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Are our Head Teachers okay? Decision-making processes during COVID-19 across South African independent schools.

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Ethical clearance number: H21/11/64

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the education sphere globally and in South Africa. The impact on pupils and teachers has been investigated. However, the impact on Head Teachers in schools, particularly independent schools in South Africa, has received less attention. Head Teachers within independent South African Schools are the decision makers, leaders, and influencers who were placed in a key role during the COVID-19 pandemic. These Head Teachers were asked to lead, make decisions, and positively influence and manage those under their care while the educational landscape shifted. This shifting educational landscape placed Head Teachers within independent schools under increased pressure and stress. This study aimed to understand the technological and financial access and contexts of Head Teachers at independent schools within South Africa and explore their decision-making processes and the impact of their decisions on their well-being. An online survey was sent to independent Head Teachers, and four in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted. Head Teachers showed that their financial and technological contexts did not constrain their pandemic responses as the nature of their independent school allowed them to have access to adequate technological resources and alternative financial support sources. Key findings of this research were that Head Teachers were commonly influenced both positively and negatively by the complex communication networks and channels created and used during the pandemic and the complex decision-making drivers they had to navigate while leading during the pandemic. The decision drivers of well-being and shared moral purpose were more dominantly considered than the decision driver of National Government Directives, as Head Teachers had to consider their complex and multi-dimensional environments when deciding which decision driver was to be prioritized.

Head Teachers had to navigate two main tensions: would they prioritize outcomes such as assessment and reports during the pandemic or would they prioritize awareness and well-being of staff and learners, and would they make their decisions from a compliance standpoint where full compliance was key or from a standpoint where complying as much as possible or enough for deniability was chosen. These results also associated increased communication networks during the pandemic with increased stress and burn-out levels and therefore a decreased well-being of Head Teachers, and increased numbers of Head Teachers leaving the profession. However, a positive outcome of the pandemic was that schools, staff, learners, and parents were forced to increase their device and/or internet access and technological skills to maintain education during the lockdown and the changing educational environment. When these results were studied across the geographical landscape of independent South African schools it was clear that the findings on access, well-being and decision-making were linked to the context of the Head Teacher and their school and not to their geographic location. Yet using complex, multi-faceted communication networks and the resultant stress was a country-wide experience and that National Government Directives was the country-wide main decision-driver for independent South African Head Teachers. Overall, this study identified six key lessons for education within any future South African pandemics: the need for clear and concise instructions within legislation, standard operating procedures need to consider access and context, blended education should become a norm in schools, consistency within education should be maintained throughout, personal boundaries should be maintained throughout and networking between leaders should be increased.

Keywords: COVID-19, Head Teachers, Decision-drivers, implications, well-being, tensions.

DECLARATION

I, Julia Pahl, declare that this research report is my own work. It is being submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science (Dissertation), with the School of Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

I declare that this work has not been previously accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. This thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Signed.....J.Pahl.....

Date .....16/10/2023.....

Student number: 1048990

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

DoE – Department of Education

DoH – Department of Health

DBE – Department of Basic Education

HREC – Human Research Ethics committee

IEB – Independent Examinations Board

ISASA – Independent Schools Association of South Africa

NAISA – National Alliance of Independent Schools Association

NCS – National Curriculum Statement

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development

SASA – South African Schools Act

SAHISA – South African Heads of Independent Schools Association

SGB – Schools Governing Body

TALIS – Teaching and Learning International Survey

WHO – World Health Organization

ICT – Information and Communications Technology

HIV and AIDS – Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome.

AD(HD) - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Are our Head Teachers okay? Head Teachers are the gatekeepers and mediators within educational spaces, they shape the social and academic transactions in a school, and they mediate between the Ministry of Education's legislature and their schools' day-to-day functions (Chapman and Burchfield, 1994). When referring to Head Teachers as a broad concept we are referring to all Headmasters, Headmistresses, Principles, and Executive heads of schools. Over time the amount of research into school effectiveness and the influence of school leadership has grown and evolved from the view that Head Teachers are separate and insignificant figureheads, to the view that Head Teachers exert measurable amounts of influence on those around them and that they are influenced by their school environment (Ribbins and Gronn, 2000). This research into school effectiveness and school leadership became more crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic as these leaders were making difficult decisions and dealing with even more stress and pressure than normal which may have affected their overall well-being (Harris, 2020; Harris and Jones, 2020; Netolicky, 2020).

This concern, for Head Teachers' well-being during the pandemic, stems from the re-shifting focus and redesigning of educational programmes around the world due to the pandemic (Harris, 2020). By redesigning the educational programme and format due to the isolation, social distancing, sanitizing laws, and other COVID-19 protection protocols Head Teachers have had to shift the teaching and learning practices in their schools as well (Harris and Jones, 2020; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). This has placed increasing stress and pressure on Head Teachers to reconfigure their

school environments, adapt to changing legislation and handle the pressure associated with navigating a safe and principled path through the pandemic (Binagwaho, 2019; Fernandez and Shaw, 2020; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Harris, 2020).

Globally the well-being of Head Teachers during this increased period of stress and pressure begets a few questions surrounding the South African pandemic: Have our school leaders been able to cope during the pandemic? Have they managed stress well? Have they been able to balance self-care and fear, while still effectively leading and managing those under their care during the pandemic? Did their geographical location within South Africa influence their decisions, access and the implications they felt? These questions are linked to some of the few being asked by researchers worldwide. To outline just a few of these worldwide researchers Binagwaho (2019), Harris (2020), Fernandez and Shaw (2020), and Netolicky (2020) consider global implications, Hayes *et. al.* (2022) specifically looked at the USA, Beauchamp *et. al.* (2020) focused within the UK, Karakose *et. al.* (2022) considered Turkey, and Lucker *et. al.* (2022) studied within Germany. These researchers take the focus of research off teachers and learners alone and spotlight it on leadership, management, legislation, and preparation within school leadership (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Shirley *et. al.*, 2020). There is limited research within South Africa and as such this study will address this by asking questions surrounding Head Teacher's well-being, their self-care, their decision-making processes, and their overall experiences of leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic within South Africa and to analyze the results within the geographical landscape of independent education across South Africa.

1.2 EMERGENCE OF THE CORONA-VIRUS IN THE WORLD AND SOUTH AFRICA

The novel coronavirus was recognized first in Wuhan City, China in December 2019 and presented as a series of pneumonia cases with symptoms including fever, sore throat, dry cough, and shortness of breath (Atiles *et. al*., 2020; Tabari *et. al*., 2020; Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020). This virus spread through close contact, through aerosols projected during coughing, and was shared through bodily fluid, leading to a rapid spread of the virus across the world (Fauci *et. al.*, 2020; Tabari *et. al*., 2020; Velavan and Meyer, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in February 2020, after which public health strategies and pandemic protocols were developed worldwide, yet these strategies and protocols varied vastly (Tabari *et. al*., 2020). These varying responses worldwide included partial lockdowns, full lockdowns, rapid containment and tracing systems, social isolation, and many other health and safety mechanisms (Tabari *et. al.*, 2020; Naidu, 2020).

The COVID-19 virus was identified in South Africa in March 2020, quickly rising South Africa to the status of the most affected African country; the impact of the pandemic was therefore rapid and swift (Naidu, 2020). This swift spread led President Ramaphosa, the President of South Africa, to impose a national lockdown effective March 26, 2020, which was one of the most restrictive lockdowns implemented across the world (Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020; Naidu, 2020). This lockdown protocol restricted movement, it implemented social distancing and sanitizing laws, closed all non-essential businesses, banned outdoor activities, and halted the sale of all alcohol and cigarettes in the country (Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020; Naidu, 2020).

These pandemic lockdown measures in South Africa, although very restrictive, had to consider the history of segregation and inequality in South Africa and the knowledge gained from past pandemics experienced in the country, such as the HIV epidemic (Naidu, 2020). South Africa's Apartheid history has had ripple effects on the access its citizens have to housing, sanitation, water, employment, and many more basic resources and needs, all of which reduce the ability of its citizens to actively and effectively fight the epidemic (Naidu, 2020). The National lockdown impacted many spheres within the economy and the society of South Africa including the educational sphere.

1.3 THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A HEAD TEACHER

Head Teachers, also known as Principals, Headmasters, Headmistresses, and Executive Heads of educational facilities – usually primary and secondary education facilities, are the catalyst to a successful and enriching educational environment. They are the mediators between the local Departments of Education and the schooling environment, and they are the center of any school's social transactions (Chapman and Burchfield 1994; Leithwood *et. al.,* 2008). The Role of a Head Teacher includes but is not limited to supervising the educational programme at their school, communicating with staff, communicating with the Department of Basic Education (DBE), working with the community, managing their school, managing the cultural and sporting activities that happen at the school, assisting in the growth and development of the learners under their care and managing the safety and finances of their school (Chapman and Burchfield, 1994; Leithwood *et. al.,* 2008; DBE, 2015).

The centrality of the Head Teacher in a school environment places them at the forefront of decision-making, guiding professional purpose and motivation, managing learning programmes, and developing learners and educators over time (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Leithwood *et. al.*, 2008). Therefore, school leadership has been brought to the forefront of education during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it has had to be adaptive and flexible, yet ridged and conform to protocol (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Ho and Tay, 2020; Netolicky, 2020).

1.4 THE HEAD TEACHER WITHIN POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

When considering the role of a Head Teacher during the South African pandemic, the methodology of information and policy development in South Africa needs to be considered in the context of a Head Teacher's role within this system. The South African educational system falls within the three spheres of government outlined in the Constitution of South Africa, 1996: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch (The Constitution of South Africa, 1996). Legislature surrounding education is created and passed in the legislative branch both Nationally and Provincially, then the executive branch executes this legislature within schools and the judicial branch works to judge any conflicts based on the legislation.

President Ramaphosa leads the National executive sphere of South Africa, with the ministers of each department, such as the Department of Health or the Department of Education, working under him to implement legislature in institutes such as hospitals and schools across all nine provinces of South Africa. The devolvement of legislature and policy during the pandemic moved from the National legislature

sphere of government to the executive and then to schools. Head Teachers work as mediators between the legislative branch and their schools, implementing the new legislature and policies within their school as it is passed down from the Minister of Education.

1.5 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

1.5.1 SOUTH AFRICA'S PUBLIC AND INDEPENDENT EDUCATION SYSTEMS

After Apartheid the new democratic government of South Africa inherited a split schooling system that educated learners differently based on race, ethnicity, and language (Sayed, 1999; Walton, 2010). This fragmented education system consisted of either government schools or independent private schools (Walton, 2010). The 1996 South African Schools Act (SASA) unified the educational system under the administration of the Department of Education (DoE) both Nationally and Provincially (Sayed, 1999; Walton, 2010). This unified system still comprised government / public schools and a separate independent/private schooling system. The main difference between these schooling types is the source of their funding, either from the government or privately funded, and independent schools have a small amount of autonomy in their governance, curriculum, and policy (Walton, 2010). The SASA Act of 1996 declaring two formal schooling systems, allows independent schools to be governed privately to maintain specific religious, cultural, or linguistic beliefs and structures, and it also means no state funding is provided to these schools (Sayed, 1999; Walton, 2010).

1.5.2 SOUTH AFRICAN STATISTICS

PUBLIC AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOL STATISTICS

When considering this split educational system, the 2021 school realities report published by the Department of Education shows that there were 13 409 249 learners in ordinary public and independent schools spread out between 24 894 schools in South Africa and 447 123 educators (DoE, 2022). This total group of learners, educators, and schools is grouped further according to the schooling system (public, independent, and public and independent) and province (Table 1). Within the 24 894 schools in 2021, 2 154 were independent (8,65%) and 22 740 were public (91,35%). Within the 13 409 249 learners in the Nation, 12 706 157 learners attend public schools (94,76%) and 703 092 learners attend independent schools (5,24%) (DoE, 2022).

Table 1: Number of learners, educators, and schools in the ordinary sector by province in South Africa in 2021 (DoE, 2022).

Province	Public			Independent			Public and Independent					
	Learners	Educators	Schools	Learners	Educators	Schools	Learners	As % of National Total	Educators	As % of National Total	Schools	As % of National Total
EC	1 772 877	58 824	5 109	75 176	3 874	232	1 848 053	13.8	62 698	14.0	5 341	21.5
FS	706 269	22 686	990	20 444	1181	81	726 713	5.4	23 867	5.3	1 071	4.3
GT	2 227 733	72 162	2 067	337 079	19 796	874	2 564 812	19.1	91 958	20.6	2 941	11.8
KZN	2 831 417	92 232	5 801	62 541	4 427	221	2 893 958	21.6	96 659	21.6	6 022	24.2
LP	1 723 583	50 021	3 675	75 547	3 561	180	1 799 130	13.4	53 582	12.0	3 855	15.5
MP	1 101 224	34 837	1 654	33 665	2 126	131	1 134 889	8.5	36 963	8.3	1 785	7.2
NC	298 253	9 984	545	6 313	502	40	304 566	2.3	10 486	2.3	585	2.3
NW	848 086	26 796	1 450	24 515	1 452	89	872 601	6.5	28 248	6.3	1 539	6.2
WC	1 196 715	37 508	1 449	67 812	5 154	306	1 264 527	9.4	42 662	9.5	1 755	7.0
NATIONAL	12 706 157	405 050	22 740	703 092	42 073	2 154	13 409 249	100.0	447 123	100.0	24 894	100.0

HEAD TEACHER STATISTICS

According to the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) of 2019 in South Africa, the average age of Head Teachers is 51 years old, which is lower than the OECD average of 52 years old (OECD, 2019). South Africa has a very low average age for Head Teachers (Figure 1) as only 6% of our Head Teachers are 60 years and older

when compared to the OECD average of 20%, we also have a very low percentage of female Head Teachers, an average of 6%, where the OECD average is 47%.

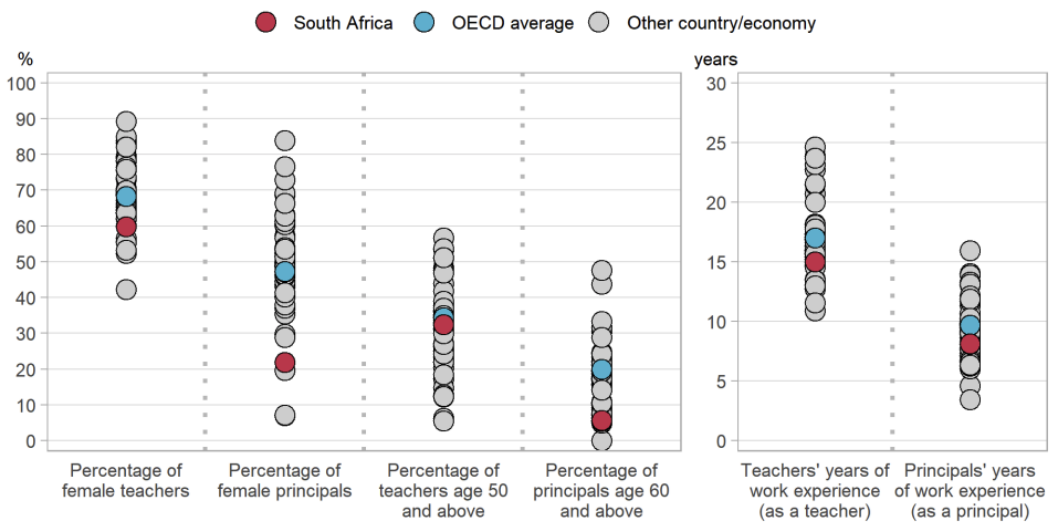


Figure 1: Socio-demographic and experience profiles of teachers and school leaders in South Africa in 2018 (OECD, 2019)

When considering stress and pressure factors for Head Teachers in South Africa the following statistics were evident in the OECD Report (2019). One-third of Head Teachers reported frequent school safety problems such as bullying/intimidation, use of drugs and/or alcohol, vandalism, and theft (OECD, 2019). According to the OECD report (2019), Head Teachers in South Africa report resource shortages, such that 70% of Head Teachers reported library material shortages and 65% of Head Teachers reported digital technology shortages, with the OECD averages being 16% and 25% respectively in these aspects. When considering the preparation and training of Head Teachers according to the OECD report (2019) only 52% of Head Teachers have completed any form of course in administrative skills or principalship, whereas the OECD average is 54%, before taking up their Head Teacher roles.

1.6 FACTORS AFFECTING HEAD TEACHER'S DECISIONS IN A PANDEMIC AND THE RESULTING STRESS

School leaders must consider several different factors each day when making decisions and leading their school communities. Prior to the pandemic managing an independent school focused on a number of key factors, specifically; managing to finance the independent school privately, hiring and firing of staff, maintaining and growing student enrolment, managing student discipline, and maintaining a school ethos and religion (Chapman and Burchfield, 1994; Squelch, 1997; Leithwood *et al.*, 2008). These norms changed during the pandemic. Some of the new norms within pandemic decision-making evident in current literature included: the fast-changing educational landscapes, the increasing reliance on online educational platforms, the socio-economic issues such as access to food and data, racial inequalities within society, and many more (Harris and Jones, 2020; Naidu, 2020; Le Grange, 2020).

One of the major factors influencing leadership in an independent school before the pandemic was religion. When the South African schooling system was divided into the two schooling systems by the SASA Act of 1996 it allowed them to maintain specific religious beliefs (Sayed, 1999; Walton, 2010), thereby placing religion at the core of their independent nature. Squelch (1997) outlined how the right to religious freedom in private schools is the basis upon which many independent educational institutions are founded, the basis upon which they hire or fire staff, how they educate students, create a school ethos and how they admit students into their schools. Although Squelch (1997) placed religion in such a central position for independent schools it is important to note she also considers that the competing principal's independent schools also had to consider, the constitution right to

education and freedom of religion such that independent schools still needed to show an interest in preserving the rights of those they employ and educate. This shows how complex the issue of religion was in independent schools, and how central it was to leadership decisions, prior to the pandemic and poses the question: 'Was religion still one of the main decision drivers' leaders had to focus on during the pandemic as the educational space was shifting and changing rapidly?'

If the religious component of an independent school played such an important role in leading prior to the pandemic and possibly shifted in importance due to the pandemic it stands to reason that financing, access, enrollment, discipline and staff issues, all central leadership considerations prior to the pandemic (Chapman and Burchfield, 1994; Squelch, 1997; Leithwood *et al.*, 2008), were also decision factors that could have shifted during the pandemic and become more or less dominant. By leading in a pandemic and having their main decision-making factors shifting constantly Head Teachers were placed in positions of increasing pressure and stress (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Lucker *et. al.*, 2022; Reid, 2022; Schechter *et. al.*, 2022).

Head Teachers have had to shoulder the stress linked to the new academic, emotional, and physical needs of their learners and teachers during the pandemic, during which their self-care and well-being were not always a priority (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). Some of the ways that these changes and stresses influenced Head Teachers according to specific studies by Fernandez and Shaw (2020); Harris and Jones (2020); and Hayes *et. al.* (2022), which studied worldwide and UK-specific pandemic responses include; increasing and relentless pressure being experienced, having limited options before them, being completely reliant upon decisions, protocols, and procedures passed down from those in legislation and protocol

development, increasing worrying about the well-being of all staff and learners under their care, increasing work-hours, and having to navigate the uncertainty of the changing staffing situations at their schools.

This pandemic has placed the role of educators and learners, and their changing interactions within the COVID-19 environment under scrutiny, yet the role of, the influence of and impacts upon the Head Teacher in South Africa, and the distribution of this across the South African landscape, is a current gap in literature and research (Harris and Jones, 2020). This gap in literature allows this study to ask, how are South African Head Teachers making decisions and responding to the pandemic in comparison to the rest of the world?

1.7 PANDEMIC RESPONSES OF HEAD TEACHERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

During this pandemic the role leaders such as Head Teachers played in schools shifted and was re-examined. This shift was due to the change in the primary decisions Head Teachers had to make, as well as the shift in educational methodologies used during the lockdown (Binagwaho, 2020; Harris, 2020; Netolicky, 2019). The decisions that became the focus during the pandemic centered around the best interests of the educational programme, and the future of their learners and their school. These decisions also had to consider the safety, health, emotional well-being, and physical well-being of those in their school environment at the same time (Binagwaho, 2020; Harris, 2020; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Netolicky, 2019).

The independent governance and independent financing of independent schools, as identified in section 1.5.1, allowed them to tailor their individualized responses and decisions to the pandemic, while still having to comply with the National Legislation and rules, based on their context. These schools could, for example, tailor how they approached their school's closure by choosing how they would use alternative learning methodologies e.g., online learning, Google Classrooms, Microsoft Teams, *etc.* yet they still had to close their schools according to National Directives.

1.8 RESEARCH AIMS, QUESTIONS, OBJECTIVES, AND RATIONALE

1.8.1 AIM:

This study aims to investigate the responses of Head Teachers in South African independent schools. Specifically, their decision-making processes during the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications of these responses for Head Teachers, and overall, to understand these results geographically across South Africa.

1.8.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

This study had the following three research questions underpinning its methodology and objectives:

1. Are Head Teachers in independent South African school's okay?

2. How did the context of Head Teachers influence their decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic and what were the resultant personal implications?

3. Was there a geographical distribution to the actions of, decision-making of and personal implications on Head Teachers, during the pandemic, across South Africa?

1.8.3 OBJECTIVES:

The objectives were:

1. To determine the context and decision-making processes of independent Head Teachers in the South African COVID-19 pandemic, and the personal implications of these decisions using a survey.

2. To interrogate the decision-making processes and implications, which were identified in the survey, further by conducting four interviews with a diverse group of Head Teachers.

3. To relate this data to the context of the Head Teachers' schools' during the COVID-19 pandemic and across South Africa.

1.8.4 RATIONALE:

This research considers the social, personal, and emotional preparedness and implications of the decisions that private school Head Teachers made and are still making during the COVID-19 pandemic. This consideration looks to fill the gap within the current pandemic research, which is the lack of research linked to Head Teacher's decision-making processes, especially in South Africa. Current research focuses on the actions, adaptations, and implications associated with educators and learners during the digital, sanitized, and socially distanced educational sphere. It

does not consider the same aspects in connection to Head Teachers. Research has until now focused on those impacted by the decisions being made in the private educational spheres, not on the reasons behind those decisions, the implications of these decisions, or the preparedness, the communication methods, and the leadership styles of the Head Teachers during this pandemic. When considering the geographical placement of this research, South Africa's independent educational landscape, the survey responses obtained allowed a geographical study within this landscape where the interviews allowed for further interrogation of these implications and decisions. This research focused only on the independent educational sphere in South Africa due to a personal interest in this sphere of education, as a current educator within the private sector, as well as the convenience associated with conducting research in private education rather than through public educational systems and departments.

1.8.5 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The structure of this report is as follows: the first chapter introduces the study (including aims and objectives). The second chapter reviews the current literature on this study topic. The third chapter explains the methodology used in this study. The fourth chapter presents the results of this study. The fifth chapter discusses the significant findings of this study. The final/sixth chapter concludes this study and makes recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Educational facilities are a central pillar in our society, the heads of schools, herein referred to as Head Teachers, lead their schools and ensure that learning and teaching are both productive and represent their specific school in all aspects (Harris, 2020). For this reason, it stands that the organization and leadership of these educational facilities need to be considered, studied, and recognized especially in times of hardship, stress, and change, so they can be optimized and understood for further development.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on educators, learners, educational access, methodology, and formats, as well as on the educational curricula have been the focus of several studies within a South African context (see Gustafsson and Nuga Deliwe, 2020; Makuna and Aloka, 2020; Spaull and van der Berg, 2020; Gumede and Badriparsad, 2022). However, little has been written about the main decision-maker in an independent school, the Head Teacher, in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of this literature review will therefore be on outlining the COVID-19 pandemic in the world and South Africa, how decisions are made in the South African schooling system, considering what the role of a Head Teacher is construed as, understanding past research on Head Teacher well-being, considering how the pandemic influenced Head Teachers decision-making around the world, assessing how the independent educational landscape varies across South Africa and finally reviewing the methodology employed in studies that have been conducted within this study's focus area.

2.2 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been a highly contagious virus around the globe since its emergence in December 2019. Considering the incubation period initially identified, an average of five days with a range of 0 – 24 days (Velavan and Meyer, 2020), as well as the different socio-economic factors found in different locations, the methods implemented in the healthcare systems of countries varied vastly (Velavan and Meyer, 2020). These mitigation methods and policies possibly included screening for symptoms, social distancing and isolation requirements, the suspension of flights, school lockdowns, contact monitoring and identifying, the closing of private and non-essential shops and businesses, banning cigarette and alcohol sales, or travel bans (Naidu, 2020; Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020; Tabari *et. al*., 2020).

The lack of a permanent treatment for COVID-19 posed a significant threat to many countries (Fauci *et. al.*, 2020) and for this reason, each country responded with a different variation of restrictions, mandates, and lockdowns based on their exposure level and their disaster preparedness. Countries, mainly those in Sub-Saharan Africa, that had diminished and fragile health care systems, histories of inequality, and high unemployment rates were at higher risk and tended to respond with harsher management strategies sooner in the progression of the pandemic through their countries (Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020; Velavan and Meyer, 2020). According to Tabari *et. al*. (2020), although the responses varied, they all focused on four common areas namely monitoring, increasing public awareness and COVID-19 education, controlling crowds, and focusing on care facilities.

When looking at the response within South Africa some of the socio-economic factors that influenced the pandemic response implemented included but were not limited to the inequalities in the country because of its segregationist history, such as income inequalities, housing inequalities, low access levels for sanitation and water, high unemployment rates, and low overall access to resources such as food and medication (Naidu, 2020; Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020; Velavan and Meyer, 2020). Considering this history of inequality, segregation, and the fragile healthcare systems within South Africa the implementation of the world's most restrictive lockdown, as of March 26, 2020, was a move made by President Ramaphosa that used the collective experience from the Ebola pandemics of the past to respond accordingly (Naidu, 2020; Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020; Velavan and Meyer, 2020). This response included all shops, restaurants, and other non-essential businesses being closed, the population not being allowed to leave their homes except for essential shopping, medical reasons, or essential work, the closure of schools, restricting all social gatherings, implementing social distancing and mask laws, and banning the sale of cigarettes and alcohol (Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020).

This lockdown was then altered to a system of deconfinement based on five stages of alert levels that relaxed the restrictions based on South Africa's COVID-19 status (Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020). Each of the five levels of lockdown had varying strictness regarding lockdown restrictions and rules, to slowly reintroduce and restore full economic activity in the country (Olivier *et. al.,* 2020).
The theory behind these lockdown levels and slowly restoring the economic activity in the country surrounded not overwhelming the healthcare system (Olivier *et. al.,* 2020). The different levels of lockdown had varying influences on the state of

education in the country as with each lockdown level change the government implemented new educational directives which all schools needed to follow.

2.3 LEGISLATIVE DECISION-MAKING AND THE SCHOOLING SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA

Basic education in South Africa is overseen by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), where implementation of educational legislature is undertaken by the Minster of Basic Education and individual DBE branches in each province, led by their respective Deputy-Director General (The Constitution of South Africa, 1996). These authorities and policymakers are linked to individual schools and are therefore responsible for ensuring safe learning environments, diminishing inequalities, and providing effective information to schools and the public about new educational legislature (Cohen *et. al.*, 2017; Stough *et. al.*, 2018).

Within the South African basic education system schools are either public or independent according to the South African Schools Act of 1996 (du Toit, 2004; Sayed, 1999; Selod and Zenou, 2003). The differentiation between these school types, according to Sayed (1999), is based on their governance systems and funding, such that public schools are governed and funded by the government and independent schools are privately governed and funded. Du Toit (2004) defines independent schools as any privately-owned school and public schools as state-owned schools, which supports the differentiation of private and independent schooling as outlined by Sayed (1999) above but in a broader manner.

The different governance and funding structures between public and independent schools in South Africa influence the implementation of the legislature in schools,

such that public schools follow directives directly from the Minister of Education and DBE, and independent schools typically follow directives given by the National Alliance of Independent Schools Association (NAISA) which consults with the DBE and Minister of Education (NAISA, 2019). However, independent schools are still held accountable to the Constitution and all relevant National and Provincial legislature (DBE, 2010).

Although they are still accountable to the constitution and legislature, the rights of independent schools differ from those of public schools, regarding how they are legally sanctioned and operated (DBE, 2010). These independent school rights, as outlined by DBE (2010), typically include having independence in the way they govern, finance, and staff their school; they typically have a unique school ethos, school values, and faith; they may create their learner admission outlines as long as they align with legislation; they choose their curricula and set their exit exams as long as they align with the National Curriculum Statement (NCS); and they outline their promotion criteria within relation to the relevant policy. Franklin (2017: 356) outlines independence as having leeway within the school's teacher-to-learner ratios, the school's broad curriculum choice, the extra-curriculum opportunities they offer, and the type of facilities available within their institution.

These independent school rights meant legislation was always adhered to in independent schools, yet Head Teachers took advantage of the leeway they have, as outlined by the rights of independent schools above while leading in the pandemic. For this reason, independent schools' Head Teachers have been and still are at the forefront of decisions implemented in South African schools during the current pandemic (Chapman and Burchfield, 1994; Leithwood *et. al.*, 2008).

Considering this placement of Head Teachers as decision-makers it is important to consider what the role of a Head Teacher is, the scope of the COVID-19 pandemic, how the pandemic has influenced education and the role of Head Teachers, and finally what factors influenced the decisions independent Head Teachers made during the pandemic, such as financial constraints, resource access, etc.

2.4 THE ROLE OF A HEAD TEACHER

The leaders of educational facilities are considered one of the most important influencers for the education and success of pupils in schools, second only to teachers (Chapman and Burchfield, 1994; Leithwood *et. al.*, 2008). This leadership role is a catalyst and agent for the potential that any educational institution is capable of, mainly because they act as a leader, a motivational source, a performance maintainer, and a mediator between ministerial policies and school transactions (Chapman and Burchfield, 1994; Leithwood *et. al.*, 2008).

When conceptualizing the Head Teacher of a school a crucial question that needs to be asked is, what is the main role of a Head Teacher? The role of a Head Teacher as outlined by the DBE (2015) and Chapman and Burchfield (1994) is that they are the managers of their school, allowing for effective learning and development of learners because they manage the school environment, encourage growth, and oversee the instructions given at their schools. However, this view is very stationary and suggests that this role is only carried out by Head Teachers and that it has not shifted or changed over time. Spillane *et. al*. (2007) studied school-based leadership daily in the U.S. and contradicted this view by showing that Head Teachers only performed 33 to 47% of the activities they were responsible for within a day.

Showing that multiple actors, some with formal and some with informal qualifications, were more effective as the leaders and managers of the school environment on a daily basis than the Head Teacher. Spillane *et. al*. (2007) further outlined classroom teachers as the leaders of curricula, administration, and instruction, and learners or other actors as part of the distributive leadership within a school, moving in and out of the role of leader regardless of their position.

The distributive leadership outlined by Spillane *et. al*. (2007) therefore places other actors as leaders and managers of a school environment more so than the Head Teacher. This view is supported by Hallinger and Heck (1998) when they considered if leadership could enhance the effectiveness of schooling. Their findings suggested that leadership could fall into three varying responses over time, that leaders could have no direct and measurable influence on effective schooling, that leadership could exert only an indirect influence on school effectiveness, or finally that school leaders could be the ones being influenced by the school rather than the leader affecting the schooling (Hallinger and Heck, 1998). By considering these varying influences and effectiveness possibilities of school leadership the Head Teacher's role in managing a school is complex, can shift over time, and could be carried out by other agents within the school environment.

Being the manager of the school was however not the only role outlined for Head Teachers in literature, several secondary or supporting roles identified included working with their community, maintaining communication between the DBE and the school, managing the cultural and sporting activities in their schools, and growing self and others (Chapman and Burchfield, 1994; DBE, 2015). In contradiction to these views of a Head Teacher as someone with clearly defined 'roles', Leithwood

et. al. (2008) discusses leadership effectiveness as centered around the qualities the leaders possess, not the roles they directly play in their school. Leithwood *et. al*. (2008), engages with leadership as any person that can build a vision, understand and develop people, envision and implement change, and maintain stability while leading an educational programme.

When considering the contradictory and supportive views of Chapman and Burchfield (1994), DBE (2015), and Leithwood *et. al*. (2008) in conjunction with one another the leadership role of a Head Teacher is outlined as an evolution of understandings, centered around their interactions within the profession of education, within the professional space of their school and the management space for their employee's skills and abilities. The Head Teacher's role is therefore conceptualized as one that depends highly on engagement and mediation while leading and maintaining standards within education and co-performing with those around them, which is supported by Netolicky (2020), who shows that educational leaders work within an environment with many moving parts, complex decision-making, and often conflicting stakeholder views to make their decisions.

2.5 THE WELL-BEING OF HEAD TEACHERS

Head Teachers work within a complex environment every day, they shoulder a heavy burden, and they navigate conflicting views regularly to accomplish successful leadership and education (Netolicky, 2020; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). Because of the importance of a Head Teacher within their school, the well-being of the Head Teacher is, therefore, an important consideration. Well-being has been a growing consideration within the education sphere, starting to become more central than

concerns of academic achievement and scores over time (Shirley *et. al*., 2020). The consideration of well-being can be outlined by connecting it to social-emotional learning, as the development of social and emotional skills create stronger abilities within leaders to cope with challenges, stress, and professional or social settings (Abdullah, 2020; Shirley *et. al*., 2020).

When leaders do not manage stress and self-care there are ripple effects within their ability to effectively lead and manage (Trinidad, 2021; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). These impacts include but are not limited to, a lowered personal satisfaction within the leaders' work environment, higher levels of burnout, increased numbers of principals leaving the profession, and an overall less effective form of management (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). Tending to Head Teacher stress self-care can therefore reduce the level of chronic stress and burnout associated with the high-pressure and complex work environment of Head Teachers, as well as create a more dependable emotional and physical space for the educators, learners, and staff under the care of the Head Teacher (Harris and Jones 2020; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022).

The consideration of well-being is central to Head Teachers as excessive stress in learners has been directly linked to student burnout, increasing anxiety, vulnerability, depression, and feelings associated with being an outcast in society by Shirley *et. al*. (2020). The view that stress is linked to well-being for learners is furthered by Harris and Jones (2020) and Hayes *et. al*. (2022), who both outline the influences of leadership in disruptive times. In both cases, Harris and Jones (2020) and, Hayes *et. al*. (2022) clearly defined the influences of COVID-19 on school leadership such that Head Teachers experienced relentless pressure, had limited options, and often sacrificed their self-care and well-being while supporting and maintaining the well-

being of those under their care. While Shirley *et. al*. (2020) outlined how student well-being is a central research and academic focus point it also outlined how teacher well-being has been an overlooked feature within academic literature and is important because teacher well-being has a direct influence on and is influenced by learners' well-being. The logical follow-on from this association is that Head Teacher's well-being will also have a direct influence on the staff and learners under their care and is, therefore, an important avenue of research.

2.6 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EDUCATION AND HEAD TEACHERS

Head Teachers, as the leaders of their schools, were in a critical leadership role during COVID-19 as the pandemic was managed in ways that limited social interactions and the spread of the infection (Krishnarachne *et al*., 2020). One of these management strategies was the implementation of school closures in many countries, including South Africa (Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020; Krishnarachne *et al*., 2020; Gonzales *et. al.*, 2022; Lucker *et. al.*, 2022; Schechter *et. al.*, 2022; Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023). Due to these restrictions within schools, the educational system was re-crafted and shifted between 2020 and 2022 into a system of online and hybrid educational programmes that depended on technology (Harris and Jones, 2020; Harris, 2020; Ho and Tay, 2020). The shift and change in the teaching and learning practices being implemented in schools worldwide influenced the way that school's function, the health and well-being of learners and educators, the school's main directives and methodologies, and the way Head Teachers made their decisions and lead their employees (Netolicky, 2020; Harris, 2020; Binagwaho, 2020).

Head Teachers experienced these changes in the rapid and continually shifting context of the pandemic which highlighted the lack of preparation within school leadership systems and the impacts of crises and pandemic decision-making on leaders (Harris and Jones, 2020; Gonzales *et. al.*, 2022; Schechter *et. al.*, 2022; Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023).

2.6.1 COVID-19 AND HEAD TEACHER PREPAREDNESS

Head Teachers were reacting, finding solutions, and making decisions faster and with more implications during the pandemic when compared to education in the pre-pandemic setting (Harris and Jones, 2020; Harris, 2020; Netolicky, 2020; Trinidad, 2021; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). Hayes *et. al.* (2022: 404) makes the strong claim that within the USA "No Head Teacher was prepared for the complexities associated with the pandemic", which is supported by Harris and Jones (2022) who concluded their study on school leadership around the world in disruptive times by stating there is no blueprint that can be of use to school leaders in the pandemic. These claims and conclusions within literature surrounding school leadership during a pandemic uncover a key query: did Head Teachers feel prepared and if not, what could have been done to prepare them? Head Teachers were ultimately reliant on the directives and guidance from National and Departmental spheres, trying to implement evidence-based decisions, while still considering the mental, physical, economic, social, and historical context of those under their care (Binagwaho, 2020; Harris and Jones, 2020; Trinidad, 2021; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Shirley *et. al.*, 2020).

Gonzales *et. al.* (2022) engaged with the debate of preparation within a pandemic by outlining the reflections of Head Teacher candidates who were studying education within the USA at the time of the pandemic. The main reflection from these candidates correlated with the findings of researchers within this field across the world during the pandemic. The candidates in Gonzales *et. al.* (2022) commented on the constantly shifting base of policies, guidelines, and pandemic resources that the Head Teachers they were shadowing had to navigate during the pandemic, questioning when these policies and guidelines could be circumvented or only partially implemented as they were not always applicable or rationale in the individual school or Head Teacher contexts. This main reflection was the framework Shirley *et. al.* (2020) used for their study on student and teacher well-being during the pandemic, in which they showed how the shifting and complex policy environment of the pandemic created a need for well-being to become a consideration in the educational space. Further evidence of the shifting policies and legislation within the pandemic is found in Schechter *et. al.* (2022) who showed that this was one of the factors influencing the need for holistic and agile leadership in schools.

The development and evolution of leadership in a pandemic is therefore associated with the shifting space in which it is developing, which leads to a further query within school leadership in a pandemic, should Head Teachers receive formal training and preparation for situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic? Harris and Jones (2022) proposed that Head Teachers do indeed need training and preparation which considers the challenges and lessons learned within the pandemic, they emphasize using different approaches to leadership rather than emulating the actions and principles of past leadership. Hayes *et. al.* (2022) supports this view of formalized

Head Teacher training by outlining how formalized training should be developed to equip Head Teachers with the skills needed to deal with increasing stress, issues of self-care and well-being, as well as being able to coach and mentor in a pandemic context. Gonzales *et. al.* (2022), associated the chaos and loss of learning during the pandemic with the unprepared Head Teachers that were leading schools during this time, calling for crisis management skills development for a pandemic situation to be included in formal training of Head Teachers. However, a contradictory view is found in Eacott and Asuga (2014). Eacott and Asuga (2014) analyzed the preparation and development of Head Teachers in pre-pandemic Africa and found a lack of formal requirements for Head Teacher positions within schools. Eacott and Asuga (2014) argue that the concept of standardizing Head Teacher preparation and development is a way to perpetuate anglophone views and beliefs of leadership. In this way Eacott and Asuga (2014) ask for school leadership preparation and development to be constructed in new and alternate contexts specific and relevant to the leader's school environment, therefore contradicting the theory, as suggested by Gonzales *et. al.* (2022), Harris and Jones (2022) and Hayes *et. al.* (2022), that Head Teacher preparation should be more universal and would have made a significant change in the responses to and impact of COVID-19 within schools.

The debate surrounding the need for the formalization of school leadership preparation for pandemics and crises is more heavily supported than contradicted, with suggestions for future preparation programmes being outlined by Gonzales *et. al.* (2022), Harris and Jones (2022), Hayes *et. al.* (2022), etc. The common theoretical frameworks for this preparation of Head Teachers include making sure to emphasize the need for diverse and effective communication networks as this allows for support structures and cohesion within responses (Azorin, 2020; Binagwaho,

2020; Fernandez and Shaw, 2020; Gonzales *et. al.*, 2022; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Harris and Jones, 2022), preparation should address concepts such as well-being, mental health, and burnout, and therefore emphasize 'soul' by being genuinely concerned for the human aspects of leadership (Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023; Gonzales *et. al.*, 2022; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Harris and Jones, 2022), emphasize the development of technologically efficient educational systems within schools, or remote leading practices, so that school leaders are able to balance technology and pedagogy within crises (Gonzales *et. al.*, 2022; Harris and Jones, 2022) and consider the benefits of distributed leadership within pandemics or crises as all agents within a school can therefore connect, share, learn and network (Azorin, 2020; Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023; Fernandez and Shaw, 2020; Harris and Jones, 2022). A few further suggestions for school leadership preparation programmes evident in the literature included developing leadership practices at the preparation stage so that they are equitable (Gonzales *et. al.*, 2022) and making sure that the theory behind a pandemic leadership response is considered and taught (Harris and Jones, 2022).

Overall, the view that Head Teachers were unprepared for maintaining the education within their schools once school closures were implemented, is a widely accepted notion within literature and the varying views on how to prepare Head Teachers shows how the Head Teacher themselves, the decisions they made, and the tensions and decisions they battled with during the pandemic as central to their leadership success.

2.6.2 TENSIONS HEAD TEACHERS NAVIGATED DURING THE PANDEMIC AND THE RESULTING PANDEMIC RESPONSES

Considering the shifting educational sphere within countries it stands to reason that the methods Head Teachers used to lead also shifted or are busy shifting as a result of the pandemic. Netolicky (2020) and Binagwaho (2020) examine this change in leadership exploring the need for compassionate leadership and how leadership tensions need to be navigated. Netolicky (2020: 391) outlined her view of leadership in the pandemic as: “We are doing the best we can in the circumstances, with little lead in the time and minimal upskilling, and most of it is not ideal”. The tensions and struggles of Head Teachers in this pandemic are central to the ability of the Head Teacher to lead effectively and with informed decision-making.

Some of the main tensions that Head Teachers needed to navigate during this pandemic, within the worldwide context of Netolicky (2020) in which the lived experiences of Deborah Netolicky are combined with the worldwide view of her literature review, included leading both fast and slow, being both accountable and autonomous, being interdependent and having independence, and finally managing both workload and well-being (Netolicky, 2020). These tensions are not compared over place or across a geographical landscape but are rather concluded from the broad literature base of Netolicky (2020) and are therefore broadly applicable to Head Teacher tensions and tradeoffs across the world, including South Africa. The first tension identified by Netolicky (2020) showed how Head Teachers had to make decisions that were as effective as possible during the pandemic, in which case the Head Teacher’s context was key, yet they sometimes had to act swiftly to effectively lead those in their care. This meant that Head Teachers had to make these swift

actions but still had to base these swift decisions on consideration, evidence and foresight for the consequences of their actions, somehow treading a fast and slow leadership movement at the same time. The need for fast-paced reactions within the pandemic is supported by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) and Beauchamp *et. al.*, (2021). Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) support this tension experienced during the pandemic through their literature review of school leadership in a pandemic across the world, in which they outline how Head Teachers had to act swiftly yet with foresight at the same time, how they had to be able to make decisions that could have life-altering repercussions as quick as possible while still considering the consequences of acting too swiftly. When studying school leadership during the UK pandemic Beauchamp *et. al.*, (2021) was able to show that leaders had to be versatile in the face of the fast-paced and uncertain environment that the COVID-19 pandemic created in schools, aligning with the first tension outlined by Netolicky (2020). It is clear however that Beauchamp *et. al.*, (2021) does not associate this tension as one where Head Teachers were balancing a fast and slow-paced decision-making setting, instead, they associate the fast pace of the changing educational environment in the pandemic with the increased pressure and expectations placed on Head Teachers because of the complexity and contradictory nature of the information being shared during the pandemic. The work of Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) and Beauchamp *et. al.*, (2021) show that leaders in a pandemic all worked within a fast-paced and complex setting, that they were either balancing this fast decision-making with evidence-based decisions or with complex and shifting information sources, either way, they had to carefully lead and manage in the pandemic as identified by Netolicky (2020).

The second tension outlined by Netolicky (2020) placed the Head Teacher in a position of accountability to National Directives and stakeholders such as School Governing Bodies (SGBs), communities, parents, and more, yet at the same time, a Head Teacher also had autonomy and freedom in some of their decisions, as long as their actions aligned with the National Directives. Therefore, their actions and decisions had to balance the need to be both accountable and autonomous at the same time (Netolicky, 2020). The idea of small freedoms while in a pandemic connects back to the differences between an independent and private school as outlined by the DBE (2015), (see Chapter 2.4), such that Head Teachers of independent schools have small freedoms within the day-to-day running of their school, however, this is not enough freedom for Head Teachers to negate National and Departmental legislation and therefore the tension of autonomy and accountability being balanced at the same time is supported by the National Directives all schools and Head Teachers had to follow within a South African context. Some of the smaller, context-specific examples of autonomy in independent schools included the ways Head Teachers implemented social distancing, distance learning, hygiene measures, and other context-specific actions based on their school setting (Lucker *et. al.*, 2022). This tension is further supported by Stone-Johnson and Weiner (2020) whose study on the professionalism of Head Teachers during the pandemic showed that Head Teachers already struggled with the tension that existed between their expertise and autonomy before the pandemic. This tension was further exasperated during the complex context of school leadership in a pandemic. Stone-Johnson and Weiner (2020) show how school leaders during a pandemic were placed in more constrained leadership positions than before, meaning their ability to use their knowledge and experience in an autonomous setting was further negated and this left Head Teachers feeling unsatisfied with their

leadership and with their role as a leader. Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) found that Head Teachers began to rely on their personal qualities more during the pandemic which contradicts the findings of Stone-Johnson and Weiner (2020), showing that Head Teachers' autonomy was improved not negated. This contradiction allows for the possibility that the individual context of the Head Teacher and their school could have influenced the amount of autonomy the Head Teacher had while leading in the pandemic and therefore to what extent the second tension of autonomy versus accountability as identified by Netolicky (2020), was relevant for Head Teachers.

The third tension, as identified by Netolicky (2020), showed how a Head Teacher in a pandemic needed to work collaboratively with those in their environment while also maintaining their distance from those under their care - so they continued to sustain their authority. They needed to be direct yet empowering and be visible yet invisible. This tension can lead to the need for support that was unattainable at the individual school level (Netolicky, 2020). Beauchamp *et. al.*, (2021) analyzed how Head Teachers within the early stages of the pandemic in the UK had to balance their leadership and their power and authority, showing that most leaders had a form of distributive leadership in place before the pandemic, which allowed them to delegate while maintaining authority, that they then further developed while leading during the pandemic. The need to further delegate and distribute tasks within the pandemic was associated with the need for new skill sets in the new educational formats used during the pandemic, such as IT skills, abilities to use online and hybrid education, etc. Therefore, this further delegation supports the idea that Head Teachers had to navigate the issues of delegating and sharing responsibility while still maintaining authority (Netolicky, 2020; Beauchamp *et. al.*, 2021). Chatzipangioutou and Katarou

(2023) also support this tension by outlining how two of the main leadership strategies implemented within pandemic leadership around the world were the increasing dependence on personal leadership qualities while managing a school in a pandemic, as well as an increase in the collaborative and distributive leadership styles implemented during the pandemic. These common strategies implemented around the world by school leaders during the pandemic showed how Head Teachers balanced and worked within the tension of being independent and leading while still delegating and managing effectively in a pandemic, trying to be both authoritative and delegative (Netolicky, 2020; Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023).

The last tension identified by Netolicky (2020), was that Head Teachers needed to consider the importance of their teacher's and learner's well-being, yet they also needed to maintain consistent results and learning. Balancing outcomes and well-being would be difficult to maintain in normal circumstances never mind during pandemic education. This tension of balancing work and well-being was supported by Trinidad (2021) and Reid (2022) whose studies both consider the need to balance well-being and outcomes in the context of schools and Head Teachers. Trinidad (2021) studied the organizational issues and priorities from the context of US schools during the pandemic, one of his key findings outlined how the need to prioritize well-being and mental health became more dominant than the normal leadership priorities, such as academic achievement, and student engagement, during the pandemic. Reid (2022) studied how Head Teachers in the USA managed stress and anxiety during the pandemic. Reid (2022) found that the crises intensified the existing workload of Head Teachers while also affecting the Head Teachers' well-being, asking them to manage both workload and well-being. Overall, Head Teachers had to decide whether they would prioritize outcomes and results or well-

being during the pandemic for themselves and those under their care (Trinidad, 2021; Reid, 2022; Netolicky, 2020).

Head Teachers were constantly navigating the tensions identified by Netolicky (2020) and supported by DBE (2015); Stone-Johnson and Weiner (2020); Beauchamp *et. al.*, (2021); Trinidad (2021); Reid (2022); Lucker *et. al.*, (2022), and Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023). When navigating these tensions and leading during the pandemic several common actions and leadership strategies were implemented across the world, as identified by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) through their systematic literature review. Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) covered multiple countries through their literature review, namely; Malaysia, Sweden, the Philippines, USA, India, UK, Central Jamaica, Canada, Turkey, Italy, Indonesia, Japan, Norway, South Africa, China, Spain, Greece, New Zealand, Australia and various other locations around the world. The multiple locations studied shows how the results and findings obtained by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) are relevant to multiple contexts and can be applied to pandemic research across the world, including South Africa. The large number of common strategies identified by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) suggests that Head Teachers around the world were not completely unequipped to deal with the pandemic, rather they used their experience and knowledge to develop new leadership strategies and practices which can now be applied to future leadership preparation programmes. There were 11 leadership strategies implemented throughout the literature reviewed by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023), which are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of school leadership strategies identified by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023).

Strategies implemented during COVID-19 by school leaders	**Explanation of this strategy**
1. Sensemaking	Leaders made sense of the nature and challenges associated with C19 and then developed adaptive decision-making methods appropriate to their understandings.
2. Adopted new managerial practices	This prioritized safety and allowed their leadership to become technologically extended.
3. Setting school resilience frameworks	Increased team building and connectedness between school communities.
4. Learning to rely on their personal qualities	Leaders used their values, skills and qualities more intensely when making and implementing decisions.
5. Promoting a positive school culture	Increasing collaboration and trust between community and stakeholders.
6. Establishing communication channels	Developing comprehensive communication to share information and decisions.
7. Leading with equity	Increasing inclusivity in digital education within the school community.
8. Increasing professional networks	More networking allowed for collective wisdom and decision-making.
9. Prioritizing socio-economic needs	Staff and communities social and economic contexts were considered with care and empathy.
10. Becoming proactive and resilient	Developing the ability to act quickly and cope in any upcoming changing pandemics or crises.
11. Developing risk reduction and management strategies	Allowed teaching to continue smoothly while reducing risk and maximizing preparation.

When considering the methodology behind Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023), a systematic literature review of worldwide pandemic research, the key findings which are summarized in Table 2 show that leaders in the pandemic evolved and learned to lead within pandemics, they developed their skills and expertise. As evident in the correlations and literature analyses to this point, the five leadership strategies within the 11 identified in Table 2 that are most relevant within the context of this literature review include strategy two – adopting new managerial strategies, strategy four – learning to rely on personal qualities, strategy six and strategy eight – establishing communication channels and increasing professional networking, and strategy 10 – becoming proactive and resilient. When analyzing strategy two, adopting new managerial practices, Head Teachers shifted their leadership to prioritize safety and well-being over outcomes and results, as well as the use of technological formats and leadership styles within the pandemic. This strategy was shown to support the last tension identified by Netolicky (2020), the need to decide between well-being

and outcomes, and it also supported the need for the prioritization of well-being when leading schools in a pandemic as outlined by Harris and Jones (2020) and Hayes *et. al*. (2022).

The ability to learn to rely on personal qualities, strategy four identified by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) showed that Head Teachers began to use their skills and values more intensely during the pandemic, which supported the tension of being independent and having interdependence as identified by Netolicky (2020). However, it was also a contradiction to the findings of Stone-Johnson and Weiner (2020) who showed that Head Teachers had less autonomy during the pandemic and therefore support the third tension identified by Netolicky (2020) in which Head Teachers had to navigate the tension of being autonomous and accountable at the same time.

Strategy six and Strategy eight (Table 2) outline the use of establishing communication channels and increased professional networks during the pandemic which allowed Head Teachers to share information and discuss decisions in broader networks and contexts (Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023). These strategies supported the suggested methodology identified to prepare formalized leadership preparation programmes as suggested by Azorin, 2020; Binagwaho, 2020; Fernandez and Shaw, 2020; Gonzales *et. al.*, 2022; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; and Harris and Jones, 2022, in which the developing of networks and communication was seen as a way to prepare Head Teachers for any upcoming pandemics or crises situations.

The final strategy which has shown a deeper connection within school leadership in the pandemic, as reviewed in this literature review is Strategy 10 (Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023), in which becoming proactive and resilient allowed Head Teachers to respond to the fast-changing environment of education in a pandemic. This use of resilience, fast-paced reactions, and proactive leadership actions supported the tension of acting fast yet with care and deliberation as identified by Netolicky, (2020).

The four tensions outlined herein, as well as the five main leadership strategies identified and analyzed further, showed that Head Teachers were ultimately working in an environment with no standardization, that was changing constantly and therefore they, as the school leaders, were experiencing heavy personal and professional impacts and burdens daily in this context (Maxwell and Superville, 2020; Harris, 2020; Beauchamp *et. al.*, 2021; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). However, the literature review study by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) suggests that Head Teachers were able to adapt and develop new strategies and methodologies as they lead their educational programmes remotely, possibly emphasizing distributed and collaborative leadership and reducing their stress and anxiety, reducing and in some cases possibly negating the impacts they may have experienced.

2.6.3 HOW WERE HEAD TEACHERS IMPACTED DURING THE PANDEMIC?

When considering the lack of preparation and the multiple tense decisions Head Teachers had to traverse during their leadership in the pandemic it is expected that there have been impacts upon Head Teachers as a result. Literature within the topic of empirical research on the implications of leading during a pandemic upon the

Head Teachers themselves is limited, however, DeMatthews *et. al.* (2021), Hayes *et. al.* (2022), and Lucker *et. al.* (2022) have all found that Head Teachers are experiencing higher levels of burnout and leaving the profession, and Hayes *et. al.* (2022), and Reid (2022) have found that Head Teachers are experiencing increased levels of tensions within self-care while leading in a pandemic.

Head Teacher burnout, as outlined by DeMatthews *et. al.* (2021), is a pattern of behaviour associated with having to respond to interpersonal stressors within a school leadership role for prolonged periods. This concept of burnout is in essence associated with overwhelming stress, a feeling of lower coping skills, a lack of support, increased feelings of helplessness, and a lack of self-care within the profession of Head Teachers during the pandemic (DeMatthews *et. al.*, 2021; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Lucker *et. al.*, 2022). Burnout can be associated with an increased number of Head Teachers leaving the profession, before the pandemic one in five Head Teachers considered leaving the pandemic due to the stresses of the profession (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). When comparing this rate of leaving the profession to that at the beginning of the pandemic as many as 45% of Head Teachers considered leaving the profession, showing a 25% increase in the prevalence of leaving the pandemic due to pandemic-associated stress (Maxwell and Superville, 2020; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). Three years after the pandemic began as many as one in four teachers and one in three Head Teachers have now considered leaving the profession after the pandemic, due to job demands and implications (Lucker *et. al.*, 2022). DeMatthews *et. al.* (2021) emphasizes a focus on Head Teacher burnout and self-care amid the results of the pandemic – the increasing number of Head Teachers considering leaving the profession as identified by Maxwell and Superville (2020), Hayes *et. al.* (2022), and Lucker *et. al.* (2022). This focus on Head Teachers

considers the increased stress and greater workload of Head Teachers during and after the pandemic, thereby placing them at a greater risk of suffering burnout and leaving the profession.

Due to the increasing pressure placed on Head Teachers during the pandemic literature outlined an overall increase in stress and anxiety levels felt by Head Teachers during the pandemic, which reduces the effectiveness of their leadership, increases their work hours, and decreases their life-work balance (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Reid, 2022). These implications result in Head Teachers feeling the need to care for everyone in their communities, protect everyone from stress, and always be available when needed by their communities, reducing their self-care and increasing their stress and anxiety (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). Gonzales *et. al.* (2022) supported this view that Head Teachers place the well-being of others before their own by outlining the impacts of crisis leadership on Head Teachers, showing that Head Teachers prioritize the needs of learners and teachers taking before learning during the pandemic, and before their well-being.

The implications of the pandemic on Head Teachers as identified and analyzed by DeMatthews *et. al.* (2021), Hayes *et. al.* (2022), Lucker *et. al.* (2022), Hayes *et. al.* (2022), and Reid (2022) show that Head Teachers have experienced an increased amount of burnout and therefore leaving the profession and that they have placed the well-being and needs of those in their schools and communities before their well-being. If Head Teachers are experiencing context-specific implications because of their leadership it begets the question for Head Teachers, how did they make their decisions during the pandemic, and did the implications they were experiencing affect their decision-making?

2.7 INFLUENCES AND DRIVERS FOR DECISION-MAKING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Decision-making within pandemic leadership placed Head Teachers in the position to consider multiple drivers and the implications of their decisions at the same time. Key decision-making drivers within the pandemic included but are not limited to religion, financial concerns, the information provided by municipalities, and shared moral purpose (Cohen *et. al.*, 2017; Netolicky, 2020; Wildman *et. al.*, 2020; Wodon, 2020a).

When considering religion as a driver of personal decision-making, religion is a huge part of the complex nature of human life. Wildman *et. al.* (2020) studied how the COVID-19 virus' spread was influenced by the religious actions of communities around the world. The influence of religion on the spread of COVID-19 varied greatly, from a blatant refusal to comply with restrictions and to still attend religious activities such as church meetings and congregations and therefore perpetuate the increased spread of the virus, to responses that were innovative and used religion to assist in disseminating information and assisting those in the community with financial help, thereby reducing the spread of the virus (Wildman *et. al.*, 2020). This suggests that religion as a decision driver during the pandemic could greatly influence how communities, schools, and Head Teachers responded to the pandemic. When Wodon (2020a) and Wodon (2020b) studied the impacts of the pandemic on Catholic schools in developed countries, specifically in the United States, and sub-Saharan Africa respectively, it was however clear that instead of religion being the main decision driver for schools it was access to finances and enrollment numbers that mainly affected their decisions. Wodon (2020a) and Wodon (2020b) both outlined how Catholic-based schools struggled with enrollment before the pandemic and

therefore finances, which was shown to be exasperated during the pandemic, further impacting the ability of Catholic schools to bring in and keep learners. Wodon (2020b) outlined specifically how Catholic schools in sub-Saharan Africa experienced more intense financing and technological access deficits due to the socio-economic contexts of these schools. These studies suggest that the religious aspect within education in Catholic-based schools was not the main decision driver or concern during the COVID-19 pandemic, rather finances and enrollment numbers, but does encourage studies to focus on the possible benefits that the Catholic community may have had due to their shared faith during the pandemic. Wodon (2020a) therefore focuses on how financial drivers influenced education such that public and private schools were placed in situations of strained finances during the pandemic due to reduced funding from the state for public schools and the reduced ability of private school parents to pay school fees due to unemployment and the lockdown. These restrained finances, therefore, lowered funds available for schools during the pandemic and increased pressure on independent Head Teachers and staff to maintain the educational programme (Wodon, 2020a). Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) support this view that funding was a dominant decision driver for Head Teachers during the pandemic by outlining three main challenges that Head Teachers faced when leading during the pandemic across the world, namely a lack of infrastructure and technology, a lack of sufficient funding and resources and finally the lack of preparation and planning for a long-term crisis. None of these challenges place religion in the center of Head Teacher decision-making, which suggests that Wildman *et. al.* (2020) found religion as a main decision driver because it was looking at the broader context of communities and churches, rather than the context of schools and Head Teachers as studied by Wodon (2020a), Wodon (2020b) and Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023).

Another key driver to consider when making decisions, especially within a pandemic is disseminated information from those in legislative positions of authority. The information provided by municipalities and health care specialists in times of crisis and pandemics plays a key role in the decisions made by individuals and communities as it assists them in understanding new policies, implementing decisions, and considering pre-existing inequalities when acting on decisions (Cohen *et. al.*, 2017). It, therefore, follows that the information provided by governments and departments during this pandemic would play a key role in the decisions Head Teachers made regarding health, safety, and their educational programme. The information from departments and governments as a major decision driver is supported by Trinidad (2021); Lucker *et. al.* (2022); and Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023), all of whom outlined the increased stress and anxiety experienced by Head Teachers during the pandemic as policies, reforms, and regulations continually shifted and changed the context of education within schools. Schechter *et. al.* (2022) outlined the dependent relationship between Head Teachers and information based down to them within pandemic leadership, concluding that such information was not fully available when needed and resulted in Head Teachers making decisions based on the resources available to them or making decisions based on the council from those around them.

Netolicky (2020) furthered their study on navigating tensions while leading in the pandemic by considering the value that shared moral purpose played as a driver of decision-making. It was evident that school leaders in a pandemic tended to value the decisions, opinions, and views of those around them, they valued the collaboration of the stakeholders they engaged with, and they considered the

feedback of those they reported to in their school or work hierarchies when making decisions (Netolicky, 2020). This shared moral purpose as a decision driver is supported by Trinidad (2021) who classified teachers and staff as active agents within schools, such that their priorities and concerns were central to decision-making and policy implementation within schools, making policy implementation, not a typical top-down process. The response areas outlined by Schechter *et. al.* (2022) continue to support the dominance of this decision driver within a pandemic setting as the study placed the creation of a crisis leadership team as one of the key responses of Head Teachers during the pandemic, working together to restore the educational sphere to full function. Overall, Netolicky (2020), Trinidad (2021), and Schechter *et. al.* (2022) all support the view that the main decision driver Head Teachers considered when making their decisions during the pandemic was the need to consider all those under their care and the shared moral purpose amongst them.

Supady *et. al.* (2020) summarizes the main principles behind rational decision-making during the pandemic to include public accessibility, objective evidence, generally accepted principles, control methods, and compliance with principles. These main principles can be seen to be at the core of the previously detailed four main decision driver's leaders tended to act on during the pandemic (religious considerations, financial constraints, the information provided by departments and governments, and a shared moral purpose). This summary considers decision-making during the pandemic as rational, yet it could also be argued that the influences mentioned above are the main factors considered and that they may be overridden especially in times of crisis.

2.8 EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE ACROSS INDEPENDENT SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

When considering the independent educational landscape across South Africa in literature, specifically with a focus on what defines independent education in South Africa, access issues across South Africa, and pandemics or disasters in South African schools, the literature is limited. Firstly, a focus on inclusion in independent South African schools is evident (DoE, 2005; Walton, 2006; Walton *et. al.*, 2009; Walton, 2011; Geyer and Walton, 2015; Mpu and Adu, 2021), secondly the access levels within rural schools in South Africa is a clear literature focus when ICT and technological access are studied (Ngcobo and Tikly, 2010; Lembani *et. al.*, 2019; Chisango and Marongwe, 2021) and finally, the HIV and AIDS pandemic in schools is dominant when other pandemics and disasters are studied in educational contexts in South Africa (Coombe, 2000; Bayers and Hay, 2007; Mahabeer, 2008).

The consideration of independent or private education across South Africa has a majority focus on inclusive education with multiple studies focusing on whether inclusive education is considered in the independent educational landscape of South Africa. Walton *et. al.* (2009) has shown that independent ISASA schools in South Africa, within their study of 120 participants, were including students with barriers to their education. They were shown to be doing this by supporting educators, adapting educational methodologies and assessment methodologies, having specialists on site when needed and making physical school landscape more wheelchair and disability friendly (Walton *et. al.,* 2009). These findings furthered Walton (2006) in which these barriers were more clearly defined as either being AD(HD), learning barriers and finally, language or family barriers. Walton (2006) was able to show a generalization in South African schools, such that schools were shown to generally

follow inclusive educational practices to a moderate degree. As a dominant voice within inclusive education in South Africa and independent schools, Geyer and Walton (2015) further Elizabeth Waltons' work in 2006 within the topic with the analysis of scholarship students and their placement in independent or affluent schools. Geyer and Walton (2015) show how inclusive actions such as scholarships are not guaranteed to effectively transcend all barriers, that scholarship learners feel they cannot fully participate and that they are outsiders or on the margins, not fully belonging. This brings into question the effectiveness of inclusive educational practices and the rebound or unforeseen implications associated with this within the independent educational landscape. These findings on inclusive education in South Africa have been further analysed by Mpu and Adu (2021) whose consideration of inclusive education showed how this is restricted by issues of a lack of training, not having enough teachers within schools to accommodate it and having teachers' feelings of inadequacy and a lack of knowledge restrict their ability to implement it in their classrooms. Inclusive education within South Africa can therefore be applied to the ideas of education within a pandemic, as issues of exclusion and access became more dominant in schools and the practices of inclusive education can therefore be considered as a possible guideline for pandemic education specifically within South Africa.

When the educational landscape is considered, access is a large factor to be studied during a pandemic, specifically within the context of Head Teachers decision making, as can be seen in section 2.7. When this is studied in literature surrounding South African independent education, the focus has been on leadership in rural schools, their access levels, and their differences and contexts rather than public versus independent education differences. Lembani *et. al.* (2019), shows the digital divide

between rural and urban schools in South Africa, showing how South Africa is 92nd in the world and 3rd in Africa based on the ICT Development Index, which they show through the graduation of access levels their study found amongst undergraduate students. This graduation of access showed that all students in university were currently in the same educational context however their access level was different based on their home access, not their current educational context (Lembani *et. al.*, 2019). Lembani *et. al.* (2019), goes on further to discuss that policies surrounding ICT and education must account for this disparity and graduation, rather than having a 'one-size-fits-all' policy in South Africa. This was supported by Chisango and Marongwe (2021) whose study of three disadvantaged schools in Gauteng showed that they had insufficient amounts of ICT to effectively educated during the pandemic. Chisango and Marongwe (2021) showed this digital divide as one that separates information and knowledge in education, they showed that this coupled with negative attitudes towards ICT in these three schools lead to a decline in equal education, and therefore inclusive education, and a worsened digital divide during the pandemic across South Africa.

These revelations in rural education and the digital divide it suffers (Lembani *et. al.*, 2019; Chisango and Marongwe, 2021) are intrinsically linked to the leadership of these schools, to the way that Head Teachers manage their educational programme, which is shown by Ngcobo and Tikly (2010) and Kwatubana (2023). Ngcobo and Tikly (2010) outlined what makes effective leadership across township and rural South African schools before the pandemic and were able to show how effective leadership trends in South Africa were closely related to western patterns and that no matter who the Head teacher was that was studied, their schools setting, and context were the most essential foundations to their decisions and actions. Yet

Kwatubana (2023) gives a perspective of leadership in South African schools during the pandemic and shows how leaders had to make ICT and digital training their priority during the pandemic, making the Head Teachers the instructional leader for everyone in their school and context. These opposing ideas show the contrasts and connections between digital access and leadership from before to during the pandemic and they also show that the context of the Head Teacher was essential to their actions, to their leadership and to their ability to implement and use ICT within their schools effectively. This essentially places the access within schools as an individual concept not a provincial divide, suggesting the educational landscape in South Africa would be tricky to study according to physical location as so many other contextual factors influence this.

The final educational landscape topic which has been found to have dominance in the literature review of South Africa surrounds the impact of the HIV and AIDS pandemic on education across South Africa. Mahabeer (2008) outlined how this pandemic was perceived by Head Teachers in the Eastern Cape and how they responded. The dominant finding showed that Head Teachers were not prepared for the HIV and AIDS pandemic, that they lacked skills, knowledge, and the correct training to deal with this pandemic in their educational programmes. Mahabeer (2008) further outlined several ways this was evident, the main correlation to the COVID-19 pandemic was seen in the common issues Head Teachers had to deal with, namely a lack of resources, not receiving enough information about the pandemic, not being adequately trained to effectively manage this pandemic in their schools and not having the manpower to cope. These findings by Mahabeer (2008) correlate and support the findings of Coombe (2000) whose initial and in-depth look at the HIV and AIDS pandemic and its influence on education in South Africa

identified mitigation strategies that should be implemented to assist with the HIV and AIDS pandemic within education in South Africa. The main strategies Coombe (2000) identified included, but were not limited to, providing systematic information to all schools and leaders, making sure funding was streamlined and available as needed, partnering amongst stakeholders in the sector effectively, increasing the capacity of leaders in schools to manage crises, and bolstering the decision-making skills and responses of Head Teachers with a foundation of actions in place to support leaders. An interesting correlation clear in the literature review was the idea that the HIV and AIDS pandemic could possibly be having a direct influence on the effectiveness and use of inclusive education in South Africa, shown by Beyers and Hay (2007). Beyers and Hay (2007) found that the HIV and AIDS pandemic placed education that is equal, inclusive and just, under immense strain, that the pandemic changed the dynamics of the classroom and placed inclusive education in jeopardy in Southern Africa. This conceptualization and study clearly showed the links between pandemic contexts and the struggles schools in South Africa have in maintaining education at a consistent and equal standard, which can be easily applied to the current educational landscape across South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These fundamental ideas on the HIV and AIDS pandemic in South African schools are crucial baselines for looking at the COVID-19 pandemic across South Africa as they show how the COVID-19 pandemic responses by Head Teachers could be like those during the HIV and AIDS pandemic, and that educational landscapes in South Africa can use the lessons learnt from the HIV and AIDS pandemic to guide them in the current pandemic. This used in conjunction with the lessons learnt in access and ICT issues, and in inclusive education all contribute to a clear idea that pandemic

research across South Africa is lacking but has got many indirect correlations within the literature that exists for education in South Africa.

2.9 METHODOLOGICAL REVIEW

The research methodologies implemented by key researchers when studying the perspectives of Head Teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic can be grouped into interview-based data collection, survey-based data collection, literature review data collection, and qualitative data analyses using either thematic analyses or coding as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Methodological review of key literature, using methodological outlines available in published literature

Authors	Research Methodology	Country
Adams *et. al.*, 2020	Semi-structured interviews with 5 Head Teachers of previously low-performing schools, thematic analyses on responses.	Malaysia
Harris, 2020	Literature review of contemporary leadership literature.	Worldwide
Netolicky, 2020	Literature review of COVID-19 and school leadership tensions, combined with authors' experiences.	Worldwide
Harris and Jones, 2020	Literature review of COVID-19 and school leadership.	Worldwide
Wodon, 2020a	Data from multiple databases were compiled using surveys, interviews, and association questionnaires.	USA
Atiles *et. al.*, 2021	Qualitative, interview-based study of primary educators in public and private schools.	USA, Latin America
Beauchamp *et. al.*, 2021	Interviews conducted, 60 minutes in length, were recorded and transcribed, then analyzed using descriptive and interpretative codes.	UK
Trinidad, 2021	Data gained from 2020 COVID-19 Response Survey 1 of the American Teacher Panel and the American School Leader Panel. Data analyzed using Likert scale response analyses.	USA
Hayes *et. al.*, 2022	Qualitative study using 120 interviews with public school Head Teachers. Responses were coded and analyzed in NVivo using a self-care framework.	USA
Karakose *et. al.*, 2022	332 Head Teachers and teachers were emailed four different scales, via email, to rate experiences and impacts during the pandemic.	Turkey
Reid, 2022	16 interviews with public school Head Teachers, semi-structured format, via online platforms, one-on-one, 20 – 45 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, then thematically analyzed.	USA
Lucker *et. al.*, 2020	Online survey emailed to schools, and link published on research projects website. Survey questionnaire including socio-demographic questions and study-specific questions.	Germany
Gonzales *et. al.*, 2022	27 aspiring Head Teachers submitted reflections and interview notes during the pandemic. Abductive analysis used to analyze the reflections, using both deductive and inductive coding.	USA
Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023	Systematic review of literature published between 2019 – 2022. PRISMA framework used to compile and report on common themes.	Worldwide

Within Table 3 the prominent methodological approaches to pandemic leadership research include the use of interviews (50% of papers in Table 3) and thematic

analysis (42% of papers in Table 3), which shows a high dependence on empirical research methodologies. However, Hayes *et. al.* (2022) – one of the core researchers within this topic in the USA – identified several limitations associated with their use of qualitative interviews and thematic coding. These limitations included covering too many topics in their interview, a lack of in-depth analysis on any particular topic, a low representation of rural schools in their sample group, and the specific context of the interviews implicated their research usability, as the COVID-19 context of their interviews limited their ability to compare responses over larger periods and broader context settings. The limitation of time as identified by Hayes *et. al.* (2022) is supported by Beauchamp *et. al.* (2021) who recognized the time frame in which their results were relevant was limited as the pandemic responses of Head Teachers continued to shift as the pandemic continued, placing their results in a specific time context. When further considering the reliability of semi-structured interviews Xu *et. al.* (2020) outlined the inability of semi-structured interviews to account for factors such as behavior and ethnography, thereby limiting qualitative studies. This limitation could be associated with the lack of detail and in-depth analysis that Hayes *et. al.* (2022) found in their results. Xu *et. al.* (2020) does however contradict this limitational view on semi-structured interviews by outlining the benefit of having a researcher able to draw richer descriptions and analyses due to their participation in the interview process. These limitations to semi-structured interviews outlined here caution a smaller, more directed question base, and they indicate the need for interviewers to make observations beyond question responses during their interview, possibly focusing on human actions, behaviors, and mannerisms. Beauchamp *et. al.* (2021) acts as a further discussion point for the methodology of interviews and coding analysis within pandemic and Head Teacher research, such that their study within the UK identified the possible lack of accuracy

in Head Teachers' self-reports as a limitation, meaning their results were dependent on the ability of the Head Teacher to accurately identify, outline and explain their own experiences and engagements which does not account for human error.

When considering the use of deductive and inductive coding as a methodological approach within pandemic leadership studies Gonzales *et. al.* (2022) outlined how coding at the start of the study through deductive coding is less flexible and links analyses closer to predetermined categories within a study. This view contradicts the limitations outlined by Hayes *et. al.* (2022) suggesting that the further definition of thematic codes in Gonzales *et. al.* (2022) deepened the analyses used and furthered the results of the study. This methodology allowed Gonzales *et. Al.* (2022) to ensure credibility in their content analyses and to make sure that the multiple researchers in the study identified and analyzed a cohesive and dependable set of results.

The main study that used online surveys to focus on school leadership during the pandemic was by Lucker *et. al.* (2022). The limitations identified by Lucker *et. al.* (2022) included the slow response time of potential participants, and a low response rate when the total response pool was considered – possibly due to the increased responsibilities, stress, and anxieties experienced by Head Teachers during the pandemic - and in connection with this it is discussed that it is possible responses to the survey were not completed by the intended audience, that head Teachers used other agents on the ground to complete the survey for them, and finally the small response within the large pool of possible participants is outlined as a limitation when considering the applicability of the research findings within broader and more diverse contexts. Karakose *et. al.* (2022), supports these limitations, as their survey study allowed for the generalization of results which created a smaller applicability within

broader literature and research fields due to this generalization and specific study context. The online context that surveys function within is also considered a limitation by Karakose *et. al.* (2022), who outlined that the perceptions of participants concerning their personal well-being and mental states were possibly not fully outlined or understood as their emotional well-being at the time of completing the survey could have influenced their interpretations and responses.

This methodological review considered the dominant methodological approaches implemented in key literature surrounding the topic of Head Teachers' well-being, pandemic stress and anxiety, and implications. The overall predominance in the qualitative studies included using surveys and interviews and thematic coding to analyze the results obtained. These methodologies were however not free from limitations which were considered during the implementation stages of this study's data collection and analysis stages.

2.9 LITERATURE OVERVIEW

This literature review has focused on COVID-19 within South Africa, the educational structure within South Africa and its schools, the role of a Head Teacher, the well-being of Head Teachers, how the pandemic influenced Head Teachers, the drivers behind decisions made by leaders and in the pandemic, the educational landscape across South Africa, and finally the methodological basis for this study. It has placed these areas of research into perspective such that the role of the Head Teacher is based on the context of the leadership role and decisions made and within the South African perspective these leaders had to navigate one of the world’s most drastic

COVID-19 responses (Naidu, 2020; Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020; Velavan and Meyer, 2020).

Some of the key findings in this review include: the role of a Head Teacher was generally considered to be managing the school they run (DBE; 2015; Chapman and Burchfield, 1994). However, Spillane *et. al*. (2007) showed that multiple actors, some with formal and some with informal qualifications, were more effective as the leaders and managers of the school environment daily than the Head Teacher. Suggesting that Head Teacher roles were more complex and interconnected to the other agents in their schools than the DBE (2015) and Chapman and Burchfield (1994) outlined initially. The next consideration of this literature review was that of well-being, in which the management of stress and anxiety was shown to play a key role in self-care and well-being, either creating more implications or reducing the implications within schools as Head Teachers' well-being shifted during the pandemic (Trinidad, 2021; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). Harris and Jones (2020) and, Hayes *et. al*. (2022) clearly showed that school leaders sacrificed their self-care and well-being during the pandemic in favour of the well-being of those under their care. Head Teachers' well-being was crucial to their ability to successfully lead and manage those under their care in normal and crisis contexts.

While leading in the pandemic Head Teachers had to navigate four key tensions, they had to lead fast yet effectively, they had to be accountable and autonomous at the same time, had to decide between interdependence and independence, and finally had to manage workload and well-being at the same time (Netolicky, 2020). While navigating these tensions Head Teachers were found to develop five common leadership strategies in the pandemic, namely, they adopted new managerial

strategies, learned to rely on their personal qualities, established communication channels and increased their professional networking, and become proactive and resilient (Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023).

When considering the implications of leading in a pandemic Head Teachers were seen to experience an increase in their burnout levels and therefore the rate at which they leave the profession increased, and their well-being was prioritized second to that of those under their care, (DeMatthews *et. al.*, 2021; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; Lucker *et. al.*, 2022; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022; and Reid, 2022). This study considered the decision drivers Head Teachers considered during the pandemic showing how religion and financial setting of schools were contradictory drivers within Catholic schools such that schools placed more importance on finances and the number of learners in the school rather than the religious considerations of leadership during a pandemic (Wodon, 2020a; Wodon,2020b; Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023). The information shared by departments and governments acted as another key driver within the pandemic when Trinidad (2021); Lucker *et. al.* (2022); and Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) studied pandemic leadership in different contexts, as the amount of information Head Teachers received was continually fluctuating and shifting, contradicting one another and making leadership strategies hard to implement. The final decision driver considered was shared moral purpose such that Head Teachers' decisions placed a high level of consideration on the implications of their decisions on those around them and on the ideas of those they lead during the pandemic (Netolicky, 2020; Trinidad, 2021).

Finally, this study considered the educational landscape across South Africa, and was able to show that contextual factors were more dominant when considering the

differences in education, access, leadership, and responses across South Africa. When considering inclusive education it became clear that independent schools in South Africa have generally succeeded in making inclusion a priority in their actions and methodologies (Walton *et. al.*, 2009; Geyer and Walton, 2015; Mpu and Adu, 2021). However, inclusive education is only effective if issues such as a lack of training, feelings of inadequacy, lack of knowledge and having small teacher cohorts are addressed (Mpu and Adu, 2021), which could be used as a baseline for addressing issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. When access was considered across South Africa it was clear the literature focus was on rural and urban divides, which placed access as an issue associated with student's home context, rather than school location or context within South Africa (Lembani *et al*., 2019) and that ICT has become a core focus area during the pandemic for Head Teachers (Kwatubana, 2023).Finally, it was clear that the lessons learnt during the HIV and AIDS pandemic in schools across South Africa are relevant to the current COVID-19 pandemic (Beyers and Hay, 2009; Cooombe, 2000). Overall, literature surrounding South African education considers issues such as access, inclusivity and mitigation to a high degree and places the individual context of a leader, student or school at the center of their actions and implications, rather than their physical location across South Africa.

This review shows a clear gap in the literature and current research surrounding COVID-19 and education, such that the state of Head Teachers associated with the pandemic is lacking especially in South Africa. This considerable literature gap considers well-being, implications of the pandemic on Head Teachers, and their perceptions of the pandemic, all supporting the need for this research focusing on the question; Are our Head Teachers okay?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on Head Teachers at some independent schools in South Africa, specifically on the decisions they made during the COVID-19 pandemic, the reasons for these decisions, and the personal consequences of their decision-making. The methodology used focused on human responses and engagement, such that responses were predominantly qualitative in nature, with a few demographic questions being quantitative in nature. The methodology of this study mainly followed that of Adams *et. al.* (2020), Atiles *et. al.* (2021), Beauchamp *et. al.* (2021), Hayes *et. al.* (2022), and Wodon (2020a). These methodologies are outlined in Table 3, page 61 of Chapter 2.

Using this vast and ever-expanding framework of research into the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts, tensions, and leadership concepts the methodology implemented in this study focused on a two-step methodology. The first step involved sending an online survey, using Google Forms, to Head Teachers in charge of independent schools in South Africa. The second step involved conducting one-on-one interviews with four of these Head Teachers, the details for each step are outlined further in this chapter. This two-step methodology was conducted on online platforms due to the uncertainty of the changing COVID-19 alert level in South Africa, such that online surveys could be conducted at any alert level and interviews were conducted online as suited the participants.

The focus on independent schools' Head Teachers was due to their independent school's rights as outlined by DBE (2020) and discussed in Chapter 2, allowing them

to independently govern, finance, and staff their schools, as well as having a unique ethos, school values, or faith. However, these independent school rights did not exclude independent schools from following National Directives and Standard Operating Procedures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their independence set the Head Teachers in unique contextual circumstances that differed for each independent school, for example: was the religious component of their education at risk through particular educational decisions, or would their financial contexts allow a shift in educational methodologies? By having different contexts, the Head Teachers' decision drivers were possibly focused on different factors, which is one of the key considerations in this study: did the independent nature of Head Teachers affect their decision-making and the implications they encountered during the pandemic? This decision-making and independence lead to the main question behind this study, when we consider the pressures of decision-making in a pandemic this study asked, ‘Are our Head Teacher’s okay?’

3.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The research instruments used in this research methodology included an online survey conducted using Google Forms and personal interviews conducted with Head Teachers. These research instruments can be found in the Appendices, with Appendix 1 being the online survey questions and Appendix 2 being the baseline interview questions, the interview protocol. These research instruments were aimed at exploring the key themes for this research paper which include decision-making influences, decision drivers, communication methodologies, use of and consideration of COVID-19 protocols, impacts of the pandemic on Head Teachers, and instruction by Head Teachers.

3.2.1 ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AND PROCESS

The online survey was based on generating general responses from a wide audience and on obtaining a broad overview of decision-making processes and drivers. The survey was sent to all independent Head Teachers in South Africa using a Google Form link attached to an email that informed them of the study. The Head Teachers school website details were obtained from the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA) website, where a list of all independent schools in South Africa which included the province, schools name, and website link, was downloaded. The email addresses for these independent schools were obtained from their specific school websites, using the link for each school given on the ISASA schools list. The survey was sent to the email addresses available for each independent school's Head Teacher. This email included the details of the ethical clearance obtained through the University of the Witwatersrand's ethics committee during the planning stages of this study.

The online survey was comprised of Section A: demographic questions, with 11 questions, Section B: COVID-19 responses, with 6 questions, Section C: decision-making drivers and impacts, with four questions (Appendix 1). This survey had a total of 21 questions and took approximately 10 – 15 minutes to complete. The online survey link was available for a period of three months, after which the link was closed.

3.2.1.1 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

A total of 35 responses were gathered, however, response number 31 had to be removed from the database as this respondent was identified as a public-school Head Teacher and was therefore not included in this study, leaving this study with 34 data sets to analyze. This number of respondents was based on Head Teacher availability and no specific maximum number of responses was required when the survey was initially sent out via email. The Head Teachers were all over 18 years of, and the schools they represented were widely distributed around South Africa. The independent schools represented by these Head Teachers covered multiple curricula and had varying ranges of student numbers.

3.2.2 ONLINE INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS AND PROCESS

The second research tool used in this study involved interviewing Head Teachers. Four interviews were conducted one-on-one with independent Head Teachers using Google Meet as the interview platform, as it allowed the study to engage Head Teachers across a wider geographical area within South Africa. This online platform also allowed more flexible meeting times, lower travel times and costs, and allowed the data collection to account for COVID-19 regulations and precautions linked to the pandemic status within South Africa (Archibald *et. al.*, 2019; Beauchamp *et. al.*, 2021; Iacono *et. al.*, 2016).

The interview questions were grouped into four sections, focusing on specific themes in each section, pre-emptively grouping responses on thematic content so that thematic content analysis could be conducted once the interviews were complete. Question Group One asked questions surrounding what Head Teacher roles are,

how they shifted in the pandemic, what decisions were made during the pandemic, and why. Question Group Two asked questions surrounding how Head Teachers' confidence and responses evolved during the pandemic. Question Group Three questioned how Head Teachers communicated and lead during the pandemic. The final question Group Four asked what the impacts and implications of Head Teacher decisions were on the Head Teachers and those surrounding them (Appendix 2).

The interviews were conducted after respondents completed a consent form (Appendix 3), which was verbally reaffirmed at the beginning of the interview before it commenced. These interviews were conducted as semi-structured open-ended interviews. The interviews were conducted using a set of baseline questions for Head Teachers (Appendix 2). The baseline questions were asked in a semi-structured manner, meaning the order of questioning was fluid and allowed the interviewer to follow the natural trend of the conversation. Once the Head Teacher responded to one of the planned questions, the follow-up questions and conversations were then based on the original response given.

3.2.2.1 INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

The Interviewees were chosen based on the following selection process factors: their willingness and availability, their location, and being able to interview a diverse range of Head Teachers. The selection process for Interviewees described above was based firstly on availability such that the Head Teacher had to express their willingness to partake in the interview by providing their email address on the final question of the online survey. They were then contacted and an appropriate time and date for the interview was identified. Secondly, the selection process aimed to obtain

a diverse range of respondents, this diversity was based on the factors outlined below (Beauchamp *et. al.*, 2021; Hayes *et. al.*, 2021).

This diversity within Interviewees was aimed at interviewing both female and male Head Teachers, from different provinces in South Africa, teaching different curricula and of different ages and therefore different experience levels. The methodology surrounding the use of a diverse pool of Interviewees was based on the context of South African independent schools being diverse in nature and background due to South Africa's politically unstable history and context especially surrounding the education of our citizens which stems from Apartheid (Naidu, 2000).

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

3.3.1 ONLINE SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS

The online survey was composed of data from short and binary questions, Likert scales, and multiple-choice questions, as well as data from longer, open-ended questions which allowed respondents to expand on their answers. This data was grouped according to participants' responses and then interpreted and analyzed using graphs, pie charts, tables, and averages compiled using SigmaPlot and Microsoft Excel.

The longer questions in the survey that allowed open-ended responses were analyzed using inductive analysis of quotes and comparisons between responses. This analysis was done by identifying themes in the responses and then grouping the responses into these themes and analyzing and comparing these responses in the context of the theme they were in (Guest *et al*., 2012). These thematic responses

were then compared across the independent South African education landscape to show a geographical perspective within the responses.

3.3.2 ONLINE INTERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS

The responses from the interviews were first transcribed from the audio interview recordings and copies of all interview and post-interview notes were made. This qualitative data was then analyzed using thematic content analysis. This thematic content analysis identified common categories and themes that ran through all interview transcripts, the responses were then grouped into these themes according to meaning and truth (Guest *et al*., 2012). These responses were used to interrogate the responses from the survey further. Due to the small amount of interviews conducted this data was not compared across the geographical landscape of South Africa.

By analyzing through thematic content analysis an epistemological stance of interpretivism was used so that the data obtained was considered in the context of the experiences of the participants and their construction of their knowledge, allowing the concepts being studied to be seen from the perspective and voice of those being studied (Pulla and Carter, 2018). This allowed the standpoint of the Head Teacher to be clear and used in the interpretation of all data analysed. The final step in this analysis was using inductive analysis to interpret the data in the identified themes. This inductive analysis meant no hypothesis was established before the research commenced, but rather the responses within thematic grouping were interpreted based on the raw data they presented.

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ethical considerations linked to these research instruments included applying for and submitting an ethical clearance application with the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) - HREC Details: H21/11/64 Pahl, J (Miss). This set of clearance details was awarded on 21 February 2022 (Appendix 3) and is valid till 20 February 2025. Informed consent was then required from all participants in the online survey and interviews.

The online survey was entirely anonymous, participation in the survey was voluntary and informed consent could be withdrawn at any step in the survey. Informed consent was obtained through participants ticking a box after reading and agreeing to a consent statement (Appendix 1). This consent allowed the study to include, quote, and use the participant's responses in the study report and analysis process.

When conducting the online interviews, the ethical considerations included: informed consent, Interviewee age, and ISASA permission. The interviews were conducted after respondents signed a digital informed consent form (Appendix 4) in which the Interviewee agreed to answer questions, while being recorded, with their responses being transcribed and used in the study. The respondents were also asked to reaffirm their consent at the beginning of the interview before it commenced. Another ethical consideration taken was ensuring the Interviewees were over 18 years of age.

The final ethical consideration taken during the data collection stage was contacting the ISASA and the South African Heads of Independent Schools Association

(SAHISA) and requesting permission to interview Head Teachers of independent schools within their associations. This email correspondence allowed me to proceed with individual contact with Head Teachers who were willing to be interviewed without the need for ISASA or SAHISA permission as they do not own or manage the individual schools in their organization (Appendix 5).

When analyzing the data collected in this study, I had to acknowledge my experience working within the COVID-19 pandemic educational sphere as an educator, as this experience would have impacted my interpretation of the study results. This acknowledgement accounts for the fact that analyzing qualitative data always includes assumptions and positions of the researcher and analyst (Beauchamp *et. al.*, 2021; Braun and Clarke, 2019). By implementing thematic content analysis, I removed assumptions and placed content in themes that can be rigorously and methodically analyzed (Beauchamp *et. al.*, 2021).

3.5 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The main limitation involved in this study was linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, such that responses from Head Teachers for the online survey were limited due to the immense time constraints and pressures Head Teachers were under during this pandemic. This limitation is clear as only 35 independent Head Teachers responded to the link sent via email when the DoE (2022) states the country has 2154 independent schools in total. The pandemic also made the accessibility of Head Teachers for interviews difficult when considering the response level and Head Teacher availability.

Other limitations of this research included the time frame and respondent identification. Due to the dynamic nature of Head Teacher calendars at the beginning of the year, which is when the surveys and interviews were sent out and conducted, there was a lower level of responses than could have been possible during other periods of the school calendar. It is also possible that the Head Teachers sent the surveys over to secretaries or other members of staff to complete due to their time constraints and this is not possible to track and may affect the validity of the responses in the theme impacts and implication.

The next limitation of this study involved closed-ended questions in the survey, such that respondents may have been limited by the options given in the multiple-choice questions and Likert scales in the survey. These closed-ended questions reduce the validity of the survey as they do not allow for individualized responses, yet they were also necessary to allow for a general comparison of baseline questions so that the interviews could use these responses and build upon these responses from Head Teachers.

This study, therefore, aimed to increase validity by including an ‘other’ option within multiple choice and Likert scale questions, and by following up on the closed-ended question responses in the semi-structured interviews which followed on from the survey with four of the survey participants.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This research study considered the responses of Head Teachers in independent schools in South Africa during the pandemic, as well as the well-being of these Head Teachers because of their leadership position in schools during this period. This focus was based on a gap identified in the current pandemic literature. Head Teacher responses and their well-being during the pandemic were ascertained using an online survey and one-on-one interviews as outlined in Chapter 3. This chapter outlines the results obtained from the online survey and the online face-to-face interviews in further detail.

4.2 ANALYSES OF ONLINE SURVEY

The results from the online survey have been analyzed, graphed, and represented in three broad data set categories, first, the broad demographics of participant Head Teachers and their independent schools, second, their responses during the COVID-19 pandemic and finally, the survey enquired as to the decision-making drivers of participant Head Teachers and how these impacted them personally. Within the survey a geographical distribution and comparison of results has been included for the survey responses, decision-making drivers and impact findings.

4.2.1 DEMOGRAPHIC RESULTS

The online survey participant age and gender demographics are shown in Table 4 below, as well as represented visually in Figure 2. The most dominant gender and age bracket within the survey participants were female and 41 – 55 years old, respectively.

Table 4: Head Teacher Demographic

Participant	Gender	Age range	Participant	Gender	Age range	Participant	Gender	Age bracket
1	Female	41 - 55	13	Male	41 - 55	25	Male	41 - 55
2	Male	41 - 55	14	Male	26 - 40	26	Female	41 - 55
3	Female	Over 65	15	Male	26 - 40	27	Male	26 - 40
4	Male	56 - 65	16	Male	56 - 65	28	Male	41 - 55
5	Female	26 - 40	17	Female	41 - 55	29	Female	56 - 65
6	Male	18 - 25	18	Male	41 - 55	30	Female	26 - 40
7	Female	26 - 40	19	Male	41 - 55	32	Female	41 - 55
8	No reply	41 - 55	20	Male	56 - 65	33	Female	41 - 55
9	Female	56 - 65	21	Female	41 - 55	34	Female	41 - 55
10	Male	41 - 55	22	Female	56 - 65	35	Female	41 - 55
11	Female	26 - 40	23	Female	26 - 40			
12	Female	41 - 55	24	Male	56 - 65			

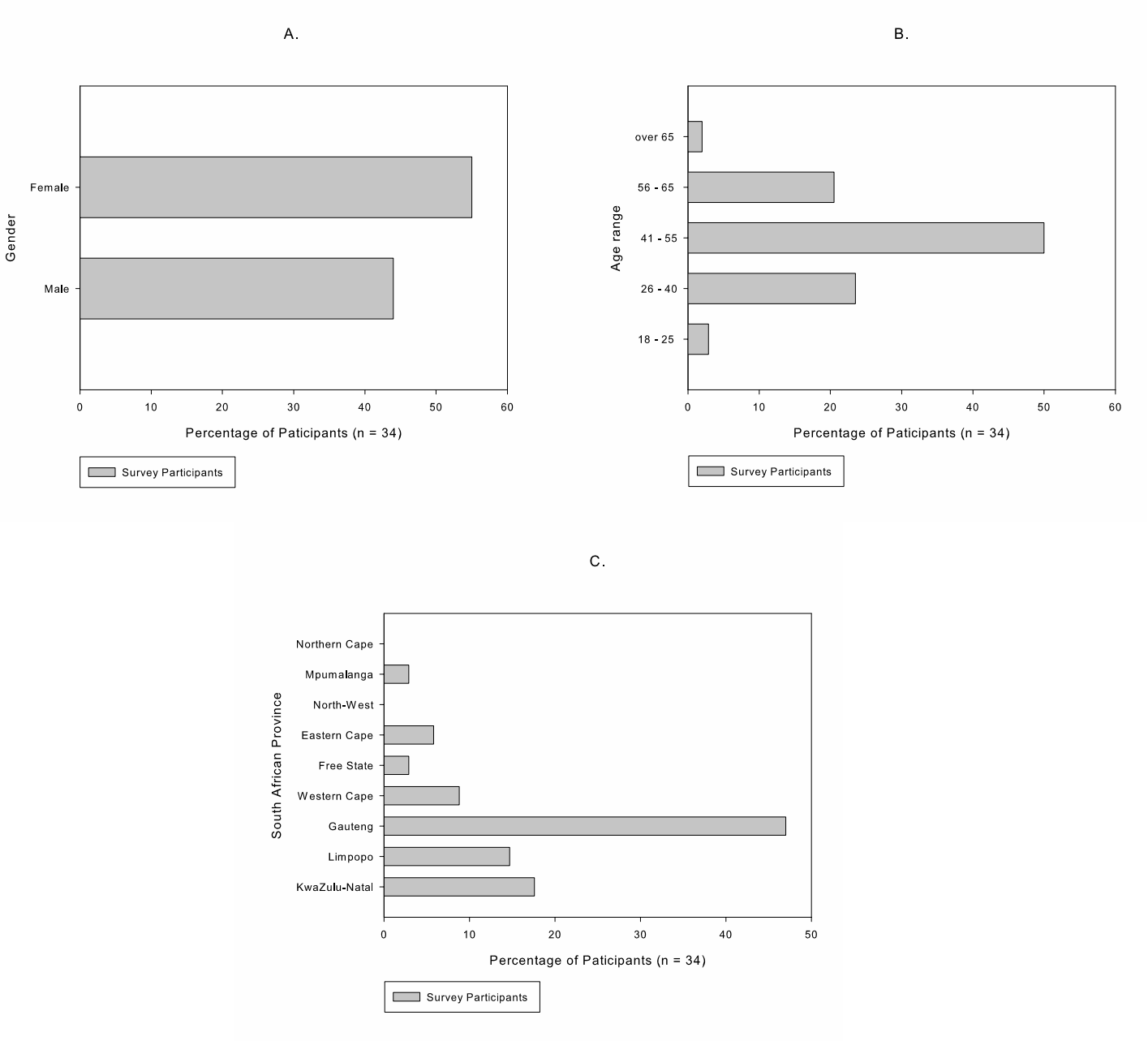


Figure 2: A) Survey participants' gender, B) Survey participants' age range, and C) Survey Participants provincial location in South Africa.

Out of the 34 participants, 18 identified as female (53%), 15 identified as male (44%), and one chose not to identify their gender (3%). Half of the respondents, 17 of 34 participants (50%), fell into the 42 – 55 years old age bracket making it the most common age bracket for independent Head Teachers in South Africa, while the lowest number of participants fell into both the 18 – 25 and over 65 age brackets, with only one of 34 respondents (3%) in each of these age brackets.

When considering the distribution of the respondents (Figure 3), the majority were based within Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, with Gauteng representing 16 of 34 participants (47%) and KwaZulu-Natal representing 6 of 34 participants (38%). None of the participants were from the North-West or the Northern Cape provinces of South Africa. This distribution of participants is used to analyse the data acquired when considering the geographical distribution of decision-making processes, impacts on Head Teachers and other factors such as access that are identified in this survey.

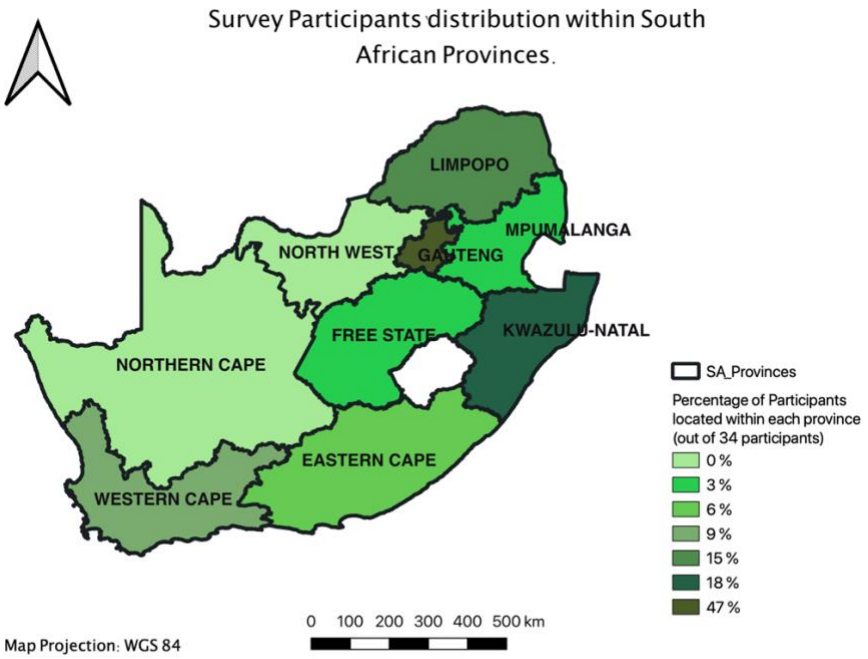


Figure 3: Distribution of Survey Participants within South Africa.

When considering the individual educational institutes that each survey participant represented and leads daily the dominant demographic context for the participants needs to be considered. The characteristics of the schools represented in this survey are outlined in Table 5 below and then visually represented in Figure 4A – E.

Table 5: Characteristics of respondent's school/s.

(* No response given to this question ** This Head Teacher oversaw multiple schools, one single-sex: male and one single-sex: female school. *** This Head Teacher oversaw multiple schools, and they were each in a different settlement type: urban, peri-urban, and rural.)

Participant	School sector/s	Province	Pupil #'s	Curriculum/s	Student Genders	Settlement type/s
1	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	KwaZulu-Natal	201 - 500	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
2	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Limpopo	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
3	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	201 - 500	*	Co-ed	Urban
4	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Limpopo	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
5	Pre-School and Primary	KwaZulu-Natal	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
6	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	101- 200	IEB	**	Urban
7	Secondary	Gauteng	> 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
8	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	101 - 200 s	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
9	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
10	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	KwaZulu-Natal	> 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
11	Secondary	Gauteng	201 - 500	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
12	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
13	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Western Cape	> 1000	IEB and Cambridge	Co-ed	Peri-urban
14	Secondary	Western Cape	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
15	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
16	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Free State	201 - 500	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
17	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	201 - 500	IEB	Single sex - female	Urban
18	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Eastern Cape	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
19	Primary	KwaZulu-Natal	201 - 500	CAPS and IEB	Co-ed	Urban
20	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
21	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Limpopo	> 1000	IEB	Co-ed	***
22	Secondary	Limpopo	201 - 500	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
23	Pre-School	Limpopo	0 - 100	CAPS	Co-ed	Urban
24	Secondary	Gauteng	501 - 1000	*	Co-ed	Urban
25	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	KwaZulu-Natal	201 - 500	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
26	Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	501 - 1000	*	Single sex - female	Urban
27	Secondary	Gauteng	201 - 500	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
28	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	201 - 500	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
29	Secondary	Gauteng	> 1000	CAPS	Co-ed	Urban
30	Secondary	KwaZulu-Natal	201 - 500	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
32	Pre-School, Primary and Secondary	Gauteng	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
33	Secondary	Eastern Cape	501 - 1000	CAPS	Co-ed	Rural
34	Secondary	Mpumalanga	201 - 500	IEB	Co-ed	Urban
35	Secondary	Western Cape	201 - 500	CAPS	Co-ed	Urban

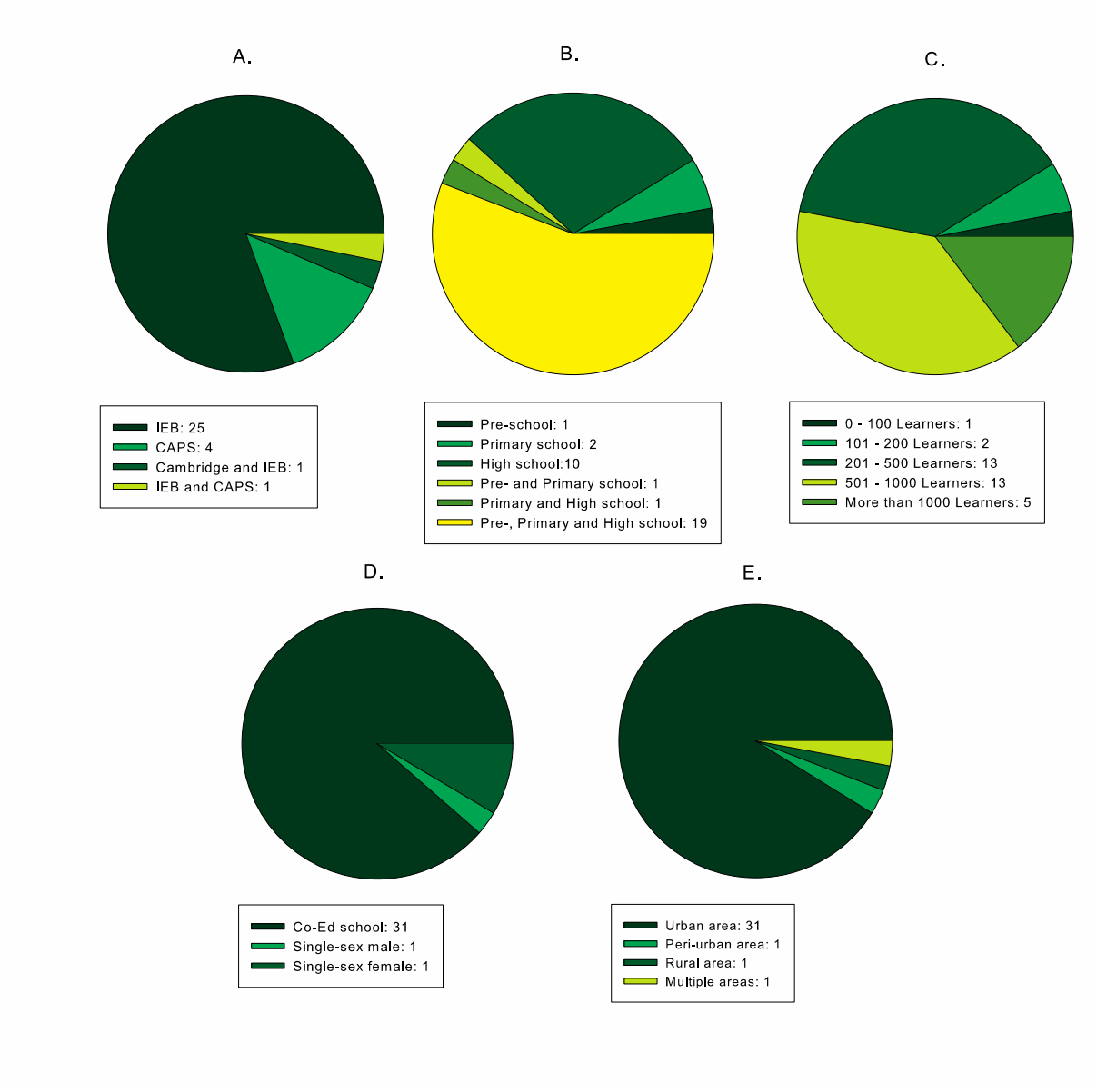


Figure 4: A) Curricula taught in participants' schools, B) Educational level taught at participants' schools, C) Number of learners in participants schools, D) Sex categories for learners in participants' schools, E) Geographical area type for participants.

The dominant characteristics of the school's Head Teachers represented were predominantly the IEB curriculum (Figure 4A), they taught all three educational levels specifically pre-school, primary school, and secondary school (Figure 4B), had either 201 to 500 learners or 501 to 1000 learners in their school (Figure 4C), were co-ed schools meaning they teach both male and female learners (Figure 4D), and were found in urban areas (Figure 4E). The characteristics represented in Figure 4A – 4E

do not always add up to 34 responses as participants in the survey were given the choice not to respond to every question.

Key outliers within this data set are that three participants did not identify the curriculum their school taught (Figure 4A) and one participant chose multiple geographical areas when asked to identify their school's geographical context (Figure 4E), this participant specified that they were the Head Teacher for three schools, one in each geographical context given.

4.2.2 RESULTS FOR PARTICIPANTS' ACCESS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Participating Head Teachers were asked to gauge their schools' staff and learner access to data, internet, and hardware during the pandemic in two separate questions, using four categories. The results from this question can be seen in Figure 5.

They could either choose:

- category one: that all staff/ learners had access to data, internet, and hardware such as computers, tablets, or smartphones, or
- category two: that most staff/ learners had access to data, internet, and hardware such as computers, tablets or smartphones, or
- category three: that very few staff/ learners had access to data, internet, and hardware such as computers, tablets or smartphones, or
- category four: that none of the staff/ learners had access to data, internet, and hardware such as computers, tablets, or smartphones.

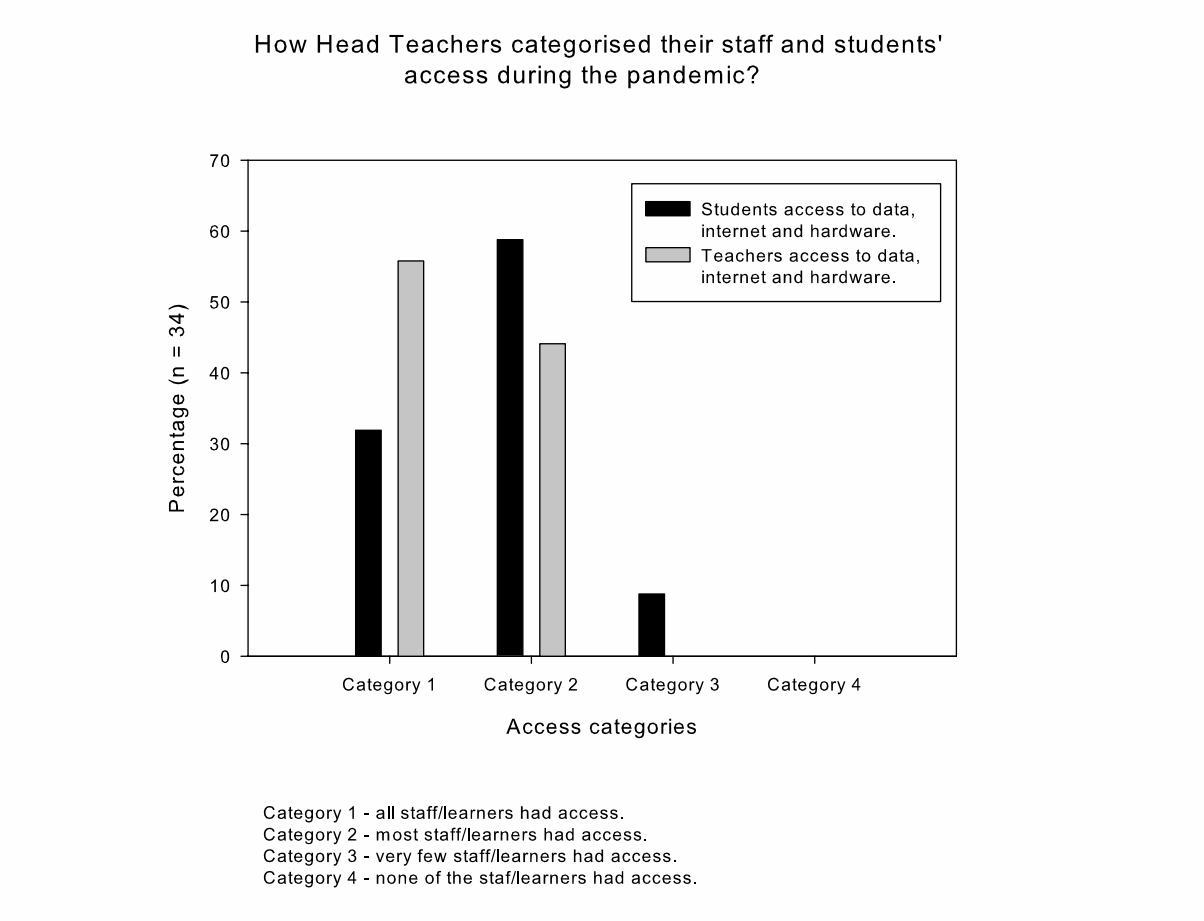


Figure 5: Participating Head Teachers' categorizations of staff and student access levels during the pandemic.

Of the 34 participating Head Teachers none chose category four for their staff or learners' access to data, internet, or hardware (Figure 5). When looking specifically at learners' access, of these 34 survey responses only three participants (9%) chose their learner's access as category three, with category two being the most dominant with 20 responses (59%) and category one having 11 responses (32%). When considering staff access during the pandemic none of the participants chose category three, with 19 responses (56%) choosing category one, and category two had 15 responses (44%) (Figure 5). Overall, respondents gauged their staff's access as higher than that of their learners, having more responses in category one than category two and none in category three or four for staff, where learner access choices were overall lower in category two and three rather than category one.

Following on from these questions on what type of access Head Teachers and their staff experienced, survey participants were asked to elaborate on how they addressed access issues during the pandemic. One response from the survey emphasized printed notes for collection, participant 8's response: "Provided printed information at certain pre-arranged places to be collected and work dropped off at the same location." An alternative approach described in the survey responses focused on digital lessons, participant 21's response: "Many of our families relied on phones. We tried not to make lessons shared too data heavy."

When considering the results obtained within access to data, internet and hardware Figure 6 below compares these according to their geographical distribution across South Africa.

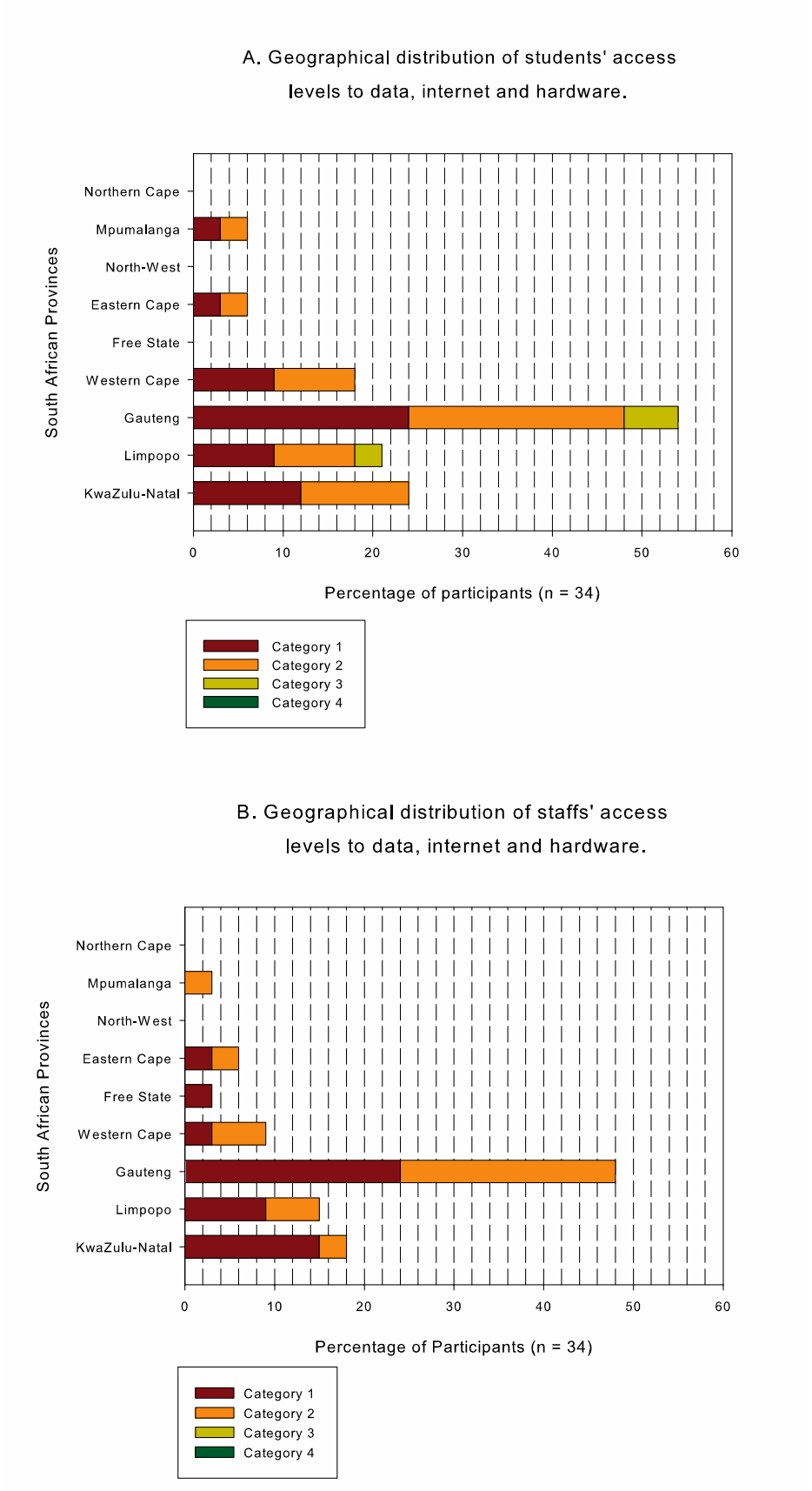


Figure 6: A) Geographical distribution of students' access across South Africa B) Geographical distribution of staffs' access across South Africa. Category classification same as Figure 5.

When considering Figure 6A students' access across South Africa the three responses within category 3 (Figure 5) are only found in Gauteng and Limpopo, with 13% of Gauteng respondents, two of 16 responses in this province, and 20% of Limpopo respondents, one of five responses in this province, placing their students access as 'very few have access.' As identified in Figure 5 the dominant responses was that most students had access during the pandemic, this responses category is found in every respondent province. The Western Cape had all 3 of their respondents falling into this category and Mpumalanga, with only one respondent, also falling into this category. The provinces with the best student access, category 1 showing that 'all students had access' were KwaZulu-Natal, with 50% of respondent schools in this province, and Gauteng, with 38% of their respondent schools falling into this classification.

When Figure 6B and staff access levels are considered category 1 and category 2 are found in every respondent province except the Free State, who only had one respondent in their province fall into category one only. Gauteng and Eastern Cape show an even distribution between these two response categories, with 8 of the 16 Gauteng respondent schools being in each category (50% each), and one of the two respondent schools from the Eastern Cape being in each category as well (50% each). KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo both show a dominance of category 1, with KwaZulu-Natal having 5 of 6 of their respondent schools (83%) in this category and Limpopo having 3 of 5 respondent schools (60%) within this category. The Western Cape was the only province with more responses in category 2 rather category 1, specifically 2 of 3 responses (67%) fell into category 2.

The final question in the access and context questions of the online survey considered how the participating Head Teachers would classify their school's financial stability during the pandemic. The participants were given three choices when classifying their school’s financial access during the pandemic:

- Stable finances. This meant their institution experienced no problems with payments from parents or salary provisions during the pandemic, or
- Neutral finances. This was clarified to mean their institution experienced problems with payments from parents yet was able to withstand the pandemic without financial constraints or reduced salaries due to other sources of funding or money, or
- Unstable finances. This was outlined to mean their institution experienced problems with payments from parents and was unable to maintain salaries and expenses during the pandemic lockdown resulting in reduced salaries and other financial changes.

Of the 34 respondents, 19 classified their school’s finances as neutral during the pandemic (56%), with stable and unstable finances having both been chosen by 6 of the 34 respondents (18% each). The responses to this question can be seen in Figure 7.

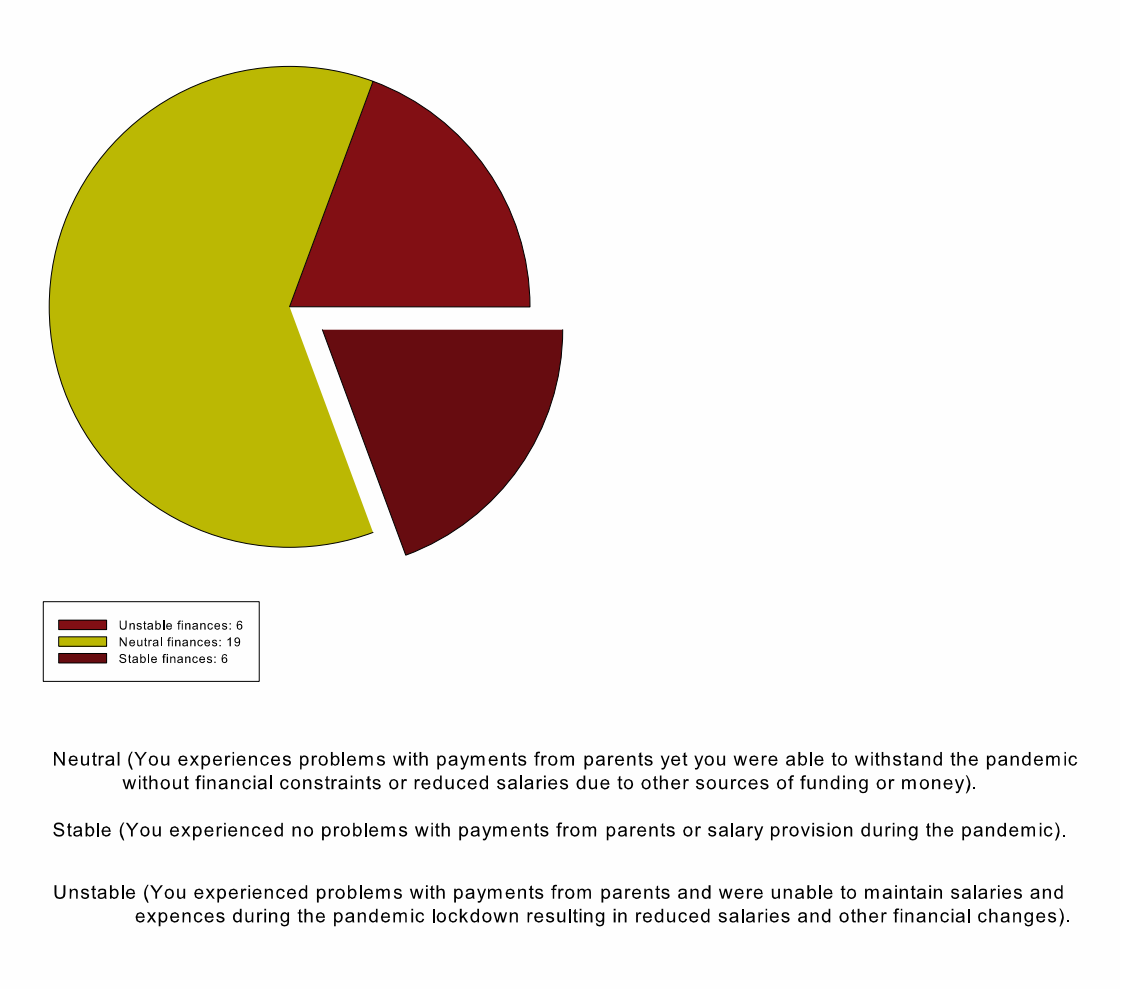


Figure 7: Financial stability of participants' schools during the pandemic lockdown.

Several respondents had financial access issues that were specific to their school, participant 24's access was "a combination of neutral and stable. No external funding", whereas participant 26's access was unstable in nature yet: "Salaries not reduced but retrenchment occurred," and participant 27's access was stable in nature yet "we were not given bonuses during the Covid period."

When the financial stability of respondents is considered in a geographical distribution context Figure 8 below shows the trends that become clear.

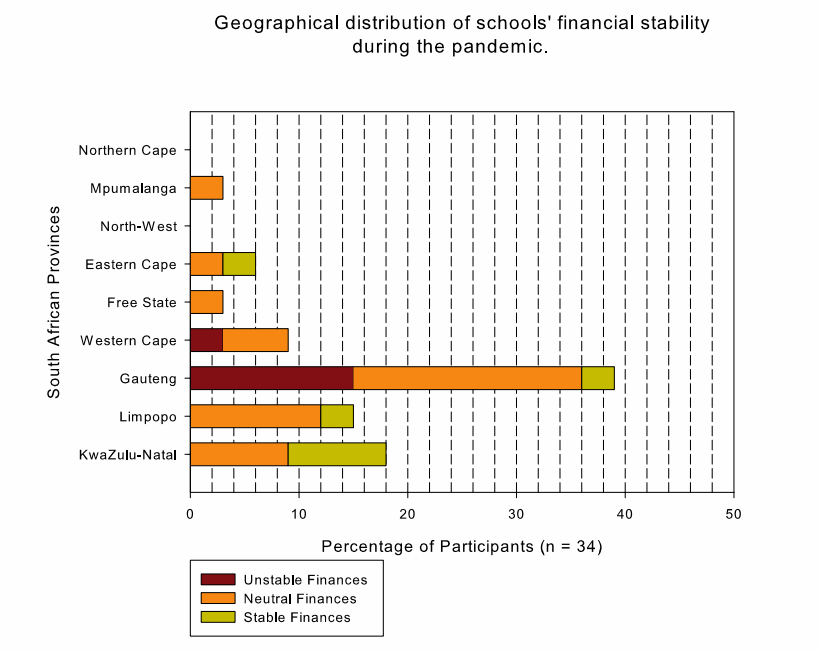


Figure 8: Geographical distribution of schools' financial stability during the pandemic. Finance category classification the same as Figure 7.

Figure 8 shows the following geographical trends within financial access during the pandemic, the respondents that experienced unstable finances where in Gauteng and the Western Cape, with Gauteng having 5 of the 6 (83%) unstable finance responses and the Western Cape only having one of the 6 (67%) responses in this category. The most dominant response category for financial stability – neutral, with 56% of responses (Figure 7), was the dominant category in three provinces, namely Gauteng (37% of neutral responses), Limpopo (21% of neutral responses), and the Western Cape (11% of neutral responses). The provinces with the same number of responses in neutral and stable finances, and therefore with better financial access during the pandemic, where KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, both with a 50% / 50% split between their respondents in the neutral and stable categories.

4.2.3 HEAD TEACHERS' DECISION-MAKING DURING THE PANDEMIC

The online survey's second section investigated how participating Head Teachers responded and felt when making decisions during the pandemic. Figure 9 represents these survey responses. The most dominant education programme implemented during the pandemic was response 4 (Figure 9A) – implementing a system with multiple formats for education, such as hybrid, online, or in-person, as the lockdown levels allowed – this response was implemented by 21 of 34 participants (62%). None of the participants completely suspended their educational programmes at any stage of the lockdown, response 1 (Figure 9A), rather using online formats for education where possible.

The prominent communication methodologies used to communicate the education programmes implemented during the pandemic, Figure 9B, were email (85%), WhatsApp groups (76%), and Zoom or Google Meet (68%). The least used communication methodologies, Figure 9B, were Microsoft Teams (6%) and school apps (9%). Participants mainly sourced the information they used to make educational programme decisions and health decisions from National Directives and Gazettes (65%) and ISASA (12%), as seen in Figure 9C. 68% of participants felt they had enough information to make informed decisions during the pandemic, while only 9% felt they did not have enough access to information to make informed decisions (Figure 9D).

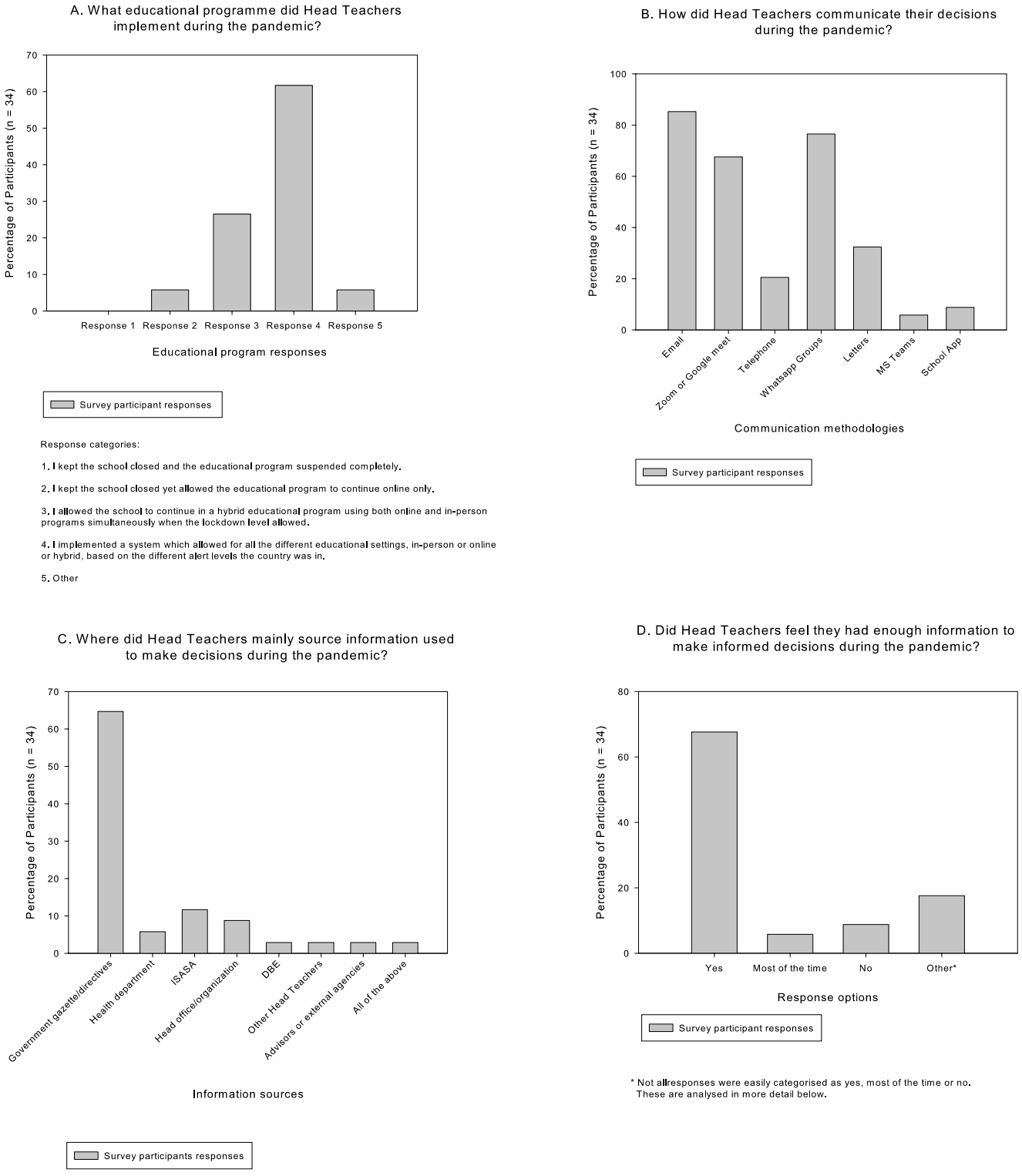


Figure 9: Visual representations of A) Educational programme implemented during the pandemic, B) Communication methodologies used during the pandemic, C) Information sources during the pandemic, and D) Access to information during the pandemic.

The online survey section two allowed participants to specify other responses to the given questions if their actions did not fall within one of the specified categories. An example of this would be participant 33's response to the question outlined in Figure 9A, such that participant 33 felt the education programme implemented in their school fell within all of the above categories in rotation. When asked if Head Teachers felt they had enough information to make informed decisions during the pandemic, Figure 9D, five respondents felt their response was not as simple as yes, most of the time or other and gave more detail. These responses varied but are quoted in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Outlying responses from Head Teachers regarding making informed decisions.

Participant number:	**Responses to: "Did you feel you had enough information to make informed decisions during this pandemic?"**
16	"Eventually yes! But most of the times you had to be pro-active in your decision-making while the relevant directives were not available."
19	"We used a committee structure to interpret the information received and to apply it as best we understood it to our school."
29	"For the short term (one to two weeks) yes, but for longer it was more difficult."
30	"Our Inspired Group who runs internationally made global decisions."
34	"Decisions were made by head-office. We simply had to comply whether we agreed or not."

The dominant trend identifiable in these survey responses (Table 6) shows that several independent school Head Teachers relied heavily of their school's head-office or committee to make decisions and they were not the main decision-makers in their schools.

When the factors of response type, communication methodologies, information sources and informed decision making in across the geographical landscape of South Africa Figure 10 shows the trends evident.

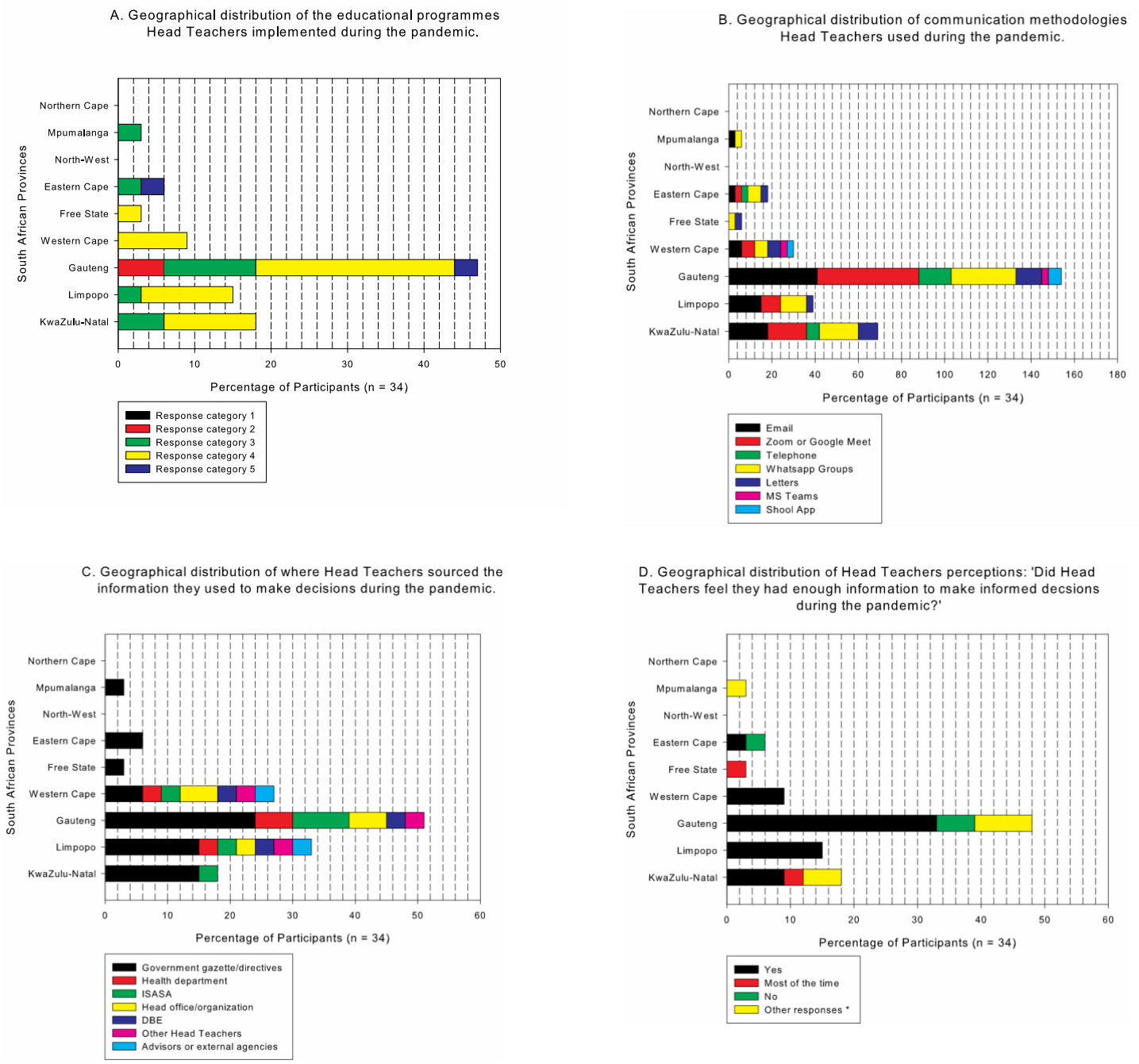


Figure 10: The geographical distribution of A) Educational programme implemented during the pandemic, B) Communication methodologies used during the pandemic, C) Information sources during the pandemic, and D) Access to information during the pandemic.*

**Response category for Figure 10A is the same as Figure 9A.*

Figure 10A shows the following trends: 5 of the 7 respondent provinces (71%) used response category 4, where multiple formats of education were used as the alert levels changed. The Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga did not use this and rather focused on hybrid educational formats only. The provinces with the lowest access as identified in Figure 6, namely Gauteng and Limpopo, also prioritized multiple educational formats. When considering the communication method used it is clear that email, the most dominant method of communication (Figure 9B) is used by every respondent school in 4 of 7 (57%) of the respondent provinces namely; Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga (Figure 10B) . It is also clear that using multiple formats of communication simultaneously is a trend almost all respondents followed. There is no clear trend in where information was sourced during the pandemic according to location across South Africa (Figure 10C). Finally, when considering if Head Teachers felt they had enough information to make informed decisions across South Africa during the pandemic (Figure 10D) it is clear that the provinces with larger response groups, 5 of the 7 respondent provinces (71%), all felt this was possible all or most of the time.

The last question within section two of the online survey surveyed the level of pressure participant Head Teachers were experiencing when making decisions during the pandemic. This is represented in Figure 11. Of the participants, 47% felt a high level of pressure and 44% felt an extremely high level of pressure during the pandemic. None of the participants felt a low or extremely low level of pressure during the pandemic, and one participant opted not to respond to this question.

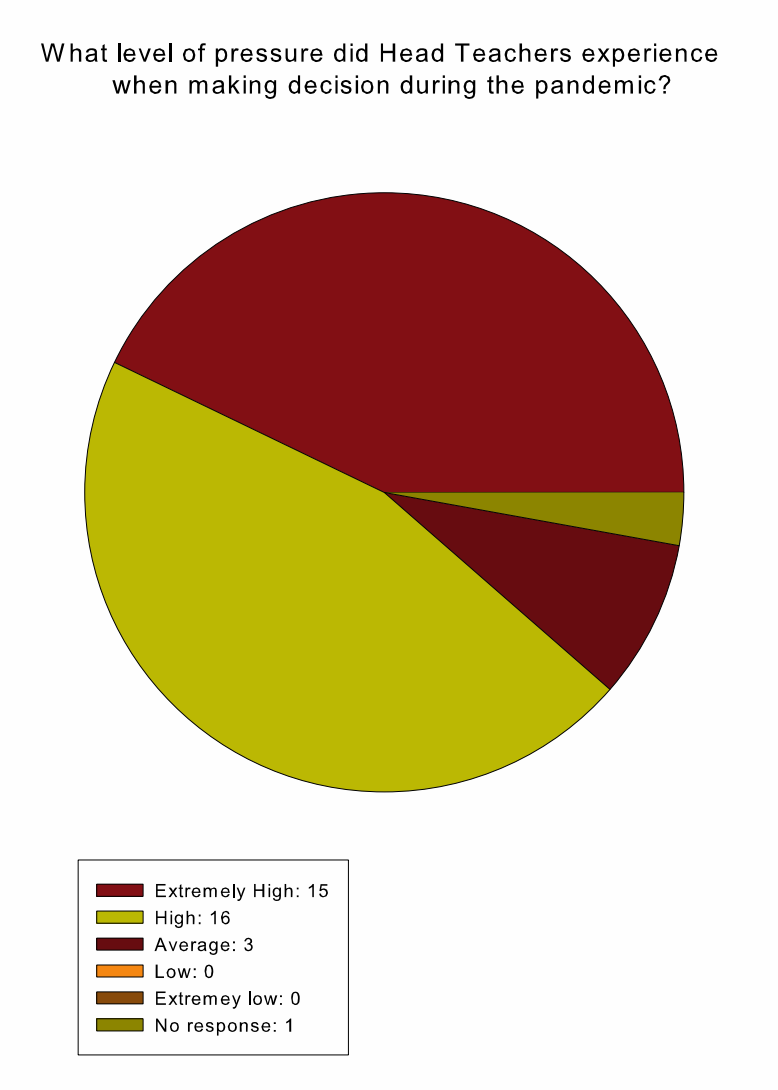


Figure 11: Level of pressure experienced by participant Head Teachers during the pandemic.

When considering the level of pressure Head Teachers experienced across the South African Landscape Figure 12 shows the trends evident for this. KwaZulu-Natal had the highest number of respondents, five of 6 respondents (83%), choose Extremely High as their pressure level felt. An average pressure level was only felt in Gauteng, two of 16 respondents in this province (13%), and the Eastern Cape with one of two respondents (50%) in this province. All three respondents in the Western Cape felt a high level of pressure.

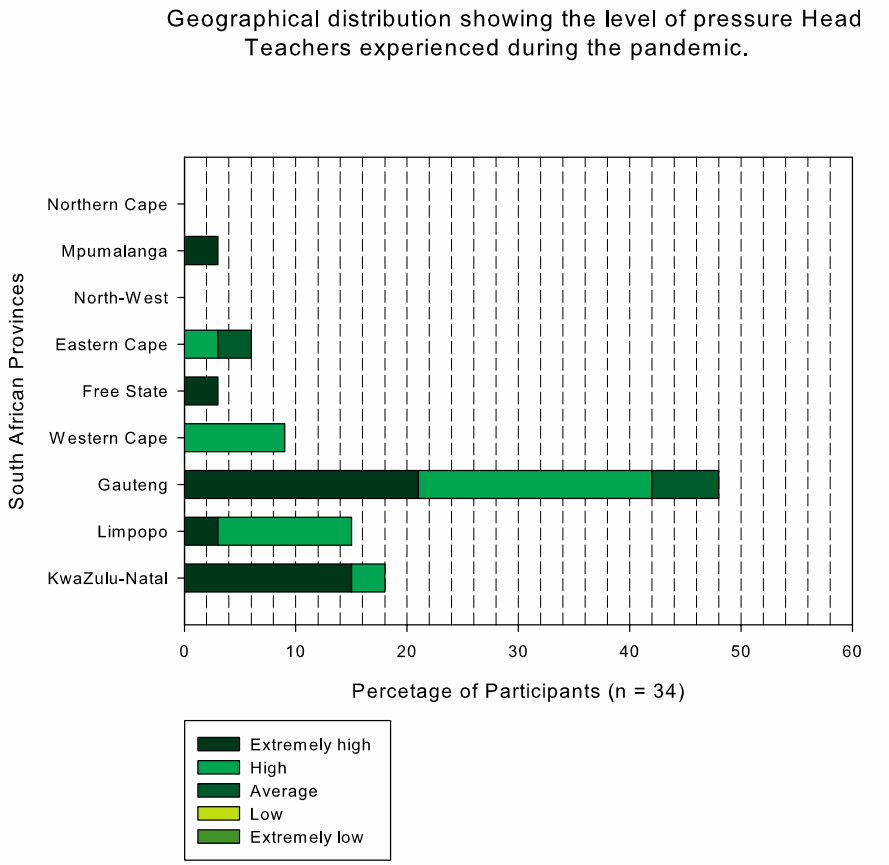


Figure 12: Geographical distribution of the pressure level Head teachers experienced during the pandemic.

4.2.4 DECISION-MAKING DRIVERS

This study also surveyed how Head Teachers made their decision and what impact this decision-making during the pandemic had on the Head Teacher. In the third section of the survey participants were asked to identify which decision drivers influenced their decision-making and then they were asked to select which of the chosen decision drivers was the main influence on their decision-making during the pandemic. The decision drivers given as options included: the religious considerations of the school, financial concerns, legal advice and ramifications, scientific facts and data, National Government Regulations, Directives and information from the local municipality, DBE and National Health Department, the

opinions of the school community, the opinions of external stakeholders, personal views, and other. The results for these questions are compared on Figure 13.

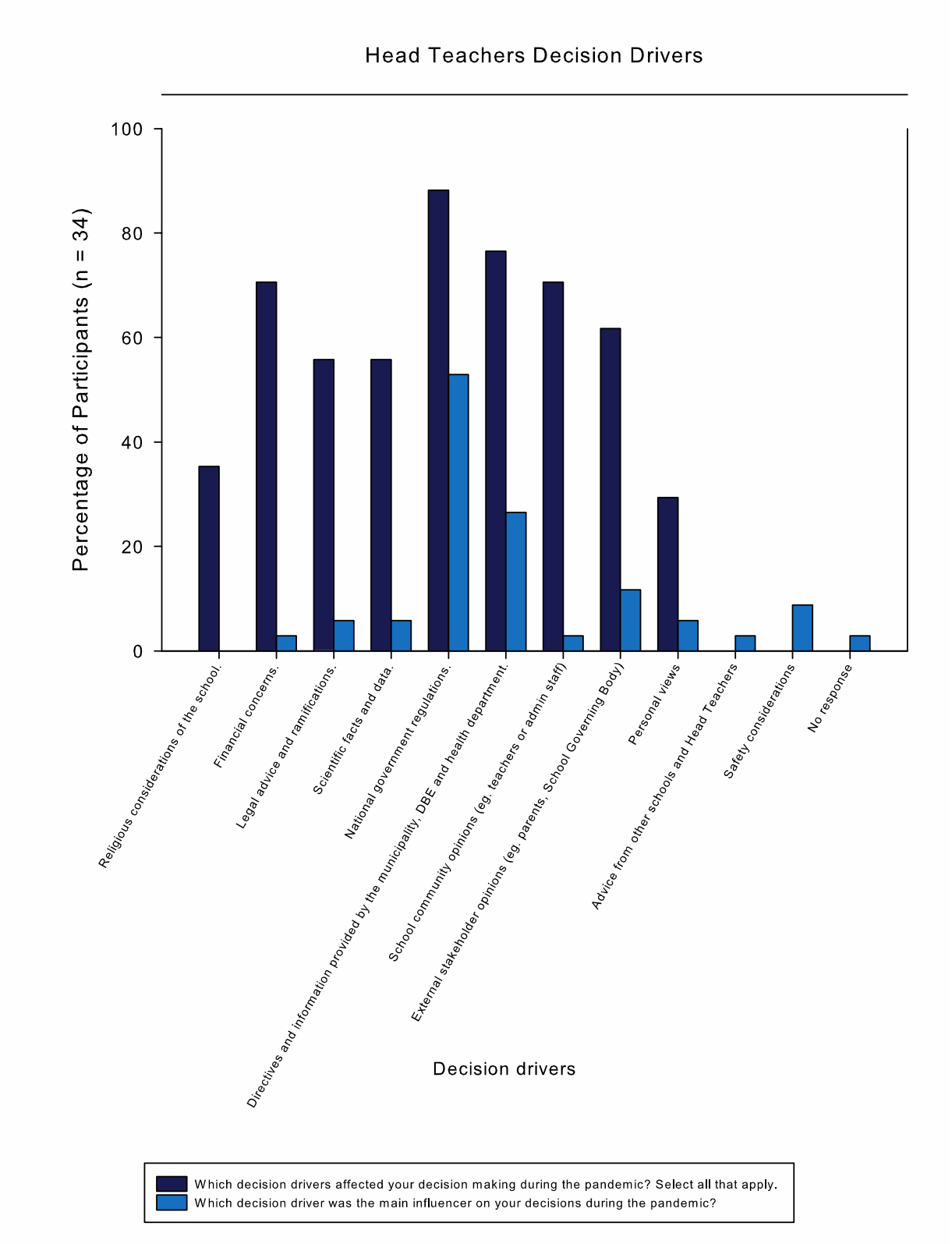


Figure 13: Decision drivers during the pandemic.

When asked to identify all decision drivers influencing their decisions, participants' main drivers were National Government Regulations (88%), and Directives and information from the municipality, DBE, and National Health Department (74%). These were closely followed by financial concerns and the opinions of the whole school community, with 71% consideration for both decision drivers. The least impactful decision drivers were personal views, with only 30% consideration, followed by religious considerations with only 35% consideration (Figure 13).

The most prominent decision driver among the 34 participants, when asked to only select one driver, was National Government Directives, with 53% consideration (Figure 13). It is interesting to note however, that when given the chance to choose their main decision driver a few new drivers were named in the ‘other’ column, these included advice gained from other Head Teachers and schools (3%) and safety considerations (9%). The decision driver that was not considered a main driver by any of the participants was the religious considerations of the school.

When considering these decision drivers in a geographical distribution context Figure 14A and 14B below show the trends evident across South Africa.

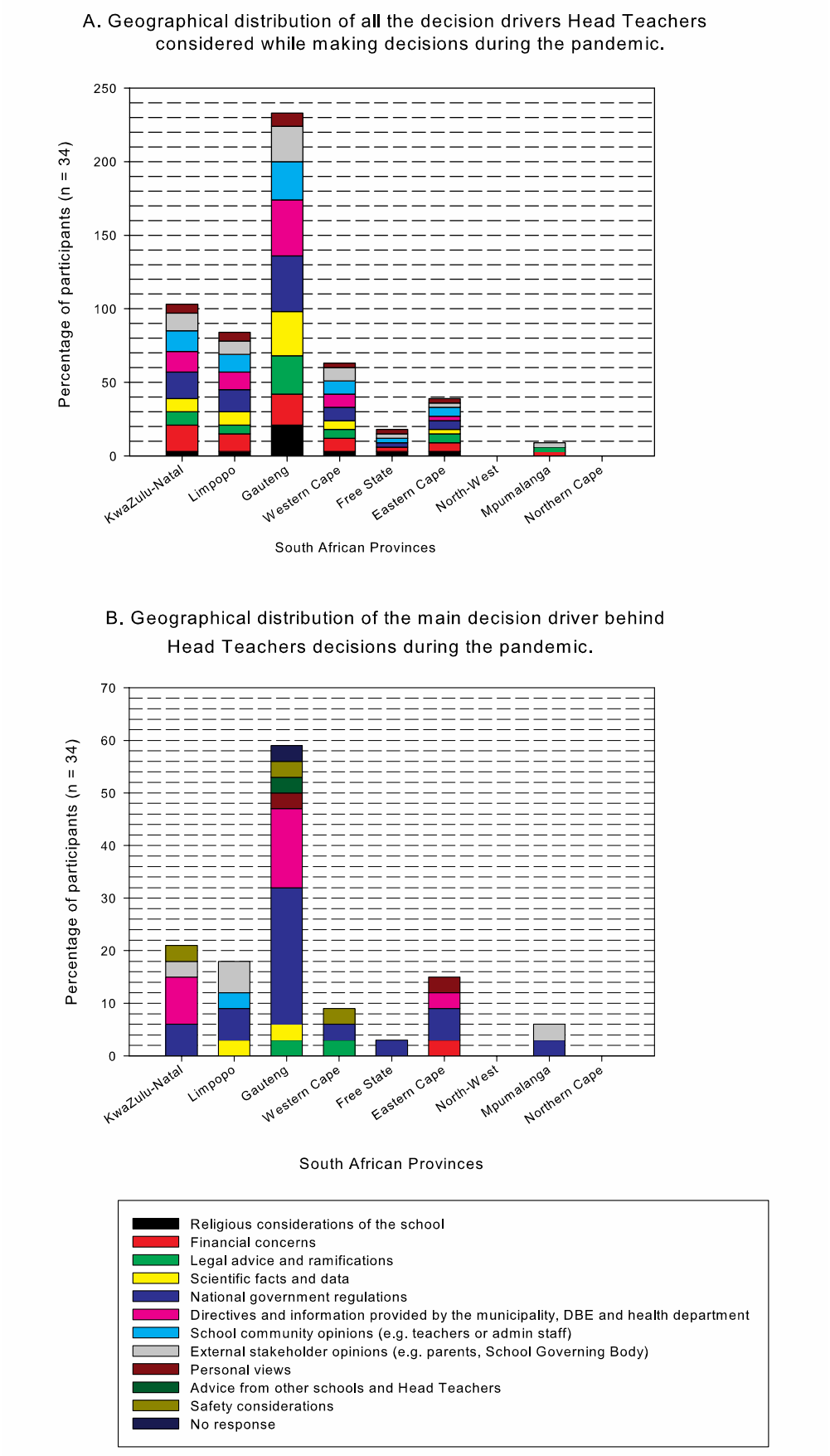


Figure 14: A) Geographical distribution of all decision drivers Head Teachers considered during the pandemic, B) Geographical distribution of the main decision drivers Head Teachers used during the pandemic.

Figure 14A shows that when given the choice to choose all decision drivers that applied to Head Teacher decisions respondents in different provinces chose very differently, the decision drivers that all respondents in each province chose are outlined here. All 6 respondents in KwaZulu-Natal chose National government regulations and financial concerns. The only decision driver that all five respondents in Limpopo chose was National government regulations. The 16 respondents in Gauteng had no one decision driver that they all considered when making decisions, rather 13 of the 16 (82%) choose National government regulations and Directives from the municipality, DBE and Health Department. All three respondents in the Western Cape chose National government regulations, financial concerns, school community opinions, external stakeholder opinions and Directives from the municipality, DBE and Health Department. The other respondent provinces had too few respondents to make this comparison. When considering religion, a decision driver shown in Figure 13 to only be chosen when given the option to choose multiple drivers, it is clear that it is a concern in 6 of 7 provinces (86% of respondent provinces).

Figure 14B however showed the dominant or main decision driver across provinces in South Africa, and it is clear that respondents in all 7 provinces (100%) chose National government regulations as their main decision driver. Financial concerns were only a main decision driver in the Eastern Cape. Directives from the municipality, DBE and Health Department was a main decision driver in three of the 7 responding provinces (43%), specifically KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and the Eastern Cape. The new decision drivers identified in Figure 13, namely other Head Teachers and safety concerns occur as follows, other Head Teachers is only chosen as a main

decision driver in Gauteng, and safety concerns are chosen as a main decision driver in three of the 7 responding provinces (43%), specifically KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and the Western Cape.

4.2.5 HEAD TEACHER PREPARATION

Participants were asked to elaborate as to how prepared they felt during the pandemic, and what would have made them more prepared. The long-form responses to this question allowed participants to express themselves, and the four major responses were thematically grouped as either; “yes, we felt prepared enough because of the normal nature of our job”, or “yes, we felt prepared enough because of our school's resources and context”, or “no, we did not feel prepared enough because no one could be prepared for this pandemic”, or “no, we did not feel prepared enough because of a lack of resources, knowledge, clear instructions and communication from decision-makers”.

The first response theme identified the typical stressful and continually changing nature of the Head Teacher job as the reason why 18% of participating Head Teachers felt they were well prepared for the pandemic. This concept is encapsulated in the following quote from participant 4:

> *I have been a principal for 25 years and have been through a number of crises, and have simply learned on the job, or in situ. I have never had any form of training.*

The second response theme identified the access, resources, and context of the participating Head Teachers as the reason why 21% of participants felt they were

prepared for the pandemic, which is clear in participant 5's response, "We were privileged to have the resources to be fully prepared." However, access and resources are broad concepts and a few of the respondents outline what specifically assisted them in being prepared for the pandemic. These specifics included technological access and familiarity with programmes and platforms - "It was fairly easy for us to move over to completely online" – and having access to a head office or group of Head Teachers to discuss and communicate with. Participant 14 shows how a pre-existing technological framework allowed for a more efficient pandemic response:

> *I have always incorporated technology in my classes and since I was in charge of my department have always driven the use of technology in the classroom. We had many things in place like document cameras, Microsoft Teams, etc. It was just a matter to streamline it for daily use and online teaching methodology.*

Where participant 32's response below encapsulates how communication and teamwork assisted their pandemic response:

> *I felt supported by a team at our brand office as well as by head office. I am also on a group with approximately 25 other principals in our company and we all communicated continuously in order to assist each other.*

The third response theme identified was that participating Head Teachers felt they were not prepared for the pandemic at all because of the rapid appearance of the COVID-19 virus and how unpredictable and unplanned it was in nature, "Not at all. No one could have foreseen or prepared you for such difficult circumstances." This response theme was the most dominant response, with 26% of participants

associating the nature of the pandemic with their lack of preparation. Participants 17 and 19 show the flexible nature of this pandemic and how no matter how prepared anyone could have been they viewed the nature of the pandemic as impossible to prepare for

> Participant 17's response: *This was unprecedented, so it was impossible to be prepared. We prepared as much as we could, put plans in place and then Sunday night, the President would address the nation and the plans we had, had to be dissolved and we had to come up with something feasible by Monday morning. The entire world was in crisis management…*

> Participant 19's response: *"Are you ever sufficiently prepared, especially for a first-time situation? We worked things out steadily, one issue at a time."*

The final response theme identified showed that 17% of participating Head Teachers viewed their lack of preparation in relation to communication issues – " I believe more concise, clear instructions from the Department of Education would have helped." – a lack of information – "I needed direct guidance on how schools ought to approach mitigation." – and a low resource and access level – "I believe that if our school were better resourced in terms of technology and teachers had the techno-capabilities it would have been easier."

Several participants responded to the questions asking how they believed they could have been more prepared for the pandemic and their ability to respond in a more accurate and effective manner. The responses included having a better knowledge of online learning before the pandemic began, having support from a group so they

could counsel and guide one another, knowing the most current trends of the pandemic as it progressed, and being as knowledgeable in all related aspects as possible.

Although not prompted to, a number of participants engaged with the ways this increased pressure affected their lives, with participant 10's response fully encapsulating the flexibility and agility needed from Head Teachers throughout the pandemic:

> *One had to remain incredibly agile, all the time. You were constantly responding to people and information, whilst managing a range of people's (staff, parents, pupils, etc.) fears and anxieties. Shifting significantly into the online space meant you "never left your office". Contact tracing late into the evenings etc. was relentless. The fear of getting it wrong was debilitating at times. Damned if you do, damned if you don't scenarios, particularly when opening sports and cultural programmes again.*

These response categories can be considered geographically to see if any trends are evident across South Africa, as seen in Figure 15 below. Response group 1 is "yes, we felt prepared enough because of the normal nature of our job", response group 2 is "yes, we felt prepared enough because of our school's resources and context", response group 3 is "no, we did not feel prepared enough because no one could be prepared for this pandemic", and response group 4 is "no, we did not feel prepared enough because of a lack of resources, knowledge, clear instructions and communication from decision-makers".

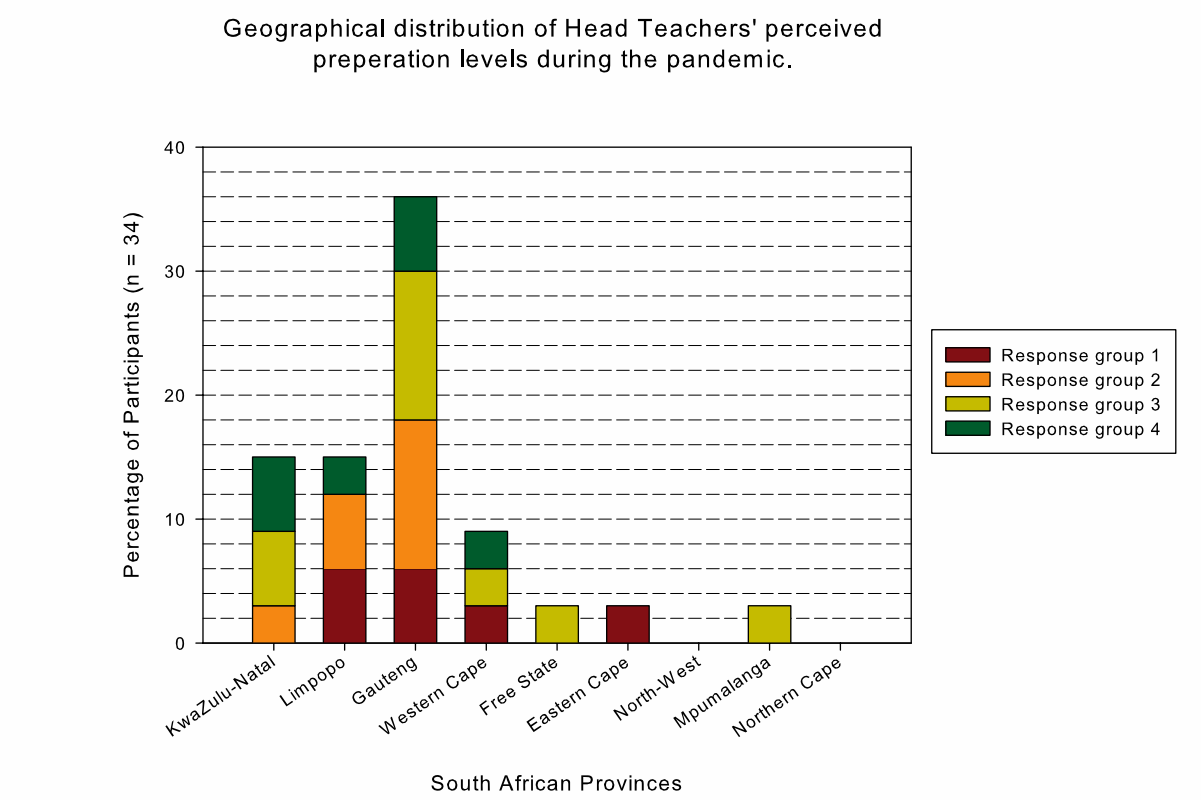


Figure 15: Geographical distribution of Head Teachers perceived preparation levels during the pandemic.

Figure 15 shows that none of the respondents from KwaZulu-Natal believed the nature of their job prepared them for the pandemic, response group 1, rather 4 of 6 respondents in KwaZulu-Natal (66%) believed they were not prepared for the pandemic either response group 3 or 4, and only one of 6 respondents (17%) in KwaZulu-Natal believed they were prepared, response group 2. Within Limpopo and the majority of respondents believed they were prepared for the pandemic because their context and resources were sufficient, response group 2. This was shown by two of five respondents in Limpopo (40%) selecting this category. An equal amount of four of 16 Gauteng respondents (25%) chose response group 2 and 3, showing a clear division amongst Head Teachers in Gauteng between yes they were prepared for the pandemic based on their context and resources and no they were not prepared as no one could be prepared for a pandemic. Response group 4 is only

evident in four of 7 respondent provinces (58%), showing a lack of resources, information, knowledge and communication was a major concern in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and the Western Cape.

4.2.6 PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

The final question in the survey asked participants to elaborate on how the responsibilities of their position within the school during the pandemic affected them personally. This response varied for every participant and ranged between negative and positive influences of the pandemic. The three prominent negative implications identified through thematic analyses of participants' responses included increased pressure, stress, and frustration, the prioritization of the well-being of others before self, and increased work hours.

1. Increased pressure, stress, and frustration.

   Of the participating Head Teachers 18% felt an increased stress level as each Head Teacher was required to follow National and Municipal Directives, yet they had to adapt these to their school's context each time they were released – “I think we were all floundering a little to find an approach that worked for each individual environment, this was extremely stressful for all heads.” – and the directives lacked clear guidance creating high stress levels. The increased number of factors that needed to be considered and managed by Head Teachers increase their stress level substantially.

These factors being managed are outlined by participant 3:

The pandemic added more pressure and responsibility to manage all the protocols and resistance to them, more pressure to manage absent teachers and support staff, and to manage our school finance with parents not being able to pay fees.

This was supported by participant 29's response which suggested that Head Teachers were constantly worried about the health of those under their care, their finances, and the access of their learners to food during the pandemic.

Participant 14 's response suggested that the pressure felt was more intense after the pandemic as the Head Teachers now had to cope with the implications of the pandemic on their educational programmes and learners:

Learners, even though they had online school, are not on the desired levels they were before the pandemic. I feel more pressure now than during lockdown.

2. <u>Head Teachers prioritized the well-being of their staff, community, and learners before their own.</u>

A clear implication outlined by 12% of participants' responses was that they prioritized the emotional, physical, and mental well-being of those under their care during the pandemic.

Participant 1's response: *As a Head one could not show weakness or be tired - you simply had to pull your team along. Your main concern was your teachers, your learners, your community, and your well-being was not important.*

Participant 21's response: *Keeping up the psychological morale of the teachers, parents, and pupils was draining. I always had to present as if "everything was fine".*

This prioritization of those under their care caused increased personal implications in 9% of participating Head Teachers, such as increased anxiety, depression, and psychological care needed – "I am suffering from anxiety".

Participant 9's response: *I have had to see a psychologist and psychiatrist and am taking medication for anti-anxiety and depression. My health has taken a significant toll.*

Participant 10's response: *Educational leadership is my life and passion, and I am actually walking away from it for a spell. After the pressures of the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement (I agree with the movement, but the pressures of managing it in our community were exceptionally taxing), and the looting in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), I woke up one morning to find my tank completely empty.*

3. <u>Increased work hours.</u>

Of participating Head Teachers 9% found an increasing number of hours was spent working during the pandemic and increased amounts of time was spent on devices as these were the vehicles of communication during the pandemic, which in turn led to less personal time.

Participant 27's response: *My roles and responsibilities extended, and sometimes infringed on my personal time. I became more freely available to parents and learners on my personal device(s).*

Although these negative implications were the most predominant responses, several participants speak to implications worth considering within a broader context, these implications included increased scrutiny, a loss in momentum, and the corporate nature of some independent institutions within South Africa. Participant 30 outlined that the pandemic placed a more intense spotlight on schools and their leadership, in such a way that "We have come under more scrutiny by more demanding parents." Participant 24 considers the implications for long-term development of schools by claiming they "Had to postpone plans and the momentum of the institution." Finally, Participant 34 expresses their frustration with the economic focus of their independent institution, such that these institutions "are only concerned with the finances of the institution - not about the staff or the learners. It was all about the bottom line at the end of the day."

Responses also identified a few positive implications associated with the pandemic, specifically for Head Teachers. These positive implications for Head Teachers included; increased levels of trust in Head Teachers as leaders, increased networking within the school leadership community, increased levels of resilience, Head Teachers learned to trust their capabilities, an increase in decision-making skills and confidence, forced Head Teachers to think outside of the box and become more creative in problem-solving, it lead to the revision of leadership policies, methodologies, and actions, and finally, an increased connection and dependence

on religion was identified in 6% of responses – “It has grown me in many ways, and benefitted the school. I believe that I grew closer to God as a result.”

Participating Head Teachers also outlined several positive ways the pandemic influenced their schools and communities. There was an increase in teamwork among school staff, the school community was brought closer together, teaching methodologies adapted and changed becoming more unique, and increased support between staff and school communities.

The implication responses have been considered from a geographical distribution standpoint using Figure 16 below. Figure 16A shows the negative impacts experienced by Head Teachers across South Africa, namely that of the 6 survey respondents that felt an increase in pressure, stress and frustration 4 were in Gauteng (67%) and one was in Limpopo (17%) and one was in the Western Cape (17%). Of the four respondents that prioritized the well-being of those under their care before their own two were in KwaZulu-Natal (50%) and one was in Limpopo (25%) and one was in Gauteng (25%). All three respondents that experienced an increased amount of work hours were in Gauteng (100%). 8 of the 13 responses (62%) that showed negative impacts were from respondents located in Gauteng, followed by two in Limpopo (15%) and two in KwaZulu-Natal (15%).

Figure 16B shows the dominant positive impacts experienced by Head Teachers across South Africa. Of the five respondents to experience an improved resilience three were in Gauteng (60%), one was in the Western Cape (20%) and one was in the Eastern Cape (20%). Of the 6 respondents that felt an increased confident and skill set three were in Gauteng (50%), one was in Limpopo (17%), one was in the

Western Cape (17%) and one was in the Eastern Cape (17%). Only two respondents found a larger connection with their religion, one located in Gauteng and one in the Free State. Only three respondents found an increased creativity and out-of-the-box thinking, one in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and the Western Cape. 10 of the 16 positive responses were found in Gauteng (63%), followed by three in the Western Cape (19%) and two in KwaZulu-Natal (13%). The Eastern Cape and Free State only responded with positive implications.

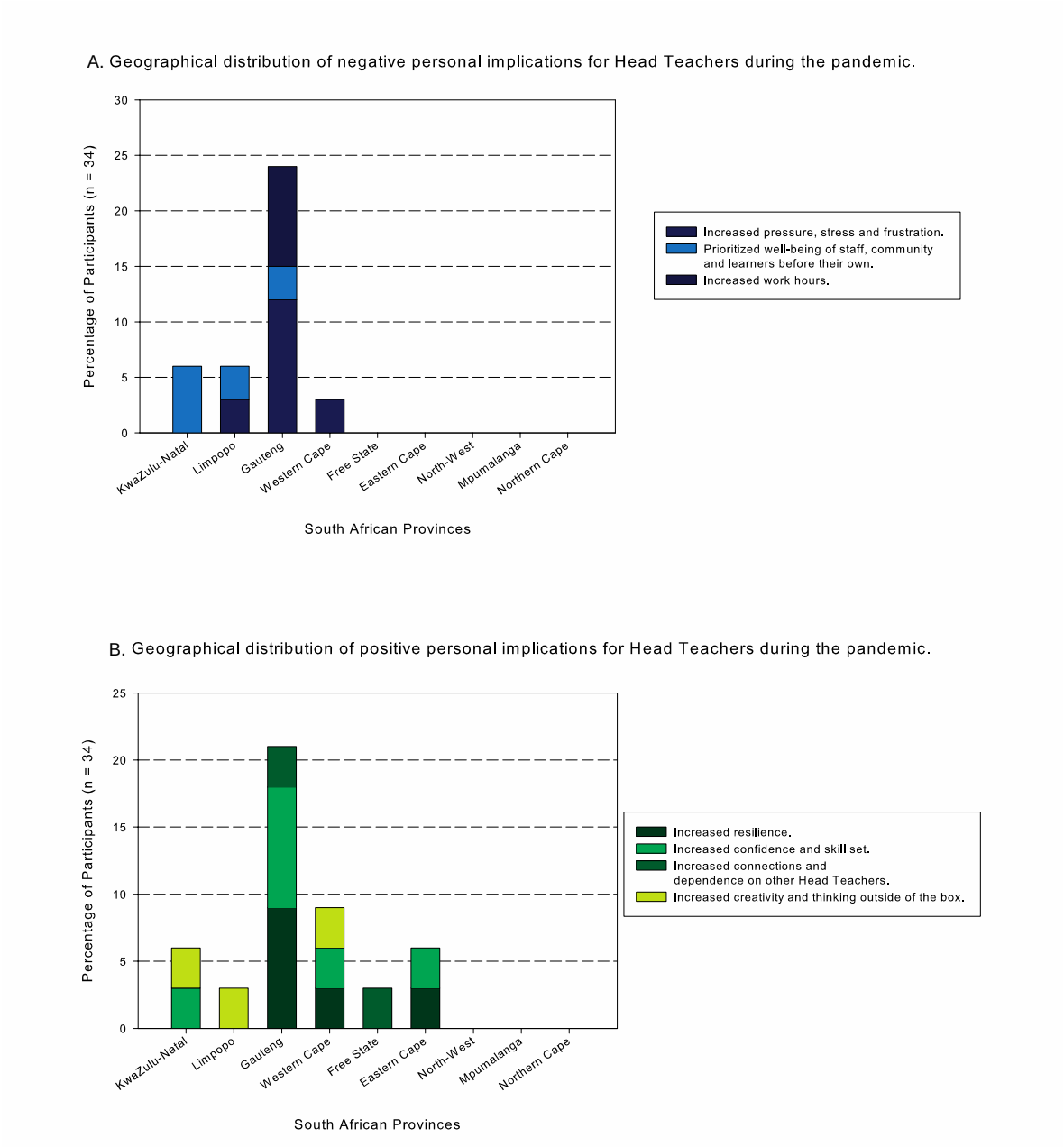


Figure 16: Geographical distribution of the A) positive and B) negative implications for Head Teachers.

4.3 ANALYSES OF INTERVIEWS

This study's methodology followed the online survey by interviewing four Head Teachers online, in one-on-one interviews using the Google Meet platform. These interviews aimed to interrogate the findings from the survey in more detail, to allow the personal experiences of South African Independent Head Teachers to be collected, understood, and analyzed. The demographics for the participants are outlined in Table 7 below. These interview participants covered a large range of age brackets, both genders, all three school sectors, and a diverse set of school characteristics (Table 7). None of these interviews have been analysed using a geographical distribution standpoint due to the small sample number.

Table 7: Demographics of Interviewees and the characteristics of the schools they represented.

Interview Participant	Gender	Age bracket	School sector/s	Province	Number of pupils	Curricula taught	Student Genders	Settlement type/s
1	Male	26 - 40	High school	Western Cape	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban area
2	Female	41 - 55	All three *	Limpopo	> 1000.	IEB	Co-ed	**
3	Male	41 - 55	All three *	KwaZulu-Natal	>1000.	IEB	Co-ed	Urban area
4	Male	56 - 65	All three *	Limpopo	501 - 1000	IEB	Co-ed	Urban area

* All three – these schools educate learners from pre-primary, to primary and to secondary school.

**Interviewee 2 was in control of multiple schools, allowing her response to Settlement type/s to be multiple in nature, she ran one peri-urban school, one urban, and one rural school.

These Interviewees were located in three of the nine provinces in South Africa, with Limpopo having two of the four Interviewees and Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal each having one of the four Interviewees (Figure 17).

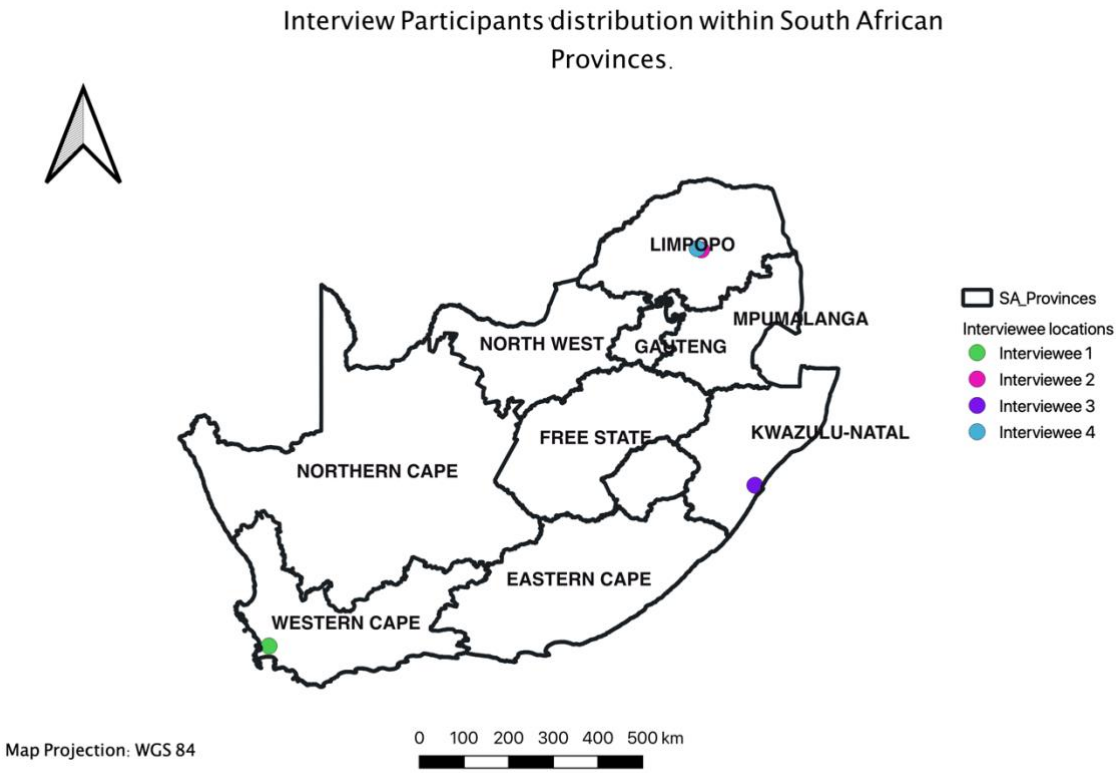


Figure 17: Distribution of Interview participants within South Africa.

The transcripts for these recordings were analyzed using thematic content analyses, which identified two common tensions Head Teachers had to navigate, two overall determinants within Head Teacher pandemic experiences, and two main implications for Head Teachers due to their experiences.

4.3.1 LEADERSHIP TRADEOFFS HEAD TEACHERS HAD TO NAVIGATE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Head Teachers highlighted two common tradeoffs that were constantly being juggled while leading in a pandemic:

1. Independence: outcome-oriented or awareness oriented?
2. Decision-making: compliance or deniability?

TRADEOFF 1: INDEPENDENCE – OUTCOME-ORIENTED OR AWARENESS ORIENTED?

While leading in the pandemic Head Teachers of independent South African schools were forced to choose between conflicting leadership goals, whether they would lead with measurable educational outcomes as their focus or if they would focus their leadership on being aware of and prioritizing the well-being of those under their care and preventing burnout. This tradeoff is specific to the independent nature of these Head Teachers' schools, as the nature of independent schools in South Africa means they are reliant on parents' tuition payments to be able to function and progress, whereas public schools in South Africa are supported by the government. Interviewee 1 outlined that:

> *That's what makes us different, that's what sets us apart, because if we don't do our work, the parents won't pay us, so there is one business aspect to it.*

This private funding was identified by two of the four Head Teachers interviewed as the reason they had to focus their leadership during the pandemic on producing reports and results for learners. Interviewee 1 further explains why reporting and assessment were their priority:

> *…we had to implement a system where we actually wrote tests and gave a report. Because the interesting thing was parents started saying that 'I'm not getting a report, so why do I need to pay'…*

This choice of outcomes and assessment was not the main choice for the other 2 Interviewees, who had to decide between the need to have tangible outcomes or prioritize awareness. Ultimately, they kept the concerns of well-being and preventing burn-out at the forefront of their actions when leading and making decisions during

the pandemic. Interviewee 3 outlined their role as a Head Teacher during the pandemic as such:

> *…spending a lot more time managing people's fears, managing people's anxieties…we often did little Google Forms to ask for feedback … we tried to keep the communication flow open.*

This view supporting staff's well-being and their mental and physical health was quite simply outlined by Interviewee 4:

> *You sometimes have to protect your staff from a lot of crap that comes along.*

When leading during a pandemic, Head Teachers had to decide between outcome-oriented leadership – the production of reports to placate parents so they continued paying their tuition fees – or awareness-oriented leadership – where the well-being and health of staff were the main reasons for leadership decisions. Overall, because of the nature of an independent school, Head Teachers had to choose between these two conflicting leadership goals, placing them in a stressful position during the pandemic.

TRADEOFF 2: DECISION-MAKING – COMPLIANCE OR DENIABILITY?

When deciding on how their educational institutes would implement National and Departmental regulations and operating procedures, once in-person schooling was phased back in, Head Teachers had to battle with the tradeoff surrounding their level of compliance with these operating procedures, do they comply to the fullest degree? Do they comply as much as they can? Or do they comply in such a way that they have deniability?

Interviewee 3 outlined how they believed their educational institution was the role model for their community, and that they had to comply fully with regulations as they did not want to put their institution at risk. This belief was steeped in the idea of good governance, that being a role model and following the regulations and operating procedures allowed the school to govern well and to protect the school.

> *…so, I was trying to role model that as well, often to the parent's frustration and annoyance. 'Yeah, but this school is doing this, and that school is doing that, and that school is doing that' and I didn't even care. I'm not that school. We're our school, you know … 'cause at the end of the day, you know if we didn't do that, I'm putting the school address on all documentation. Yeah, I'm putting the school at risk. I can't do that.*

When confronted with this same tradeoff decision Interviewee 2 followed their need to comply fully with all regulations and operating procedures at the beginning of the lockdown and when schools were first re-opened, not wanting to put their school in jeopardy, yet as time went on as the operating procedures continued to be released, the need to comply lessened.

> *So, initially, I just wanted to comply, I didn't want to get into trouble about anything, I don't like getting into trouble… So, I was very, very, compliant, I am still compliant. I mean we are not, not compliant, I am just less worried about not being compliant.*

Contrary to both of these standpoints Interviewee 4 dealt with this tradeoff decision by choosing to have deniability, stating: "I've always had a healthy disrespect for the

law.” This led Interviewee 4 into outlining how they aimed to have deniability wherever possible.

> *And you know, as long as I have deniability. So I was quite happy, you know, to not, so, for example, when the thermometer thing came out, there was a SOP [Standard Operating Procedure] that came out from the Department of Education with standard operating procedures and it had a clause in it, clear as day that says temperatures do not need to be taken anymore. Well at that point I closed off my mind, I wasn't prepared to hear anything else. I had my document that I could hold up to an inspector … 'cause then what are they going to do?*

These responses clearly outline how Head Teachers in independent South African schools had to battle with the tradeoff decision of compliance or deniability, and how they had to decide to which degree of compliance they would lead and implement in their independent institutions.

4.3.2 COMMON DETERMINANTS HEAD TEACHERS ENCOUNTERED DURING THE PANDEMIC

While leading during the pandemic, Interviewees encountered two common determinants, one of which was negative and one of which was positive. These determinants were factors that had clear effects on the outcomes of the pandemic. The two determinants are as follows:

1. Communication was a common determinant for decreasing well-being.
2. The pandemic was a common determinant for improved technological access and capabilities within schools.

COMMUNICATION WAS A COMMON DETERMINANT FOR DECREASING WELL-BEING.

While leading their school during a pandemic Head Teachers identified the important role of communication in their lockdown and pandemic educational programmes. Head Teachers found that their communication traffic increased, such that they were communicating on multiple platforms, and sending the same communication multiple times so that all stakeholders and learners were included and accounted for. Interviewee 1 outlined this complex and intensified communication traffic:

> *… everything we need is probably done three or four times, but it's important that our communication was quite clear, and everything goes out, not everyone watches their WhatsApp all the time, and not everyone's on email the whole time, so it's like everybody has a way to get all the communication.*

The intensified communication traffic was a two-way process, for all communication sent out to stakeholders and learners, communication was generally returned in some manner, usually on multiple platforms, as outlined by Interviewee 2: "When we put out something we expected something back. So, because of that, we were assessing all the time …" Although this two-way communication allowed for increased assessment and the generation of reports, it also allowed stakeholders a platform to express their worries, anxieties, and fears, bombarding Head Teachers continually, and increasing the time spent on devices and therefore reducing the amount of personal time during the lockdown. Interviewee 3 outlined the vast network of communication they used during the pandemic and showed how it was the determinant of decreasing well-being:

> *…there were more staff WhatsApp groups and platforms than ever before so it kind of felt like you never left work. Yeah, there was a large flow of*

communication coming from kids. Parents weren't scared to air their anxieties, or why have you made this decision? Or why have you made that decision? So, there was huge, huge traffic, huge communication traffic.

A further determinant of the increased communication platforms and connectivity during the lockdown and pandemic was identified as the pace at which Head Teachers were expected to respond to changing regulations. Interviewee 3 outlined how as soon as an announcement was made by President Ramaphosa all their WhatsApp groups would become active with stakeholders asking what this means for their learners, their children, and the educational programme, not allowing Head Teachers time to consolidate and plan before communicating. Overall communication was described by Head Teachers as “complex and fast”, “exhausting” and “painful”, showing how increasing communication traffic was a determinant for the decreasing well-being of Head Teachers and the decrease amount of personal time.

THE PANDEMIC WAS A COMMON DETERMINANT FOR IMPROVED TECHNOLOGICAL ACCESS AND CAPABILITIES WITHIN SCHOOLS.

Participating Head Teachers associated the lockdown and pandemic with their schools’ and learners’ access, skills, and methodologies evolving and improving over time. This evolution came in the form of technology and skills, such that learners who were educated through online platforms during the pandemic were expected to be able to use technology in a more advanced manner than before, they were expected to be able to access a device and connectivity or data so that they could download and upload during the pandemic.

The shift and improvement of technological access and knowledge was a slow process, that first started with Head Teachers working with scholarship learners and less economically developed families to provide them with devices, data, and airtime during the lockdown as needed. This starting point is clearly outlined by Interviewee 4, whose schools boarding facilities allowed international learners to attend on scholarships:

> *It was mainly our African scholarship kids … we had to get a cell phone to them, and then data packages all the time, to make sure that they could work.*

Over time access to devices and data or networks continued to improve showing how, although the pandemic had negative implications for most, the pandemic was a positive determinant for this specific aspect within schools and families, which is clearly explained by Interviewee 2 below:

> *So now, whilst at the beginning, the kids could come to the car park and download things, now no one ever seems to need to download on campus. They all seem to have reasonable infrastructure at home…*

However, there were some participating Head Teachers that did not have to worry about access, as their school's independent nature allowed them to make devices a requirement for admission to their institutions before the pandemic, as outlined by Interviewee 1: "We are quite well prepared, cause at our school it is compulsory to have a device". This was further outlined by Interviewee 1 when they were asked how their response to the pandemic shifted over time. However, it was clear that it was not just learners whose access and infrastructure improved during the pandemic, staff and Head Teachers also experienced improved skills:

… there were people who were resistant, you know if I've done it this way for so long, I don't know why I have to move, and COVID took that all away and you had to learn. You had to be more digitally proficient…

The improvement of the technological skills base and knowledge of the staff was carried out in the form of digital and online training by multiple Head Teachers. Of the four Head Teachers interviewed three implemented training in the few days leading up to the lockdown after their school was warned the pandemic lockdown was going to be in effect. Interviewee 2 outlined their approach to upskilling staff before the lockdown as:

We had three days' warning before the closure and because I was already a flipped teacher, I thought, I'm going to train, and I went to all three schools and ran a two-and-a-half-hour workshop for all of them. Then I made videos and what I had done in the live workshop I repeated again in little video chunks, and they all had to do quizzes and train and upskill themselves, but I was really chuffed to have done a live performance before we closed completely…

This training before the pandemic lockdown was also carried out by Interviewee 3 who associates his staff's increased technical skill level with the fact that they never lost any schooling time during the pandemic:

…we did high-intensity tech training over those two days and, thank goodness we did because you know, it was only a few days after that that we discovered it was going to be a three-month or X amount of time hard locked down, so we didn't lose a day of schooling, which was a blessing…

It can be seen overall that "…technology exponentially improved. Digital literacy of the staff exponentially improved, digital literacy of the pupils exponentially improved and digital tolerance of the parents improved…" allowing the pandemic and the lockdown to be considered a positive determinant for technical skills development and improving access in schools, and staff and student homes.

4.3.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR HEAD TEACHERS WHO HAD TO DEAL WITH THE COMMON TRADEOFFS AND DETERMINANTS IDENTIFIED BY THIS STUDY.

Effective and earnest leadership during the pandemic became the focus of being an independent Head Teacher when COVID-19 first affected South Africa, this leadership as previously outlined meant Head Teachers across South Africa had to navigate tradeoffs when making decisions and had to deal with unforeseen determinants, both positive and negative. The implications of their leadership actions, navigating the tradeoffs they were faced with, and the determinants they did not expect were identified through this study's interviews and are analyzed under two themes:

1. Declining well-being.
2. Increasing burn-out and leaving the profession.

DECLINING WELL-BEING

Head Teachers experienced increased levels of stress and anxiety during the pandemic. Many had to cope with the pressure of making decisions that affected the well-being of those under their care, and therefore their well-being became compromised. Interviewee 2 associated this increasing stress with the shift from one-

sided considerations to two-sided considerations within a classroom space, as Teachers now needed to consider well-being while they taught during the pandemic:

> *…now I have to stop, not just teach, and kind of think "oh wait, are you okay"? How are your parents? How's your sister? How's your brother? Is the granny okay? It's actually a lot more stress because you're not just thinking my job is this, do my job, you're considering both sides of the classroom in that sense.*

Interviewee 2 goes on to associate the stress felt during the pandemic with their workaholic nature: "I am a workaholic, and so I just worked a little more, but that does mean that I'm permanently somewhat anxious…" This idea of working more and working harder is supported by Interviewee 1 who exclaimed: "I worked harder during lockdown than when I was a student… I literally worked from 8 am till 10 at night, every night."

The nature of a Head Teachers job has always been one where health and safety are considered, as outlined by Interviewee 3:

> *you know – health and safety – all of those things were, you know, always part and parcel of the job, but I think COVID amplified them to new levels that we potentially hadn't anticipated*.

As the complexity of classroom management and education increased and health and safety concerns became more central than before Head teachers had to deal with "a sustained period of stress" which in some cases was more intense than others. Interviewee 3, as a Head Teacher in KwaZulu-Natal, was having to manage learners and staff who had been experiencing "layer of trauma on top of layer of trauma." These layers of trauma were related to the socio-dynamic and physical

environment of the KwaZulu-Natal province at the time, where Interviewee 3's learners had been dealing with the Black Lives Matter movement, the sustained and intense flooding, the resulting looting, and then the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, Interviewee 3 exclaimed they were: "just really trying to, you know, do the right thing."

Although the socio-dynamic and physical context of Interviewee 3, as outlined above, was more complex than other participants the general well-being of all Head Teachers declined dramatically during the pandemic. This decline has been associated with having "no lines between when my work hours is done and when can I just say no more", as well as the unclear transmission of information during the pandemic, which meant that preparation was often not possible or effective and there was an overall increase in stress levels and anxiety levels and therefore, a decreased well-being.

INCREASING BURN-OUT AND LEAVING THE PROFESSION

The increasing stress and anxiety outlined above, and the overall decreasing well-being of Head Teachers can be directly correlated with the increased burn-out and leaving of the profession experienced by and witnessed by the participating Interviewees. Interviewee 3 outlined how the complexity of his leadership position and his experiences during the pandemic affected his stamina for the job:

> *I literally woke up one morning, it was in October last year [2020] and I just, I just said to my wife, is this really it? 'cause my tank is empty I got nothing.*

The same Head Teacher went on to outline how the pandemic influenced his profession and him personally by saying:

I'm going to summarize it in one sentence for you. I resigned. At the end of the term, I'm off to South Korea to go back to the basics and to teach English for a year.

As an interesting side note, this same Interviewee went on to speak about how he regularly checks the ISASA website and studies the jobs being offered as it allowed him to keep track of the changing landscape in the country. Overall, he suggested that there seemed to be an increasing number of Head's positions advertised over the course of the pandemic, as well as an increasing number of associates he knows who have taken early retirement as a consequence of the pandemic:

I know of Head's who've taken early retirement. The mental and physical, you know, health suffered quite a lot.

However, contrary to this view Interviewee 4 outlined that the increasing stress and anxiety felt during the pandemic had not affected them personally and rather "I've been able to quite successfully compartmentalize." This suggests that there have potentially been two responses to the decreasing well-being in the pandemic. Response one seems to show an increase in the number of Head Teachers leaving the profession and experiencing increased burn-out in South Africa, whereas response two shows how there has possibly even been an improvement in Head Teachers' skills and confidence during the pandemic because of the pressure and stress they were under.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focused on addressing the limited amount of empirical research considering the state of Head Teachers in relation to their leadership positions during the pandemic – as identified by Harris and Jones (2020); Trinidad (2021); Gonzales *et. al.* (2022); Lucker *et. al.* (2022); Reid (2022), and Schechter *et. al.* (2022). This study explored the decision-making process of independent Head Teachers in South Africa during the pandemic, it aimed to explore this process and its implications for Head Teachers using an online survey and semi-structured interviews conducted online, and finally to relate these data with the context of the Head Teachers and their schools across South Africa. These three research questions and the three aims were used to answer the fundamental question of this study, are our Head Teachers, okay?

This discussion uses the idea of voice and interpretivism when discussing the results obtained so that the context participants. This was done so that the contexts of the interviewees themselves could be analysed and understood, so that their experiences and how they construct their knowledge could be used when compiling the findings of this study (Pulla and Carter, 2018). This discussion begins by considering the demographic coverage of these results, then the factors that influenced whether independent Head Teachers are okay are considered. The idea of being ‘okay’ is herein related to financial access during the pandemic, technological access during the pandemic, communication networks and complexities during the pandemic, and having to navigate complex decision-making settings. This discussion ends by considering how these issues implicated the Head

Teacher and what lessons can be learnt for future pandemics or crises in South Africa.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS OF PARTICIPANT HEAD TEACHERS

This study found that the dominant demographics within the 34 independent South African Head Teachers participating in the online survey were: female, age range of 41 to 55 years old, and most dominantly leading schools in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal (Figure 2A – 2C). The average age range of Head Teachers in this study, 41 to 55 years old, aligns with the average age of Head Teachers as identified by the OECD survey of 2019, which showed South African Head teachers were on average 51 or 52 years old (TALIS, 2019).

The Head Teachers surveyed on average represented independent schools that teach the IEB curriculum, teach pre-primary, primary and high school levels, have either 201 to 500 learners or 501 to 1000 learners in their schools, are co-ed in nature (teach both male and female learners), and are dominantly found in urban areas (Figure 4A – 4E). These demographics cover a broad spectrum of independent Head Teachers and their schools and therefore can be used to draw some conclusions regarding the experiences of and implications for Head Teachers within independent South African schools.

Four semi-structured interviews with Four independent Head Teachers around South Africa. The demographics for these participants were predominantly male, in the age range of 41 – 55 years, teaching all three levels of education (pre-primary, primary and high school), evenly distributed between 501 to 1000 learners and more than

1000 learners, teaching and leading predominantly in the Limpopo province of South Africa, teaching an IEB curriculum, with co-ed schooling in urban areas (Table 7).

It is clear that the demographics of Head Teachers interviewed, and Head Teachers surveyed align with one another, the most common group that these results align to within South Africa would be Head Teachers between 41 and 55 years old, with schools that teach from pre-primary through to high school and with schools with 500 or more learners in them. The outlying demographic differences include a dominance of male Head Teachers interviewed where the dominance in the survey was female Head Teachers. This difference is associated with the availability of Head Teachers who were willing to partake in the interview process. The second outlier was the size range of the schools that the Interviewees represented, such that they were one size bracket larger (more than 1000 learners) than the predominant school size brackets in the survey (500 to 1000 learners), which can be seen as beneficial to the context of the interviewing process. The interviews aimed to consider the implications associated with leading in a pandemic, and therefore the larger the cohort the Head Teacher represented the more likely it is they experienced a higher level of pressure and stress. The final outlier between the demographic groupings was the location of the Interviewees' schools, as the dominant location for Interviewees was Limpopo whereas in the survey it was Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, this difference can be associated with the unpredictable and plannable availability of willing interview participants.

5.3. FACTORS INFLUENCING WHETHER INDEPENDENT HEAD TEACHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA ARE OKAY.

5.3.1. FINANCIAL ACCESS DURING THE PANDEMIC AND ITS INFLUENCE ON HEAD TEACHERS

Any independent school within South Africa is defined by its right to privately fund and govern its school (Sayed, 1999; DBE, 2010; DBE, 2015). This private funding was identified as both a positive and negative influence for Head Teachers in the pandemic, as it allowed them to have access to external or alternate funding sources and to keep their school running while online, yet it was also one of the reasons they have to decide between outcomes or wellness when leading, as parents expected results from the school in order to continue paying their school fees.

The online survey conducted found that the majority, 56% (Figure 7), of Head Teachers experienced a neutral financial context where they did have problems receiving tuition from parents during the pandemic, however, they were able to survive using other sources of funding or money. This finding contradicts Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023) who identified funding as one of the three major challenges Head Teachers faced during the pandemic. These findings also contradict Wodon (2020b) who found that Catholic schools in sub-Saharan Africa, mainly public schools, experienced enhanced financial access issues due to their socio-economic contexts. The finding that most independent school Head Teachers within this study did not have financial access issues during the pandemic suggests that the independent nature of their schools in South Africa allowed for more financial options and support during the pandemic.

When considering this access across South Africa the survey was able to show that the neutral financial access, as identified above as the most dominant access category, was the main response from Head Teachers in Gauteng, Limpopo and the Western Cape. While the respondents within the unstable financial access category were in Gauteng and the Western Cape, and the respondents with stable financial access were KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape (Figure 8). The distribution of these access level choices made by respondents suggests that Gauteng and the Western Cape had the most variable financial access amongst their independent schools, where KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape had the least variable financial access during the pandemic. Overall showing an inconsistent financial access across South Africa's independent schools. These findings support the financial access deficits identified by Wodon (2020a) and Wodon (2020b) when considering private and public schools in the pandemic, and Catholic schools in Sub-Saharan Africa. The varying financial access across South Africa, specifically in independent schools, supports Ngcobo and Tikly (2010) such that this financial access follows more closely to that of western patterns of access and the associated leadership styles than it does with the trends in effective leadership in rural South African schools.

The positive financial influence of the independent nature of Head Teachers discussed above was only one side of the financial considerations during the pandemic. Head Teachers also had to navigate a tradeoff in which they were asked to decide what they would prioritize while leading, outcomes and results, or well-being and burnout. This tradeoff was steeped in the independent nature of the Head Teachers' school, such that their private funding gave parents a stronger influence on leadership styles as they threatened to stop paying tuition without reports and

tangible results for their children. This direct relationship between parents' independent right to pay tuition to schools and the way the school was ultimately managed tended to have negative implications for Head Teachers' leadership and decision-making during the pandemic. The impact parents could have on the leadership styles implemented within the pandemic is clearly shown in Interviewee 1's response:

> *…we had to implement the system where we actually wrote tests and to give a report. Because the interesting thing was parents started saying that 'I'm not getting a report, so why do I need to pay'…*

Overall, 50% of Interviewees made the choice to prioritize outcome-oriented leadership, whereas 50% prioritized awareness-oriented leadership during the pandemic, showing a clear divide between leadership styles implemented and the amount of prioritization Head Teachers placed on financial access during the pandemic. These results support the final tension identified by Netolicky (2020), in which Head Teachers had to decide whether they would maintain results or well-being during the pandemic. When considering the predominance of this tensions within other Head Teacher studies the even results between choosing outcomes versus well-being that were evident within this study contradict the results of both Trinidad (2021) and Gonzales *et. al.* (2022). Trinidad (2021) found that US schools prioritized well-being over outcomes, and Gonzales *et. al.* (2022) outlined the lessons learned during the pandemic including the lesson that human needs should take precedence over instruction and assessment. These results in correlation with Netolicky (2020), Trinidad (2021), and Gonzales *et. al.* (2022) show that Head Teachers within a South African context experienced a similar tradeoff when financial access was a factor influencing them during the pandemic, however, South

African Head Teachers tended to react abnormally as half the Interviewee's prioritized outcomes rather than well-being when Trinidad (2021) and Gonzales *et. al.* (2022) found a focus on well-being to be the norm in the pandemic.

The issues of financial stability and access during the pandemic can be seen as both a positive and negative influence for independent Head Teachers during the pandemic, as the independent nature of their schools meant finances were more stable than expected and this, therefore, reduced the pressure Head Teachers felt when considering financial stability. This financial access was however not evenly distributed across independent schools in South Africa, suggesting context plays a role and that even though they are independent their financial access is still not always guaranteed and could be a complex factor Head Teachers have to consider. Their independent nature also meant that parents could influence their management strategies if they refused to pay their tuition fees. The influence of parents and tuition on Head Teachers shows that financial access was also a negative influence on Head Teachers, forcing them to prioritize results over well-being and increasing the amount of uncertainty they felt because of parent's influence.

5.3.2. TECHNOLOGICAL ACCESS DURING THE PANDEMIC AND ITS INFLUENCE ON HEAD TEACHERS

The issue of technological access is an important consideration within a pandemic as it provided Head Teachers, staff, and learners with the ability to continue their education while the pandemic lockdowns were in effect around the world and schools were closed. Gonzales *et. al.* (2022) outlined how the loss in teaching time experienced during the pandemic could be directly associated with the level of

preparation for Head Teachers and their schools. Considering the importance placed on technology during the pandemic it can be assumed that access levels were important to Head Teachers.

Following on from the issues of financial access identified in Catholic sub-Saharan schools, Wodon (2020b) also found that these schools experienced low technological access levels which made pandemic education very tricky. When considering the access categories Head Teachers gave their staff and learners in the online survey the dominant trend showed that staff in South African independent schools had better technological access than learners (Figure 5). These categorizations considered access to the internet, data, and hardware during the pandemic and suggested that although the learners experienced generally lower access levels than staff the overall rating for independent schools was extremely high (Figure 5) and that the participating Head Teachers did not have to consider technological access a major deterrent to their online educational programmes or as a major decision-driver during the pandemic. This once again contradicts the understanding of Wodon (2020b) and Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023), which showed access was lowered in the pandemic and negatively impacted education.

Lembani *et. al.* (2019), discussed the digital divide across the specific context of undergraduate students in South Africa and found that it is consistently unequal mainly due to the access at the different home levels and that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy in regards to digital access limits learners in our country. The survey supported this by showing that technological access across South Africa was inconsistent and that some provinces were better equipped than others to handle the move to hybrid and online education that the pandemic required. The province with

the worst access for both staff and learners was Gauteng, with 13% of respondents classifying their learners access as ‘ very few had access’ and with 50% of respondents placing their staffs access as ‘most had access.’ KwaZulu-Natal showed the best access across its staff and learners, such that 50% of respondents said their learners access was ‘all had access’ and 83% of respondents said their staffs access was ‘all had access.’ An unusual finding was that Limpopo showed contradicting access levels, with 20% of respondents classifying their learners access as ‘very few had access’ and yet 60% of respondents said their staffs access was ‘all had access,’ showing disjointed access levels between staff and learners. These results contradict the OECD (2019) results which showed 65% of Head Teachers reported digital technology shortages, suggesting that the independent nature of the respondents’ schools allowed more access than the rest of South African schools.

When analyzing the interviews conducted the pandemic was seen as a positive determinant for access and skills, acting as an evolutionary tool in the context of technological and internet access. This study showed that, by forcing education into an online space and forcing the use of technology within educational spheres, schools improved their technological bases, and that staff, learners, and their parents improved their technological access and digital literacy during the pandemic. Which was clearly outlined by Interviewee 2:

> *So now, whilst at the beginning, the kids could come to the car park and download things and, now no one ever seems to need to download on campus. They all seem to have reasonable infrastructure at home…*

When considering the pandemic as a positive determinant for technological access it can be seen that not all independent schools in South Africa needed to improve or had an improvement in their technological and access levels as they were already working within digital and online spaces for their education before the pandemic. This was clearly shown by Interviewee 1's response: "We are quite well prepared, cause at our school it is compulsory to have a device". Interviewee 1 elaborated further to explain how they experienced no loss in teaching time because of this existing technological foundation. The result of having a technological foundation and being technologically prepared before the pandemic created no loss in teaching time which supports Gonzales *et. al.* (2022), who claimed that teaching time losses were associated with the lack of preparation of Head Teachers, and it contradicts Kwatubana (2023) who showed Head Tecahers focus during the pandemic to focus on ICT and digital training during the pandemic. The access within independent institutions is therefore a contextual variable and needs to be considered in individual contexts, especially within South Africa where development and historical context has varying influences over space (Naidu, 2020; Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020; Velavan and Meyer, 2020; Kwatubana, 2023).

The results herein show that because independent schools generally require more technology from learners upon entrance to the school there were fewer issues with technological access during the pandemic than expected, and it also showed that technological access, therefore, did not have a major influence on Head Teachers, that it was not a major decision-driver for Head Teachers in South African independent schools during the pandemic. The geographical distribution of access across South Africa showed that even though access was less of a concern than expected, different provinces had varying amounts of access. South Africa's access

distribution therefore supported Lembani *et. al.* (2019) such that our digital divide was based on the context of the school and on the learners and was therefore a major factor to consider in certain provinces when educating in the pandemic. These results support the need for technological efficiency to be part of Head Teacher preparation programmes in the future, as outlined in chapter 2.6.1, as leaders should be able to find a balance between the way they teach and the way they bring technology into a classroom and into their leadership style (Gonzales *et. al.,* 2022; Harris and Jones, 2022).

5.3.3. COMMUNICATION NETWORKS AND COMPLEXITIES DURING THE PANDEMIC AND ITS INFLUENCE ON HEAD TEACHERS

Communication acted as a major factor within the pandemic as outlined by Netolicky (2020), and Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023). The results outlined in Chapter 4 show how increasing professional networking and communication channels could assist Head Teachers in managing during a pandemic or it could act as the main catalyst and cause decreasing well-being among Head Teachers.

When participants were asked to identify the communication channels they used during the pandemic (Figure 9B) only three participants (9%) used one single form of communication, whereas the other 91% of participants used multiple platforms with varying levels of complexity. This 91% was spread out across all 7 provinces with respondents, showing that the use of multiple, complex communication channels was something Head Teachers across the majority of South Africa made use of. These complex and multi-faceted communication channels supported Chatzipangioutou and Katarou's (2023) findings as they allowed the Head Teachers

to share information and decisions regularly and to multiple stakeholders quickly. This relationship between an increase in the amount of communication during the pandemic and a feeling of support during the pandemic and more connection and sharing of information further supports the findings of Azorin (2020) and Fernandez and Shaw (2020), both of which saw that increasing communication in the pandemic and in leadership settings improved the cohesion within schools to the benefit of the Head Teachers.

Although this cohesion and support is a clear benefit to the increase in communication channels during the pandemic, it can also be associated with an increased number of work hours and a decrease in the work-life balance of Head Teachers (Reid, 2022; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). Communication was identified by 50% of survey participants as a factor that increased exponentially during the pandemic, with communication being traffic heavy and a two-way street for educational purposes. This two-way communication allowed for the giving and receiving of work between educators and learners, and the giving and receiving of information between Head Teachers and stakeholders, overall creating exponential growth in communication traffic during the pandemic. Some of the keywords used to describe this communication traffic were “complex and fast”, “exhausting” and “painful”. Therefore, the results discussed here show a decrease in Head Teacher well-being and balancing of personal and work time during the pandemic and directly link this to the increased communication channels and networks used in the pandemic, further supporting the findings of Reid (2022), and Hayes *et. al.* (2022). Indirectly these results also align with the third tension outlined by Netolicky (2020) wherein Head Teachers had to be interdependent and have independence at the same time. Within communication and the pandemic Head Teachers had to be available yet find a

balance, they needed to work with others and support others – have interdependence, yet try and maintain boundaries and balance work and personal life – have independence.

It is clear from this discussion of communication within the pandemic that increasing the number of channels and networks of communication either had a positive influence on Head Teachers or a negative influence. The positive implication of communication complexity was that Head Teachers experienced an increased amount of cohesion and support when making decisions, yet the negative implications were that it increased the amount of time spent on devices, decreased work-life balance, and increased stress, pressure, and anxiety experienced by Head Teachers during the pandemic. These findings aligned with the experience in an increased amount of communication and thereafter an increased amount of stress and pressure felt by Head Teachers around the world as shown by Netolicky (2020), Reid (2022), and Hayes *et. al.* (2022).

5.3.4. NAVIGATING COMPLEX DECISION-MAKING SETTINGS DURING THE PANDEMIC AND ITS INFLUENCE ON HEAD TEACHERS

Making decisions in a pandemic was part of the job for an independent school's Head Teacher, it placed them in the position where they needed to balance multiple decision drivers, such as religion, finance, National Government Directives, etc., and figure out how they complied with National Government Directives and Standard Operating Procedures, considering their individual views and contexts.

As expected during a National State of Emergency and lockdown most survey respondents, 53% (Figure 13), identified National Government Directives as the dominant decision driver they used when making decisions during the pandemic. This supports Cohen *et. al.'s* (2017) study on the connection between effective information provided by municipalities and community resilience in emergency contexts as it shows that the majority of independent Head Teachers relied heavily on the directives given to them by municipal authorities thereby influencing their ability to develop resilience during a pandemic. However, it is important to consider that although National Government Directives were the dominant response when Head Teachers were asked to identify one driver, with 53% choosing it, the number of Head Teachers that chose National Government Directives as a consideration when they were allowed to choose multiple decision driver was 88% (Figure 13). This result implies that 35% of the respondents who originally selected National Government Directives as one of their many drivers did not consider it their main driver. The 35% of respondents who did not believe National Government Directives were the most important decision driver support Netolicky (2020) and Trinidad (2021) both of whom show the dominance of other main drivers within pandemic decision-making, such as shared moral purpose and stakeholder or community opinions over that of National Government Directives. This result also ties into the amount of information Head Teachers were given, such that 68% of participants felt they did have enough information to make informed decisions (Figure 9D). This suggests the National Government Directives was effective in communicating information during the pandemic, contradicting multiple studies which showed participants did not fel they had enough information made available to them during the pandemic (Mpu and Adu, 2021; Chatzipangioutou and Katarou, 2023; Netolicky, 2020).

Geographically the main decision-drivers Head Teachers considered across South Africa varied significantly (Figure 14A and 14B), suggesting that although decision making was dominated by National Government Directives in all provinces, it varied significantly across all other decision-drivers across provinces. This supports Supady *et. al.* (2020) such that finding multiple other decision-drivers as dominant in varying quantities and amounts across South Africa shows that each Head Teachers context played a role in determining which drivers were their dominant decision influences.

When making decisions within the pandemic Interviewees outlined varying levels of compliance with the National Government Directives, which suggests that they believed their independency could allow them freedom in this regard. The varying responses identified via interviews were either, full compliance with all directives or they would comply enough to have deniability, or they had shifting compliance levels over time. This was shown by Interviewee 1 whom believed they should be role models and should follow the directives and operating procedures to the letter, no matter how frustrated or impatient parent's became, where Interviewee 2 changed their response over time starting with full compliance and became less concerned with full compliance as the pandemic continued, and Interviewee 4 chose deniability when making decisions such that Interviewee 4 implemented the directives and operating procedures that were more applicable or appropriate for their school and they, therefore, could claim not to know about any newer directives or procedures, denying when needed. The varying compliance formats identified herein were connected to the independent nature of these Head Teacher's schools (DBE, 2010), such that they could make decisions on their daily actions and governance as long as they followed the National legislature.

Decision-making variance and compliance variation within the pandemic support the findings of Gonzales *et. al.* (2022), Shechter *et. al.* (2022), and Netolicky (2022). Gonzales *et. al.* (2022) and Shechter *et. al.* (2022), were able to show how Head Teachers struggled to respond to the constantly shifting policies and guidelines during the pandemic, with cases where Head Teachers felt the policies were not always relevant or useful within their schools' context and access levels. This created a need for Head Teachers to make decisions based on what was available and clear, using council from others more so than directives in these cases (Shechter *et. al.*, 2022). This was outlined by Interviewee 2:

> *...the thing is that the government had made the rule and then they weren't adhering to the rules and that was making, anyway, it was just, the goalposts kept shuffling … what frustrated me was that they would hold us accountable to a set of unclear rules.*

Further supporting the need to seek the council of others when making decisions as outlined by Shechter *et. al.* (2022), 15% of survey respondents identified other Head Teachers as a source of conscious decision-making and informed decision-making during the pandemic (Figure 9C). This emphasis on other professionals shows that although National Government Directives was a critical decision driver, they were not the only factor being considered besides technological access, financial access, and communication networks. This reliance on other Head Teachers allowed school leaders to increase their professional networks and collaborate while leading, which further supports one of the core actions Head Teachers used while leading during the pandemic as identified by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023).

The varying level of compliance outlined by Interviewees 1, 2, and 4 also supports the second tension identified by Netolicky (2022), in which Head Teachers had to be

both accountable and autonomous at the same time, trying to follow legislature and placate SGBs and school agents, while also leading from an autonomous standpoint. Within the interviews conducted Head Teachers varied their compliance with National Government Directives based on different contexts and belief systems, and they each had to decide how autonomous or accountable they wanted their decisions to be.

When making decisions in the pandemic South African independent Head Teachers show a number of varying responses to National Government Directives, with a large number of Head Teachers not using these directives as their main decision driver. This suggests that, within the context of independent South African schools, Head Teachers placed value on balancing advice from other Head Teachers, complying with National Government Directives, using evidence, and using context-specific factors when making decisions, supporting Supady *et. al.* (2020) finding that rational decision-making usually balanced multiple drivers and considerations at the same time. This was supported by a geographical analysis of the survey responses across South Africa, to show that National Government Directives was a dominant decision-driver in every respondent province, however each Head Teachers context was important as they all chose varying amounts and types of decision-drivers when given the choice, with no clear pattern to this context-based decision-driver selection. The making of decisions, therefore, impacted Head Teachers negatively as it placed them in a position where they had to decide between autonomy and accountability, where they had to weigh the confidence they had in their personal knowledge and expertise against the need to follow directives from National and Departmental policies.

5.4. OVERARCHING IMPLICATIONS FOR HEAD TEACHERS WHILE LEADING AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PANDEMIC.

Leading in a pandemic placed Head Teachers in a position where they had to consider multiple factors at once, namely financial access, technological access, complex communication networks and channels, and complex decision-making contexts (see 5.3.1 – 5.3.4). The implications for Head Teachers are both positive and negative in nature, however, the negative implications are more dominant. The implications for Head Teachers were an increasing confidence and reliance on personal qualities, increasing work hours, an increased level of worry for their community, a decreased well-being, and an increase in the amount of burnout and leaving the profession.

Head Teachers asked to identify how the pandemic affected them as leaders responded in a multitude of ways, some of which support the idea that they grew as leaders and learned to rely on their personal qualities, such as participant 25: “Made me confident in my ability as a leader”, and participant 35: “It brought out my strengths, resilience, and innovativeness.” This finding was dominant across 57% of respondent provinces, suggesting that the implications for Head Teachers across South Africa were once again highly varied and based on context. This finding supports one of the eleven leadership strategies identified by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2023), which was that Head Teachers responded to the pandemic by increasing the reliance they had on their personal skills when compared to before the pandemic.

A result, not outlined in the literature regarding Head Teachers' well-being and the implications of their position during a pandemic, was the increased work hours experienced by Head Teachers. Participating independent Head Teachers identified the increased reliance on devices for educational tools during the pandemic as the reason they felt like they never left work or had no personal time during the pandemic. This was experienced by 9% of respondents, all found within Gauteng and not in any other province within South Africa. This suggests although access to technological devices was a benefit during the pandemic and not a major deterrent to online education in independent South African schools, see 5.3.1, it does however intensify the personal stress and anxiety felt by Head Teachers, as well as decreased the well-being Head Teachers experienced during the pandemic, mainly for Head Teachers in Gauteng.

When considering the need to care for their community Head Teachers experienced increasing needs to care for the entire community around them, not to just teach their learners, but rather considering the family contexts and physical contexts of all those in their class and their community as well, basically considering both sides of the classroom. These findings were supported by a geographical analysis of the survey that showed that Head Teachers feeling the need to prioritse the well-being of others over their own was a dominant implication in KwaZulu-Natal, followed by Limpopo and Gauteng (Figure 16B). This meant an increase in anxiety and an increase in stress was experienced by educators and Head Teachers. This was clearly outlined by Interviewee 2:

> *…now I have to stop, not just teach, and kind of think "oh wait, are you okay"? How are your parents? How's your sister? How's your brother? Is the granny*

okay? It's actually a lot more stress because you're not just thinking my job is this, do my job, you're considering both sides of the classroom in that sense.

This increasing consideration of the community within decision-making and the resultant decrease in well-being supports Hayes *et.al.* (2022) who found that Head Teachers felt a need to support whole communities before themselves while leading in a pandemic.

The increased work hours and need to support and look after everyone in their community has implicated Head Teachers in such a way that they experienced higher levels of stress, anxiety, and pressure during the pandemic. These findings support the dominant view within literature surrounding that Head Teachers experienced increasing pressure levels and stress levels, and in turn sacrificed their well-being for that of those under their care while leading in the pandemic (Harris and Jones, 2020; Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). This dominant view was further supported by 91% of survey participants feeling either a high or extremely high level of pressure during the pandemic (Figure 11). Head Teachers were also found to continually prioritize the well-being of their staff and learners above their own, clearly outlined by participant 1's response:

As a Head, one could not show weakness or be tired – you simply had to pull your team along. Your main concern was your teachers, your learners, your community and your own well-being was not important.

Furthering the findings of Harris and Jones (2020) and Hayes *et. al.* (2022) that Head Teachers experienced negative implications associated with the pandemic 9% of participating Head Teachers either experienced anxiety, depression, the need to seek professional help for anxiety and depression, or the need to medicate for these

issues within South African independent schools. This was very clearly outlined in participant 9's response:

> *I have had to see a psychologist and psychiatrist and am taking medication for anti-anxiety and depression. My health has taken a significant toll.*

The best explanation of the pandemic was given by Interviewee 3: "it was a sustained period of stress." When the stress and anxiety levels of leaders are not managed, the implications of this have been found by Hayes *et. al.* (2022) to include limited personal satisfaction with their own leadership work "just really trying to, you know, do the right thing" and less effective management. The worst experiences of pressure were experienced by Head Teachers in KwaZulu-Natal, with 83% of respondents in this province experiencing extremely high pressure levels, Gauteng, with 43% of respondents in this province experiencing extremely high pressure levels and 43% experiencing high pressure levels, and the Western Cape with 100% of respondents in this province experiencing high pressure levels (Figure 12). These support the interview findings as Interviewee 1 and 3, from the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal respectively, both described intense stress felt and possible leaving their profession due to this pressure and stress.

The final implication for Head Teachers was an increasing amount burn-out and an increase in the number of Head Teachers leaving the profession. This implication was very clearly outlined by Interviewee 3 who explained how they woke one day to feel their "tank was empty" and that they had nothing more to give to the profession, resulting in their resignation and their move to teach English in South Korea in the upcoming year. This result placed one in four interviewed Head Teachers in a position where the pandemic caused them to resign from the profession and to

experience burnout, which supports Lucker *et. al.* (2022) who found that because of the pandemic, the rate of leaving the profession shifted from 1one in five Head Teachers to one in four Head Teachers, which is a largely significant shift within countries with limited numbers of qualified and experienced Head Teachers. This increased level of burnout among Head Teachers was associated with therefore associated with a high level of Head Teachers leaving the profession, showing that the need to balance leadership and self-care among Head Teachers is crucial for leading in a pandemic, as identified by Hayes *et. al.* (2022).

It is worth mentioning however that one of the four Head Teachers interviewed experienced the exact opposite of Interviewee 3's experience, where they were able to compartmentalize during the pandemic, and their experience and time as a Head Teacher before the pandemic allowed this compartmentalization and therefore, they experienced no personal well-being implications or professional implications. This suggests that the possible positive implications of the pandemic outlined earlier – the feeling of increased reliance on personal skills and confidence during the pandemic idea – showing that a possible outcome of the pandemic was that Head Teachers were able to use their experience and knowledge as a strong leadership tool during the pandemic.

The results discussed here have shown that Head Teachers in the pandemic were both positively and negatively impacted by their leadership positions, that they experienced increased levels of stress, anxiety, and pressure, had long work hours and a decreased well-being, but at the same time were experienced an increased feeling of confidence and reliance on their abilities and skills. Overall, the geographical distribution of these implications shows a dominance of both positive

and negative implications (Figure 16A and 16B) within Gauteng, they show that the Eastern Cape and the Free State respondents only experienced positive implications, and that respondents in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo experienced more negative implications than positive. These results overall showed that the positive implications were experienced in 6 of 7 respondent provinces (86%), yet only covered 36% of responses, and the negative implications were expereiced in 4 of 7 respondent provinces (57%), yet covered 64% of responses.

These results support the findings of this study such that the context of the Head Teacher in South Africa is directly related to their experiences and the implications they felt during the pandemic, and they support the ideas of DeMatthews *et. al.* (2021), Hayes *et. al.* (2022), Lucker *et. al.* (2022), Hayes *et. al.* (2022), and Reid (2022) all of whom show the different implications of the pandemic on Head Teachers across the world in varying contexts and countries.

5.5 LESSONS LEARNT, APPLICATION WITHIN FUTURE SOUTH AFRICAN PANDEMICS OR CRISES

The view of a Head Teachers' role was conceptualized as one dependent on engagement and mediation, while continually leading and maintaining standards within education and co-performance with those in the same school context of the Head Teacher. By understanding the role of a Head Teacher from this conceptual standpoint this study emphasized the importance of the beliefs, values, motivations, skills, knowledge, and working conditions of the Head Teacher with their ability to effectively lead during a pandemic (Leithwood *et. al.*, 2008). This conceptualization was supported by the findings of this study, which showed the personal context and

school context of Head Teachers influenced their ability to lead and manage an independent school during the pandemic, a clear example comes in the polar opposite responses between Interviewee 3 and 4, where Interviewee 3 experienced a loss in drive saying “my tank is empty” and summarizing the influence the pandemic had on them by saying: “I’m going to summarize it in one sentence for you. I resigned.” In comparison to this Interviewee 4 claimed to experience no personal impacts due to the pandemic saying: “Not really. I’ve been able to quite successfully compartmentalize.” This also supported Ngcobo and Tikly (2010) who showed that the leadership style employed across South African rural and township schools was related to the contexts of the school. The varying pressure levels and implications experienced by Head Teachers, see section 5.4, clarified this across a geographical perspective of South Africa and showed a contextual pattern to Head Teachers experiences in South Africa, rather than a broad and overarching geographical pattern.

The lessons learned by Head Teachers during this pandemic, which can be applied to future pandemics or crises, specifically within the educational sphere include: one) Increase the clarity of National guidelines and instructions, two) Standard Operating Procedures need to consider issues of access and context when standardizing procedures, three) Blended education should become a norm in schools, four) Maintain consistency, five) Maintain boundaries, and six) Increase professional networking. These lessons are further outlined below.

By increasing the clarity and concise nature of the guidelines and instructions given to Head Teachers through National and Departmental communication during a pandemic a country can guarantee a smoother response and shift within schools, as

well as reduce the decreasing well-being across the Head Teacher profession. This lesson supports Gonzales *et.al.* (2022), who identified the contradictory and irrational directives Head Teachers had to follow in the pandemic as a cause for Head Teacher's experiencing increased stress and anxiety during the pandemic.

When applying Standard Operating Procedures within their schools 15% of participating Head Teachers found that their access level (technological and financial), their resource level, and their school's context made applying standardized procedures complex and often a very stressful leadership dilemma to face. Therefore, by making sure all future standard Operating Procedures consider the vast and diverse historical context of schools within South Africa within their Standard Operating Procedures. This could be done by outlining several variations to the responses expected from schools based on their context, for example schools without the ability to access online learning platforms, for schools with learners that are still experiencing implications from Apartheid and segregation, for schools that cannot afford to implement safety precautions or strategies, etc. Head Teachers should therefore experience less stress and anxiety and should be able to apply these procedures in their individual contexts with greater ease. This lesson is linked to the complex and oftentimes unequal historical development and access issues found in South Africa's schools because of the turbulent history education has within our country (Naidu, 2020; Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020).

The third lesson learned during the pandemic in South Africa suggests that blended learning should become the norm. This lesson has been outlined by Interviewee 2 who stated: "… we need to upskill teachers overall… it {education} must be a blended or a hybrid approach where technology cannot take away anything…" By

having education within a blended or hybrid space before a pandemic, the shift of education to a completely online space or back to a completely in-person space would be more effective, resulting in less work time lost and a smoother transition as identified by Gonzales *et. al.* (2022), who claimed that teaching time losses were associated with the lack of preparation of Head Teachers.

Consistency should be maintained in the form of timetables, assessment rigor and pace, and maintaining hygiene and dress code expectations. This lesson learned shows that consistency in the form of timetables allows learners and staff to be able to effectively shift between online, hybrid, or blended and in-person education in the fluid space that pandemic education falls into. By making sure to maintain the rigor and pace of assessment no matter the form of education occurring learners will not struggle to keep up when full in-person teaching is rephased in “kids are really falling apart, and the time management is an issue because there are too many assignments which are coming in.” This quote from Interviewee 1 suggests that pace and rigor need to be consistent before, during and after a pandemic. When considering the consistency related to hygiene and dress code, Interviewee 2 found that their responses were not consistent from the start. They should have implemented rules regarding the need for learners to be fully dressed in their school uniform, with cameras on, and following typical school hygiene and appearance rules from the start, as shown here in Interviewee 2’s response:

> *I would roll out the system immediately where I would have put out structures in place if I knew what I know now… they don’t shower, they just lay in bed all day, they must get dressed in school clothes, they must sit with cameras on. I think we didn't give clear instructions beforehand…*

Overall “the big idea was to keep consistent” by maintaining this consistency within education, perhaps allowing progress within education to occur at a steady pace no matter the form of education implemented during a pandemic or crisis.

An increase in communication traffic, the lengthening of work hours, and the loss of boundaries between work and personal time created higher levels of anxiety and stress for Head Teachers and their staff. By making sure that boundaries are maintained between the length of work hours, personal time, and the sharing of personal communication numbers Head Teachers can ensure they do not experience burnout, increased stress, or anxiety. This finding supported Gonzales *et.al.* (2022), who showed how human needs needed to take preference over concepts such as assessment and instruction. Prioritizing well-being was essential for productivity to improve exponentially. Interviewee 2 speaks to this counter-intuitive finding: “I am definitely more productive now than I was last year, I think, just because of saying no, which is counter-intuitive because you are now spending time being more effective.”

The final lesson learned during this pandemic was to increase professional networking. By increasing the communication and connectivity between Head Teachers this networking allows the sharing of ideas, methodologies and provides a support structure to the leaders within South African schools. This lesson is supported by Chatzipangioutou and Katarou (2020) who found increasing professional networks was one of the main methodologies implemented by Head Teachers across the literature on this topic.

These lessons cover a variety of scales, making suggestions for actions to be implemented from the National, Departmental, and school context such that education can be maintained to a high standard and that the well-being of Head Teachers, staff, and learners can be prioritized during any pandemic or crises that may impact schools within South Africa within the future. These key lessons learnt during the pandemic are summarized in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Key lessons learnt for education within a South African pandemic context.

Lessons learnt for future pandemics or crises.	**Description within the context of this study's results.**
1. Clear and concise instructions.	National legislation and departmental instruction need to include clearer guidelines within educational contexts.
2. Standard Operating Procedures need to consider access and context.	Standard Operating Procedures given to schools need to include guidelines on how they apply to varying and complex contexts, as the historical context within South Africa has created varying levels of access across the nation.
3. Blended education should become a norm.	Blended education should be used in educational contexts regularly so when pandemics or crises strike education is already integrated with technology, thereby not losing work time trying to shift the format of education completely.
4. Maintain consistency.	By keeping consistent Head Teachers could guarantee the effectiveness of their online and hybrid educational programmes. This consistency presented in the form of keeping the same timetable when online and when back at school, of keeping assessment consistent and of keeping expectations regarding hygiene and dress code consist across all formats, whether they were online, hybrid or in-person.
5. Maintain boundaries.	Make sure to implement boundaries regarding work hours, personal time, and the sharing of personal communication numbers. This reduces the anxiety and stress experienced by all within a pandemic.
6. Increase leadership networking.	By increasing the amount of networking within their profession Head Teachers can increase their communication, engagement and combined knowledge during a pandemic or crisis.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic Head Teachers at independent schools in South Africa were at the forefront of decision-making, carrying out procedures and directives issued by National legislation, and ensuring the successful implementation of the educational programme within their school (Netolicky 2020; Harris, 2020; Binagwaho, 2020). This placement within the pandemic and the immense responsibility borne by Head Teachers during the pandemic was the basis for the fundamental question behind this study: Are our Head Teachers okay? This study aimed to address the literature gap which was identified as a lack of empirical research considering the state of Head Teachers in connection to the pandemic (Harris and Jones, 2020; Trinidad, 2021; Gonzales *et. al.,* 2022; Lucker *et. al.,* 2022; Reid, 2022, and Schechter *et. al.,* 2022). This study aimed to answer this fundamental question by investigating the responses of independent South African Head Teachers during the pandemic, their decision-making drivers, how their leadership position impacted their personal well-being and how these factors differed across the South African independent school landscape. To interrogate these concepts of Head Teacher well-being and decision-making the main objectives herein were to use two tools, first, conduct an online survey, and second, conduct online interviews, and then analyze and discussed the results gained in the technological and financial access contexts of Head Teachers, their schools and their actions.

The methodology implemented used both data collection methods outlined in the objectives, the online survey was constructed using Google Forms and emailed to potential participants – specifically the Head Teachers within independent South

African schools. Following on from these online surveys were four semi-structured interviews conducted one-on-one using the online platform Google Meet. The results obtained from the survey and interviews were analyzed using data presentation software, specifically SigmaPlot, and thematic content analyses for all empirical data obtained. The survey data was analysed further to understand the variations across the South African geographical landscape. When considering the methodological approaches of previous research within the pandemic, leadership and Head Teacher focus areas (Table 4) this methodology was able to critically analyze and thematically group results within this studies' aim and objective, as well as answer the studies' research questions.

The key constraints and limitations encountered included the lower-than-expected response rate to the online survey when compared to response rates in similar studies, possibly caused by the immense pressure and workload that Head Teachers were dealing with at the time of data collection during the pandemic (Lucker *et. al.*, 2022). This means that the results shown in this study may only represent a snapshot of the responses, decision-making drivers, and implications associated with independent Head Teachers in South Africa. A further constraint was identified in the thematic analyses of interviews conducted for this study, such that the broad spectrum of topics covered in the one-hour interviews constrained the depth that Head Teachers could respond with, on all topics (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). The time period for the data collection was specific to mid-pandemic, such that the results obtained are specific to this time period and do not show changes in responses, decision-making drivers, and implications over longer periods of time (Hayes *et. al.*, 2022). The geographical analyses of the survey data was limited by the fact that respondents only accounted for 7 of 9 provinces in South Africa, each with different

numbers of respondents, therefore making broad results and claims more difficult to obtain.

These constraints and limitations could be addressed by resending the survey participants' emails in the aftermath of the pandemic, allowing Head Teachers a chance to respond when their workload and pressure had possibly reduced. By resending the survey link to Head Teachers a larger response rate could be obtained and therefore a more detailed view of independent Head Teachers across space could be possible, even allowing for the comparison of post-pandemic responses to pandemic responses. Finally, the questions asked within the online interview could have been further constrained and limited to allow for more in-depth responses being drawn out from interview participants on a smaller number of key questions.

The responses of participating Head Teachers to the online survey were first analyzed by considering what factors were common throughout responses and could have influenced whether Head Teachers in South Africa are okay. The factors identified included, financial access, technological access, complex communication networks and complex decision-making drivers. The responses found were less interconnected with the issues of technological and financial access than expected. This was associated with the independent nature of respondents' schools, which meant the majority of participants in the survey did not experience access issues. Their independence meant that most participants had pre-existing technological frameworks for learners and staff, and alternate financial sources to support them during the pandemic. When these financial access levels were compared across South Africa they showed that Gauteng and the Western Cape had the most variable financial access levels and that KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape had the least

variable access levels, overall showing an uneven distribution of financial access across South Africa's independent schools. The responses also showed that financial access being independent acted as both a positive and negative influence on the Head Teacher as it gave them alternative sources of funding during the pandemic, but it was also a way for parents to control their methodologies and reduce their autonomy while leading during the pandemic. When technological access was considered across South Africa it was found to be disjointed, with Gateng with the worst staff and learner access levels and KwaZulu-Natal with the best staff and learner access level, overall showing a clear digital divide across South African provinces and between staff and learners in provines such as Limpopo. Both issues of access showed a contextual factor, such that the context of the Head Teacher was more of an influential factor on their reported access than their geographical placement in South Africa.

The next two factors that affected Head Teachers during the pandemic included complex communication channels and complex decision-making drivers. The different pandemic responses identified herein showed an inherent contradiction surrounding communication during the pandemic. This contradiction showed that the majority of survey respondents believed communication allowed increased communication and networking, which assisted them in their ability to manage and lead and connect during the pandemic, yet when interrogated further it was evident that it also created increased anxiety and stress levels in Head Teachers as the lack of boundaries between work and personal time negatively affected their well-being. Communication showed a clear geographical trend, such that the 91% of respondents that used complex and multi-faceted communication channels were based in every respondent province. This showed that communication was an

additional stressor across the whole of South Africa. The next factor which impacted Head Teachers was that of decision drivers, which in this study were identified predominantly through the online survey. The most dominant decision driver identified within the survey was National Government Directives, which supported the preconceived notion that Head Teachers fully followed the procedures and directives implemented by those in charge of developing South Africa's pandemic response over time. This main decision driver was found in all of the respondent provinces, showing it was the dominant decision-driver for Head Teachers all across South Africa. There was however an interesting contradiction to this conception, when participants were asked to identify which decision driver was their main concern during their decision-making in the pandemic, there was a 35% drop in the dominance of National Government Directives. Most of the respondents that chose a main decision driver that was not National Government Directives were placing 'shared moral purpose or well-being-based drivers' as their main choice. This was supported by the analyses of decision drivers across South Africa, which showed that there was no major pattern to the decision-driver dominance by province within South Africa. This lack of pattern in decision-drivers suggesting that the specifc context of the Head Teachers school and pandemic response was key to the decision-drivers they used to make decisions, and that multiple decision-drivers were at the core of Head Teachers decisions within South Africa. This shift showed that when Head Teachers made decisions in the pandemic it was usually in a very complex and multi-dimensional space that considered many drivers rather than just one and that when asked to choose what was the main reason for their decisions human needs and well-being-based drivers had a higher preference than expected.

These factors showed that Head Teachers of independent schools in South Africa had to work within complex and shifting environments, creating multitudes of implications for them. These implications, some positive and some negative, included an increase in confidence and reliance on personal qualities, an increase in the number of work hours, higher levels of concern for communities and those under their care, decreased well-being, increased burnout, and increased numbers of professionals leaving the profession.

The positive implications identified within the results showed that Head Teachers began to have higher levels of confidence in their ability to lead, adapt and manage in a pandemic. They also felt an increased level of reliance upon their own skill sets and capabilities as a result of the pandemic. These positive implications were distributed across 86% of respondent provinces, yet they were only 36% of the implication responses received. The negative implications identified through the online survey showed that 91% of participating Head Teachers experienced high or extremely high levels of pressure and that none of the participants selected low or very low levels of pressure. This negative implication of increased pressure was more dominant in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, were the positive implications were more dominanat in the Eastern cape and the Free State, with Gauteng having almost equal amounts of both positive and negative implications. The negative implications were distributed across 57% of respondent provinces, yet covered 64% of the implication responses received. Overall, showing that the responses regarding implications Head Teachers in South Africa experienced were more negative than positive, and condensed in the provinces with the most respondents, suggesting once again that context was a more determinant factor than geographical location.

This survey also found that respondents experienced increasing levels of stress in association with the decreasing boundaries between their work time and personal time, as previously identified within the pandemic response results. This determinant between the pandemic response of increasing communication levels during the pandemic and the implication of increased stress and anxiety and therefore decreased well-being shows the direct relationship between the actions of leaders and the resulting implications associated with their actions, even in this case resulting upon themselves. The most striking outcome from this survey regarding Head Teacher well-being was the response from participant 9:

> *I have had to see a psychologist and psychiatrist and am taking medication for anti-anxiety and depression. My health has taken a significant toll.*

This response brings into question the ability of Head Teachers, who were experiencing intense personal implications as a result of the pandemic, to lead and manage a school's curriculum implementation and the well-being of those under their care.

When the interviews conducted within this study were analyzed for implications experienced by Head Teachers two overall implications were identified, the declining well-being of Head Teachers, and the increasing burnout and resignation or early retirement from the profession. These implications link the responses of Head Teachers as identified earlier: the increased communication, increased networking, and increasing reliance upon personal qualities, with the decreased well-being and increased burnout and resignation/early retirement from the profession of Head Teacher. This study’s result of one in four of the Head Teachers interviewed resigning as a result of the pandemic correlated to related pandemic research, which

showed a one in four resignation level of Head Teachers as a result of the pandemic. This is clear in Interviewee 3's response:

> *I'm going to summarize it in one sentence for you. I resigned. At the end of the term, I'm off to South Korea to go back to the basics and to teach English for a year.*

These results allowed the following to be constructed in response to the fundamental question of this research report: No, Head Teachers in independent South African schools are not okay, they are experiencing increased levels of pressure, stress, and anxiety, increased levels of burn-out, and they have had an overall decrease in their well-being. Leadership during a pandemic has increased the number of resignations and early retirement within this profession in South Africa. The context of Head Teachers within South African independent schools, and the contexts of their schools were determining factors in the degree to which Head Teachers experienced personal implications and their ability to manage and lead during the pandemic. The well-being of Head Teachers was also associated heavily with the independent nature of participants within this study, allowing them decision-making power within the pandemic and therefore more stress and anxiety.

The geographical analyses of the survey results showed that all of these findings were contextually based and not geographically dependent, such that the context of the Head Teacher and their school influenced their decision-making, stress levels, technological access levels and financial access levels not their location within South Africa. It was clear however that using complex, multi-faceted communication networks and the stress that resulted from this was a country-wide experience and

that National Government Directives was the country-wide main decision-driver for independent South African Head Teachers.

Finally considering these results this study outlined six lessons to be learnt for future leaders in pandemic education within South Africa, within all three levels of leadership – National, Departmental, and within schools; one) Increase the clarity of National guidelines and instructions issued, two) Standard Operating Procedures need to consider issues of access and context, three) Blended education should become a norm, four) Maintain consistency within educational methodologies, five) Maintain boundaries between personal and work time, and six) Increase professional networking.

This study specifically represented the independent schools within South Africa during the pandemic. Recommendations for future research within this field include comparing the responses, decision-making drivers, and implications for Head Teachers within public schools to those obtained herein for independent schools, as well as comparing these findings to those of more developed nations analyzing how education and preparation may have differed across space and development levels, and therefore how Head Teachers states may have differed across space and development levels. Other focus areas for future research could consider the distribution of responses in a more complex geographical distribution study that specifically studyies how pandemic responses varied over South Africa, across all nine provinces.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

CONSENT STATEMENT:

The questionnaire should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

I agree with and understand the following:

1. My responses will be used solely for education and academic research.

2. My privacy and confidentiality will be respected together with my schools. No school or personally identifiable information will be shared on the questionnaire or report.

3. My participation in the survey is solely voluntary.

4. It is my right to withdraw from the survey at any given stage.

5. Only Head Teachers who live and work in South Africa, and are 18 years and above, can respond to the questionnaire.

Please check the following box if you have read and agree with the statements given above

- ☐ I confirm that I have read the above statement and agree with all statements given above.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

1. In which province are you and your school situated? Please select the correct box.

☐ Gauteng

☐ Limpopo

☐ North-West

☐ Mpumalanga

☐ Free State

☐ KwaZulu-Natal

☐ Northern Cape

☐ Eastern Cape

☐ Western Cape

2. What is your Gender? Please select the correct box.

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Prefer not to disclose

☐ Prefer to self-identify

3. What is your age bracket? Please select the correct box.

☐ 18 – 25

☐ 25 – 40

☐ 40 – 55

☐ 55 – 70

☐ Over 70

4. What curriculum is taught in your independent educational institute? Please select the correct box.

☐ CAPS

☐ IEB

☐ Cambridge International

☐ Other: _____

5. Choose the correct educational level that your school falls into. If you educate in more than one level, please select all correct boxes and specify any others.

☐ Pre-school

☐ Primary school

☐ Secondary school

☐ Others: _____

6. What is the size of your school in terms of pupil numbers? Please select the correct box.

☐ 0 – 100 learners

☐ 101 – 200 s learners

☐ 201 – 500 learners

☐ 501 – 1000 learners

☐ More than 1000 learners

7. Select the correct grouping your school's learners fall within.

   ☐ Co-ed

   ☐ Single sex

8. Rate the access that your learners had before the pandemic to data, internet, computers or hardware. Select the correct box.

☐ All our learners had access to data, internet and hardware such as computers, tablets or smart phones.

☐ Most of our learners had access to data, internet and hardware such as computers, tablets or smart phones.

☐ Only a small percentage of our learners had access to data, internet and hardware such as computers, tablets or smart phones.

☐ None of our learners had access to data, internet and hardware such as computers, tablets or smart phones.

9. Rate the access that your teachers and staff had before the pandemic to data, internet, computers or hardware. Select the correct box.

☐ All our teachers and staff had access to data, internet and hardware such as computers, tablets or smart phones.

☐ Most of our teachers and staff had access to data, internet and hardware such as computers, tablets or smart phones.

☐ Only a small percentage of our teachers and staff had access to data, internet and hardware such as computers, tablets or smart phones.

☐ None of our teachers and staff had access to data, internet and hardware such as computers, tablets or smart phones.

10. If you answered question 8 or 9 as only a small percentage or none, please detail how you addressed this access issue during the pandemic.

_____

_____

11. How would you rate the financial stability of your independent institution during the pandemic. Please select the correct response.

☐ Stable (You experienced no problems with payments from parents or salary provision during the pandemic).

☐ Neutral (You experiences problems with payments from parents, yet you were able to withstand the pandemic without financial constraints or reduced salaries due to other sources of funding or money).

☐ Unstable (You experienced problems with payments from parents and were unable to maintain salaries and expenses during the pandemic lockdown).

☐ Other: _____

SECTION B: COVID-19 RESPONSES

1. How did you as the Head Teacher of your independent institution respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and regulations regarding school closures at the during the pandemic when a full lockdown was engaged. Select the most accurate response from the list below.

   ☐ I closed my school and suspended the educational programme completely.

   ☐ I closed my school yet allowed the educational programme to continue online.

   ☐ I allowed my school to continue in a hybrid educational programme using both online and in-person programmes simultaneously when the lockdown level allowed.

   ☐ I implemented a system which allowed for all the different educational settings, in-person or online or hybrid, based on the different alert levels the country was in.

   ☐ Other: _____

2. Where did you get the information, you used to make your decisions on the educational setting of your school, specifically health, regulation and COVID-19 information? Select the main source of information you used.

   ☐ Media

☐ Government Gazettes

☐ Health department

☐ Word-of-mouth

☐ Other: _____

3. How did you communicate your decisions to your staff, school community and external stakeholders? Select all that apply.

☐ Email

☐ Zoom or Google Meet

☐ Telephonically

☐ WhatsApp Groups

☐ Letters

4. Did you feel you had enough information to make informed decisions during this pandemic? Select the correct response and elaborate further as to why you think this.

☐ Yes, _____

☐ No, _____

5. What level of pressure do you feel during this process of decision-making during the pandemic. Considering the impacts your decisions have on those in your care. Select the most accurate response.

☐ Extremely high

☐ High

☐ Average

☐ Low

☐ Extremely low

6. Do you feel it is an advantage to be an independent school during this pandemic, considering the flexibility you have in your educational approach when compared to public schools as well as the lack of state funding you received? Select the most accurate response

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

    ☐ Unsure

SECTION C: DECISION-MAKING DRIVERS AND IMPACTS

1. Which of the following driving influences listed below did you use to make the decisions regarding the educational methodologies and programme your school followed. Select all that apply to your decision-making.

    ☐ Religious considerations

    ☐ Financial concerns

    ☐ Legal advice and ramifications

    ☐ Scientific facts and data

    ☐ Directives and information provided by the municipality and health department

- ☐ School community opinions (e.g., teachers or admin staff)
- ☐ External stakeholder opinions (e.g., parents, School Governing Body)
- ☐ Personal views

2. Considering the drivers you selected above which would you say was the main influence on your decisions regarding educational settings, safety, sanitation and sport programmes, and why.

_____

_____

3. Did you feel prepared to cope with the pressures associated with being a Head Teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic? How could you have been more prepared for this pandemic as a Head Teacher?

_____

_____

4. Have your decisions during this pandemic regarding your learners and staff safety impacted you in any way? Please select the correct response and elaborate.

☐ Yes, _____

☐ No, _____

APPENDIX 2: ONLINE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

By agreeing to and participating in this interview you agree to have your responses to the upcoming questions recorded, transcribed, and used in my research report. Your participation in this interview is voluntary and you have the right not to answer all questions asked of you or to withdraw from the interview at any point. There are no benefits to participating in this interview and there are no penalties for withdrawing at any point in the interview. Your privacy and your school's privacy will be respected such that none of your details will be shared or used in the study.

SECTION A: Demographic questions to answer.

- In which province are you and your school situated?
- What is your Gender?
- What is your age bracket?
- What curriculum is taught in your independent educational institute?
- What is the correct educational level that your school falls into? If you educate in more than one level please specify.
- What is the size of your school in terms of pupil numbers and teacher numbers?

- Please describe the access your staff and learners had to data, internet and hardware before and during the pandemic and any actions you took to remedy this?

SECTION B: Exploratory questions

Question Group 1: Head Teacher role and decisions

1. What would you consider the role of a Head Teacher to be, in normal circumstance versus in a pandemic?
2. How do you access information regarding the pandemic, restrictions, and the actions you are allowed to take as a Head Teacher? (e.g., ISASA, NAISA, Government?)
3. What kind of decisions did you have to make to ensure your school and educational programme would survive during this pandemic?
4. What level of involvement do your parents, teachers, SGB and staff have in your decisions?

Question Group 2: confidence and response evolution

5. How did your response to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and alert levels change over time as the pandemic continued?
6. Do you feel that you became more confident in your actions and responses as the pandemic progressed, such that your response changed over this time as well?

Question group 3: Communication and leadership style

7. How would you describe your communication style before the pandemic and in comparison, after the pandemic? Have you noted any major changes?

8. How did you communicate your decisions to those under your care during the pandemic? Did your communication style influence the impacts your decisions had on your staff and learners?
9. Where you available for consultation or approachable by your school community during this period and how?

Question Group 4: Impacts of decisions and preparation

10. What influences do you think your actions had on those in your care, such as teachers, learners, parents, and the community?
11. How has the pressure placed on you and your decision-making during this pandemic affected you? Has it influenced your mental, spiritual, or physical health?
12. If you could change anything you did during your response to the pandemic, what would it be?
13. How could you have been better prepared for this pandemic, what assistance would you have needed to better respond to the crisis?

APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Pahl

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H21/11/64**
PROJECT TITLE	Are our Head Teacher's okay? Decision-making processes of Head Teachers in COVID-19 times: Implications for head teachers and independent schools in South Africa
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss J Pahl
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Geography, Archaeology & Environmental Studies/
DATE CONSIDERED	26 November 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Low
EXPIRY DATE	20 February 2025

DATE 21 February 2022 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr M Evans

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. I **agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

Signature _____ Date 28/02/2022

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

APPENDIX 4: LETTER OF CONSENT

CONSENT FORM:

PROJECT TITLE: Are our Head Teacher's okay? Decision-making processes of Head Teachers in COVID-19 times: Implications for head teachers and independent schools in South Africa.

RESEARCHER: Julia Pahl

I, ... agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me in full and I understand what I am required to do in order to participate. I therefore have read and understand the following:

(Please circle the relevant response for each option given below.)

I understand that my participation will remain anonymous .	YES	NO
I understand I am not required to answer any question I am not comfortable with.	YES	NO
I understand I have the right to withdraw my participation in this interview at any point.	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may quote me anonymously in her Research report and any further publications.	YES	NO
I agree that this interview may be audio recorded and transcribed at a later date, which I will have the chance to check and correct where necessary.	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

Participant:

Name: .....
Date: .....
Signature: .....

Researcher:

Name: .....
Date: .....
Signature: .....

APPENDIX 5: ISASA/SAHISA PERMISSION CORRESPONDENCE

From: Julia Pahl [mailto:julia16.jp@gmail.com]

Sent: Sunday, 06 February 2022 11:13

To: Karen Smith <Karens@isasa.org>

Subject: Masters Research permission

Good Day

My name is Julia Pahl, a current Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am emailing you to request permission for my Masters research.

Please would you take the time to read the attached letter informing you about my research.

I look forward to your response.

Kind Regards

Julia Pahl

RESPONSE:

Dear Julia

Thank you for your email requesting assistance with your research.

ISASA is a non-profit, voluntary association and schools elect to apply for ISASA membership. Each member school pays an annual subscription fee and, in return, ISASA

Provides its members with a range of services. ISASA does not own or manage any individual schools and is not a governing body for private schools.

We are therefore not in a position to assist you and we cannot give permission to conduct research at independent schools. We suggest you contact specific schools individually. Where the school is part of a larger group, e.g., Reddam Schools, you may need to contact the group head office.

ISASA also doesn't share details of its member schools with anyone.

We do wish you well in your research.

Best regards

Karen