to understand the word and the sound and that was difficult.

I have taught for 10 years in grade R and then Grade 1 2019- to present but it was difficult when I started teaching grade 1.

Question 5a Prior to mask wearing did you observe any students who had difficulties with communicating their ideas/general communication

Yes. The Difficulties that I have are that most children in the whole school actually are coming from different cultures and they are mostly foreigners and whereby you have to teach them Setswana that's when the difficulty arises, because they can only speak their own language they do not understand the words in Setswana. It was difficult for me to make them understand Setswana that was difficult and that's why that child had a problem because they only speak their own language at home and when they came into the class I had to teach them Setswana and it was difficult that was a big challenge.

Do you teach in Setswana or in English?

Setswana. Most of the things are in Setswana. English is only when you teach English.

In foundation phase the subjects are taught in Setswana; Life skills, Maths, language

Question 5b: What was the experience after mask wearing

Now we had to use the sign language because they could not even understand especially when you put on the mask some other words for Grade 1 it is difficult for them to understand. Then we have to use the sign language, that's the sign language when you show them A and then you have to write it on the board for them to see and understand what you have said. When you speak they do not understand. When there is story time we have the big books and you want

them to see and you need to open the book and you say do you see, and you need to show them what is this and you point at it some other children understand and for those children with difficulties it is difficult and it takes two weeks for them to understand what you are trying to do or say.

Question 5c How did COVID regulations affect your teaching process in general

Affected a lot. Most of the things had to change. Like now we do it times once but during covid you were not supposed to do 5 sums at once. For example if they were 5 sums during covid you had to do one sum and everything was dragged back you find the syllabus is not done. There were rules to be followed during COVID when we were teaching. For example every 5 minutes the children were to be taken out of the classroom because children were not to be stuck in the classroom for more than 5 minutes. By the time they went out what about the time in the timetable even the timetable had to be changed because of that.

The children had to be sanitized after every 5 minutes.. When you go outside we needed to sanitize the children, when they come in we needed to sanitize again and wipe the tables with a sanitizer also and washing their hands and keeping their masks on every time. They were only allowed to take off their mask when they eat while sitting outside and then put on their mask after eating, there was no social distancing because of the overcrowding in the classroom.

Question 6 How did the compulsory wearing of mask in the classroom have an impact on your teaching of language and literacy? (missed this question)

I had difficulty when I had to teach phonics because they could not hear the sounds, When you teach phonics you need to see them so that they can say a, e but when you are wearing a mask they could not see that but what you had to do you had to use your body language to show them what you actually are try to say to them, can use a poster or demonstrate.

Question 7: Was the usage of phonics or awareness when teaching language skills affected by the wearing of mask in the classroom?

Yes it was affected, when you say the letter K most of the time when you say phonics you need to look at the kids so they can see how you pronounce it or say it. How can you say the sound b when the mask is on, when the children do not know how to pronounce the sound and especially the children with difficulties. The teacher demonstrated by putting her lips together to make the sound b and said the children will not be able to see the lips when the mouth is covered with the mask. Example when you say the sound l they will think you said r.

Question 8: Did you experience challenges during activities which required collaboration or group work?

We were not allowed to group the children together. During Covid no group work was allowed.

Question 9a: Did you face any challenges when teaching phonics and vowels while wearing the mask?

Yes. That is what I am saying that in Grade 1 usually when you say something the children must look at you and what you are trying to say to them. Because you just do not have to just write on the board, you see before I do something on the board example when I say seven I will have to use the eggs to show them this is seven. You need to demonstrate that this is seven for

them to understand. Seven is seven but how is seven, where is 7 on my hand, I need to demonstrate that by using my fingers.

Question 9b: Did you ever try using the face shield while teaching phonics or vowels?

The shield was affecting us because it was irritating

Question 10: Please describe how mask wearing had an impact on the way you taught or communicated with the learners?

That's what I said at the beginning first of all it was affecting me as a teacher, let me not talk too much about the teachers, but on the side of the children when you are teaching them phonics more especially on the level of Grade one they need to look at you at what you are saying because most of the time if they do not look at what you are say they won't understand what you are saying. How you move your mouth, when you say "a" because some of the children do not understand what you mean when you say "a" or "e" will affect the learners who have a problem (difficulty).

Question 11: How was the engagement of the students during language and literacy lessons during the compulsory mask wearing period?

What can I say during COVID everything was just a mess, how can I put it in a nice way. More especially me I had 60 children in the class that was very bad I did not know what to do especially when it is time to teach when you come in the morning and go into the class room and everyone is wearing a mask and some are putting the mask on their heads because they are tired and there are lot of things happening when you are teaching. You are afraid of the COVID and you want the children to concentrate others they are taking out their mask and you are busy trying to make them understand what you are teaching. Some are putting the mask on their head, will put it on their mouth and chew the mask. It was not easy. At the end even if you put posters to show them no do not take off your mask, even when you are teaching them literacy and other skills you would use poster for them to be able to see and they would not understand or concentrate.

Question 11b: During COVID are there any strategies you used when teaching in the classroom?

These are my strategies, I went home and decided to make something for them to understand what COVID-19 is. The teacher made 3D shapes or pictures of the clinic, pharmacy, hospital , COVID-19 virus, cut them out and brought them to school to represent what the COVID-19 virus is, and explained that the CoVID-19 virus is around us and even in the classroom and if you always take off your mask the virus will enter inside your body and everyone was scared and the children were able to understand what the COVID-19 virus looks like and that's why I said it's better to teach them about what is a COVID-19 virus. They could not understand social distancing so I cut out figure pictures of a person and place them on the theme wall to demonstrate again and every day the children would look at the theme wall and remember to social distance. Hugging also was demonstrated by the person figures and told the learners that if you sit too close to each other the CoVID-19 virus will spread. So the children would make sure they are sitting at the required marked distance. I also demonstrated that you need to

wash your hands frequently and also demonstrated the safe way to greet using the elbows. I created this theme wall because the children were not understanding the ordinary COVID-19 posters. The theme wall with the 3D images was to make the learning fun and were demonstrated in English and Setswana. So depending on which language was been taught in on that day they will be exchanged, I also have the same 3D figure pictures in Setswana.

I also used a lot of demonstration, and during teaching life skills I would show them a mask and demonstrate and even children who are still learning the language are able to answer the questions because of the demonstration, even though they may answer in their own language but it showed that they were learning from the demonstration, young children are fast learners.

Question 12: Now that the pandemic is under control and compulsory mask wearing is no longer compulsory, are you still using all these strategies? If not why?

Yes I am still using the strategies. As I said Monday I use the English words for the distances, greeting and on Friday I change to Setswana words, making the children understand in both languages.

Question 13: What lessons did you learn due to the impact of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy?

I have learnt that even if you are still wearing a mask education can still continue but you must have a strategy for teaching the children even though you are still wearing a mask. Firstly you must demonstrate and if you demonstrate using posters they will understand and even writing on the board, bring them posters, pictures in to class for them to understand.

Question 13b: Did you practice social distance in your classroom?

I had 60 children in the classroom and I tried to social distance. So they would spread around the classroom even up to the door. You could not even enter at the door because I was trying to make space and social distance the children. The windows would also remain open because there were many children in the classroom. But most of the time we went outside and did a lot of work outside.

Question 14. How did mask wearing in the classroom generate new teaching practices?

I learnt how to use the sign language and it is easy for me now. I had a book which I had and my friend who is a Teacher at Phillip Kushlik School taught me how to use the sign language and I have learnt a lot even if I get a deaf learner in my class I will be able to teach them. COVID made me learn a lot and work a lot.

Question 15: How important do you think expression on the teachers face influence the learners response to the teaching.

The children were able to understand eventually if I do not like the behaviour through the change of my facial expression to show if I am angry, unhappy with their behaviour.

When you are wearing a mask you needed to bang the table or use a sign to show that you are not happy and they need to keep quiet. Because the mouth was covered by the mask and the children could only see your eyes and no facial expression.

Question 16: How did face mask wearing influence your facial expression while teaching?

The children could not hear you if you are screaming under the mask, the children at the back, especially if all the 60 children are making noise they wouldn't be able to hear me. But if you bang the table the children will quickly get your attention and know that the teacher wants us to keep quiet and listen.

Question 12b: During Lockdown did you continue with teaching?

We had to stay at home. But when we came back it was trouble because we had to have training while teaching we had to do two things at the same time.

Question 12 c: Did you take off your mask at any time when you were teaching.

Yes I did. Because I have a chronic disease called High blood pressure. Sometimes when I close or cover my mouth for too long I get headaches so most of the time I had to take off my mask because of the headaches.

Transcript B (TRC- every line is represented by a number ranging from B1 to B124)

Question 1: How long have you been teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase?

I started teaching since 1990- at Hammanskraal teaching grade 2. 2007 I moved to Witkoppean Primary and taught grade 1. 2023 I moved into Grade 2 to support the Grade 2 team

Question 2: What qualifications do you hold?

Senior Primary Teachers Diploma, Further education at University of Johannesburg for a Further Diploma (it was a higher diploma which you did after the SPTD and we called it Further Diploma) and ACE

Bachelor of Education at the University of Johannesburg

Question 3: Did you teach a foundation grade during COVID?

Yes I did;

May I ask which grade you taught? Grade 1

Question 4: May you give a background of your teaching experience

I started teaching in 1990 in Hammanskraal at a school and I was teaching grade 2. What I experienced in my first year teaching in Hammanskraal was that teaching is not a child's play. As a teacher you must prepare yourself you must be humble and look after the children like your biological children. Some of them come to school without shoes, books, pencils as a teacher you must know that the children cannot learn without the above and they cannot listen to you teaching without having ate something to begin the day. So every month end I would buy extra pencils, exercise books and if there is a child in my class that is lacking a pencil or a book I would get from my supplies which I personally purchased. As a teacher if you see a child has no food, if I had money I would give them money to go to the shops and buy food so that they are able to listen. In 2007 I moved to Witkoppean Primary School and the situation was different the learners come from outside the country (they are foreigners from Mozambique, Zimbabwe) the problem was the language and are home language at the school is Setswana the learners could not speak Setswana. So I had to teach at a slow pace for them to understand what I am teaching and see the learners who are struggling with the language so that I help them.

Question 5a Prior to mask wearing did you observe any students who had difficulties with communicating their ideas/general communication

I had only one boy who presented with poor eye sight. He used to squint his eyes while trying to read what is written on the board and he usually sat at the back of the classroom. I moved him up to sit in the front role of the classroom and asked him if he struggles with seeing what is on the board and he said yes. I called his parents and asked them to make an appointment with the doctor so his eyes could be examined.

Do you teach in Setswana or in English?

Setswana is our home language and all the subjects are taught in Setswana except English language. Maths is taught in Setswana and it is a little bit difficult for the learners because they are used to speaking in English. When you say the number 10 in Setswana, the learners find it challenging but they are able to count in English well. Teaching Maths in Setswana is not good and there is a year we ask if we can change to English because teaching Maths in Setswana is disturbing the learners from (Grade1-3).

Question 5b: What was the experience after mask wearing

Yes. There were some problems. Because we were not used to wearing the mask and the learners were also not used to wearing the masks but we were forced by the situation to wear the mask. When I am teaching some learners would say "Maama I cannot hear you?", So I would come near the learners so that they are able to hear me. When I am asking the learners questions "what is this" I could not hear their answers because of the mask and would go near them so I can hear what they are saying. As time went on we were used to wearing masks and I could hear them speak. I had to keep reminding them about the COVID-19 measures (social distance, washing hands, no hugging, or touching each other every day. Each learner had his or her own stationery in the classroom to reduce sharing of items.

Question 5c How did COVID regulations affect your teaching process in general

It affected my teaching, because we were not used to the measures of COVID. Some learners sometimes they did not come to school because they were coughing. The minute a learner fell sick for example coughing the parents would withdraw the learner from school until they are not coughing anymore. The learners were not coming to school regularly, some would come today and then be absent the next day so ones teaching was affected.

Question 6 How did the compulsory wearing of mask in the classroom have an impact on your teaching of language and literacy?

The mask affected my teaching because if I am saying a word to the children in my classroom while wearing a mask, the word did not come out loudly, so the learners could not hear or understand the word I was pronouncing. So I had to go closer to them and project my voice a bit louder but not shouting.

Question 7: Was the usage of phonics or awareness when teaching language skills affected by the wearing of mask in the classroom?

The mask affected the teaching of language skills; the phonics, for example let's say I am teaching the phonic sound of the letter "b". I am saying to the learners look hear and I say the sound is "b". The learners were not able to hear the phonic sound of the letter I am teaching. I had to go to the chalkboard and write the letter down and I also use the chart which I have written the vowels and the blending sounds to show the learners the letter and go a bit closer and then make the sound for them to understand which letter I am teaching.

Question 8: Did you experience challenges during activities which required collaboration or group work?

During COVID the tables were not arranged in groups but were spread out. So the learners sat one by one, meaning that on a table which normally sat 4 learners there were only 2 sitting across each other. So learners did do group work but sitting further way from each other.

Question 9a: Did you face any challenges when teaching phonics and vowels while wearing the mask?

Yes, as I explained before, I had to hold the chart with vowels and point at the vowels while making the sound for the learners to understand what phonic or vowels I am teaching.

Question 9b: Did you ever try using the face shield while teaching phonics or vowels?

Yes we were provided with the shield and the mask. With the shield it was difficult for the sound to come out and but by using gestures the learners where able to understand.

Question 10: Please describe how mask wearing had an impact on the way you taught or communicated with the learners?

As I said the mask had an impact when I was teaching. When we are talking while wearing a mask some people cannot hear and others can hear you. That was an impact. To solve the problem as a teacher you had to move closer to the learners to talk to them. Since you and the learner will both be wearing masks to protect yourself.

Question 11: How was the engagement of the students during language and literacy lessons during the compulsory mask wearing period?

Some of them were participating and were able to answer and ask questions when they did not understand.

Question 11b: During COVID are there any strategies you used when teaching in the classroom?

My strategies were writing on the chalkboards, so they can see; doing gestures in front of them and using a chart.

Question 12: Now that the pandemic is under control and compulsory mask wearing is no longer compulsory, are you still using all these strategies? If not why?

Yes I am still using the strategies now. As a teacher you need to act for example show them how to jump to show them how to do it.

Question 12b: During Lockdown did you continue with teaching?

The teachers' job is to teach face to face. The learners have to face the teacher and the teacher has to face the learners. We did not continue with teaching but what I did was prepare for my lessons at home and be ready for when we are told to come back to school.

Question 12 c: Did you take off your mask at any time when you were teaching.

I did not take off my mask, but when I felt like coughing I would go outside to cough and then come back inside the classroom.

Question 13: What lessons did you learn due to the impact of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy?

I think I learnt about social distancing in the classroom and no grouping when sitting in the classroom.

Question 14: How did mask wearing in the classroom generate new teaching practices?

It helped me because I was able to notice the learners who are not able to hear or had difficulties with seeing the work on the chalkboard. It taught me to come closer to the learner so that they can hear what I am saying.

Question 15: How important do you think expression on the teachers face influence the learners response to the teaching.

It is very important when I am teaching and some of the learners are playing I will call her name or his name and I will change my facial expression and he/she will notice that the teacher is not happy with what they are doing (behaviour).

Question 16: How did face mask wearing influence your facial expression while teaching?

The mask was covering my nose and mouth but still they could see my eyes. I was talking through my mask and use gestures with my eyes.

Transcript C (TRC- every line is represented by a number ranging from C1 to C129)

Question 1: How long have you been teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase?

I have 8 years.

Question 2: What qualifications do you hold?

I hold a Diploma in Teaching and I also hold a ACE management certificate from University of Pretoria

Question 3: Did you teach a foundation grade during COVID?

Yes I did;

May I ask which grade you taught? Grade 3

Question 4: May you give a background of your teaching experience

I started teaching 2005 Grade 4-6 at Witkoppean Primary School because I did Intersen and then I moved to Grade 3.

Question 5a Prior to mask wearing did you observe any students who had difficulties with communicating their ideas/general communication

It was easy to communicate with the learners prior to mask wearing. I was audible and they were also audible.

Do you teach in Setswana or in English?

Setswana is our home language at this school and all the subjects are taught in Setswana except English language. Maths, life skills, Setswana language is taught in Setswana. But since the Grade 3s are the foundation for the Grade 4 then for us in term two and three we mix both English and Sestwana so that they do not have a challenge when they go to Grade 4 in understanding the teachers when they are speaking in English. We speak and teach more in English at the end of term two, three and term four. Because before we would teach only in Setswana and when the children went to Grade 4 they met a challenge because they would not understand because they are used to Setswana only.

Question 5b: What was the experience after mask wearing

The children could not understand me and when they talked I could not hear what they were saying with the mask on. Because we could not allow them to take off their mask. During that time we had a challenge we could not communicate well with the learners. Communication was not free. It was difficult. What I have noticed is that when you are talking to someone you need to see their facial expressions when one is wearing the mask the facial expression is not open and you cannot see if the person is happy, angry or smiling. When you are not wearing the mask I can see if you are happy because you will be smiling but if a mask is covering the facial expression I cannot see, for example one can be laughing at me while wearing a mask and I would not even know they are laughing because of the mask.

Question 5c: How did COVID regulations affect your teaching process in general

Because, our classrooms were not big enough and we had a lot of children. We were instructed to divide the children into groups. We divided them into two groups. It was too much because we were repeating the same thing (teaching the same material twice). Today I will be teaching the children this and when the other group comes on their day I will be repeating the same thing, we did not make progress in our teaching because we had to repeat the same thing again and again. When I say divide them into groups, I meant they are coming on different days in their groups because the number of children in the class was many we could not accommodate them all in the classroom so we divided them into two groups, some would come on Monday, other group on Tuesday, the first group will repeat on Wednesday and the second group on Thursday, etc so that we could teach them. The system was excellent because we would teach the learners in small groups and they understood the material we were teaching it was manageable because they were a few children in the classroom, comparing with now when everything is back to normal.

Question 6: How did the compulsory wearing of mask in the classroom have an impact on your teaching of language and literacy?

My speech was affected because during COVID I could not speak well because I was wearing a mask. The children sometimes would not understand the instructions which you were giving and you had to repeat yourself again and again .

Question 7: Was the usage of phonics or awareness when teaching language skills affected by the wearing of mask in the classroom?

Yes. Children should see your mouth when you are saying some words. For example if I am saying the sound "ch" they must even see my mouth and lips, When you are wearing a mask the children could not see your mouth, but will only hear the sound and some of the children were not repeating the sound properly because they could not see the teachers' mouth while saying the word. Unlike now after the COVID - 19 is over when I am teaching sounds the children look at my mouth and when I say the sound they repeat the same sound and they are excellent at doing it.

Question 8: Did you experience challenges during activities which required collaboration or group work?

Yes, because of the distance the children were not allowed to sit next to each other. When they were doing activities it was hectic for me the teacher and the children. During the activities some of the children would forget and try to hold each other and I had to repeatedly remind them its not allow.

Question 9a: Did you face any challenges when teaching phonics and vowels while wearing the mask?

No problems.

Question 9b: Did you ever try using the face shield while teaching phonics or vowels?

We were given face shields even though it was difficult but because of the rules and regulations we used them. The shield was distracting me when I was talking, because putting something on

your face when you should talk is a very serious thing. But now when I talk I just talk because there is nothing that will hinder by speech or anything.

Question 10: Please describe how mask wearing had an impact on the way you taught or communicated with the learners?

Yes. Most of the children could not hear. Some children would try to understand. Children are children they need to see your face when you are teaching them. We have different kind of learners in our classroom there are those who are auditory, and those who need to see your lips and your face while you are teaching for them to understand. The learners who needed to listen and look at you when you are teaching found it challenging and it took time for them to understand what you were teaching.

Question 11: How was the engagement of the students during language and literacy lessons during the compulsory mask wearing period?

The children were positive, they understood even though sometimes they would not clearly hear what I was saying because of the mask I would repeat again and again for them to understand because I am there for them so that they can understand.. That's why I am their teacher, I need children to understand me to do the right thing and if they do not understand me I should make sure they understand me.

Question 11b: During COVID are there any strategies you used when teaching in the classroom?

No strategies were mentioned by the teacher.(she did not really understand the question fully). The teacher said she wanted to communicate with her learners and she did send the messages.

Question 12: Now that the pandemic is under control and compulsory mask wearing is no longer compulsory, are you still using all these strategies? If not why?

I am still doing the same strategies I used before COVID and during COVID and continuing.

Question 12b: During Lockdown did you continue with teaching?

The instructions were that we should use the phone to communicate with the parents. But most of the parents, we are teaching children from disadvantaged backgrounds so most of them they do not have those phones to send messages to, So some of them yes we did they received the information but there was a problem with those who could not receive the messages.

Question 12 c: Did you take off your mask at any time when you were teaching.

No we were not allowed to.

Question 13: What lessons did you learn due to the impact of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy?

No lesson learnt

Question 14. How did mask wearing in the classroom generate new teaching practices?

None.

Question 15: How important do you think expression on the teachers face influence the learners response to the teaching.

The children understand well when they are looking at your face, if the teacher is cross they are able to see that the teacher is cross now. If the teacher is happy they will see on your face, but by that time most of the children did not know us and for example if I was funny or somehow they could not see you and even myself I could not see their faces well and that was not well with me because they needed to show their facial expression while I was teaching them, but because of the mask they couldn't.

Question 16: How did face mask wearing influence your facial expression while teaching?

It is important to see anyone's facial expression because it is good I can see your face and if you are happy. Even though I cannot change the way I am because of your facial expression but it is exciting to see a person's face.

What I have noticed is that when you are talking to someone you need to see their facial expressions when one is wearing the mask the facial expression is not open and you cannot see if the person is happy, angry or smiling. When you are not wearing the mask I can see if you are happy because you will be smiling but if a mask is covering the facial expression I cannot see, for example one can be laughing at me while wearing a mask and I would not even know they are laughing because of the mask.

Transcript D (TRC- every line is represented by a number ranging from D1 to D101)

Question 1: How long have you been teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase?

23 years.

Question 2: What qualifications do you hold?

I hold a Diploma in Education, BSc Special Needs, I have got a Certificate from Harvard- Making Thinking visible, Bachelor of Education (Honours) from Wits, Specialising in E-Learning, Certificate from University of Johannesburg – Identification and Innovation for Dyslexic Children.

Question 3: Did you teach a foundation grade during COVID?

Yes I did;

May I ask which grade you taught? Grade 3s and I also coached 15 Teachers doing ECD(3 years-6 year olds).

Question 4: May you give a background of your teaching experience

I started with Grade 6 and 7 at a rural school. Then moved to Grade 2 and have taught in the foundation phase for 10 years. I briefly moved out of teaching or from the classroom into training, remedial teachers. Then I moved to South Africa and taught for 9years in the foundation phase (Grade 1-3). I moved to teach Grade 3,5,7 and I was teaching the Maths subject only. I did teacher training when I was Dean of Instructions. I taught Grade 3 at the present school from 2020 to 2023 and next year I will be leaving Grade 3 teaching and moving to the position of Director of Academic Enrichment and Support.

Question 5a Prior to mask wearing did you observe any students who had difficulties with communicating their ideas/general communication

Students with difficulties. You always have those, in all the classes I have taught I cannot look back and say that I did not have a student who had difficulties you will have one or two that will have difficulties. Bear in mind that in my teaching I taught also at a special needs school.

Question 5b: What was the experience after mask wearing

It was very difficult, I remember here at my present school, there was a child, we were recommending speech because of the problems we had seen before and even the previous teachers had also recommended that he needed speech just to address certain difficulties in language and speech, The parents were adamant that it was the mask. It was very difficult for those children. He relied on the facial expressions of the teacher and how the teacher's lips are moving for him to actually get the information. He did have a hearing test done at the school and it came out clear and the parents took him to a private audiologist and it also came back clear.

Question 5c How did COVID regulations affect your teaching process in general

The biggest thing was the groupwork been taken out and the facial expressions; I use a lot in my teaching that was also affected and I had to adjust a lot of things. But groupwork was the biggest thing for me.

Question 6 How did the compulsory wearing of mask in the classroom have an impact on your teaching of language and literacy?

Language, teaching language for me is not just words it is a lot of other things; it's a lot of gestures; lots of collaboration in all the subjects but for languages I felt that we were limited on things we had to do. There was no physical touch and some of the things you wanted to do in language especially in foundation phase you want to include a lot of things that include touching and this had a negative impact on my teaching of language and literacy.

Question 7: Was the usage of phonics or awareness when teaching language skills affected by the wearing of mask in the classroom?

When teaching phonics, that is obviously affected, because for some phonics you want to say to the child take your tongue out or put your tongue to the top; of your mouth and do this for them to pronounce something correctly and we could not do that.

Question 8: Did you experience challenges during activities which required collaboration or group work?

Yes we did definitely.

Question 9a: Did you face any challenges when teaching phonics and vowels while wearing the mask?

I did, I remember having sometimes I had to move away from the children and lower down my mask so that they could see what I was saying, because I felt that they were not getting what exactly I was saying and I had to rely on showing a picture; writing it down rather than saying it because I felt limited.

Question 9b: Did you ever try using the face shield while teaching phonics or vowels?

Question 10: Please describe how mask wearing had an impact on the way you taught or communicated with the learners?

I think it is repetition but it had a negative impact on my teaching.

Question 11: How was the engagement of the students during language and literacy lessons during the compulsory mask wearing period?

Children will be children, what we struggled with was "to keep them apart from each other, but them wanting to collaborate and do things the way they are used to. In terms of class management during literacy teaching it was negatively affected.

Question 11b: During COVID are there any strategies you used when teaching in the classroom?

Strategies I developed I think was that I realized that we could use a lot of technology more. I did not need to rely on my voice only. I could do like a video recording while not wearing a

mask and they could look at the video recording and be able to see exactly what I am saying. I developed better planning strategies even though it was more work, but I think it came out with things that I will never use in my teaching.

Question 12: Now that the pandemic is under control and compulsory mask wearing is no longer compulsory, are you still using all these strategies? If not why?

Yes I am still using some of the strategies. The video recording not so much but technology I now use it more often.

Question 12b: During Lockdown did you continue with teaching?

We continued from day one. We got trained to use google class, google meet, we were given choices to use Zoom or Google meet.

Question 12 c: Did you take off your mask at any time when you were teaching.

Yes, I did several times.

Question 13: What lessons did you learn due to the impact of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy?

I learnt that your facial expressions and mouth are very important in teaching language and literacy. Especially with this little ones. Things we take for granted until they are taken away to realise that actually that if nothing is covering my face or part of my face I can be more effective.

Question 14. How did mask wearing in the classroom generate new teaching practices?

The use of technology while teaching.

Question 15: How important do you think expression on the teachers face influence the learners response to the teaching.

I think it is very important, they need to understand it is when we lay foundations or understanding a passage and you need to be able to look the way you want them to express themselves especially when they are to understand a passage reading when it is a sad story and when it is a happy story it should be a happy story. What I struggled with is that without the facial expression it was difficult to teach punctuation in reading, because punctuation and expression are linked a child has to know that there is an exclamation mark and the tone of the voice defers

Question 16: How did face mask wearing influence your facial expression while teaching?

As I have said before it influenced the way I would want to express myself and would want the children to understand because I feel it has an impact naturally it has an impact.

Transcript E (TRC- every line is represented by a number ranging from E1 to E111)

Question 1: How long have you been teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase?

8 years.

Question 2: What qualifications do you hold?

I hold a Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase and sub major in Early Childhood Development

Question 3: Did you teach a foundation grade during COVID?

Yes I did;

May I ask which grade you taught? Grade 1

Question 4: May you give a background of your teaching experience

I started my first year teaching in 2016 and I was at a government school. I taught grade 3 for four years and then I applied for a position here and to try out a private school and I moved to St Davids and started teaching Grade 1. Which I have never taught before and then in my first two months of being here then we went into hard lockdown for the first time so not only was it my first year teaching grade one, my first year of being in a private school yeah it completely changes from government to private, from grade 3 to grade 1. from Co-ed to all boys from non-denominational to Catholic it was a big change. I had to teach these children on online so it was an interesting experience.

Question 5a Prior to mask wearing did you observe any students who had difficulties with communicating their ideas/general communication

No not really so much. Before COVID having a speech therapist wasn't really anything that I would ever refer children to unless there was something like they had their teeth extracted at a young age and the new ones hadn't come through, things like a lisp, you know I'm correcting things like that but yeah I didn't really notice much until after mask wearing.

Question 5b: What was the experience after mask wearing

Now yeah, I started to find that more and more kids have been referred for speech therapy and a lot of the boys (because teacher F teaches at a boys school) that I taught during COVID that had masks started to hook their top lip on top and which restricted their bottom jaw movement and yeah so there's been lots of changes now to their speech because of mask I think.

Question 5c How did COVID regulations affect your teaching process in general

I think in the beginning with having the social distancing and the boards up it became very difficult to engage with the boys on the same level that we did now. I'm also one those teachers that's quite nurturing and I know that boys at this age or children of this age need lots of love and so to always tell them that they're not allowed to hug you or they're not allowed to come to you and sit on your lap when they're upset yeah yeah you know I just found that it did kind of put a barrier on the relationships formed with the children.

Question 6 How did the compulsory wearing of mask in the classroom have an impact on your teaching of language and literacy?

So I would wear a shield instead of a mask so that the boys could see my mouth moving during language lessons I think that that's especially at such a young age seeing the movement of the mouth is important for language and literacy and but yeah I did find that some of the boys struggled to get the correct sounds out because here in grade one we do a lot of sounds before we do letter names so it's a lot of sounding things out and having the masks in the way and it started to cause problems in terms of what they were actually hearing versus what they were writing down.

Question 7: Was the usage of phonics or awareness when teaching language skills affected by the wearing of mask in the classroom?

I think so. Well like I said they the children couldn't see and hear simultaneously so they had to just base if purely on their hearing. So what happens with the boys that maybe had a slight hearing issue yeah I think that was definitely something that affected their spelling and the spelling results that we were getting towards the end of the year weren't as strong as they had been in previous years because of them not being able to use the hearing and seeing in unity.

Question 8: Did you experience challenges during activities which required collaboration or group work?

To be honest I avoided doing group work just because we didn't want to make any issues with the social distancing so the boys were separated, floors were taped, sure what a strange time.

Question 9a: Did you face any challenges when teaching phonics and vowels while wearing the mask?

Yeah, I think it was difficult to see the children almost looking confused because they couldn't see my mouth moving so that like I said the challenges is that I needed to switch between wearing a mask and wearing a shield.

Question 9b: Did you ever try using the face shield while teaching phonics or vowels?

Yes I did. The face shield I did feel like it gave me my own hearing issues though, because the sound of my own voice almost reflected off and bounced back so I would end up having a quite bit of a headache at the end of most days. I didn't feel like it was clearer for the boys to hear me if I was wearing a mask and not the shield.

Question 10: Please describe how mask wearing had an impact on the way you taught or communicated with the learners?

I think teachers as well use a lot of facial experiences and I think that the learners become quite aware of your facial expression so I felt like the mask almost restricted them from getting the full view of your personality and being able to communicate without having to use your words you know like they would say that teachers give their kids one look and they know where to stop you know.

Question 11: How was the engagement of the students during language and literacy lessons during the compulsory mask wearing period?

They were fine they were fine OK I think they didn't know any better so yeah it was almost like they you know I think at that point they were just relieved to be back in person.

Question 11b: During COVID are there any strategies you used when teaching in the classroom?

I think the routine was the most important thing is making sure that even though things were so chaotic outside in our world that the kids were at least coming back to some stability so that was the most important thing for me if they weren't getting to the number range that they needed to get to or if they weren't you know if we weren't reaching certain milestones at the correct or if they expected pace as long as they had routine and they knew what was coming next I felt that it made them quite calm ok.

Question 12: Now that the pandemic is under control and compulsory mask wearing is no longer compulsory, are you still using all these strategies? If not why?

Yes. I think the routine thing I always found was important so yes and I'm obviously quite relieved that they changed the things that I could let go of it and you know I think that the overuse of technology. The overuse of technology during COVID I saw how we lost out on basic skills like writing with a pen or pencil on paper so those kind of things I try to focus on so if I don't have to use technology in my class I won't.

Question 12b: During Lockdown did you continue with teaching?

Google Classroom and Google meet. I did not have any prior knowledge of this: nothing. It took some getting used to but I'm also quite a flexible person in terms of learning and I love being send on things like courses where I can further my own development that I like learning and yeah so yeah being able to use something different wasn't a problem for me.

Question 12 c: Did you take off your mask at any time when you were teaching.

Yes, that generally out of frustration that the children could not hear my voice properly so I would pull it down so they could see my mouth moving.

Question 13: What lessons did you learn due to the impact of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy?

I think the speech aspect of children.

Question 14. How did mask wearing in the classroom generate new teaching practices?

It didn't really.

Question 15: How important do you think expression on the teachers face influence the learners response to the teaching.

I think it is so important, it's a big part of children being able to process you can say no but if your face is saying no in such a friendly way then you don't create boundaries so being able to communicate without using your voice is a big thing.

Question 16: How did face mask wearing influence your facial expression while teaching?

yes you find ways to use your eyebrows that was pretty much it.

Transcript F (TRC- every line is represented by a number ranging from F1 to F238)

Question 1: How long have you been teaching language and literacy in the foundation phase?

6 years.

Question 2: What qualifications do you hold?

I hold a Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase, Honours Bachelor of Education Specialising in Inclusive Education.

Question 3: Did you teach a foundation grade during COVID?

Yes I did;

May I ask which grade you taught? Grade 3 in the government school and then the second year until now I've been teaching Grade 2's.

Question 4: May you give a background of your teaching experience

So I started teaching in 2018 and having my own classroom. I started in the government school and I taught pretty much all the languages of foundation phase, including Isizulu and Afrikaans for Grade 2-3. I taught Grade 3's for about three years and then I moved into private school and was placed in the Grade 2 class where I teach all the subjects of foundation phase and this is my third year and I do not teach the language subjects beside English.

Question 5a Prior to mask wearing did you observe any students who had difficulties with communicating their ideas/general communication

I did have some few children but compared to now there are quite a few children that were still battling to communicate and socialize in both private and government schools after or during COVID the number grew bigger and bigger and you could just see even the children from before COVID that I was still teaching it was quite a challenge for them during COVID; it was worse than when we didn't have the mask wearing.

Question 5b: What kind of challenges did they have with mask wearing ?

Socialising, communicating or expressing themselves and being able to just raise their hand and speak or say something in the class. I saw a lot of them they weren't doing that they were quite a lot of anxiety in the classroom less interactive obviously we couldn't also during COVID you know touch each other or be in the same space for a long time and you know it's the little things that I can remember when you are bringing in a topic and you're trying to make it fun and interesting and share ideas then we'll go still and most of the kids they don't talk and then you'll just ask maybe you think ok the question is too difficult and break it down but still they wouldn't want to interact we go outside and we'll see by the playground. I remember in the government school where I taught all the teachers had to label sections and have little squares, well at break time children will go and sit in their little squares and that was a big shock for the children you know and then when we started easing off all moving away the squares they were scared. I mean the children were questioning if it is still safe and if the space is safe. The socializing was just completely different.

Question 5c How did COVID regulations affect your teaching process in general

COVID occurred when I was doing my last year in a government school and I think that affected my teaching so much where I couldn't and we didn't have online, no resources or even parents being able to maybe have access to Google Classroom or zoom meetings, so we can have interactions with the children online. So it meant that there was less of teaching you know explaining, interacting everyone was at home and it was more of I had to take a video of myself, explaining and for example addition or subtraction and then send it home with a workbook pack. We had to print out booklets and booklets and booklets so parents would drive by and we would drop it into the car and not even hand them but drop it in and then latter on that day I would have to record myself or just send my previous recordings to parents on a group chat on WhatsApp and explain. This was ok children would be able to get the explanation but now the problem is we could not see if our children are understanding the concepts we were teaching or we recorded and sent to parents. The children would listen to the send recording, half of them didn't listen because parents couldn't afford data and then literally just do self-study these were 9 year olds in fact from 6-7 year old Grade one until Grade Three and obviously even higher grades, so you didn't really get to understand and trying to consolidate any concepts in hat space because we didn't get that interaction. I then came to the private school and that's when I was introduced into the google classroom and that was a bit better because you can actually have small groups online and then we can teach and but even with that we still found that or I still found that as I didn't get to consolidate the concept clearly and have maybe physical interaction or having the same resources or apparatus you know maybe for example if I'm teaching I'm adding and subtracting I have blocks or jelly beans let me put it that I have jelly beans and my learner in front of me has jelly beans we can manipulate together and I can interact with them we didn't have maybe I had jelly beans and then the child online had sticks and still the concept wouldn't click especially for the children that were more weakly, in terms of academics. So there was a lot of yeah no interaction you go online maybe everyday in the morning but you don't get to go back and revisit the concept and consolidate with our children or even try to have one-on-one sessions and with that said online as much as it has it had those apps that space at their own home in the comfort of their own home they're too comfortable they lose focus and often you'd have to remind him to use it nicely and or leave your little fish alone or leave your cat outside let's focus and then all the other children would get distracted as soon as you speak about pets maybe saying please leave your little dog down and then let's talk about pet then all of them say I have a dog. We are moving away from now explaining the concept and got into talking about pets well all that interruption and yeah that was COVID.

Question 6 How did the compulsory wearing of mask in the classroom have an impact on your teaching of language and literacy?

So that meant that obviously you have like something covering your face you're covering your voice they cannot hear you clearly. I mean one of the topics that we do go through in life orientation or Life Skills is emotions you want them to see your emotions as well while teaching and they did not get to see that even when they are speaking to you giving you feedback you could not hear them clearly what are they talking about sharing their weekend news. Some of them were chewing on their masks and but I know that there was a little boy that was quite affected not only academically because obviously you can't really hear, you can't really see your teacher's expression and it affected his social for the longest time even after we stopped wearing masks he still wore his mask I mean even last term he still was wearing his mask so it was quite

a challenge in terms of teaching and trying to interact, you know and I think that was the biggest thing for us especially with JP (junior prep) you have to be around the little children and sometimes even when you are doing like small things like handwriting you want to work around you want to be in their space while teaching that is a mission you can't really do that we had no physical interaction and constantly wearing your mask, reminding them to keep their masks on and I think that also took away a lot of time of teaching because if you think about it you have this little boy that wants to take off his mask they want to take it off or chewing on it now you are stopping your lesson here, because the first thing you have to think of during COVID you don't want anyone to get sick so you quickly want to grab out some new mask and put it on the little boy and throw away the old one you know, the chewed up all the broken ones you know yeah. Sanitize every way and I know that with the sanitizer we had I had a few children and their hands were starting to peel and starting to grow scrabs and obviously with something like that handwriting was a challenge, even cutting you know because they've got all these little marks on them and recreating to the sanitizer. Even I had some eczema you know and even then you don't want to touch anyone because you do not know if it's something that could spread or it is just the alcohol rubbing on your skin.

Question 7: Was the usage of phonics or awareness when teaching language skills affected by the wearing of mask in the classroom?

100% yes I mean with phonics with spelling with literacy you teaching a lot of spelling and the sounds um blending and the most important thing is for the children to be phonologically aware to hear what the sound is and make connection to the letter so obviously with the mask covering it's hindering and that sound the proper sound maybe you saying TH the sound but then the hearing and f sound so yeah wearing her mask was quite a challenge then when you're teaching a lot of the spelling for the phonological and aspect of spelling yeah it was quite a mission with that mask covering.

Question 8: Did you experience challenges during activities which required collaboration or group work?

during COVID obviously we couldn't do groupwork children were not allowed to interact to be in each other's spaces and there are some activities where you want children you've taught the concept but you just one thing to be able to teach each other you know maybe group the weak learners with the average learners at the top but you couldn't do that because you know sanitizing and you're not allowed to be in each other's spaces wear masks all the time and even at break I mean I I'm not too sure about where I am now at the school but at break we had to in the previous school children had to sit in their own little block so even then is you know it's break time you want children to play to have different games and enjoy themselves but in the classroom we can imagine how it is then you can't sit in groups and there is just that separation, all the group activities you want them to do fun activities you can't let them whether you are inside the classroom or outside it was quite a mission.

Question 9a: Did you face any challenges when teaching phonics and vowels while wearing the mask?

definitely OK I I often had to pull down my mask so that you know my children can hear me or they can see my expression so it was really quite a mission it's not an easy thing to do when you

teaching with the mask on like I'm saying especially when you're teaching spelling and maybe you explaining a concept that's different in its foreign it's a mission for them to hear what you're saying and it's often muffled all in that mask so it was just yeah a big challenge for me.

Question 9b: Did you ever try using the face shield while teaching phonics or vowels?

so OK previous school no they didn't offer the face shield. As I said it was a government school and it was it's a school catered for you know children coming from low income background so even the school couldn't afford those face masks when I came to see Davids the face shield was offered and when I used it personally I felt you see, when you do speak you don't really see it but once you put the face shield over you see the mist coming and sticking on the shield and even spit. At some point you will have to often sanitize and clean it, and now the sanitizer goes in your face you know it was all of those challenges but obviously it made a bit of a difference so that you know our children can see our expressions maybe they can hear a little bit better even though it's still blocks that sound a bit of that sound it's better than a mask but I think my shield ended up being a bit, you know when a plastic is being used over and wiped over and over again it's no longer see through clear that was the issue then.

Question 10: Please describe how mask wearing had an impact on the way you taught or communicated with the learners?

it definitely did affect as I said before you wouldn't hear the words clearly as much as I know my words weren't heard clearly you know imagine if their words were not heard clearly and they wanted to interact and speak to me and you know it was almost um even physically we can't communicate children they do need a hug or they do jump on you know all that and they couldn't do that you know and you know it was quite difficult to even try and communicate with them without showing my expression obviously half of my face is covered so when I speak to them they don't know maybe if I'm being serious if I'm joking often you have to pull down your mask so that they can see not only how your face is looking in but also what you are saying it was quite a challenge.

Question 11: How was the engagement of the students during language and literacy lessons during the compulsory mask wearing period?

There was still engagement, but not as much as now when we are not wearing masks. So like I said anxiety I think played a major role and so obviously more children wouldn't lift up their hand, wouldn't want to say anything because also you can't hear what they are saying and if you had to say pull down your mask they are scared to pull down their mask, so that interaction was awkward. OK and in the classroom and like I said you couldn't even allow them to so I'm one teacher I want some activities you come to the front and you know demonstrate they couldn't even do that because now you must sanitize the pencil or the pen you know everything just had to be sanitized and already taking into the lesson it's a drag in the lesson and it's too much going on but yeah I just remember a lot of moments where it was silent whether we are doing our work or I am teaching whereas now you hear children laughing and they are playing and it's exciting yeah they're very like I said lack of a better word awkward moment.

Question 11b: During COVID are there any strategies you used when teaching in the classroom?

I have to remember them quite nicely. One of the strategies I used I don't know if this is a strategy but just the design of the classroom how it was set up and you know. We had to now have individual desks so that was my aim having individual desks every child had their own container with the resources in. Because we had to get rid of chair bags so they all have these boxes if one had their own space which was amazing because then you don't have children mixing and matching the their stationary or their belongings. Another strategy it was just the small things you know, like lining up it will be row by row and it will be just when we line up instead of lining up in the classroom you line up outside so first row will go outside because there's more ventilation outside 2nd row that's how it would work and another strategy like I said ventilation always windows were open I had a routine also of when we sanitize our hands when we wash our hands and I'll be honest I think and that more kids weren't sick that's what I've noticed in fact this winter more kids are sick now because we've sort of let go of you know wash your hands before you eat sanitize before you change your books or anything like that and whereas during COVID less children were sick you know it's quite interesting and maybe we can learn something from COVID yeah maybe we should go back into washing your hands frequently yeah anything I can't I don't I do remember also very awkward it was weird when we had to sanitize the books and in my previous school so as children came and brought you the books you have to sanitize if we were teaching at school during COVID so it wasn't the lockdown we had to sanitize when they're done with their books and wipe the cover out.

Question 12: Now that the pandemic is under control and compulsory mask wearing is no longer compulsory, are you still using all these strategies? If not why?

No, if not why OK and so going back to you know having to line up I just feel that it's already a big statement why we have to line up outside and there's less socializing there's less touching when you going outside your mask is on and there is more ventilation I just feel that it will contribute to already the social aspect of you know the children interacting with one another and just children being children and it's just normal. If we had to sanitize everything it's going to go back to something's not right why are we sanitizing our hands. Recently I even said to one of my children sanitize your hands my hands are clean why I said no just to make sure that you know you're coughing in your hands you need to sanitize your hands and you see that talk I knew that it will trigger COVID. like I said maybe I should get into washing their hands often it should continue being in routine you know.

Question 12b: During Lockdown did you continue with teaching?

everyone went home but so yeah there was no teaching on campus but we tried to do teaching online and as I mentioned before online was just a nightmare especially my previous school but yeah on campus no teaching.

Question 12 c: Did you take off your mask at any time when you were teaching.

I did and even the face shield at some point I don't care but especially outside II I just thought you know what it's still safer and the school would allow us it wouldn't be an issue as long as the children have these on just for controlling the movement of you know being each other spaces obviously children they'll be around your space you turn around they right here they just have to

be more on the safer side to have people but as soon as I would have to approach children go closer to the space I have to have my mask on and sanitize your mask and shield and at times

Question 13: What lessons did you learn due to the impact of compulsory mask wearing when teaching language and literacy?

They are, the one lesson like I said when it came to spelling it's very important for children to hear. Most importantly but also just communicating your instructions for our children what are we saying you know, my pronunciation etc. And the other thing just communicating instructions you know for them to hear clearly and not just with the mask wearing they couldn't hear you and they couldn't hear you clearly like I said the must just hinders all that sound and so I learned that you're without a mask they hear you clearly with a mask it's just a mission it's a challenge for them and for us also if you sure and also you couldn't really recognize the children most of the time because you can't see the whole face you just see the eyes and all the eyes look the same.

Question 14: How did mask wearing in the classroom generate new teaching practices?

just working around no group work that's one working mostly outside, because of the ventilation. I took the teaching outside stop trying my best to make my lessons outside orientated you know working on our whiteboards outside and working on our sanitized resources apparatus outside for maths or even working outside doing our written activity I thought it would be easier and you know just to make it fun for the children to let loose to lie on their tummies and work and though some sort of be a few communication with them but their mask are still on, someone would pull down their mask but I think even if it's pulled down at least we are outside, we are in the space where there's more air coming through.

Question 15: How important do you think expression on the teachers face influence the learners response to the teaching.

I think it was a big influence because just to give you an example if maybe you are sharing or your disciplining as much as the children were anxious about what was going on around you just had to be gentle but in showing you gentle side it meant they see your expression. Because I think that's the first thing that they see specially if whether you have a mask on or not but that's the first thing that they will see and to have your mask on they couldn't really see if she may be very upset with me oh you know this may be something that they can read or from your facial expression and it was just not easy with your mask on and even with them if you wanted to see if they are crying behind that mask or there's something going on you just needed the mask to go down so you can read their facial expression you see um yeah those masks thank goodness we go rid of them.

Question 16: How did face mask wearing influence your facial expression while teaching?

Answer covered in Question 15.