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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

The Experiences of Public and Private School Teachers in Johannesburg during the National Lockdown due to COVID-19

by

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Master of Arts in Labour and Economic Sociology

This research report is submitted to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Labour and Economic Sociology

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences of high school teachers in private and public schools in Johannesburg during the COVID-19 lockdown. The global lockdown period introduced unprecedented challenges across multiple professions, compelling professionals to rapidly adapt to new ways of working. In this study, I focus on the education sector. I used qualitative research methods and conducted eleven in-depth interviews with high school teachers to understand their experiences during the lockdown.

The findings reveal the diverse challenges teachers faced, including adapting to remote teaching, managing learner engagement, and coping with the personal and professional psychological and emotional toll of the pandemic. These challenges significantly impacted their wellbeing and motivation to continue in the teaching profession. Despite these obstacles, teachers demonstrated resilience and commitment, providing valuable insights into their ability to navigate periods of crisis.

This study highlights the enduring struggles faced by educators, not only during "normal" periods but especially in challenging times. By examining the effects of the lockdown on teachers, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the support systems needed to sustain teacher effectiveness and wellbeing during disruptive events. The findings underscore the importance of improving teacher preparedness, enhancing support mechanisms, and fostering resilience to ensure that educators can continue to thrive in their roles even under extraordinary circumstances.

DECLARATION

I, **Tirhani Matsimbi** declare that:

The work produced in this study **"The Experiences of Public and Private School Teachers in Johannesburg During The National Lockdown Due to COVID-19"** submitted for the Master of Art in Labour and Economic Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand is my own work, and where I have made use of another person's work, I have referenced in the correct way. This study has not been previously submitted for any degree requirements or examination at any other academic institution.

Student's signature: 

Date: 30 July 2025

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My mother – **Khensani Ethel Shingwenyana** – Inkomu, Ngwenya Nkelenge

My brother – **Tiyani Matsimbi** – Dankie, Belugs

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List of abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

ATP: Annual Teaching Plan

DBE: Department of Basic Education

ENCA: eNews Channel Africa

ER: Emotional Regulation

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

ISASA: Independent School Association of Southern Africa

LMS: Learning Management System

OBE: Outcomes Based Education

PED: Provincial Education Department

SABC: South African Broadcasting News

SEL: Social-Emotional Learning

SADTU: South African Democratic Teachers Union

WCED: Western Cape Education Department

WHO: World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE:

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In March 2020, South Africa underwent a national lockdown as result of a pandemic caused by the Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19. Coronavirus is an infectious disease that occurs as a result of the SARS-CoV-2 virus (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d). It causes mild to severe respiratory illness that does not require special treatment for mild cases but calls for special treatment for severe cases. Older individuals and those with underlying medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer are more likely to develop serious illness; however, anyone is prone to being infected with the virus and may become seriously ill or die (WHO, n.d.).

The national lockdown refers to the state regulated and enforced restriction of people's movement in South Africa. This included confining them to their homes, except for individuals engaged in essential services, those requiring medical attention, or those needing to collect social grants or purchase essential goods and services (Smit & Fourie, 2021). The primary objective of such measures was to limit the spread of COVID-19.

The lockdown was a widespread measure implemented in numerous countries worldwide, all with the common goal of limiting the spread of the virus. Throughout this time, economic and social disruptions were experienced globally (Onyeaka et al., 2021). People's livelihoods, comprising of physical, emotional, financial, and mental health, were significantly affected, and the quality of social relationships was strained as daily routines were upended by the lockdown (Rich et al., 2022). Employees of organizations transitioned to remote work, while others faced layoffs (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Individuals living with family spent more time at home, while those living alone experienced increased isolation and, in some cases, depression (Loades et al., 2020). Business owners were forced to close operations due to inactivity, leading to loss of income and

profits (Bartik et al., 2020). Additionally, social activities were put on hold, further altering lifestyles.

During the first months of the lockdown (March - June 2020), schools were among the institutions that were not functioning at full capacity, especially during level 5 lockdown (described later in this section). Depending on available resources and teacher capacity, some schools transitioned to remote online teaching and learning (Lemay et al., 2021), while others remained entirely closed, with no engagement in teaching or learning activities. As a result, teachers and learners had to adapt to alternative methods of teaching and learning in order to stay on track with the school curriculum (Pena-Levano et al., 2022). Furthermore, teachers also needed to re-evaluate their professional roles.

The education system in South Africa

South Africa's education system comprises of two distinct sectors: public and private. This division is rooted in the country's political, historical, and socio-economic context, particularly shaped by its colonial and apartheid past, where education was delivered along racial lines, resulting in varying standards and types of education for different population groups (Blanden et al., 2022; Dipitso, 2022; Motala & Pampallis, 2020; Chetty, 2019 as cited in Muyambi et al., 2025). During the colonial period, education primarily served European settlers, while limited educational opportunities were available to indigenous populations through missionary schools, leading to the development of a dual education system (Chisholm, 2020).

During the early colonial period of South Africa's four colonies, namely: the Cape, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal, education was mainly driven by private initiatives, with churches and religious groups playing an important role in establishing, maintaining, and supervising schools. Education at the time was irregular and informal (Squelch, 1997 as cited in Pretorius, 2019). As the demand for structured education grew, there was a gradual introduction of state education systems, starting with the Cape (1814), Natal (1860s), the Orange Free State (1870s), and Transvaal (1880s). By the mid-19th century, each colony had a public education system. State education predominantly served the white population, while African children were subjected to missionary schools, with many receiving no education at all (Squelch, 1997 as cited in Pretorius,

2019). In 1953, The Bantu Education Act was enacted and comprised of a set of policies that institutionalised racial segregation (Gallo, 2020) within South Africa's education system, specifically targeting non-white individuals (Gallo, 2020). As highlighted by McKeever (2017), the Act ensured access to quality education solely for the white population, while Black, Coloured, and Indian communities were subjected to a separate and unequal system. The curriculum for non-white students was intentionally structured to restrict their future job opportunities, training them primarily for unskilled labour roles, such as gardening or sewing (Gallo, 2020).

While post-apartheid educational reforms have been a central focus for South Africa since the establishment of the Government of National Unity in 1994 (Gumede & Biyase, 2020), the education system remains deeply affected by socio-economic inequalities, particularly in how resources and funding are distributed among public schools (Gallo, 2020). These inequities disproportionately disadvantage marginalized communities, leading to distinct challenges for both educators and students. This imbalance significantly influences the quality of education and shapes the broader teaching and learning environment. Thus, South Africa moved from a racially segregated schooling system to one that is predominantly divided by income and class, reflecting the enduring legacy of apartheid (Chirinda et al., 2021).

The lockdown in South Africa

South Africa's national lockdown began on the 27th of March 2020 (Köhler et al., 2023), and continued in various stages until September 2020, transitioning from alert level 5 to alert level 1. At alert level 5, only essential workers could leave their homes, interprovincial and national movement was prohibited, public spaces were closed, and gatherings were restricted (Potgieter et al., 2021). Alert level 4 allowed limited economic activity, imposed a curfew from 20:00 to 05:00, and permitted public and private transport with capacity restrictions (Potgieter et al., 2021). Under alert level 3, economic activities such as food services, e-commerce, and tourism resumed with restrictions, but interprovincial travel remained limited (Potgieter et al., 2021). At alert level 2, interprovincial travel and family visits were permitted, curfew hours shifted to 23:00–04:00, and indoor and outdoor gatherings were capped at 250 and 500 people, respectively, and alcohol sales also resumed (Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2021). Alert level 1 signalled a return to near-normal activity as COVID-19 cases declined, with continued adherence to health

measures (South African Government, 2020). At the time of this study (November 2020 to April 2021), the country was under alert level 1.

During the first phase at level 5 of the lockdown, schools were closed (physical access) across all sectors. There were different responses to this within the education sector. Private schools continued with teaching and learning using online platforms (Chipangura, 2023) while many public schools remained closed and did not operate for reasons outlined in the next chapters of this study.

As a result of the country's regulatory shift to Level 3 on the 1st of June 2024, the Minister of Education at the time, Minister Angie Motshekga, implemented a phased approach for the reintegration of students into schools. The reopening of schools was to be effective as of 1 June 2020, as approved by the National Coronavirus Command Council and Cabinet (South African Government, 2020). The reopening process for schools commenced with the return of Grade 7 students in primary schools and Grade 12 students in high schools (South African Government, 2020).

Teaching and learning during the lockdown

The lockdown period imposed significant stress on both teachers and learners, as they had to adjust to a new mode of learning - remote learning (Nomtshongwana & Buka, 2023), which included attending classes, completing assessments, and sitting for exams from home. Many students without access to online platforms had to manage their academic progress independently, relying on personal technological resources such as smartphones or tablets, engaging with curriculum support material, and learning through programmes on television and radio introduced by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) for different subjects and grade levels (Maluleke, 2020). However, not all learners had access to these resources, particularly learners in rural areas that struggle with limited electricity and network connectivity (Nomtshongwana & Buka, 2023).

To mitigate the impact of the disrupted academic year, the DBE and PEDs developed a recovery plan, which involved reorganizing the curriculum and reducing content to ensure key topics were

covered. Teaching plans were revised across all grades, and the June examinations were cancelled to provide additional time for teaching (Maluleke, 2020). As a result of this new norm of learning and living during the lockdown, Haffejee et al. (2024) note that learners were affected by the closure of schools and experienced loneliness, boredom, anxiety and isolation, which were exacerbated by extended periods of limited physical interactions with their peers.

Educators faced significant challenges adapting to remote teaching environments, requiring them to rapidly develop proficiency in digital teaching platforms, manage online assessments, and provide virtual feedback. These demands were further exacerbated for teachers with their own school-aged children engaged in online learning, as they had to balance their professional responsibilities with supporting their children's education at home (Budhrani et al., 2021). Female teachers, in particular, faced an intensified burden, as traditional gender roles placed heightened expectations on them to manage both household and caregiving duties (Leo et al., 2022), which, in turn, required them to navigate an increased workload at home while simultaneously adapting to the demands of remote teaching (See, 2024). These overlapping demands, along with limited access to resources (Nomtshongwana & Buka, 2023), emotional and psychological strain (Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021), and financial constraints, particularly among public school educators (Spaull &Van der Berg, 2020), significantly impacted teachers' wellbeing. The heightened work-life conflict ultimately contributed to increased mental health strain (Gromada et al., 2020).

1.2 Problem statement

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the education system in South Africa, and teachers faced significant challenges in adapting to remote learning. Public and private schools experienced these challenges differently due to disparities in access to resources. Despite the government's efforts to implement online education, many students, particularly in under-resourced areas, were unable to participate effectively, exacerbating educational inequalities. It is therefore important to explore the ways in which teachers in different school sectors experienced and navigated these challenges, and to better understand the strategies employed to overcome these obstacles across public and private sector schools.

1.3 Research question

The research question that guided this study was: **How did the COVID-19 lockdown affect teachers' motivation, wellbeing, and commitment to their profession in South Africa?**

1.4 Research aim and objectives

This study aimed to investigate the experiences of teachers during the COVID-19 lockdown and to analyse the challenges faced by teachers in public and private schools during the lockdown. Specific study objectives included:

- To understand the general experience of teaching in South Africa in relation to teachers' roles, responsibilities and challenges and the impact of the lockdown on this.
- To examine the motivation to join the teaching profession and to remain in the profession during the lockdown and after.
- To explore how teachers experienced stress and the impact of the lockdown on their wellbeing.
- To understand the coping strategies used by teachers to adapt to lockdown measures and the perception of their roles during the lockdown.

This chapter has presented an overview of the study's purpose by detailing the background, problem statement, research objectives, and research questions.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the teaching profession in South Africa, analysing the historical, social, and political contexts that have shaped teachers' experiences and influenced the broader education sector. It investigates the relationship between teacher stress and the challenges faced in their professional environment, with a particular focus on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the chapter explores the adjustments made in the South African education system during the lockdown, including shifts in pedagogical approaches and their implications for both teachers and learners. It also examines the roles of gender, class, and race, considering how these factors intersect with the teaching profession in the South African context. To encapsulate these diverse perspectives, I use a theoretical framework to guide the understanding of these complex phenomena.

The term *educator* is often used synonymously with *teacher*. For the purposes of this study, these terms are used interchangeably. Conversely, while the terms *learner* and *student* are also frequently used interchangeably, they convey distinct meanings. The term "learner" refers to an individual acquiring knowledge or skills in a particular subject or activity (Mokhaba, 2005). In the context of South African education, this term aligns with the principles of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), which underscores the holistic development of learners, prioritising knowledge acquisition and the development of essential skills and attitudes (Mokhaba, 2005). This study uses *learner* to describe the group taught by the teachers acquiring knowledge and gaining critical competencies.

The context: teaching in South African schools

Although teaching may appear to be a universal experience, it is important to consider the specific context in which it occurs when analysing the effectiveness and success of education systems globally. The educational landscape in South Africa is marked by significant diversity, shaped largely by the coexistence of a dual education system that reflects socio-economic disparities. This

system comprises well-resourced, higher-cost private schools contrasted with often under-resourced and understaffed public schools (Gamedze & Ruiters, 2023). However, it is important to acknowledge the nuanced reality within the private sector, which includes not only elite, high-cost institutions but also more affordable, low-cost private schools that cater to different socio-economic groups.

Pretorius (2019) highlights the historical and legal differentiation between public and independent schools within South Africa's education system. Public schools are often referred to as "state" or "government" schools and are generally defined as institutions that are owned, funded, and administered by the state. However, this classification is not absolute. Some public schools, especially former Model C schools (defined as formerly white schools in white areas by Masino & Nińo-Zarazúa, 2016 as cited in Kanyopa et al, 2024), have maintained certain elements of autonomy, including school governing bodies that oversee admissions, budgeting, and staffing decisions. They may also charge school fees and own their physical infrastructure.

On the other hand, independent schools, also known as "private schools," – which is the terminology used throughout this study – are typically privately owned and operated, although some receive limited state subsidies or are subject to limited state control (Pretorius, 2019).

Pretorius (2019) argues that the development of independent schooling in South Africa reflects broader constitutional values, such as freedom of association, religious and cultural rights, and access to education. Therefore, understanding this distinction is critical when investigating how different school types responded to challenges like the COVID-19 lockdown, as governance and funding models often determined their ability to adapt to disruptions.

Private schools in South Africa are commonly categorised according to fee structure: high-fee, mid-fee, and low-fee institutions (Van der Berg et al., 2017). Although some private schools such as those in the Curro group – charge more than R50,000 per year, the majority of private schools fall into the mid to low-fee categories (Hofmeyr et al., 2013; Selod & Zenou, 2003 as cited in McKay et al., 2018). In low-fee schools, annual tuition is generally below R12,000, with some Johannesburg inner-city schools charging between R5,000 and R8,000 (Machard & McKay, 2015 as cited in McKay et al., 2018). These schools are usually registered as not-for-profit entities and

may qualify for state subsidies if they meet the Department of Basic Education's fee threshold (Hofmeyr & Schirmer, 2015 as cited in McKay et al., 2018). These economic realities don't only influence the quality of education offered but also the working conditions and experiences of teachers, more specifically during periods of disruption such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

This background contextualises how teachers in different private school environments may have experienced the lockdown period. The teachers in the study fall with the mid and high fee paying private schools.

According to Chipangura (2023), teachers at mid and high-fee paying private schools in South Africa experienced the COVID-19 lockdown with a merge of advantage, adaptation, and pressure. Chipangura (2023) notes that they had greater access to infrastructure such as reliable internet and backup power that prioritised uninterrupted and thus enabled a smoother transition. Teachers could also use personal or school-provided devices under Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies - a policy that states employees may bring and use their own devices for work purposes (Yasar & Chouffani, 2023, which decreased barriers to access. Additionally, some schools were better resourced and could afford to adopt platforms like Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Google Meet for online classes.

Furthermore, peer mentoring became a key strategy: teachers with ICT experience informally trained colleagues, especially in schools without formal professional development (Chipangura, 2023). Teachers who were already comfortable with technology adapted quickly and helped lead the transition.

However, despite being set up for success with infrastructure and resources, their workload increased significantly. Teachers had to redesign lessons for online delivery, often with little time. This resulted in most of them spending longer hours planning, teaching, and supporting learners online than they used to pre-lockdown. The emotional labour also intensified, particularly in maintaining learner motivation and managing digital engagement (Chipangura, 2023).

Nevertheless, differences in management style, planning, and technological readiness shaped how stressful or smooth the transition felt for each teacher.

According to the Department of Basic Education (2011), public schools in South Africa, which are owned and administered by the state as previously mentioned, are categorised into five quintiles by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). This classification is based on the poverty level of the communities they serve and is used to guide funding allocations by the state (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

- Quintile 1 schools cater to the poorest communities, mainly situated in rural or township areas, and operate under a no-fee policy.

- Quintile 2 schools are also situated in very poor areas, often in rural or under-resourced urban settings, and are no-fee paying schools.

- Quintile 3 schools serve low-income communities, usually found in a mix of rural and peri-urban locations, and also follow a no-fee structure.

- Quintile 4 schools are found in less impoverished, mostly suburban or former Model C areas, and are allowed to charge school fees.

- Quintile 5 schools are located in wealthier, urban or suburban areas, represent the least poor category, and serve as fee-paying public schools.

Therefore, the amount of state funding that is allocated to a school is dependent on the quintile it operates under. Quintile 1 - quintile 3 schools typically receive the most government funding but still often lack adequate infrastructure (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

The schools covered in this study range between quintile 3 and quintile 5.

As stated by Sithomola (2021), quintile 4 and 5 schools, which are situated in more affluent areas, were better equipped to adapt to online and hybrid teaching. Teachers and learners had access to digital devices and internet services, often using platforms such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom, like those in mid-to-high paying private schools. These schools benefited from supportive parental involvement, which offered educational stability during the lockdown. Vale & Graven (2022) also reported that teachers in these public schools implemented diverse technology-mediated strategies during the lockdown, such as WhatsApp messenger, weekly learning packs,

and external online platforms, once again highlighting similarities to the mid-high fee-paying private schools.

Teachers in Q3 schools reported limited access to professional psychosocial services in that they felt that their learners experienced severe emotional and psychological struggles, such as anxiety, depression, and difficulty concentrating and had limited institutional support. Although some schools collaborated with parents and communities, the lack of access to social workers, who were either absent it overwhelmed during the pandemic, hindered effective emotional support for learners.

Teachers in these schools also experienced emotional labour that was beyond their academic role, where they often had to provide emotional and psychological support to their learners, thus acting as caregivers (Gore et al., 2023).

Additionally, they experienced heavy workload and curriculum pressures as they had to pivot rapidly to rotational timetables, smaller teaching groups, and compressed curricula, without the infrastructure and digital tools available and accessible in higher quintiles.

The segregation between public and private schooling often perpetuates a culture of social exclusion and societal division, stemming from prevailing racial and socio-economic factors (Gruijters et al., 2024). This highlights the broader social implications of educational segregation. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that teaching practices will differ between the public and private sectors, owing to the challenges pertaining to resource allocation, the availability and accessibility of facilities, and the availability of qualified teachers as previously mentioned due to the governance and funding models. The learner demographics and social location in which the schools are located also play a pivotal role in the way teachers prepare and administer lessons. These differences translate into practical impacts on education quality and experiences.

2.2 The profession of teaching

2.2.1 The role of the teacher in society

According to Parma & Hansraj (2017), the profession of teaching is a vocation that involves the act of providing knowledge to students or pupils and instructing them in any educational institution. The Department of Basic Education (2021) refers to teaching as a profession that presents a unique opportunity to shape and inspire young and developing minds while fostering essential lifelong skills in children. They do this by instilling confidence, integrity, and responsibility in the learners they teach (Day & Gu, 2010). Teachers also act as catalysts for change in that they facilitate positive transformations in the lives of individuals (Bourn, 2016) through their support and mentorship. Thus, according to Parma & Hansraj (2017), the role of teachers extends beyond simply imparting knowledge in front of the classroom. Effective teachers serve as role models and mentors who shape individuals to become responsible members of society and active citizens of any country (Govindharajan, 2017). This profession provides them with the platform to influence students in their personal development.

Teachers play a crucial role as community builders by engaging with parents, caregivers, policymakers, and communities. Chandratreya (2024) discusses the way teachers partner with families and local communities and argues that when teachers actively engage families in the learning process, parents are better equipped to support their children's education (Fan & Chen, 2001 as cited in Chandratreya, 2024). He further states that teachers play a vital role in strengthening community ties, cultivating a sense of belonging and ownership within the local neighbourhood (Nieto, 2002 as cited in Chandratreya, 2024). By championing collaboration, teachers help create a more holistic and inclusive educational experience, reinforcing their indispensable role in shaping both individuals and society (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

Moreover, the ability of teachers to influence and collaborate with various groups – including parents, policymakers, and community organizations – contribute to the advancement of educational policies and community programs. However, in many underprivileged communities, external organizations often supplement educational efforts, especially with regards to resource gaps, language barriers, and gender inequalities. For example, the *Urglobal* initiative equips rural schools with mobile technology labs and delivers community-based digital literacy training in learners' home languages, helping to bridge both the digital and language divides (Mkuzo &

Govender, 2025). The teacher influence and collaboration mentioned above highlights the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in strengthening educational and social development, and also fosters a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for learners, which ultimately drives long-term social and economic development.

Notably, teachers also play an important role in the socialisation of students by contributing to the moral codes and belief systems that learners uphold (Popovska & Popovski, 2021). They do this by teaching values, norms, and behaviours that enable students to integrate into society. This kind of socializing can be referred to as a form of secondary socialization, as schools are one of the first places where learners get exposure to different social structures and authority outside of the homes they are raised in (Ballantine et al., 2017).

Additionally, teachers are foundational in fostering societal growth and development by shaping learners' academic success, wellbeing, and future contributions. Teachers create supportive environments that enhance students' confidence, resilience, and sense of belonging, which are essential for motivation and achievement. By fostering positive relationships, teachers empower learners to develop creativity, innovation, and dedication, enabling them to excel academically and contribute meaningfully to their communities and society at large (Zheng, 2022).

2.2.2 The role of schools in society

Schools play a fundamental role in the growth, development, and functioning of society, shaping students academically and socially while also meeting their broader needs. As Gill & Nawaz (2023) explain, schools serve as environments for socialization, instilling morals, values, and worldviews that help develop learners' social skills. Banda (2021) adds that schools provide safety and physiological support through feeding programs, crucial for students from vulnerable backgrounds.

Le Grange (2020) underscores the importance of schools in offering stability and security, particularly in unsafe neighbourhoods. Matidza et al. (2023) investigated the impact of COVID-19 on school nutrition in South Africa and found that many learners experienced food insecurity due to the disruption of school meal programs as a result of schools being closed. The study reported that a significant number of students lacked access to adequate nutrition at home. This

highlights the extended role of teachers and schools in fostering societal development and addressing the diverse needs of learners beyond academics. Together, these perspectives illustrate how schools function as critical support systems for education and community wellbeing.

2.2.3 The skills required in teaching for effective job performance

Halász and Michel (2011 as cited in Holmes et al., 2021) highlight terms like "competence," "competency," "skill," and "ability" are often used interchangeably, depending on the context. Strivens et al. (2014 as cited in Holmes et al., 2021) stress that competency involves not just knowledge but also the application of that knowledge in real-world situations. In this study, I use the terms "competency" and "skills" interchangeably, as both refer to the practical ability to perform tasks effectively and demonstrate competence in specific contexts.

For both private and public school teachers to be effective in their roles and have a positive impact on their learners, ultimately contributing to a positive and thriving society, they must possess certain skills that enable them to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently. Teachers who do not have such skills will find it extremely difficult and challenging to deliver knowledge to their learners (Hotaman, 2010).

In *Essential Teaching Skills*, Kyriacou (2018) identifies three core competencies critical for effective teaching: knowledge, decision-making, and action. These interrelated skills are pivotal in shaping how educational content is delivered in the classroom, directly influencing the learning experience and outcomes. By integrating these competencies, teachers are better equipped to design and implement lessons that meet diverse learner needs and foster meaningful engagement.

The skills required for effective teaching also include planning the instructional process and utilizing class time efficiently, which ensures the timely delivery of high-quality content. Creating an engaging learning environment also enhances students' absorption and understanding of the material. Offering diverse, innovative, and creative teaching methods helps learners grasp content more easily and effectively. Additionally, teachers who monitor students' progress, provide necessary support, and foster self-discipline and self-control in task completion are more likely to cultivate students who excel academically and carry these principles into their adult lives, leading positive and successful lives (Hotaman, 2010).

When examining the skills required for the teaching profession, it is essential to contextualize this within the historical inequalities that exist in teacher training in South Africa. The legacy of apartheid created systemic disparities in access to quality teacher education, with institutions in historically disadvantaged areas often underfunded and inadequately resourced. These inequalities have had a lasting impact on the development of teaching competencies, leaving some educators without access to robust training that equips them with the necessary skills for effective classroom practice.

These inequalities in education and the lack of adequate preparation for teachers, as highlighted by Chisholm (2019), exacerbated the challenges faced by educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. The long-standing disparities in teacher training, particularly in terms of access to technological resources and skills, became even more apparent when schools had to transition to online and hybrid learning approaches. Some of these technological resources include (1) Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Google Classroom, and Canvas, which enable the delivery of lessons, assignments, and assessments; (2) video conferencing tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet facilitate real-time communication between teachers and students in virtual classrooms; (3) digital content creation tools like Adobe Creative Cloud, Canva, and assist teachers in creating multimedia-rich lessons and interactive content; (4) collaborative tools such as Google Docs and Jamboard promote student collaboration in online settings; and (5) educational apps and platforms like Coursera, and Duolingo provide supplementary learning resources, while assessment tools like Kahoot, and Quizlet help track student progress. These are just a few examples of the various technological resources that support online and hybrid learning environments. Teachers who had not previously received sufficient training in technology, especially in disadvantaged areas, struggled to adapt quickly to the demands of remote learning. This reveals the crucial intersection between historical underinvestment in teacher development and the new challenges presented by the pandemic (Chisango & Marongwe, 2021), as well as the intersection of race, class, and educational equity as wealthier, predominantly white schools generally have better access to technological resources than under-resourced schools in low-income areas (Department of Education, 2004 as cited in Chisango & Marongwe, 2021).

In response to these challenges, the Department of Basic Education (2020) introduced a consolidated guideline that included instructions for remote teaching and learning as well as

strategies for planning teaching for the remainder of the school year using the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) and other curriculum and assessment-related issues.

The COVID-19 lockdown revealed stark disparities in access to online education across South Africa, as only 11.7% of schools were able to offer online learning, with urban schools generally being better equipped (Maluleke, 2020). Despite these challenges, South African teachers, particularly in private schools, demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. They leveraged digital tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams for video conferencing and sharing educational materials while simultaneously navigating various learning management systems to continue instruction remotely (Maree, 2022; Nakhriyah & Muzakky, 2021 as cited in Chipangura, 2023).

Moreover, some public schools supplemented their instruction with radio and television programs launched by the Department of Basic Education alongside the SABC, to ensure the curriculum could continue despite technological constraints (Department of Basic Education & South African Broadcasting Channel, 2020). This response highlighted teachers' commitment and ability to adjust to a rapidly changing teaching environment and to ensure the continuation of education during the pandemic.

While examining the differences between private and public schools, it is important to recognize that public schools in South Africa vary significantly in terms of resources, teaching quality due to lack of resources, and overall experience. Public schools are categorized into quintiles based on socio-demographic profiles, with quintile 1 schools serving students from the poorest communities and quintile 5 serving those from less disadvantaged backgrounds. Thus, not all public schools had the resources to continue learning or to implement the methodologies necessary to deliver undisrupted education during the pandemic.

To address these challenges moving forward, Ramírez Navarro et al. (2024) highlights the importance of providing teachers with continuous training, support, and guidance in digital education. Such ongoing professional development is critical for enhancing and sustaining teachers' technological skills. This preparation is vital for creating a resilient, technology-driven learning environment, particularly in the context of shifts like the transition from in-person to

online learning, as we've seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Investing in these initiatives will better equip teachers to adapt to future educational challenges and foster long-term success in digital teaching.

2.3 Theory of education

This study is conducted using a sociological lens; therefore, exploring and applying sociological theories is essential for understanding how education is integrated into and shapes society. I use the theory of Structural Functionalism to offer insights into the impact of COVID-19 on the education system in South Africa.

Structural functionalism is a theory developed by Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons that understands society as comprising different aspects that are fundamental to the functioning and operation of the world as one large system (Giddens et al. 2017). Structural functionalism postulates that society consists of various institutions and structures, each serving distinct functions that contribute to its overall stability and functioning. For instance, institutions such as the family, education system, and economy each play a part in sustaining societal equilibrium (Parsons, 1961). Durkheim (Durkheim, 2009 as cited in Gonzales et al., 2024) viewed society as fundamentally grounded in morality, having the belief that the foundation of social order lies in shared moral norms and rules. Due to this, he considered education to be the method in which these moral codes would be taught and instilled in people's lives and thus guide their behaviour in society (Barnes, 1977). Therefore, the process of teaching and learning is important in understanding the way the world works and in shaping worldviews and perspectives in peoples' lives. It is for this reason that education is highly prioritized in society, from primary to secondary and all the way to higher education. The individuals who make this possible are educators, and they have an important role to play, not only in teaching and instilling moral codes but also in creating a world that is sustainable and efficient through the many careers that have evolved from formal education that countless individuals go through in school. While Durkheim believed that education was necessary for creating and shaping a moral society, he also believed that education through schooling was necessary for socialization of individuals in that the school has a specific duty in bridging individuals to society and thus it serves as a foundation for young people to ease into adulthood (Vigilant & Williamson, 2007).

I have employed Structural functionalism in this study because it offers a comprehensive framework for analysing the diverse roles and functions of teachers within different educational contexts. For example, it provides a framework to understand how public school teachers may prioritize delivering equitable education to a diverse student body while private school teachers might focus on specialized curricula and personalized instruction. It also sheds light on how teachers adapt to challenges, such as students' needs, resource availability, and educational policies, thereby contributing to the stability of the system. Additionally, structural functionalism assesses the impact of teachers on social integration, including how they address issues like social stratification, student diversity, and inclusivity.

This theory, therefore, facilitates a nuanced exploration of the interplay between educational roles, institutional dynamics, and societal outcomes, thus enriching the analysis of the research study.

2.4 Teachers and stress/pressure

2.4.1 Wellbeing

Wellbeing refers to the psychological strength that one has to resist and overcome experiences of psychological adversity, ultimately maintaining effective function in spite of life's adverse circumstances (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Furthermore, Michaelson et al. (2012 as cited in Jarden & Roache, 2023) highlight that wellbeing can be perceived as the way individuals feel and function in personal and social settings and how they assess their overall life satisfaction. This includes emotional, psychological, and social dimensions, which reflect a comprehensive view of their health and contentment. Having a sufficient understanding of these factors and incorporating measures to ensure balance in one's lifestyle have the potential to improve the quality of an individual's life.

A critical aspect of understanding the challenges faced by teachers during the COVID-19 lockdown lies in examining the impact of their professional experiences on their wellbeing. This played a pivotal role in my study as it provided valuable insights into the broader implications of these challenges.

In a study by Medina-Garrido et al. (2017), it is highlighted that well-being is achieved through a balance across various aspects of life, such as work responsibilities, family life, finances, and personal fulfilment. When individuals manage these areas effectively, it leads to an overall sense of harmony, which not only enhances personal well-being but also improves professional performance. Achieving this balance is crucial for sustaining both personal and professional satisfaction (Medina-Garrido et al., 2017).

When applied to the teaching profession, this may include managing workloads and maintaining personal resilience whilst facilitating effective student development. However, during the lockdown, the distinction between personal and professional wellbeing became increasingly blurred. Teachers that had the resources to continue teaching online in private schools and some public schools were required to quickly adapt to online platforms, handle heavier workloads, and cope with the emotional stress of the situation. These challenges had a direct effect on their sense of professionalism and the extent to which they were able to contribute to society.

Educational theories often highlight the importance of learners' holistic development, including their emotional, social, and mental wellbeing, in addition to academic success. In this context, the wellbeing of teachers is critical, as their ability to create a supportive and engaging learning environment is closely associated with their own emotional and mental health. Teachers with a good experience of wellbeing are more able to thrive in teaching, offer their learners emotional support, and effectively manage their classrooms, all of which contribute to the overall development, functioning, and growth of students and consequently, society (Day & Gu, 2010).

During the lockdown, teachers faced numerous challenges and experiences related to their profession, which were further intensified by the everyday difficulties they routinely encountered outside of the COVID-19 context. Garcia-Alvarez et al. (2021) describe strategies aimed at supporting teachers' wellbeing and retention during the pandemic and highlight the importance of sharing self-care practices with teachers to enhance their holistic wellbeing, which subsequently improves their performance and positively influences their students. There are several approaches to maintaining wellbeing during times of crisis, according to Garcia-Alvarez et al. (2021). One such approach is mindfulness meditation, which helps reduce stress and burnout, leading to healthier relationships, improved teaching practices, and better overall wellbeing. Additionally,

gratitude exercises and social support networks may provide emotional assistance and boost morale.

Despite the clear importance of teacher wellbeing, systemic neglect in under-resourced schools has made it difficult to implement effective support structures. Bagga & Singh (2018) highlight even before the pandemic, that many schools lacked the necessary resources and programs to help relieve teacher stress and burnout. The shift to remote learning and the additional pressures brought on by COVID-19 only made these challenges worse, further straining educators who were already working under difficult conditions. In the absence of adequate institutional support, teachers often depend on personal coping mechanisms and informal peer networks to manage their wellbeing. According to Gavade et al. (2023), teachers in low-income schools created their own informal support networks due to the lack of formal support infrastructure. The use of smartphones played a significant role in facilitating these support practices, serving as both a valuable source of support and a medium for communication. This underscores the need for a more structured and sustainable approach to teacher support, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged communities.

Additionally, Lazarus and Folkman (1984, as cited in MacIntyre et al., 2020) suggest two types of coping strategies, namely emotion-focused strategies, which seek to decrease or control the emotional stress linked to or triggered by the circumstance, and problem-focused strategies that help resolve the made-out problem by engaging in an activity that will change the cause of stress. Coping with challenges is essential for teachers, as it enables them to perform their duties efficiently, maintain a positive outlook, and avoid the negative results of stress, which can impact their ability to deliver quality instruction and support students.

2.4.1.1 Stress factors that affect wellbeing

Various studies have shown that teaching is a profession associated with high levels of stress (Bardach et al, 2023; McCarthy, 2019). Anxiety and perceived stress among teachers are significantly influenced by factors such as workload, student behaviour, and employment conditions. A scoping review by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) identified a lack of administrative support as a primary contributor to increased anxiety in teachers. These stressors often lead to burnout, a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from prolonged exposure

to workplace stressors. Burnout adversely affects teachers' health and is a risk factor for poor physical and psychological wellbeing. It typically occurs after extended periods of emotional and interpersonal challenges in the workplace, leading to individuals feeling overwhelmed, drained, and unable to meet the demands of their roles effectively (Agyapong et al., 2022).

In teaching, burnout can be caused by excessive workloads, challenging classroom environments, as well as limited support, all of which can ultimately result in emotional exhaustion and a sense of disconnection from their work (Agyapong et al., 2022). Agyapong et al. (2022) highlight that inadequate support exacerbates these stressors, which contributes to emotional exhaustion and a depleted sense of personal achievement amongst teachers. This aspect must be addressed to prioritize educators' well-being, which is essential for maintaining effective job performance. Addressing these stressors is crucial to creating a supportive work environment that enables teachers to perform at their best and sustain their professional roles. Nevertheless, I have investigated this concern in this study to gain perspective of the way teachers navigated their well-being during the lockdown as a result of the challenges it presented.

Exploring wellbeing in this study was crucial, particularly in understanding the broader implications it has on individuals' functioning, productivity, and overall quality of life. Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept encompassing physical, emotional, social, and psychological health (Bautista et al., 2023), and can significantly influence how individuals perform in various environments, including the workplace. In the context of teaching, wellbeing impacts how teachers balance work demands, manage personal life, and cope with stress. Baluyos et al. (2019) denote that job satisfaction in teachers is closely associated with higher levels of work performance and commitment, identifying factors such as job security, supervision, and the work environment as key contributors to teachers' overall satisfaction.

In particular, subjective well-being, as defined by Diener et al. (1997 as cited in Proctor, 2014), provides insight into how individuals perceive their life experiences, helping to differentiate between those who are generally content and those who frequently encounter negative emotions. This distinction is vital for identifying how teachers perceive their roles and cope with challenges in their profession. High subjective well-being is associated with greater life satisfaction, more positive emotions, and fewer negative emotional states, whereas low subjective wellbeing may

signal dissatisfaction and emotional distress (Diener et al., 1997 as cited in Proctor, 2014). Understanding these dynamics is essential for improving teacher retention, performance, and overall wellbeing within educational settings, which I hope this study will do by contributing to existing literature on this subject matter.

Additionally, by considering the feelings educators were faced with and the intensity at which they felt those emotions, this perspective assists in understanding the broader impact on their wellbeing, which is inclusive of analysing whether the challenges they experienced led to lower or higher levels of wellbeing, dependent on the quality and intensity of their emotional experiences.

2.4.1.2 Changes in the job duties and responsibilities of teachers

Esteve (1989 as cited in Travers & Cooper, 1996) identified five significant changes that occur in a society that add pressure and stress to teachers.

The evolving role of teachers and the shifting dynamics of traditional agents of social integration have significantly increased educators' responsibilities, often without the necessary resources or training to meet these new demands. One crucial challenge is the growing contradictions in teachers' roles, as they are expected to act not only as educators but also as helpers, friends, colleagues, and disciplinarians. Balancing these multiple roles adds to their stress and impacts their overall wellbeing. Additionally, when teachers take on roles such as motivators or friends to their students, it is often driven by their commitment to their learners' success and academic achievement. Similarly, maintaining positive relationships with colleagues is essential for fostering a supportive work environment. However, when teachers struggle to meet these expectations or feel overwhelmed by the demands of these roles, it can lead to significant stress and emotional strain (Agyapong et al., 2022). This highlights the need for better support systems and training to help teachers navigate their expanding responsibilities while maintaining their wellbeing.

2.4.1.3 Coping strategies

Given the challenges of working from home during the pandemic, such as social isolation and psychological stress (Viner et al., 2020), coping strategies became crucial. MacIntyre et al. (2020)

outline how teachers typically rely on emotional support and stress-relieving activities to cope with work-related stress in periods outside of the lockdown. These coping mechanisms, which include seeking social support and engaging in relaxing activities, continued to play a role for teachers navigating the pressures of the lockdown (Paredes-Ruvalcaba, 2023).

2.5 Education in South Africa during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of schools in South Africa, starting with the national lockdown on March 26, 2020, as part of efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus (see Figure 1 for timelines). By March 18, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that 107 countries had closed schools, affecting around 862 million children globally (Viner et al., 2020). In South Africa, the closure of schools impacted the education system significantly, disrupting the learning and teaching process for millions of learners.

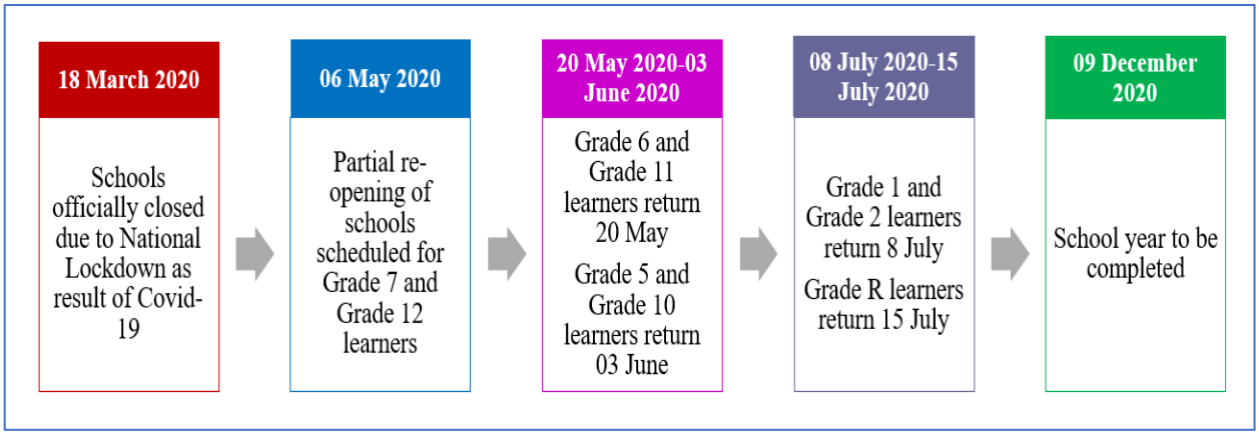


Figure 1: Timeline of schools re-opening

School closures are commonly seen as an effective public health strategy during outbreaks, as shown in past influenza pandemics (Viner et al., 2020). However, the situation in South Africa was complex. Despite the health rationale behind school closures, the expected link between the reopening of schools and a rise in COVID-19 infections did not materialize. Initially, schools were scheduled to reopen on May 6, 2020, but due to mounting concerns from the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), this date was postponed. The rise in infections and deaths during this period delayed the reopening, with schools finally reopening on June 3, 2020, following

significant negotiations. Unfortunately, the reopening was not smooth, and schools had to close again by July 27, 2020, due to inadequate preparation for ensuring the safety of students and teachers (ENCA, 2020).

The emotional and physical toll on teachers was immense. Many teachers were concerned about their health due to comorbidities, leading to temporary replacements for those unable to return to the classroom (SABC News, 2020). Teachers also faced a significant emotional burden as they navigated the repeated cycles of opening and closing schools. Some teachers struggled with burnout, stress, and a lack of support (Agyapong et al., 2022), while others found ways to adapt to online learning platforms. However, these solutions were not universally accessible. Educators were deeply concerned about learners in underprivileged areas who lacked access to reliable internet, technology, and home support for remote learning (Chomunorwa et al, 2022).

The inequalities within the South African education system were starkly highlighted during the pandemic. Privileged families, particularly those with access to private schools, were better positioned to support their children through online learning, with access to essential resources like the internet, laptops, and dedicated spaces for learning. In contrast, learners from underprivileged backgrounds faced significant barriers to remote education due to a lack of access to these resources (Soudien et al., 2021). Some interventions, such as educational broadcasts on radio and television, were introduced, but these were not sufficient to level the playing field (South African Government, 2020). This exacerbation of existing inequalities demonstrates how the pandemic has intensified the divide between wealthy and disadvantaged learners.

Le Grange (2020) highlighted the broader role schools play, particularly in communities where safety and nutrition are concerns. For children in unsafe neighbourhoods, schools are not only places of learning but also critical sources of safety and security. Schools provide meals and a sense of stability, which became even more vital during the lockdown. Before schools reopened, many students were deprived of the regular meals they would normally receive at school, leaving them vulnerable to hunger. This underscores the crucial role that teachers and schools play beyond education, providing a vital support system for vulnerable learners. Le Grange (2020) emphasized that the role of schools extends far beyond academics; they serve as safe havens for children and provide critical resources that may not be available at home.

As schools navigated the complexities of reopening, the South African government, through the Department of Basic Education, introduced new health measures, including the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) for teachers and learners, to help control the spread of COVID-19 (Chilenga-Butao & Pakade, 2020). These measures aimed to ensure that schools could resume teaching while minimizing the risks associated with the pandemic. However, the effectiveness of these measures was mixed, with many schools struggling to meet the necessary health and safety standards.

The decision to reopen schools was influenced by several factors, including the institutional coordination between education authorities and health experts, as well as the growing recognition of the importance of schools in supporting the psychosocial development of learners. The Minister of Education at the time, Ms. Angie Motshekga, supported the reopening, citing the critical role schools play in providing a safe environment for learners, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds (The Big Debate South Africa, 2020, as cited in Chilenga-Butao & Pakade, 2020). The reopening of schools after the lockdown was critical in ensuring that children in South Africa continued to receive essential support, including access to nutritious meals. Schools, through programs like the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), play an important role in addressing food insecurity, which directly impacts children's nutritional health, learning ability, and overall wellbeing. These feeding programs have been shown to improve school attendance, concentration, and academic performance (Department of Basic Education, 2025). The reopening of schools during the pandemic allowed these feeding programs to resume and support children's nutrition.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep flaws in the South African education system, particularly in terms of resource allocation and support for teachers and students. While the closure and subsequent reopening of schools were driven by public health considerations, the education sector faced immense challenges in ensuring equitable access to learning. The pandemic highlighted the complex role of teachers and schools in society, illustrating that their functions extend far beyond education alone. Teachers not only educate but also contribute to the wellbeing of their communities by providing safety, stability, and support for learners during difficult times (Le Grange, 2020).

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research methods and instrument

According to Dehalwar and Sharma (2023), qualitative research involves the exploration and interpretation of the complexities of human interactions, behaviours, and social phenomena through the analysis of non-numerical data. I chose this approach due to its capacity to acknowledge the subjective nature of human experiences, and its data collection techniques facilitate the acquisition of rich, detailed, and in-depth information (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2023). This approach proved conducive to analysing and comprehending the phenomena examined in this study.

Qualitative research provides a deep analysis of human experiences and social contexts. It aims to equip new researchers with the skills for ethical, rigorous inquiry and challenge common misconceptions to broaden understanding of the approach (Lim, 2024). Furthermore, it allows for a deep understanding of human consciousness while uncovering meaningful insights that can shape both theory and practice (Lim, 2024).

Qualitative research employs different methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observation. Interviews can be unstructured, allowing open-ended questions and flexible responses, or structured, where each participant is asked the same set of predetermined questions (Tenny et al., 2022).

For this study, I employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. This method allowed me to follow a predefined thematic guide but also provided me with the opportunity to probe further if needed in order to elicit additional information and clarify ambiguous responses.

The questions were designed based on thematic areas informed by the literature reviewed in this study and aligned with my research objectives. Additionally, the development of these questions was guided by my research question and sub-questions, discussed in chapter one.
These included:

- **Demographic questions** - to ensure a diverse range of perspectives, identify patterns and variations within the data and provide context into the setting and circumstances of the participants' condition during the lockdown
- **General questions** - to understand how teachers understood their professional roles and how they experienced teaching generally
- **Professional identity/job roles** - to understand their perception of teaching, the impact it has on society through the multiple roles teachers play and how this was affected by the lockdown.
- **Wellbeing, motivation and commitment to work** - to investigate the driving forces to work in this sector, particularly after COVID-19, and to determine how they ensured their wellbeing in the profession
- **The impact of the lockdown** - to determine the effects the COVID-19 lockdown had on their profession and general life

Some participants requested the interview guide prior to the interview to familiarize themselves with the questions, while others encountered the questions for the first time during the interviews. A copy of the interview guide is included as an appendix to this report.

In addition to gathering primary data from the participants, I also made use of secondary data in the form of policy documents related to school closures and reopening during the lockdown. These documents also addressed the impact of remote work, sources of stress, and the prospects of education in South Africa.

3.2 Research site, population, and sample

This study collected data from teachers who work in private and public schools in the Northern and Southern parts of Johannesburg, Gauteng. The schools differed in terms of socio-economic

class, with teachers in this study working at underperforming and under-resourced schools, middle-class schools, as well as top-performing, high-quality schools. This selection of participants ensured that I captured diverse perspectives of the experiences of teachers during the lockdown. The schools were located in different areas, including both suburban and township settings. The selection of schools for this study within the South African education system was guided by their socio-economic diversity, reflecting the varying challenges and resources that schools operate under. This approach offered distinct perspectives, enhancing the inclusivity and depth of the research findings by capturing the experiences of educators across different contexts during the COVID-19 lockdown.

To provide further context, I made use of South Africa's quintile system (see Table 1 below), which ranks schools based on community poverty levels and specific infrastructural criteria.

Table 1: Depiction of school quintile categorization

Quintile 1	**Quintile 2**	**Quintile 3**	**Quintile 4**	**Quintile 5**
No-fee paying schools	No-fee paying schools	No-fee paying schools	Fee-paying schools	Fee-paying schools

Quintile 1 schools are in the most impoverished communities, while quintile 5 schools are in relatively wealthier areas. For this research, schools between quintiles 3 and 5 were selected, representing institutions with moderate to higher levels of resources. I aimed to explore how teachers' experiences and challenges differed across these settings.

In addition to socio-economic factors, the schools were chosen for their varying environments, educational cultures, and the diversity of their teachers in terms of age, race, and experience. Accessibility and the distinct characteristics of these schools, including their educational quality, also influenced the selection process. For ethical and confidentiality reasons, the names of the schools are not disclosed in this study.

Although this study was conducted during alert level 1 of the lockdown, the research study was virtual because it was convenient for participants and could mitigate safety concerns surrounding

in-person interactions. I held interviews via WhatsApp video calls, Google Meet, and phone calls. Furthermore, although all participants were based in Johannesburg schools, 1 participant was in Durban, having travelled there at the time of the interviews in November 2020. This participant was a teacher at a Johannesburg-based school and hence included in the sample. Interviews were conducted in November 2020, January and April 2021.

During the interviews, I took written notes but also utilized a voice recorder to facilitate accurate and efficient transcription after the interview, especially for details that were not captured in my notes. Participants provided consent for the recordings, which are securely stored on an iCloud drive.

The population for this study was purposively selected, focusing on female teachers, a term I use throughout this study as it reflects the gendered nature of the profession. Women, in particular, face unique challenges in balancing professional and caregiving responsibilities, particularly during the COVID-19 lockdown (Thébaud et al., 2024). According to the Department of Basic Education (2022), there were 392,773 teachers employed by the government in 2022, with women making up the majority. In public schools, 71% of teachers (278,858) are female, while 29% (113,915) are male. However, only 39% of school principals are women. Given the significant representation of women in the teaching profession, especially in South Africa (Davids & Waghid, 2020), I selected women who lived with families or had family-related responsibilities during the lockdown. This enabled me to explore how their dual roles impacted their wellbeing and teaching effectiveness.

To gather data, the sample was selected using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. Convenience sampling involves collecting data from a population that is easily accessible to the researcher (Rahi, 2017, as cited in Golzar et al., 2022). This method ensured that participants were readily available and willing to take part in the study. At the same time, purposive sampling was employed to specifically identify participants who were relevant to the study, particularly those with the necessary characteristics and experiences to provide rich, detailed insights. The combination of both methods ensured that the study balanced ease of access with the inclusion of knowledgeable and insightful participants.

This study involved eleven female teachers from both public and private high schools in Johannesburg, South Africa. While I faced challenges with my sample, which I discuss in detail in section 3.5 of this chapter, I adhered to the principle of data saturation. Creswell & Creswell (2018) describe data saturation as the point at which the researcher has gathered a sufficient sample, denoting that further data collection would not yield any new insights. Although my initial aim was to interview fifteen teachers, the eleven participants provided enough data to achieve the depth of understanding required for this study.

The decision to focus on high school teachers rather than primary school teachers was due to the nature of teaching at the secondary level, which often requires more structured classroom management strategies. High school teachers also face distinctive challenges because of the complexity of working with adolescent learners who exhibit heightened social dynamics and a growing sense of independence (Masedi et al., 2023). Adolescents require tailored approaches to discipline, motivation, and guidance, given their developmental stage, which is marked by cognitive and emotional changes.

Table 2: Participants' demographics (Five public school teachers)

Participant	Age	Race	Family Dynamic During Lockdown	School Region	Subjects Taught & Grade	Profession Duration
Participant 1	35-45	Black	Married 3 Children	Johannesburg North, Quintile 4	Computer Applications Technology Grade 10-12	2006-Present 15 Years
Participant 2	25-35	Black	Single 1 child	Johannesburg South, Quintile 4	IsiZulu and Life Orientation Grade 8-12	2015-Present 6 Years
Participant 3	35-45	Black	Married 2 children	Johannesburg South, Quintile 4	IsiZulu First Additional Language Grade 8-12	2011-Present 10 Years
Participant 4	45-55	White	Married 1 child	Johannesburg North, Quintile 5	History	1993-Present 28 Years
Participant 5	25-35	White	Single Parents & siblings	Johannesburg North Quintile 5	History and English Home Language Grade 8-12	2018-Present 3 Years

The five private school teachers were selected from different schools in Johannesburg.

Table 3: Participants' demographics (Six private school teachers)

Participant	Age	Race	Family Dynamic During Lockdown	School Region	Subjects Taught & Grade	Profession Duration
Participant 1	25-35	Coloured	Single Mom, Sister & Nephew	Johannesburg South, Quintile 3	Life Sciences and Mathematics Grade 9-10	2015-Present 6 Years
Participant 2	35-45	Black	Single 1 child	Johannesburg South, Quintile 4	History and English Home Language Grade 10-12	2010-Present 11 Years
Participant 3	45-55	Black	Married 3 children	Johannesburg South, Quintile 3	English Home Language and First Additional Language Grade 10-12	1998-Present 23 Years
Participant 4	45-55	Black	Divorced 2 children	Johannesburg North, Quintile 4	English and Geography Grade 8-9	1993-Present 28 Years
Participant 5	45-55	Black	Widowed 2 children	Johannesburg South, Quintile 3	Consumer studies Grade 10-12	2006-Present 15 Years
Participant 6	35-45	Black	Single 1 child	Johannesburg North, Quintile 5	English home language Grade 10-11	2003-Present 18 Years

The six teachers were also chosen from various schools across Johannesburg.
Eleven teachers from eleven different schools (six private, five public) was the final study sample.

3.3 Data analysis

The data in this study was analysed using thematic analysis, a widely recognized qualitative research method initially developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke for Psychology Research (Caulfield, 2023). This method involves the systematic identification and examination of recurring patterns, themes, and concepts within qualitative data. By focusing on the patterns that emerge across the data, this approach enables researchers to generate deeper insights and a richer understanding of the underlying meanings and experiences that shape the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Elliott, 2018; Thomas, 2006, as cited in Naeem et al., 2023). This method allows for flexibility in its application, making it particularly useful in exploring complex phenomena and uncovering both explicit and implicit themes that may not be immediately evident in the data
It allowed me to organise the large volumes of qualitative data that I collected into manageable content without compromising on the quality of the data. Studying teachers across two diverse contexts, private and public schools, facilitated a deeper understanding of the commonalities and differences in their experiences, contributing to a more comprehensive analysis of the data.

Additionally, in this study, I undertook an interpretivism epistemological stance where I valued subjective meaning and individual participant perspectives. Interpretivism emphasises the importance of understanding the meanings individuals attach to their actions and interactions within social and cultural contexts. Rather than seeking universal laws, interpretivists intend to uncover the underlying motives, beliefs, and meanings that drive human behaviour and social participation (Elster, 2007; Walsham, 1995; Whitley, 1984, as cited in Chowdhury, 2014). This is usually common in a qualitative study, particularly when exploring emotional, personal or social phenomena like I have done in the context of teaching, wellbeing and adaptation.

3.4 Ethical considerations

As noted by Bos (2020, cited in Mirza et al., 2023), ethics guide researchers in distinguishing right from wrong and inform decisions on data collection and analysis (Mirza et al., 2023). This study upheld ethical standards, including anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and transparency. Participants received an information sheet and consent form outlining these principles before data collection. Anonymity was ensured using numbered identifiers, and participation was voluntary, with no incentives and the option to withdraw at any time. Interviews were conducted sensitively, avoiding harm, while data was securely stored on a password-protected iCloud drive, accessible only to my supervisor and I. Copies of the participant information sheet and consent form are included as appendices.

3.5 Study limitations

I encountered some obstacles during the data collection phase. In the proposal, I planned to interview eight public school teachers and seven private school teachers, totalling fifteen teachers. However, this plan had to be amended to five private school teachers and six public school teachers due to difficulties in securing participation from private school teachers. This adjustment ensured a sufficient sample size for qualitative methods while maintaining reliability and validity. According to Hennink & Kaiser (2022), data saturation is commonly taken to indicate that, based on the data collected or analysed thus far, further data collection and/or analysis is not necessary. As previously discussed, given the depth of insights gathered from the participants, the information obtained from the eleven teachers was sufficient for meaningful qualitative analysis.

Some of the private school teachers initially selected for this study ceased communication days before their scheduled interviews without explanation and ultimately did not participate. This unexpected lack of response affected my ability to collect, transcribe, and analyse data within the planned research timeline and required me to find new participants. As a result, time constraints and participant availability posed challenges during the study. However, despite these limitations, the data gathered from the participants was sufficient for a meaningful analysis of the phenomena under investigation and aligned with the objectives of the research.

CHAPTER 4:

THE ANALYSIS OF TEACHER EXPERIENCES DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of the study based on an analysis of the data collected. The results are organized thematically; they are aligned with the research questions and follow the themes explored in the interview guide. The themes explored include:

1. The general experience of teaching during the lockdown
    - Teaching roles and the impact of the lockdown
    - Teaching responsibilities and the impact of the lockdown
    - Teaching challenges and the impact of the lockdown
2. Motivations to join and stay in the teaching profession
3. The impact of the lockdown on teachers' wellbeing and factors of stress
4. Coping strategies and perceptions of their roles

4.2 The general experiences of teachers

In this theme, I examined teachers' overall experiences in their professional roles to understand their impact, clarify their responsibilities, and explore the effects of their daily activities, including interactions with parents and learners, assessment responsibilities, and time management. These aspects are integral to their professional duties. With this analysis, I also aimed to provide a broader overview of their general experiences as educators and determine whether their experiences differed during the lockdown.

4.2.1 Teaching roles and the impact of the lockdown

The study's findings align with the literature reviewed in section 2.2.1, which discusses the multifaceted roles of teachers. The data confirms that teachers fulfil various responsibilities beyond those outlined in their job descriptions, emphasizing the complexity of their roles.

> *"We do the pastor's work. We motivate. We encourage… So, our role is not just teaching, it's a lot of things."* (Participant 2, Public School)

> *"Like I said, we don't just teach, we are nurses sometimes, social workers at some point, we are counsellors at some point, pastoral duties at another so that takes a lot."* (Participant 3, Public School)

The quotes from teachers underscore the multifaceted nature of their role, extending beyond academic instruction to include emotional, psychological, and even social support. This highlights the concept of emotional labour in teaching, where teachers have to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics while fulfilling their professional responsibilities. The findings suggest that teachers act as caregivers and counsellors, in addition to simply sharing and facilitating academic knowledge. Day & Gu (2010) similarly highlight that the professional identity of teachers usually encompasses an aspect of emotional labour, as they are involved in the lives of learners not just in the context of teaching in the classroom but also outside those academic duties.

This acknowledges the unspoken responsibilities teachers become involved in to cultivate their learners' wellbeing and development. Their references to providing emotional support and addressing social issues suggest that teaching is not restricted to the classroom but that it is integrated deeply with broader societal challenges.

In discussing the results of the study, it is important to highlight the significant challenges teachers faced in fulfilling their multifaceted roles during the lockdown. Teachers are often the primary source of emotional support, motivation, and discipline for many students, particularly when parents are unavailable due to work or other commitments. Đurišić & Bunijevac (2017) strongly support the argument that teachers have an important role in learners' emotional and academic wellbeing, particularly when the involvement of parents is limited as a result of external pressures. They acknowledge that many families have overwhelming and inconsistent work schedules that hinder them from fulfilling their parental obligations. However, in their research, Đurišić & Bunijevac (2017) show that parental involvement is often misunderstood as it is a topic that is still being debated, and thus suggests that while teachers require the support of parents for their learners, they end up taking on more responsibility to provide their learners the relevant emotional and academic support.

While this research emphasizes the importance of the role of teachers, it does not imply that they should fully replace parental involvement, which is evident in these findings when some teachers felt compelled to show up for their learners in ways that their families are not able to.

The shift to online learning created additional barriers, making it difficult for teachers to maintain these roles. Participants in this study reported considerable difficulty in engaging with students and providing the emotional and psychological support they typically offer in face-to-face settings.

The absence of non-verbal cues, such as body language, facial expressions, and emotional states—especially when students kept their cameras off—compounded these challenges. Teachers, accustomed to interpreting these cues to gauge student moods and provide timely feedback, were unable to do so effectively in the virtual environment. This lack of visual and emotional feedback hindered teachers' ability to offer the support and affirmation necessary for fostering student wellbeing and maintaining a positive learning environment. These findings underscore the critical role that non-verbal communication plays in the teaching process and the unique challenges posed by the shift to online learning. One private school teacher noted this experience:

> *"…and you also spend about a good 10 minutes trying to get them to speak themselves and they'll refuse to show an image of themselves, so you kind of spend a good 10 minutes to get them to "please switch on your cameras, unmute your mic, I want you to talk to me" so getting the personal contact, for them to interact, it was not there. We lost them you know. And also, because you can't see their facial expressions, when they're in class you can see that "no man, this child is confused, but now camera off and muted, you can't really tell."* (Participant 3, Private School).

In analysing the results of this study, it becomes evident that the emotional and caregiving roles teachers assume are integral to their professional identities and their learners' overall wellbeing. The concerns teachers expressed about their learners' home environments and nutritional needs point to the broader socio-economic challenges that many learners face, which often go beyond the scope of traditional academic support. Participant 4 (Public School) raised this concern.

> *"Others (learners) come from child-headed homes, others are coming from abused families, others' parents are maybe drinking or on drugs, others maybe find themselves in*

> *areas where poverty is major there, so you don't just deal with one area of a child, but you try also get into the child's shoes and try to shape that child to a whole human being. You don't just work on the side of teaching…"* (Participant 4, Public School)

The role of teachers as in loco parentis (in place of a parent) takes on added significance in this context. Teachers focus on their learners' physical and emotional care, especially when external support systems, such as family or community resources, are limited. The worries expressed by teachers about their learners' access to meals during the lockdown are a clear reflection of the fragility of the safety nets that some students rely on, further emphasizing that the physical borders of the profession of teaching, which is a school, makes this a safe environment and a place of comfort and security for countless learners who come from vulnerable homes (Darawal & Hernandez, 2020). Ibarra (2022) agrees with this perspective; she found that teachers are crucial in establishing learning environments that foster a sense of belonging for learners, which means they have to balance their academic facilitation with supportive classroom communities in which the learners will find safety and solace. Ibarra (2022) similarly highlights that the pandemic intensified the need for teachers to attend to the social and emotional needs of learners, resulting in embedding strategies relating to social-emotional learning (SEL), which would promote wellbeing amongst the learners. Moreover, this process of prioritising SEL has been associated with improved performance academically and socially, which has contributed to the holistic success of the learners (Ibarra, 2022). This supports my study findings, highlighting the multifaceted role of teachers in caring for their learners.

> "*...that really made me stress a lot and also because some of them get their meals when they're at school, so now I was even worrying about their health-have they eaten? Are they okay? You know, stuff like that but then I realized that it's out of my power, I just need to relax and hope all goes well."* (Participant 4, Public School)

These findings also highlight the severity of the impact of the lockdown. While some schools provide meals to students, the disruption caused by the lockdown emphasized how dependent some students are on these resources for their wellbeing. Nevertheless, the results suggest that the challenges faced by teachers during the lockdown went far beyond the logistical issues of online learning. Teachers were forced to grapple with the emotional impact of seeing students'

vulnerabilities but lacked the tools and structures to provide the necessary care. Fundamentally, the findings underline the essential role of empathy and care in the teaching profession, especially during times of crisis. Teachers' concerns about their students' wellbeing during the lockdown offer valuable insights into the broader responsibilities they assume, which are often overlooked in discussions focused solely on academic outcomes. The emotional investment demonstrated by teachers indicates the humanitarian aspect of teaching, further emphasizing the need for systemic changes to support educators in fulfilling these diverse roles.

I also sought to explore the roles that teachers play in shaping and contributing to the functioning of society. Drawing on the idea that teachers create supportive environments that improve the confidence, resilience and sense of belonging for learners—which are essential for motivation and achievement - the data revealed that teachers play a crucial role in motivating students, nurturing their aspirations, and guiding them toward various professions that contribute to societal development. As one participant noted, teachers possess the "power" to shape and sustain a healthy and prosperous society by fostering the potential of future generations.

> *"I think teachers are very important in society and in a child's growth. And the funny thing is teachers have the power to make or break a child, and it all lies in how they treat their learners."* (Participant 1, Public School)

Most professional development results from the knowledge transfer and dissemination that occurs throughout an individual's education and academic journey, which spans many years of learning and development. This process is vital for shaping careers, as it not only equips individuals with the necessary knowledge but also helps develop essential skills and values. Thus, teachers, as the primary facilitators of this knowledge transfer, play a crucial role in shaping the future workforce. By providing guidance, teachers influence students' career choices and aspirations. They not only impart subject-specific knowledge but also foster critical skills such as problem-solving, communication, and resilience—qualities that are essential for future success in the workforce. Moreover, through their encouragement and mentorship, teachers help learners recognize their potential and align their career goals with their talents and interests. In this way, teachers contribute to the formation of professional identities, preparing learners to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society's social, economic, and cultural fabric. This is reflected below:

> *"Educators play a vital role in society, they shape society. They play an important role of being both parents and teachers. We are the ones who dare our learners to dream and make them realise that those dreams are attainable. It's through what we say and do that determines that kind of society that we have. It's through inspiring, motivating, showing integrity, and always remaining positive that we produce confident, hard-working, and resilient young adults. Also, we make or break society as teachers. We are the cornerstone of society because every single…I know this is cliché but it's also true, teaching is the mother of all professions. Every single doctor, psychologist, etc-they've had a teacher in their lives so it's important because we are the ones that need to inspire them to dream."* (Participant 2, Public School)

Essentially, the evolving nature of global economies and technological advancements has placed increasing pressure on education systems to equip students with skills surpassing traditional academic knowledge, such as critical thinking, adaptability, and digital literacy. Lastly, teachers are essential in ensuring that future generations are equipped with both the technical skills required and the broader competencies to navigate an increasingly complex, rapidly changing, and interconnected world.

This section highlights the multifaceted roles that teachers play, which extend beyond their traditional academic responsibilities to include emotional care and mentorship and ultimately contribute to shaping future generations. This section also reflects the theory of structural functionalism in that it underscores the important role that teachers play in the maintenance and continuity of society by carrying out crucial functions beyond transferring academic knowledge within the borders of the classroom. While the disruption caused by the lockdown affected some of these additional duties, the findings emphasize that teachers remain pivotal figures in the development of their learners and in the long-term progress of society.

4.2.2 Teaching responsibilities and the impact of the lockdown

According to the Western Cape Education Department (2022), a teacher's duties are multifaceted, comprising of teaching, administrative duties, and interaction with stakeholders. Their main responsibilities include delivering lessons, assessing academic progress, and maintaining a positive learning environment. Teachers also engage in extracurricular activities, administrative

tasks like coordinating stock and timetabling, and participating in school governance. Part of their responsibilities is to contribute to the professional development of colleagues, engage with parents, collaborate with colleagues, and stay informed about educational developments (WCED, 2022).

During the lockdown, many public school teachers experienced limited interaction with their students, which led to the suspension or modification of some of their responsibilities. The shift to remote learning, together with the disparities in access to digital resources, further limited their ability to engage with learners effectively. However, for other teachers—particularly those in private schools or those who continued teaching through online platforms—their responsibilities increased significantly. These educators faced the challenge of adapting to new modes of instruction while ensuring that learners remained engaged and on track with the curriculum.

> *"It has changed a lot. I use technology more than I did before because we had to start with zoom lessons, using google classrooms, using our phones, WhatsApp groups, things that we didn't really use. We actually never used zoom and google classroom for teaching you know, so we had to start going that route and it wasn't easy. We had to adapt. I mean the anxiety of having to present online, something we had never done before; we had to learn, get new skills, "how do you share screen, how do you upload things" and all of that; and it was all in a rush and talking amongst each other as a staff; you know that support, "how do I do this, how do I do that?" really did help".* (Participant 2, Private School)

The COVID-19 lockdown significantly reshaped teachers' job responsibilities, requiring them to adapt to both instructional and administrative duties in online formats. In many instances, teachers had to cover a greater volume of content within a condensed timeframe to address learning gaps caused by the disruption to traditional schooling. Additionally, they had to navigate the complexities of digital instruction, including managing student participation, adapting teaching materials for online platforms, and compensating for the absence of in-person interaction. The transition to online learning also introduced new administrative tasks, such as tracking student attendance and engagement, maintaining frequent communication with parents, and adjusting to rapidly evolving school policies.

When schools reopened, teachers' responsibilities expanded beyond instruction, facilitation and sharing of knowledge to include enforcing COVID-19 safety protocols. They were tasked with

monitoring social distancing, ensuring mask compliance, and overseeing sanitizing protocols. While some schools assigned brigades or support staff to enforce these measures, many teachers had to integrate these responsibilities into their daily routines, further adding to their workload. However, despite these additional duties, the increased responsibilities were not directly related to curriculum delivery but rather focused on health and safety compliance.

> *"I think it was more [responsibilities], actually. It was a bit more [responsibilities] because you had to do more in a short space of time and you still had to have kids submit things and you have to assess and send back, so the workload was actually a bit more than what you'd normally expect, because you try to push as much as you can and you're still assessing and you need to mark and give feedback."* (Participant 1, Private School)

> *"Also, we had to do more duties such as toilet duty, ensuring the kids are sanitizing, before brigades. Brigades just came like a month ago, cause we have youth brigades assisting us in schools now, but before that we had to ensure that protocol was followed, we had to ensure that social distancing was adhered to, kids are sanitizing, you know? All of these things. We literally had to stand at toilets."* (Participant 3, Public School)

Lengwadia et al. (2024) found that teachers in Mmashadi circuit of the Sekhukhune district in Limpopo were faced with considerable difficulties in managing their newly added duties of enforcing COVID-19 protocols while also trying to make up for the instructional time lost. Baron et al. (2022) also showed the evolving role of teachers and the skills required for their profession during the lockdown. The lockdown underscored that, beyond their traditional skills, teachers needed to develop new skills to adapt to unprecedented disruptions. Digital literacy, flexibility in instructional delivery, and the ability to engage students in virtual settings became essential (Baron et al., 2022).

Ultimately, similar to the roles of teachers, the findings emphasize the multidimensional nature of teachers' job responsibilities and reinforce the need for better institutional support, targeted training, and recognition of the complex duties they perform, particularly during times of disruption. The pandemic has demonstrated that teachers are not only responsible for teaching, but

also for maintaining student wellbeing, enforcing public health measures, and adapting to evolving educational landscapes. These demands highlight the importance of policies that support educators in effectively fulfilling their roles.

Furthermore, teachers also described how resource allocation impacted their job performance. Effective teaching relies on resource availability (Okongo et al., 2015), yet many public school teachers faced significant shortages, exacerbated during the lockdown. Limited access to teaching materials and infrastructure hindered instruction and compliance with COVID-19 safety measures.

> *"So, like, typical example when we're supposed to ensure the kids sanitize, every day, every day, when they walk in the class, they sanitize, you know? There's no damn sanitizer!"* (Participant 1, Public School)

While most participants reported having adequate resources, these were primarily accessible on school premises, restricting remote learning for public school learners during the lockdown phases when they were not in school. Notably, only one participant explicitly cited resource shortages as a challenge, despite well-documented gaps in public education. A 2020 report by Amnesty International revealed that many South African schools lack essential facilities, with over 20,000 public schools not having a laboratory and nearly 18,000 without a library. Similarly, Gamedze & Ruiters (2023) highlighted that a few public schools are fully functional, with many facing problems such as deteriorating infrastructure and the absence of basic learning materials. These resource gaps not only hinder effective teaching but also reflect broader systemic challenges within the education system, thus, this discrepancy may suggest that resource constraints may be normalized or overlooked in teachers' perceptions. Study findings emphasize the important role of institutional support in mitigating resource disparities, particularly in times of crisis.

4.2.3 Teaching challenges and the impact of the lockdown

Teachers described many challenges that they experienced in their profession, ranging from financial concerns to classroom management difficulties. These were general, preceded COVID-19 and remained thereafter too. For example, inadequate remuneration remains a persistent issue, with many educators expressing that their compensation does not reflect the level of effort, responsibility, and expertise required for their role.

> *"One disadvantage of being a teacher is sometimes you get bullied by the children and you feel like you not really worth being a teacher. And again, you find that some of the government policies you don't really like them, but you are forced to work certain hours, supposed to work extra hours but there is no remuneration for those hours worked; especially when you teach grade 12s you find that you put extra work, you put extra hours but there's no remuneration for that. You engage in sports activities, and there's nothing that we get for that extra work that we put in." (Participant 5, Public School).*

Beyond financial constraints, teachers also experience frustration when learners underperform in assessments despite their instructional efforts. This challenge is exacerbated by a lack of parental support and, in some cases, outright disrespect from parents, further complicating classroom management and academic progress.

> *"The behaviour of learners. Sometimes they are so rude and disrespectful and don't listen when you reprimand them. This is stressful because you care about their future, and their wellbeing and so when they seem to not care about doing their work, this can be stressful."* (Participant 4, Public School)

Additionally, poor learner work ethic remains a significant concern, requiring teachers to invest additional effort in motivating disengaged students. Some educators even report instances of bullying by learners, which disrupts the classroom environment and makes discipline enforcement more challenging. These factors collectively highlight the complexities of the teaching profession and the multiple external influences that shape teachers' ability to fulfil their responsibilities effectively.

> "*I think in this day and age you deal with a lot of kids. Some that are interested in being at school and some that are not. So, you have to deal with bad attitude and bad work ethic, uhm, you know? That kind of thing. So, it kind of makes our job difficult because you have kids in the class that don't want to be there so it's like you are forcing them to be there or you are forcing them to do something that they don't to do."* (Participant 2, Private School)

Another challenge for teachers is parental behaviour, particularly when parents perceive that teachers are not meeting their expectations. In a study by Motshusi et al. (2024), the limited

involvement of parents is due to high rates of illiteracy amongst the parents, demanding work schedules, and poor communication between parents and teachers, ultimately having an impact on learners' experiences. My study findings indicate that the lack of parental involvement stems from the high expectations parents have for both their children and teachers. Having made significant financial investments in school fees, parents often expect strong academic performance from their children and a high level of commitment from teachers, which can lead to limited direct engagement in the learning process and affect the children's learning experiences. However, these expectations are not always clearly articulated, leading to misunderstandings and additional stress for teachers. While Motshusi et al (2024) findings do not explicitly corroborate with the data in this study as Participant 2 (private school) highlighted below, this aspect of parental behaviour in their limited involvement is a key challenge for teachers.

> *"[Exhales] You know to be quite honest, it's dealing with parents who are not supportive because they think "we're paying expensive fees, so you do all the work. "We bring our child to you and we pay your salary, so you do what you need to do".* (Participant 2, Private School)

The financial disparity between private and public schools in South Africa may partially explain these differing expectations. Private school fees typically range between R100,000 and R200,000 per year, whereas fee-paying public schools charge between R30,000 and R60,000 annually (BusinessTech, 2021). Consequently, private school parents often expect more personalized attention for their children. However, participants in this study did not provide sufficient explanations for why the treatment of teachers differed between the two schooling environments.

School management also plays a critical role in shaping teacher-parent dynamics. Participants noted that in some instances, school leadership failed to support teachers in justifying their teaching methods or grading practices to parents. This was particularly evident in private schools, where parents' financial contributions to the institution—and, by extension, teachers' salaries—appeared to grant them greater influence over school decisions. As a result, rather than mediating conflicts effectively, school leadership often prioritized maintaining positive relationships with parents, sometimes at the expense of supporting teachers. While this issue was more prevalent in private schools, some participants reported similar experiences in public schools.

> *"I think when you teach in a private school, some people might, uhm disagree with me, but you don't get to be your own person, you don't get to argue your points because at a private sector, the parent kind of rules, so kids get away with lots of things and you as a private school teacher, you need to fix it because remember now the school needs to be okay, the school can't do this and you're not free. I mean like, we don't have unions so, if I've been harassed like that-parents coming in every term to say, "my kid this…"and I really had to change the marks, I mean like, it's sad."* (Participant 2, Private School)

The COVID-19 lockdown further intensified the stress associated with parental expectations. The transition to online learning introduced unique challenges, particularly regarding learner engagement. As discussed in Section 4.2.1, many learners disengaged from lessons by muting their microphones and turning off their cameras, making it difficult for teachers to assess participation. Additionally, parental supervision of learners' schoolwork varied, with some parents struggling to provide adequate support. This lack of oversight contributed to lower academic performance, ultimately leading to an increase in complaints from parents about their children's progress.

> *"And we saw that a lot during the lockdown where parents think if a child is sitting in front of the screen, then he's doing work. When I'd email and say: "I haven't received this work from your child." and they'll be like "but I thought he was working." So, they don't actually verify if the child is working. It breaks my heart to think that we have parents who are not interested in their children's education, they just think that the teacher must do everything."* (Participant 1, Private School).

These findings reinforce the significant role teachers play in learners' development as previously discussed. Teachers not only facilitate academic learning but also fill gaps that arise when parents are not adequately involved in their children's schooling.

> *"Uhm and for my kids, I knew it was never going to be an easy one but my worry was that these kids, like I said to you-I then started to look at my kids individually and I knew that some the kids don't stay with their parents because their parents are always gallivanting, sorry if I may say; and then I started looking at it from a teacher's point of view that if I don't get my assignments from you, obviously I'm going to have some, I'm going to*

understand that I know "she barely gives me my assignments on time when we are face to face, obviously what did I expect?" (Participant 1, Private School)

As a result, teachers assume additional responsibilities, offering guidance and emotional support that might otherwise be provided by parents.

Participants in this study expressed a strong sense of duty toward their learners, often taking on caregiving roles in response to the challenges created by parental absenteeism. Their commitment to ensuring student success highlights the depth of their professional and personal investment in education. However, it also showcases the additional pressures placed on teachers, particularly when their efforts are met with criticism rather than support.

Ultimately, the COVID-19 lockdown provided parents with an opportunity to experience first-hand the complexities of teaching. As they took on more active roles in facilitating remote learning, many gained a deeper appreciation for the teaching profession. This period of increased parental involvement dispelled many misconceptions about teaching being an easy or low-pressure job, reinforcing the crucial role teachers play not only in student achievement but in shaping the future of society. Lastly, with parents becoming more active in the learning of their children during the lockdown, this provided them with a new outlook on how children are socialized through education as explained by structural functionalism. This experience further highlights the interdependence of family and educational institutions in preserving societal norms and ensuring the development of young people.

4.3 Motivation to join and stay in the profession

4.3.1 Motivation to join the profession

Understanding the motivation to become a teacher was key in offering insights into the social and cultural influences that shaped teachers formative years and also helped to contextualize their commitment to making a societal impact. This exploration highlights how personal backgrounds and early experiences shape teachers' motivations, ultimately influencing their roles by informing

their teaching approaches, engagement with learners, and commitment to staying in the field of teaching. Understanding this also provided insight into how they remained motivated, or lacked motivation, during and after the pandemic.

I found that the primary motivation for entering the teaching profession was a deep passion for the role of teachers, the influence they exert within society, and a commitment to making a meaningful impact. Several participants were raised in families with educators or had formative experiences with inspiring teachers during their schooling years, which fostered a desire to contribute positively to learners' lives. This influence extended beyond academic support to include emotional and mental wellbeing, cultivating a desire to "pay it forward" and make a meaningful impact. For others, the intrinsic passion for teaching and the aspiration to impart knowledge served as the decisive factor in their choice to pursue a career in education.

> *"My passion to impart knowledge to others, my eagerness to learn because being a teacher means being a lifelong learner. Most importantly, to contribute meaningfully to a better country though shaping young minds."* (Participant 2, Public School)

> *"Wow, I think it started off in primary school. We all face challenges growing up, and often the child is not heard. And I've had these amazing teachers around me that often went beyond the classroom to make sure that my mental wellbeing is okay, you know? So, that was stroke one."* (Participant 1, Public School)

Teachers do not only facilitate academic instruction but they are also key drivers of social and political transformation. As a result of their role in shaping young minds, they contribute to building a more conscious and engaged society. By integrating discussions on governance, democracy, and social justice into the curriculum, teachers help learners critically analyse societal structures and foster informed perspectives. In many societies, teachers are regarded as key figures capable of initiating positive change in people's lives (Bourn, 2016). They are viewed as natural leaders who can offer guidance on various community matters and are often considered the primary agents through which global social change is promoted and learning is facilitated (Bourn, 2016).

Additionally, the desire to shape human behaviour was a significant factor in career choice, as well as recognising that teaching would offer a meaningful opportunity to guide and influence the development of individuals in society.

> *"...You know, I was at school towards the end of the apartheid era…I was at wits in the early 90s when it was particularly hectic, so it kind of inspired me to be politically aware and guiding people in terms of human behavior so I think it's a mixture-about having really good role models and knowing that actually I always wanted to be around young people."* (Participant 4, Private School)

The reflection above indicates a multifaceted motivation that is defined by both the socio-political context of South Africa and personal aspirations. Being a student during the late apartheid era and attending the University of the Witwatersrand in the early 1990s—a period marked by intense political activism and social upheaval—heightened her political awareness and commitment to social justice. This formative environment influenced her desire to guide others in understanding human behaviour, reflecting an alignment with the values of empathy, awareness, and social responsibility. Moreover, her mention of role models suggests her inspiration not only by broader political movements but also by individuals who exemplified these values, further reinforcing her motivation to work with young people. Both of these aspects suggest that her decision to join the profession of teaching was influenced by an intrinsic desire for social contribution and a response to the specific cultural and historical context of her youth.

The motivation described by these three teachers mirrored the literature which describes passion for the profession and altruism as dominant motivations for joining the teaching profession (Yuce et al., 2013).

A love for children was another major motivator closely linked to the passion teachers have for their profession. According to Vallerand et al. (2003), "Passion is described as a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy" (p.758). Based on this definition, several educators in this study expressed enjoyment in spending time with children, a strong interest in teaching, and a desire to contribute to the growth of society. These findings indicate that passion in teaching is not a one-dimensional concept.

Rather, it is multifaceted, with multiple factors contributing to a teacher's motivation and dedication. Some teachers feel passionate about the direct impact they have on students' lives, while others are encouraged by a broader desire to contribute to societal change. This combination of personal fulfilment, professional commitment, and the pursuit of educational equity underline the complexity of passion as a motivating factor in the teaching profession.

Conversely, I also found that some participants were not as passionate or interested in the profession. For them, teaching appeared to be the only viable career choice that had societal value and was within their capabilities. Participant 6, in particular, resonated with this sentiment, noting that there were limited career options available to her and others at the time.

> *"Basically, initially, I was not very inspired to be a teacher. I feel like where I come from, it was easier to get into the teaching profession, than anything else. So, like after completing my high school, there were so many other opportunities, but it was very difficult to get into other professions, so eventually I decided to go into teaching…"* (Participant 6, Public School)

In current times, this group of teachers who became teachers due to scarcity of career opportunities may have had greater access to a wider variety of career options—such as social media roles or careers in fields like AI and telemedicine—and may have contributed to society from these professional spaces. However, the rise of these alternative careers, which offer greater flexibility, autonomy, and technological engagement, came later and reflect a significant shift in generational career opportunities and expectations (Lyons et al., 2024). This shift emphasizes how career opportunities have evolved, offering younger generations today a broader range of paths aligned with personal and professional goals.

Notwithstanding initial motivations (or lack of) to join the profession, many participants seemed to have "found their purpose" and described enjoying the profession and associated benefits.

> *"…then I realized my purpose when I was already there-that I was in the right place. And I had so much to offer, and I realized that I'm very passionate about teaching. I love children, and it's the best thing that I can ever do, because I've never done anything else*

and I've given my all, so I feel like I was born to be a teacher but initially I did not realize that." (Participant 6, Public School)

In this study, I found that most teachers view teaching as a profession of profound impact and purpose, offering them a sense of fulfilment and meaning that leads to a satisfying career, also highlighted by Bosso (2017) who points out that teachers view their profession as a calling, than a basic job. Essentially, Bosso (2017) suggests that teachers' identities are closely linked to their beliefs, emotions, and the moral mission they experience in their work, resulting in a strong sense of purpose and professional satisfaction. This aligns with the broader motivations these participants have indicated for entering the profession. They often see themselves as key players in shaping the future, with a responsibility to foster both academic and social growth. Through their roles as educators, mentors, and community leaders, they contribute to social development and help students develop values that empower them to meaningfully engage with society. This sense of purpose reinforces the significance of their impact, not just on learners, but on society at large.

4.3.2 Motivation to stay in the profession

Despite the strong motivational factors teachers for joining the profession, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 lockdown encouraged me to explore what motivated teachers to remain in the profession during and after the pandemic. Specifically, I investigated the factors that kept them engaged and committed to their roles during this unprecedented time.

The motivations discussed earlier for joining the profession, such as a passion for teaching and a desire to positively impact learners' lives, played an important role in why teachers remain committed to the profession, even in the face of challenges like the lockdown. For some participants, the fulfilment received from shaping young minds and fostering both their personal and academic growth continues to inspire and reinforce their intrinsic motivation to stay dedicated to the profession despite the difficulties encountered.

"Whenever I see my students succeed in whatever they do. Be it achieving distinctions in their modules at varsity, becoming poets and thanking me for allowing them to fall in love

with Shakespeare …that's validation that I am certainly doing something right…that is the BEST motivation anyone can ever ask for." (Participant 2, Public School)

"The love for the job just keeps me going you know, until such time that the Lord releases me because I really feel like He still needs me here; maybe there's a life to touch so I don't know, but…I just love it and that keeps me going." (Participant 1, Private School)

For some, job security within teaching, with fewer job cuts compared to other sectors, serves as a strong motivator to remain in the profession. The assurance of regular income, even during periods of limited work—such as the lockdown (for teachers who were not actively working)—further reinforces this commitment. During the lockdown, many public school teachers continued to receive their salaries, except for those paid by the School Governing Bodies as some schools did not receive payments during the lockdown due to some parents losing employment as a result of lockdown (du Plessis, 2020). This financial stability provides a sense of security that encourages long-term dedication to the profession.

"You know, at least I still have a job, I'm still getting paid. Some people are at home and when they're at home, they're not getting a salary. I was getting a full salary, even though I wasn't really working. So, that shows me again that teaching is a safer place to be, rather than in the big companies out there where they tell you, "no job, no pay." So that motivated me to say: "I think I've made the right choice with teaching." (Participant 3, Public School)

Building on the earlier discussion in section 4.3.1 about limited career and opportunities for some participants when joining the teaching profession, Participant 5' remarked: *"Because I have nothing else to do, I'm forced to do this. There's nothing else I can do outside of this."* (Participant 5, Public School) She shared that her motivation to remain in teaching derives from the reality that teaching is the only career path she feels capable of pursuing. This statement reflects how external factors, such as a lack of alternative career options, can influence not only the decision to enter the profession but also the commitment to remain in it despite challenges. For some, teaching becomes not just a calling but also a practical necessity, shaping their professional trajectory and identity.

This study reveals that while motivation may differ for some teachers, they still share common themes such as flexibility, job security, a passion for teaching, and a deep commitment to positively impacting the world. These motivations are consistent across both public and private school settings, reflecting the universal drive to contribute to the wellbeing of learners and society.

4.3.2.1 Advantages of the teaching profession

In addition to examining the motivational factors to remain in the profession, I investigated the advantages of the teaching profession because they often serve as reinforcing elements for teachers' commitment. When teachers experience job security, professional growth opportunities, and the satisfaction of making an impact, these benefits help them manoeuvre challenges and remain in the field. In particular, teachers' personal fulfilment, sense of purpose, and the emotional rewards of nurturing students' growth and contributing to societal change can enhance their motivation to stay in the profession, even during difficult times. Understanding these factors was therefore important with how they coped and managed their professional and personal responsibilities during and after the pandemic. Given the disruptions of the COVID-19 lockdown, exploring these aspects provided insight into their resilience, motivation, and the extent to which external support —such as school leadership and resources—influenced their experiences in both public and private schools.

One of the advantages of teaching that participants highlighted was the profession's perceived work-life balance. The ability to have structured working hours and time off during school holidays was seen as a major benefit, allowing teachers to spend quality time with family and manage personal responsibilities. While the lockdown disrupted this balance—particularly for female educators who had to juggle remote teaching with increased caregiving duties—some participants still acknowledged that this field of teaching provided more flexibility compared to other careers, thus suggesting that, despite periods of crisis, the overall structure of the profession's flexibility is something that many teachers continue to appreciate, even when faced with challenges.

> *"Because I'm a family person, I love to have time for my family, and I don't want to find myself working at night or working awkward hours, like over 12 hours. Advantages are the hours. You work reasonable hours, and you don't work over the weekend and every holiday you're at home."* (Participant 3, Public School)

Lastly, being a teacher offers opportunities for personal growth through interactions with learners. The profession encourages continuous reflection, adaptation, and development, enabling teachers to respond to the evolving needs of their learners and the education system. This dynamic aspect of teaching nurtures both professional and personal growth, keeping teachers engaged and motivated. It creates a continual process of learning and self-improvement, by engaging in current affairs and stay up to date with the latest advancements in society, allowing teachers to feel fulfilled and inspired by their learners.

> *"So, advantages I think would be that: being around people, you always think fresh and think young. You don't kind of get stuck in being out of touch with what's really happening with people. Generational changes happen, so I think the advantages are the freshness, the youngness."* (Participant 4, Private School)

The lockdown disrupted many of the personal growth opportunities that teachers typically experience through their relationships with learners. As previously discussed in section 4.2.1, I noted a similarity in that the shift to remote learning and the isolation of teachers from their students hindered the dynamic, interactive aspect of teaching. Teachers found it challenging to engage in the reflective practices they are accustomed to, as the immediate feedback and adaptation to learners' needs were limited. Additionally, the lack of in-person connections with learners prevented teachers from experiencing the fulfilment that comes from personal growth through fostering relationships with their learners.

The findings indicate that teachers are motivated by an amalgamation of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsically, teachers are driven by the desire to shape lives and contribute to societal transformation. Extrinsically, they are motivated by aspects like job security and professional connections. Moreover, teaching offers significant advantages such as personal growth through relationships with learners, job stability, and a balanced work-life dynamic. Despite the disruptions caused by the lockdown, teachers' commitment underscores the profession's importance as a meaningful, purpose-driven career that nurtures both personal fulfilment and societal impact.

4.4 Teachers experiences of stress and the impact of the lockdown on their wellbeing

Investigating teacher wellbeing during the lockdown was important, as the pandemic intensified the psychological strain educators already carry. The sudden shift to remote learning, increased home responsibilities, particularly for female teachers, and uncertainties about the future placed additional strain, impacting their effectiveness and ability to support learner development. Given that teacher wellbeing directly affects the quality of education that learners receive and the learning environment, this study examined how the lockdown either made their challenges worse or, in some cases, eased them. The findings thus offer crucial insights into how resilient teachers were during this period. It also highlights the kinds of support systems that are necessary to help them cope and continue performing their roles effectively.

To thoroughly investigate this aspect, I explored the experiences of stress experienced by teachers and inquired about their personal understanding of wellbeing. Additionally, I analysed the wellbeing strategies they implemented during the lockdown to manage the stress and challenges they experienced.

I found that teachers experienced wellbeing as a multidimensional concept comprising of mental, spiritual, and physical health. They closely associated wellbeing with their overall quality of life, with the potential to influence various personal and professional aspects of their lives. Wellbeing not only affects an individual's ability to navigate daily responsibilities but also flows beyond the self, influencing interactions and experiences in both home and work environments, either in a positive or negative way (Litchfield et al,. 2016).

> *"I think it's being mentally and physically well, healthy. Mental health is a really important issue, currently. People are going through depression and things like that, so wellbeing is so, so important because if you are not well, whether (health wise) physically or mentally then it means you're not functioning properly, you know. So, it's an important factor in a person's life; how they live, and the quality of the life that they live. Is it good? Is it something that every individual has access to you? So, for me wellbeing, it's spiritual, it's physical, it's mental, and if there's one area that is not well, it's going to affect your*

performance at home, at work or in life in general so it's quite important" (Participant 2, Private School)

For some, the break the lockdown brought from the usual demands of the classroom provided a much-needed respite, offering them the time to restore their energy and renew their sense of purpose, which may have had a positive impact on their long-term wellbeing and professional outlook.

"The lockdown helped in a way just to slow me down a bit, because we were so busy. My husband and I also do ministry and so our weekends were always busy, so the lockdown actually helped us to slow down a bit and just be at home and not travel on weekends, just be at home, so it really helped me just to slow down and to relax. Even though, I was a bit overstretched in terms of work and home life, but I just preferred being at home than being all over the place." (Participant 2, Private School)

The topic of teacher wellbeing during the COVID-19 lockdown reveals the deep and multifaceted impact the pandemic had on educators. The primary stressors faced by teachers were not only related to their usual professional duties but were magnified by the heightened risks and uncertainties posed by the virus. The fear of contracting COVID-19, especially in a school environment, added a layer of emotional distress. This fear, combined with the challenges of enforcing safety protocols in schools, disrupted their sense of security and stability, both from a personal and professional perspective, as many teachers were balancing work with home life, which likely exacerbated the overall stress they were experiencing.

The participants emphasized that teaching is an inherently stressful profession, not only due to the demands of their formal job responsibilities but also due to the fact that it requires a deep personal investment. They indicated that being a teacher goes beyond instructional duties; it requires the continuous application of one's emotional, intellectual, and psychological resources. Teachers often bring their whole selves—mind, soul, and personal experiences—into their work, fostering meaningful connections with students while simultaneously managing administrative pressures, performance expectations, and the emotional complexities of the role. This holistic engagement contributes to the intensity of the profession, further encapsulating the many roles that they fulfil.

"It is stressful, because I don't just carry my own problems or challenges, I carry a lot of the learners' challenges as well because these learners come from different places…you don't just work on the side of teaching, but you work on the mind, and soul, and the spirit of the child so it is really draining for teachers. " (Participant 3, Public School)

Based on this, I also asked the teachers to identify the significant sources of stress they experienced during the lockdown and how these challenges affected their overall wellbeing. Many participants expressed concerns about the intensified fear of contracting the virus, which not only created anxiety about their own health but also about the wellbeing of their families, colleagues, and learners. This fear was heightened by the uncertainty surrounding the evolving nature of the pandemic, inconsistent safety measures, and the pressure to balance their professional responsibilities with personal health precautions.

The fear of returning to work further exacerbated their distress, as many teachers were deeply concerned about the heightened risk of exposure within the school environment. Enforcing strict health protocols in classrooms was challenging, and the possibility of contracting the virus from students or colleagues remained a constant worry. Beyond personal health risks, teachers also feared spreading the virus to vulnerable family members, which added to their emotional burden. The lack of clarity on long-term safety policies and the unpredictability of the pandemic further contributed to their stress.

Additionally, the demands of adapting to remote teaching, managing increased workloads, and addressing the emotional needs of learners intensified their exhaustion and vulnerability. Collectively, these stressors had a profound impact on their mental and emotional wellbeing, affecting their ability and willingness to effectively perform their roles and maintain stability in both their personal and professional lives.

"There was a time a time when I fell sick and I thought I had COVID and I was terrified to go and test. I did not go and test. I just decided that I'll just go to the doctor, take this as a normal flu and I went to the doctor and I didn't even want the doctor to test me because I wouldn't be able to handle it if they said to me that I contracted COVID. So, I did not test, but what I did is try to separate myself from being in the company of my family, in

case maybe this is COVID then I don't spread but jah, that was my personal challenge." (Participant 3, Public School)

The previous sections have already discussed the multifaceted role of teachers and their deep sense of responsibility for their students' wellbeing. During the lockdown, this concern intensified, as teachers did not only have to navigate their own challenges but they were also worried about the broader impact of school closures on learners. For example, Participant 1 (Public School), who was not actively teaching at the time, expressed significant concern for her learners, particularly regarding their heightened vulnerability to Gender-Based Violence (GBV)—a pervasive issue in South Africa (Govender, 2023).

> *"For some, I was worried about the whole gender-based violence, cause you know they closed the alcohol and smoking cigarettes and whatever? So, obviously I think people were frustrated and things like that and took it out on their families so those are the aspects I felt… the impact I thought lockdown would have on learners."* (Participant 1, Public School)

According to Ostadtaghizadeh et al. (2023), the COVID-19 period exacerbated key factors contributing to the rise in GBV incidents, including limited social support for women and girls, economic insecurity due to women's employment in the informal and private sectors, and gender inequality rooted in patriarchal norms. Systemic failures, such as inadequate police responses and a lack of effective prosecution, further perpetuated the problem. Economic hardships, male unemployment, and women's dependence on men also fuelled domestic tensions. Additionally, substance abuse, the digital divide, and insufficient legal frameworks left many women vulnerable, while societal normalization of violence and previous abusive relationships further entrenched the cycle of GBV (Ostadtaghizadeh et al., 2023).

Furthermore, alcohol abuse is a prevalent issue in South Africa (Pengpid et al., 2011) and domestic abuse, particularly in certain homes, worsened during the lockdown. According to Bhavsar et al. (2020), the pandemic led to an increase in domestic violence, with Lentoor & Maepa (2021) noting that confined spaces amplified incidents due to factors like income loss, stress, and anxiety. Isolation from support networks further enabled abusers to exert more control over victims. This

context reflects Participant 1's concerns above for her learners during the lockdown and highlights this teacher's deep emotional investment for her learners.

The restrictions imposed during the lockdown meant that many learners were confined to unsafe home environments, limiting their access to the protective structure of schools, where teachers play a critical role in identifying and addressing signs of abuse. Adverse childhood experiences, such as maltreatment, poverty, and food insecurity were some challenges likely to be exacerbated for children and young people experiencing mandated social isolation during the lockdown. (Chanchlani et al,. 2020). As discussed by Le Grange (2020) in section 2.6 of this study, the findings corroborate this literature in that the disruptions in education, coupled with the economic and social strain caused by the pandemic, further heightened the risks faced by vulnerable students.

For teachers, the inability to provide direct support to their learners during this period contributed to their own emotional distress. The knowledge that many learners might be facing increased risks of abuse, neglect, or mental health struggles, without the usual avenues for intervention, weighed heavily on educators. This highlights the broader societal role that teachers play beyond academic instruction, underscoring the urgent need for holistic support mechanisms that extend beyond the classroom, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The profession of teaching is often perceived by the public as a relatively low-stress profession, largely due to its distinct working conditions compared to many other fields, particularly in relation to hours of work. In South African schools, the schools times are typically between 08:00 to 14:30 (Western Cape Education Department, 2017).

In South Africa, public schools follow a four-term schedule, with holidays scheduled between each term. Inland schools typically enjoy a two-week break in the first term, while coastal schools close for one week. The second term generally allows for a three-week break, the third term includes a one-week holiday, and the fourth term concludes with a holiday lasting between four and six weeks (Department of Basic Education, n.d). In contrast, private schools, as noted by the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA, 2024), often align with the public school calendar but may adopt their own schedules.

In addition to their regular salaries, many public school teachers in South Africa receive a range of benefits, including housing subsidies, pension contributions, medical aid allowances, and an annual bonus, sometimes referred to as a 13th cheque (Pampallis, 2022). These benefits contribute to the perception that teaching is a relatively comfortable profession, with attractive perks for what is sometimes considered manageable work. However, the reality for many teachers, especially during periods like the COVID-19 lockdown, presents a more complex picture, where the pressures of remote teaching and heightened stress factors challenge the notion of teaching as an easy or stress-free profession.

Therefore, this study, along with previous research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik, (2016) and Bardach et al. (2023) highlight that teaching is, in fact, a highly stressful profession. 10 out of 11 participants reported their work as stressful, citing various factors, namely (a) challenging behaviour from learners and parents, (b) the demands of marking assessments and exams, (c) emotional and mental strain, (d) workplace conditions and location, (e) school management practices, (f) tight deadlines and inadequate preparation time, (f) racism, and (g) insufficient remuneration as significant stressors in their roles. These can directly impact teachers' wellbeing by contributing to burnout and emotional exhaustion.

> *"It's always about time, there aren't enough hours in my day to do what I need to do… And the stress I get from teaching is that I can't be the teacher I want to be, because I just simply don't have the time to do what I simply should be doing for them, so I'm doing okay but I could be so much better if I had the time-the time to consistently sit still and find the apps and readings and kind of motivate them and be there, there's so much more to my job now."*

During the lockdown, these existing stressors were aggravated by the need to quickly adapt to remote learning, creating an added layer of pressure. Teachers found themselves not only managing the usual demands of teaching but also struggling to find creative ways to engage learners online. This shift highlighted a key aspect of teacher wellbeing, which is the ability to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances while maintaining mental and emotional resilience. The lockdown underscored how such stressors, if left unaddressed, could diminish teachers' wellbeing,

affecting their capacity to cope with the emotional demands of their roles and potentially leading to a decline in job satisfaction and performance.

While many teachers described the lockdown as a period of increased stress and emotional strain, some, like Participant 1, viewed it as an unexpected opportunity for rest and rejuvenation. For these teachers, with reduced commuting time, and a change in the pace of their daily routines, some teachers found they could prioritize their own wellbeing, engage in personal activities, and recharge mentally and physically.

In summary, the COVID-19 crisis amplified existing pressures in the teaching profession, denoting the importance of understanding how external crises can affect teachers' ability to perform their roles effectively. The emotional, mental, and physical toll of the lockdown period on teachers highlights the need for ongoing support systems to help sustain their wellbeing in times of crisis. However, some teachers viewed the lockdown period as an opportunity to rest more, allowing them to recharge, which positively impacted their wellbeing. This section shows a correlation to structural functionalism in that the theory perceives society as a system of interconnected parts that work together to maintain stability. Structural functionalism implies that the education system is required to adapt to such disturbances and that the holistic health of teachers has an effect on the entire stability of the education system. This underscores that teacher's wellbeing is fundamental for the functioning of the educational system.

4.5 Coping strategies and perceptions of their roles

I also examined the coping strategies teachers employed during times of crisis. This exploration provided insight into how they navigated the pressures of the lockdown.

4.5.1 Coping strategies

Acceptance emerged as one of the key coping strategies employed by the teachers in the face of change and challenging times, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the context of my study, teachers demonstrated that accepting the reality of the situation—such as the shift to remote learning and the uncertainties of the lockdown—was an essential part of how they managed the emotional and psychological challenges they faced. By acknowledging the limitations and adapting to the new circumstances, many teachers were able to focus on finding solutions and

maintaining a sense of stability for themselves and their students. This strategy of acceptance, while not without its emotional toll, allowed teachers to shift their focus from resistance to proactive adjustment, which played a key role in sustaining their wellbeing during a period of unprecedented stress.

> *"COVID was just like "I'm here" and we had to stop everything. It was just too much and the fact that no one anticipated it, I think if we knew, we would've planned better but now we didn't know, it just happened. So, we had to react, we couldn't be proactive, we just had to react and just see "what do we do now", you know?"* (Participant 2, Private School)

Furthermore, social media emerged as a significant tool in helping teachers navigate the challenges brought on by the lockdown and helping them cope. Beyond serving as a means of communication and connection with students, many teachers turned to social media platforms to seek support from colleagues, share teaching strategies, and access resources that were essential for adapting to remote teaching. Social media provided an outlet for teachers to exchange ideas and experiences, creating virtual communities that fostered a sense of solidarity and mutual support during a time of isolation and uncertainty. Additionally, according to Cauberge et al. (2021 as cited in Cho et al., 2023) multiple studies revealed that the use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic can be advantageous, as it acts as a positive coping mechanism, helping individuals alleviate feelings of anxiety and loneliness (Cauberghe et al., 2021 as cited in Cho et al., 2023), thus it became a crucial factor in sustaining their professional networks, emotional resilience, and a sense of connection, which helped alleviate some of the stress and anxiety brought on by the lockdown.

> *"I think it's just managing my time better and how to draw the boundaries with the children, especially with social media. I mean we used it as a tool to survive COVID-19 and now it can also be misused."* (Participant 8, Private School)

Social media platforms played a crucial role in supporting teachers' wellbeing during the lockdown, by helping them bridge the physical distance created by the pandemic. This created a sense of community, alleviating feelings of isolation and stress that arose as teachers navigated the rapid changes brought about by the lockdown. The exchange of ideas and experiences within virtual communities fostered a sense of empowerment, reinforcing professional identity and

solidarity, which helped ease emotional burdens during this challenging period. This coping strategy also demonstrates that social media can be an essential tool for emotional and professional wellbeing.

Additionally, time management emerged as an important factor in maintaining teachers' wellbeing during the lockdown. The balancing act of remote teaching, managing increased workloads, and personal responsibilities created significant stress. However, effective time management helped teachers to organize their tasks, prioritize self-care, and maintain a more practical work-life balance. These reflections depict the importance of social media as a supportive tool, and time management as a fundamental strategy in maintaining teacher wellbeing during periods of crisis.

While my findings agree with some of the coping strategies discussed by Rajesh et al,. (2022) such as time management, they also mentioned that social support, exercise, religious practices and emotional regulation also serve as coping strategies for teachers in general. These strategies may also be implemented in times of crises.

Furthermore, the ability of teachers being able to regulate their emotions is a critical factor that influences their wellbeing, particularly under high-stress conditions such as the COVID-19 school closures. Emotion regulation (ER), which involves managing one's emotional responses to challenging situations (McRae & Gross, 2020), is important in helping teachers remain effective while navigating increased workloads, uncertainty, and emotional demands from learners. The process model of ER provides a useful framework for understanding how teachers select and implement coping strategies in response to stressors (McRae & Gross, 2020). Notably, strategies like perspective change, reframing stressful events in a more manageable or meaningful way, can alleviate negative emotional impacts and support psychological resilience. In this study, teachers' informal reports of "remaining calm for the learners" or "focusing on what they could control" reflect such emotion regulation processes, emphasizing their role in maintaining wellbeing during unfortunate events.

Recent research in South Africa shows that teachers with stronger ER and resilience skills reported lower psychological distress, regardless of intensified workloads and emotional strain (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2023). However, ER often remains an individual coping mechanism rather than a supported professional skill, raising concerns about equity and long-term

sustainability. Without institutional support for emotional wellbeing, such internal regulation may result in burnout and disengagement. Schools should therefore apply ER capacity-building to wellbeing initiatives and professional development.

4.5.2 Teachers' perceptions of their roles during the lockdown

I also explored how the challenges and experiences of the lockdown period may have influenced teachers' perceptions of their profession. This aspect was particularly important for my study, as the pandemic forced teachers to adapt to a rapidly changing landscape, which may have changed their views on the role of teaching, their sense of professional identity, and the value they place on their work. By examining their reflections of this time, I aimed to gain insight into whether the stress and demands of the lockdown led to shifts in their understanding of their professional responsibilities, job satisfaction, and long-term career aspirations. Understanding how teachers' perceptions of their profession evolved during this crisis provides valuable context for assessing the broader impact of the pandemic on the teaching profession, as well as the long-term implications for teacher retention, morale, and overall wellbeing.

> *"Like I said at first that teaching wasn't something that was on my bucket list. I got into teaching and I loved it, but at some point I got bored. I resigned in 2016 because I really was feeling bored and overwhelmed and stressed and all that, and I thought of maybe changing careers but because I developed this passion for teaching, I went back. So, now during lockdown, I saw our importance in the community, very, very important. We were needed in the communities because you can imagine-parents are panicking and they don't what to do with their children when they are at home and they don't know how to help them, some of them don't even know how to guide their children. So, we were there in that sense so stand in the gap. Again, teaching really showed me that it's a career that I can really trust because as I've mentioned the issue of remuneration, because whether or not you are at work you still get paid, financially you are stable, you don't have to worry about that area of your life so, in a way I think I'm here to stay."* (Participant 6, Public School)

Teachers recognized the significance of their roles, but during the pandemic, they noted that parents and communities came to appreciate their contributions even more deeply. The challenges of the lockdown and the rapid adjustments required by teachers highlighted the crucial role they

play in shaping their learners' academic and personal development. Parents and communities, who were more directly involved in their children's education during the lockdown, gained a clearer understanding of the immense effort and dedication teachers invest in supporting their children. This era demonstrated the complexity of the teaching profession in addition to the profound impact teachers have on learners, as parents and communities witnessed first-hand the difficulties and successes of facilitating education outside the traditional classroom setting. As a result, this heightened recognition of teachers' contributions further reinforced the value of their work in the eyes of those they serve, providing a renewed sense of appreciation and respect for the profession of teaching.

The findings relating to this section also reflect the growing concern among teachers concerning the relevance of traditional education in preparing learners for the rapidly changing world of work. Teachers, particularly in public schools, perceive their roles as increasingly important in equipping students with practical, adaptable skills, such as computer literacy and entrepreneurial abilities, instead of just academic knowledge. This perception emphasizes the evolving nature of teaching, where teachers feel they need to help learners navigate not only the normal pathways to employment but also the broader societal and technological shifts that impact career readiness. One teacher in particular, questioned the traditional emphasis on university degrees, as learners may need skills that are more directly aligned with the demands of modern and evolving work environments.

> *"The only perception that's changed is that we need more help in public schools, we need more drastic change because if we're looking at the learners that we're producing, they are not fully equipped for the way things are changing in the working force; computers are taking over, people are being laid off because a computer can do their job so these kids, if it's not entrepreneurial skills, they need computer skills, they need skills more than they need a university degree in my opinion, they need more than books at this point."* (Participant 3, Public School)

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced teachers' perceptions of their roles as not only educators but also as important influencers of the development of learners. Although teachers have always valued their work, the challenges of the lockdown brought a deeper recognition and

newfound respect and appreciation from parents and communities. Furthermore, the findings in this study reveal growing concerns among teachers regarding the relevance of traditional education in preparing learners for a constantly changing and growing workforce. Teachers, particularly in public schools, feel increasingly responsible for equipping learners with practical skills for today's job market. This shift in focus reflects the need for an educational framework that adapts to societal and technological changes. Teachers' perceptions of their roles, especially their influence on students' cognitive, emotional, and social development, demonstrate the broader function of education in maintaining the order of society. Therefore, teachers are perceived as important agents in the process of social adjustment and the safeguarding of societal equilibrium.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of teachers' roles, which became even more challenging to fulfil during the COVID-19 lockdown. The study shows from a structural functionalist perspective that teachers serve a crucial function in maintaining social stability by facilitating both academic instruction and socialisation. Nevertheless, the disruptions caused by the lockdown revealed structural weaknesses within the education system, more especially regarding the way resources were allocated and how societal expectations influenced the responsibilities of teachers.

Furthermore, parental expectations – especially in private schools – placed additional strain on teachers, while public school teachers often contended with fewer resources and larger class sizes, making remote teaching even more challenging.

The disparities between private and public school experiences highlight the significant role of institutional structures in shaping teachers' ability to navigate crises. Private school teachers generally had better access to technology and institutional support, whilst, public school teachers experienced greater barriers because of financial and infrastructural limitations. Moreover, the findings of this study also revealed that while there are differences between private and public schools, the gap between certain quintile schools - such as quintile 3-5 and private schools is not as vast as might be expected.

From a functionalist perspective, these inequalities depict extensive systemic disparities, in that different parts of society do not have equal access to the necessary tools to carry out their social functions effectively.

These differences can also be examined through the lenses of gender, race, and class theories, as the experiences of teachers from marginalized communities - often women and people of colour - were compounded by pre-existing socio-economic inequalities, which became more pronounced during the pandemic. The structural functionalism theory in this context proposes that when key social institutions, such as schools, experience pressure, existing social inequalities become more pronounced. As discussed in the literature in chapter 2, women, that make up the majority of the teaching profession, often bear a disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities, both in their homes and in the classroom. The challenge of balancing remote teaching for the teachers who could teach with family responsibilities was particularly intensified for the teachers in this study, especially when access to resources was limited.

Despite these challenges, teachers remained dedicated to their profession, driven by both intrinsic motivations - such as shaping young minds and contributing to societal change - and extrinsic factors like job security and professional relationships. Nevertheless, in order for the education system to function effectively, it must be structured in a way that offers equitable support to teachers across the different school environments. These findings emphasize the need for policies that address resource inequities and offer appropriate support for teachers, ensuring their wellbeing and effectiveness, particularly in times of crisis. Recognising the intersection of gender, race, and class is crucial in shaping policies that support teachers holistically, addressing the systemic inequalities that affect both teachers and the learners they are of service to.

Lastly, from a structural functionalist perspective, understanding and addressing the existing inequalities is fundamental for both teachers and the wider stability and development of society because education has a critical foundational role in the coherence of society and the progression of the economy.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study provided a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of teachers during the COVID-19 lockdown. It discussed the multifaceted roles that teachers play, especially during periods of disruption. While teachers have always been recognized for their academic contributions, the findings in this study reveal the additional responsibilities they assume as caregivers, mentors, and community figures. These roles, though fundamental to their profession, became even more pronounced during the pandemic as they adapted to new teaching methods, managed COVID-19 protocols, and navigated challenges such as limited resources and disengaged learners.

The findings align with structural functionalism theory and show how the education system plays an important role in maintaining stability in society, with teachers serving as key agents in transferring knowledge, social norms, and values. However, the pandemic disrupted this equilibrium, revealing systemic weaknesses in educational support structures. The additional emotional and psychological burdens put on teachers underlined the strain on their role as both teachers and social caretakers. The inability of institutions to fully support teachers during this time suggests a need for reforms that fortify the education system's ability to function effectively in times of crisis.

The findings revealed that teachers across both public and private schools faced increased workloads, a lack of resources, and strained interactions with learners and parents. Teachers in private schools encountered high expectations from parents, whilst teachers in public schools encountered significant resource constraints. This reflects broader inequalities in education, echoing findings from studies done by Chisango & Marongwe (2021) in other low- and middle-income contexts like South Africa, where disparities in infrastructure, digital access, and socioeconomic conditions have similarly shaped teachers' experiences. Moreover, this study further emphasizes the emotional labour teachers undertake, suggesting that systemic interventions

should not only address resource allocation but include psychological and professional support for teachers. Additionally, these interventions should ensure equitable measures for teacher wellbeing and improved communication and relationship dynamics between parents and teachers, ultimately enhancing the resilience and effectiveness of education during times of crisis.

5.2 Recommendations

1. **Improved Resource Allocation:** The pandemic highlighted the distinct disparities in resource allocation across schools, especially in under-resourced communities. Addressing these inequalities by ensuring equitable access to digital tools and reliable connectivity will not only improve teaching during crises but also support long-term educational development, despite periods of disruption. Online learning will enable flexibility for learners who require extra support and thus have access to continuity during disruptions. Online learning also allows for self-taught/directed learning. This will prepare learners for a world that is rapidly growing in hybrid learning and working models.

2. **Teacher training and professional development:** The crisis exposed gaps in teachers' preparedness for remote and hybrid learning, highlighting the need for continuous professional development. Many teachers needed to quickly adapt to new digital platforms without prior training, which resulted in increased stress and ultimately reduced the effectiveness of teaching. Investing in consistent professional development programs that include technical and emotional support aspects will equip teachers with the necessary tools to navigate evolving educational landscapes. Post-pandemic, prioritising the upskilling of teachers in digital literacy will enable them to leverage technology for personalised and flexible learning, which will assist and improve learners in various learning contexts.

3. **Support for teachers' emotional wellbeing:** Teachers experienced immense emotional burdens during the lockdown when they had to facilitate online learning, provide emotional support to their learners facing uncertainty and trauma, and attend to their personal

caregiving responsibilities with their families. Acknowledging this distress will result in the implementation of peer support programs or counselling services, as well as management strategies to use to cope with their workload. These initiatives are important during periods of crises, however, institutionalising them to create and maintain a culture of teacher wellbeing post-pandemic will aid in supporting teachers better manage with the negative emotional experiences they encounter in their profession during unprecedented times.

4. **Parental engagement and communication:** The lockdown reinforced the key role of the involvement of parents in their children's education, exposing the significant gaps in their communication and misunderstanding with schools and teachers. Introducing school-parent initiatives such as workshops to strengthen this collaboration will aid in equipping parents with the relevant knowledge and tools of the role they play in supporting teaching efforts. Ultimately, having these efforts in place post the lockdown will facilitate a supportive and nurturing learning environments for learners at school and at home, and can be applied or implemented in future crises.

5. **Equitable treatment across school sectors:** In addressing the inequities that exist across the two school sectors, policymakers must ensure consistency in teacher support systems in both public and private schools by addressing funding discrepancies, resource distribution, and professional development opportunities. These measures will assist in bridging the education gap and encourage increased equitable learning environment for all learners. This will also avoid inconsistencies and interruptions in learning should there be future periods of disruptions such as the lockdown, however, in normal times, it will further contribute to parity across the school sectors.

6. **Work-life balance and teacher retention:** The increased workload and blurred boundaries between work and personal life during the lockdown resulted in a lot of pressure on teachers, affecting job satisfaction and retention. Similar to facilitating wellbeing measures, promoting a healthier work-life balance that will put a limit on excessive

administrative duties, foster mental health breaks, and establish clear role expectations will aid in boosting the wellbeing of teachers. This will also contribute to the retention of teachers in the profession and essentially empower them for long-term educational stability, and resilience in times of disruptions and uncertainty.

7. **Government and community collaboration:** The pandemic underscored the need for stronger collaboration between educational institutions, government agencies, and community organizations to support teachers effectively. Strengthening these partnerships can results in a stronger educational ecosystem, ensuring that schools can access the relevant resources during both routine operations and interrupted situations. Investing in a long-term partnership across these groups will improve the overall resilience of the education system.

By addressing both structural inequalities and crisis-specific interventions, these recommendations are targeted at establishing a more resilient education system that supports teachers in both everyday teaching and future events and periods of crises.

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APPENDICES

Participant Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

University of the Witwatersrand,
Faculty of Humanities. School of Social Sciences, Room 145, 1st floor, Robert Sobukwe Block (former Central Block), East Campus, University of the Witwatersrand, Braamfontein, 2000.

THE EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS DURING THE NATIONAL LOCKDOWN DUE TO COVID-19: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

To whom it may concern

My name is Tirhani Matsimbi, and I am a Master's student in Organisational and Institutional Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project and I am investigating **The Experiences of Public and Private School Teachers During The National Lockdown Due to COVID-19: A comparative study** under the supervision of Dr Federica Duca. The aim of this research project is to find out the teaching experiences within private and public schools during the lockdown and how this their roles as teachers; and to analyse teachers' understanding on their perception of the profession of teaching in the development, growth and functioning of society.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This activity will involve me asking you a series of questions and you answering according to what you deem fit to

the questions. The interview will take about 45-60 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital device for later transcription of the interview.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking you for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data collected from this research project will be stored on a password protected computer and online database being google drive and/or iCloud storage. 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) through these details: telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Yours sincerely,
Tirhani Matsimbi

Researcher: Tirhani Matsimbi, 1355116@students.wits.ac.za, +27724409108

Supervisor: Dr Federica Duca, federicad@pari.org.za, +27114821739

Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

University of the Witwatersrand,
Faculty of Humanities. School of Social Sciences, Room 145, 1st floor, Robert Sobukwe Block (former Central Block), East Campus, University of the Witwatersrand, Braamfontein, 2000.

The Experiences of Public and Private School Teachers During The National Lockdown Due to COVID-19: A comparative study

Consent Form for Participants for data collection in research

I, _____ agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.
I agree to the following:

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	yes	no
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report	yes	no
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	yes	no
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended for academic purposes by other researchers subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained	yes	no
I agree that I can withdraw from participating in the research at any time	yes	no
I agree that I do not have to answer questions I feel uncomfortable answering	yes	no

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Name of person seeking consent/researcher: Tirhani Matsimbi

Signature: 

Date: _____

Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic questions for all participants

1. Do you work at a public or private school?
2. Job responsibilities
3. Which subjects do you teach?
4. How long have you been an educator?
5. How long have you been working at this school?
6. Is this the only school you've worked at or have you worked at other schools previously?
7. Is this the only job you've worked at or have you held other job positions?

Questions for all participants

1. Please tell me what inspired you to pursue this career choice?
2. What are some of the pros and cons of being an educator?
3. How do you deal with the cons/lows?
4. What is the best part about being an educator?
5. To what extent would you say is the importance of having educators in society?
6. What kind of impact do you think your profession has in the development and growth of society?

7. Based on the skills you have as a teacher, would you say this is enough to do your job well? If no, what else is important in assisting you to perform well at your job?

Questions on wellbeing, motivation and commitment to work

1. What does the concept of wellbeing mean and how important is it to you?
2. Prior to the lockdown, did you ever experience any challenges concerning either your emotional, physical and mental wellbeing? If yes, how did you deal with these challenges?
3. In your opinion, do you think your profession is stressful?
4. What would you say are some of the factors that cause stress in your job?
5. How do you typically deal with stress regarding your job?
6. Since the lockdown started, would you say you've experienced any challenges regarding your wellbeing and your work?
7. Will you please tell me about some of the difficulties you've encountered since the lockdown started in relation to your job and whether or not these have impacted your wellbeing?
8. How have you been coping with the stresses of the lockdown in relation to work and family responsibilities?
9. Have you/do you receive any support from your school during this time?
10. Would you say that your level of motivation and commitment to your work has changed ever since the lockdown started?
11. To what extent do you think the COVID-19 lockdown has impacted on your motivation and commitment to your work?
12. What keeps you motivated to continue working and remain a teacher?

Questions on the lockdown and its impact?

1. Please share with me your usual method of teaching and how that has changed since the lockdown?
2. What was your immediate reaction or response when you found out about the national lockdown?
3. What were some of your concerns regarding this period in relation to your job security?

4. What impact did you anticipate the lockdown would have on you as an educator, and on the learners?

Questions on teaching experience

1. Please talk me through your daily routine on a normal day before the lockdown
2. How has your work routine changed ever since the lockdown?
3. How has this period influenced the way you interact with your colleagues and learners?
4. In the time you've spent working as an educator, have you ever experienced any form of crisis that required you to change and adapt your way of working? If yes, how is that experience different from this one and how did you cope?
5. As an educator in a private school, what are some of the challenges you face?
6. How do you deal with them?
7. What was your overall teaching experience like during the lockdown and if given the opportunity to do it again, would you accept it?
8. What has been your main concern throughout this period in relation to the education sector and teachers in public schools?
9. Have you experienced any form on stress related to your job as a teacher during the lockdown?
10. Throughout the lockdown when regulations were eased, did you return to work? If yes, at which point did you return to work?
11. What are your feelings regarding the fact that some of your colleagues have continued to work throughout the lockdown?
12. Did you, at any point during the lockdown have any concerns about losing your job? If yes, please share these concerns with me and how you resolved them?
13. To what extent did the knowledge and uncertainty of going back to school affect your wellbeing?
14. When you first heard that schools would open after they were closed due to lockdown, what thoughts and feelings did you have?
15. Would you say your method or style of teaching has changed since going back to school, if yes in what way?
16. What motivated you to go back to work when schools opened?

17. What would you say was been the most difficult part about staying at home?
18. As an educator in a public school, what are some of the challenges you face?
19. What are some of the factors of stress of your job?

Questions on professional identity/job roles

1. Prior to the lockdown, how important do you think your job role was and has that changed at all or remained the same?
2. How important do you think your job is during this time? Has this in some way affected the way you perceive your profession and your job role?
3. Would you say that your job duties have increased ever since the start of the lockdown or they've decreased and why do you say so?
4. Do you find your job responsibilities easier to fulfil or difficult to accomplish due to the lockdown? How has this impacted your wellbeing?
5. What forms of concern or support has your school provided to you during this time of crisis?
6. Do you have enough resources and access to facilities to fulfill your job duties?

Thank you!