

THESIS / DISSERTATION SUBMISSION

EXPLORING TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES ON STRUCTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES PROMOTING TEACHER WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS IN RURAL SETTINGS

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in the Faculty of Education at the
University of the Free State.

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DECLARATION

I, Masabata Anna Dhlamini, declare that the thesis, *exploring teachers' experiences on structural support programmes promoting teacher well-being in schools in rural settings*, submitted for the qualification of the Master of Education at the University of the Free State, is my own, independent work.

All the references I have used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete citations.

I furthermore declare that this work has not previously been submitted by me at another university or faculty for the purpose of obtaining a qualification.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. A. Dhlamini', written over a dashed horizontal line.

SIGNED

28/09/2024

DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Mamani Elizabeth Dhlamini, who supported me during the thesis. Thank you very much for your motivation.

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My deepest gratitude goes to the following people:

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ABSTRACT

Exploring teachers' well-being has emerged as a topic of profound significance in educational psychology globally and locally. This burgeoning area reflects a growing recognition of the pivotal role of teachers' welfare in shaping the quality of teaching and learning experiences within educational settings. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which precipitated unprecedented challenges for educational systems worldwide, understanding and addressing the well-being of teachers has assumed heightened importance. This study explores the teachers' experiences in improving their well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19. This study adopted a qualitative approach through a phenomenological research design. It employed an interpretive paradigm. It used semi-structured interviews to collect data. These data were analysed through narrative analysis. The results suggested that teachers encountered multiple experiences with structural support programmes in rural schools. These included unawareness of the programmes, heavy workload, lack of support from SMT, insufficient time for family, unfair treatment from the management, lack of running water and electricity, undisciplined learners, and teachers' absenteeism at rural schools. The results indicated that structural support programmes could help improve teachers' well-being in rural schools. The results further revealed that support programmes could influence teachers' well-being and job performance, especially on the teachers' well-being. Research has suggested strategies for schools to reduce the number of overcrowded classrooms. However, information on how teachers in South Africa's rural schools might manage student overpopulation is lacking. Teachers' resilience and self-efficacy could help them deal with challenges in the classroom.

Furthermore, government officials advise adaptation when changing attitudes, behaviours, and feelings for the teachers' well-being. Lastly, during the COVID-19 era 2019\2020, a South African department proposed that teaching be converted to an online format 2019–2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This recommendation was potentially convenient for teachers and learners. Nonetheless, teachers and other learners faced difficulties due to a shortage of resources.

Keywords: Structural support programmes, Teachers' self-efficacy, Teachers' resilience, Teachers' well-being, Rural schools, COVID-19

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease

CAPS: Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements

DBE: Department of Basic Education

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

JD-R: The Job Demands-Resources

NEIMS: National Education Infrastructure Management System

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisations

SDT: Self-Determination Theory

SMT: School Management Team

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Exploring teachers' well-being has emerged as a topic of profound significance in educational psychology globally and locally. This burgeoning area reflects a growing recognition of the pivotal role of teachers' welfare in shaping the quality of teaching and learning experiences within educational settings. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which precipitated unprecedented challenges for educational systems worldwide, understanding and addressing the well-being of teachers has assumed heightened importance. Consequently, Magalong and Torreon (2021) revealed in their study that the role of the teacher influences the growth and wellbeing of the nation teachers' physical health, school stability, educational efficacy, and learner accomplishment have all been related to teacher well-being. Magalong and Torreon (2021) further stated that teachers' stress levels and emotions greatly influence the learners.

Scholars have delved into the interplay between teachers' and learners' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, shedding light on educational stakeholders' adaptive strategies and resilience in navigating this extraordinary period (Brief, 2021; Dhlamini, 2023). Furthermore, Mukuna (2021) explored enabler actions that influenced Basotho teachers' well-being, underscoring the contextual factors in rural school environments.

Teachers' well-being encompasses a multifaceted process to preserve their welfare and foster a conducive environment wherein they can wholeheartedly commit to their professional roles. Structural support programmes, such as those discussed, bolster teachers' psychological resilience and efficacy, enhancing their capacity to navigate the challenges inherent in their vocation (Fathi, Derakhshan, and Saharkhiz Arabani, 2020). Despite implementing such programmes, teachers in rural schools often contend with formidable obstacles, including limited access to resources and facilities essential for their well-being.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In educational psychology, there has been a notable surge in research focusing on the well-being of teachers, both on a global scale and within local contexts. This growing interest underscores the recognition of teachers as foundational pillars in the educational landscape, whose well-being significantly impacts the quality of teaching and learning experiences for learners. Dhlamini (2023) investigated novice teachers' experiences coping with adversities at a rural school during COVID-19 and highlighted the intricate dynamics of teacher and student well-being, particularly amidst the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed that resilience and adaptive strategies could help teachers and learners navigate their complexities and remote hybrid learning environments.

Furthermore, exploring teachers' well-being extends beyond mere academic inquiry to encompass practical considerations to enhance the support structures available to teachers. Mukuna (2021) highlighted that teachers faced challenges in rural areas and identified strategies that could facilitate their ability to cope with adversities and contribute valuable insights to the discourse on teacher support and development (Mukuna, 2021). The structural support programmes designed to bolster teachers' psychological resilience and efficacy are central to teachers' well-being. Fathi, Derakhshan, and Saharkhiz Arabani (2020) developed a comprehensive structural model of self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and psychological well-being among teachers of Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Their findings underscored the importance of collective efficacy, or the belief in the collective ability of teachers to positively impact student outcomes, in enhancing teachers' psychological well-being (Fathi et al., 2020).

However, despite the proliferation of structural support programmes, teachers in rural schools often face challenges that hinder their access to essential resources and facilities for their well-being. These challenges may include geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and inadequate professional development opportunities (Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen, 2015). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated disparities, amplifying teachers' socioeconomic and technological barriers in rural areas (Oyedotun, 2020).

For those mentioned above, there is a pressing need to explore and understand teachers' experiences participating in structural support programmes, particularly within rural educational settings. This study aims to elucidate strategies for enhancing the effectiveness and equity of support mechanisms for teachers in rural schools. This study endeavours to inform policy and practice aimed at promoting the holistic development of teachers and fostering equitable educational opportunities for all learners.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Teachers experienced challenges in coping with their well-being in rural schools. The Department of Education has made efforts to support teachers. However, the Department of Basic Education highlighted the urgency of addressing this issue, emphasising teachers' overwhelming demand for psychological assistance (Perez et al., 2013). Similarly, scholars indicated that psychological support services for teachers have increased and reflected the profound impact, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, on teachers' mental health and well-being (Perez et al., 2013). As schools prepare to welcome back learners who may be traumatised by the loss of loved ones or their own experiences with the virus, the demand for support services is expected to escalate even further (Acton and Glasgow, 2015).

The Department of Basic Education indicated that 1,169 teachers succumbed to difficulties associated with COVID-19 data from December 2020 to February 2021 (Oyedotun, 2020). Furthermore, non-teaching personnel lost their lives due to the virus, further exacerbating the crisis (Chawula, 2021). The devastating toll of the pandemic on the education sector is underscored by statistics revealing the loss of teachers due to COVID-19-related complications.

In response to these challenges, the Department of Basic Education has collaborated with various stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), online services, and faith-based organisations, to provide much-needed support services to teachers (Chawula, 2021). However, despite these efforts, there remains a significant gap between the availability of support programmes and their utilisation by teachers. Many teachers are unaware of the existence of these programmes, and even when they are aware, they may not effectively access or utilise them. In the Gariep district the two

schools that were interviewed teachers responding to the structural programme majoring they did not know if they do exist because from their experience none of them got help from the department regarding their mental health / wellbeing. Furthermore, there were limited studies that looked specifically at the existence of the supporting programmes specifically focusing on teachers' wellbeing and mental health and the existence of teachers supporting programmes. According to (White , 2020)“there were limited numbers of evaluations that looked specifically at ways to support teachers' mental and wellbeing” white further stated that majority of studies focused on individual -level approaches to help teachers cope with stressors in their work environment.

(White , 2020)

Despite these efforts, however, a significant gap remains between the availability of support programs and their actual utilization by teachers. Many educators are unaware of these programs, and even when they are informed, they often struggle to access or effectively engage with them (Brock, et al., 2020). This issue has been highlighted in research by (Brock, et al., 2020), who found that despite the availability of mental health and well-being programs for educators, a significant proportion of teachers were either unaware of these services or faced barriers to accessing them, such as lack of time, perceived stigma, or insufficient information about how to engage with the programs.

This gap underscores the critical importance of exploring teachers' experiences with structural support programmes aimed at promoting their well-being, particularly within rural school settings. By gaining insights into the challenges and barriers teachers face in accessing and utilising support services, this study seeks to raise awareness of existing programmes and identify strategies to enhance their effectiveness. Ultimately, the goal is to empower teachers to prioritise their mental health and well-being, fostering a supportive and resilient teaching workforce capable of navigating the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic and beyond. This study exemplifies the crucial role of structural support initiatives in fostering a supportive and empowering environment for teachers.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1 Main research question

What are the teachers' experiences improving their well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19?

1.4.2 Subsidiary questions

1. What factors influence teachers' well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19?
2. What are the challenges faced by teachers in rural high schools during COVID-19?

1.5 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 Aim

This study explores teachers' experiences in improving their well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19.

1.5.2 Objectives

Objective 1: To investigate the types of structural support programmes implemented in rural schools.

Subsidiary Question 1: What types of structural support programmes were implemented in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Objective 2: To evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes in supporting teacher well-being.

Subsidiary Question 2: How effective were the structural support programmes in enhancing teacher well-being in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Objective 3: To identify barriers to the utilisation of support programmes.

Subsidiary Question 3: What barriers did teachers face in accessing or utilizing the structural support programmes in rural schools?

1. To explore teachers' challenges in improving their well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19.
2. To determine the factors influencing teachers' well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19.
3. To explore the challenges faced by teachers in rural high schools during COVID-19.

1.6 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The study's rationale emanates from the need to address the well-being of teachers in South African rural schools, considering challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers serve as pillars of the education system, yet they often face numerous adversities that impact their mental, emotional, and physical health (Mukuna, 2021). Thus, this study is imperative as it helps the Department of Basic Education to evaluate existing support programmes to ensure they effectively cater to the needs of teachers and school principals (Perez et al., 2013).

The support programmes play a crucial role in assisting teachers in coping with the multifaceted challenges encountered in schools, thereby prioritising their well-being (Mukuna, 2021). These programmes foster a conducive working environment for teachers, ultimately enhancing their performance to address the stressors and providing necessary resources and assistance (Barni et al., 2019). However, evaluating these programmes becomes essential to ascertain their efficacy in effectively meeting the intended objectives and supporting teachers (Mukuna, 2021).

Furthermore, teachers' well-being is closely intertwined with their performance and the quality of their education (Bakker, 2018). This study is crucial to exploring the positive emotional state, self-introspection, and resilience of teacher well-being directly influencing their teaching practices and student interactions (Poulou et al., 2019). Therefore, prioritising teachers' well-being through effective support programmes benefits teachers and enhances learners' learning experiences (Fathi et al., 2020).

Additionally, this study helps promote awareness of existing support programmes among teachers and ensures their utilisation and efficacy (Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen, 2015). Many teachers may be unaware of the available resources or face barriers to accessing them, such as geographical isolation or lack of information (Poulou et al., 2019). Therefore, this study is vital to ensure equitable access to support services, promote these programmes, and create teacher awareness (Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen, 2015).

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study holds significant implications for the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa. This is because it provides an opportunity to evaluate and optimise existing support programmes to enhance teachers' well-being. This study helps the DBE to ensure that they align with their intended objectives and adequately serve the needs of teachers and school principals by assessing the effectiveness of these programmes (Perez et al., 2013).

Teachers' well-being is closely intertwined with their performance and the quality of education (Bakker, 2018). Therefore, prioritising teacher well-being and effective support programmes benefit teachers and enhance learners' learning experiences (Fathi et al., 2020). The teaching profession should be granted academic freedom to perform its obligations (Haniford and Edge, 2023).

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Update the introduction to explicitly position the JD-R model and SDT as the dual theoretical lenses guiding the study. Include:

"This study employs the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to examine teacher well-being in rural schools. The JD-R model provides a framework for analysing the impact of job demands (e.g., workload, administrative pressure) and resources (e.g., support programs, professional development) on teacher stress and performance. SDT complements this by exploring the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are critical for fostering intrinsic motivation and long-term well-being. Together, these frameworks allow for a holistic understanding of the structural and personal factors influencing teacher well-being."

This study's theoretical framework is grounded in teacher well-being and its influence on educational outcomes, such as Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is central to this framework, which posits that job demands and resources influence employee well-being and performance (Bakker, 2018). According to Bakker (2018), job demands refer to aspects of the job that require physical, psychological, or emotional effort and are associated with stress and burnout. Examples of job demands for teachers include high workload, student misbehaviours, and time pressure (Barni et al., 2019). On the other hand, job resources facilitate goal achievement, reduce job demands, and promote

motivation and engagement (Bakker, 2018). These can include social support, autonomy, and opportunities for professional development (Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen, 2015). Drawing from the JD-R model, this study examines how structural support programmes serve as job resources for teachers in rural high schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. These programmes provide teachers with the necessary resources and assistance to cope with job demands enhancing their well-being and performance (Mukuna, 2021). Furthermore, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasises the importance of intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and competence in promoting psychological well-being (Poulou et al., 2019). According to SDT, individuals thrive when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied (Fathi et al., 2020). In teaching, support programmes that empower teachers, promote professional growth and foster positive relationships contribute to their intrinsic motivation and overall well-being (Barni et al., 2019).

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study seeks to understand how structural support programmes influence teacher well-being in rural high schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores the interplay between job demands, job resources, intrinsic motivation, and psychological well-being to inform teachers' development and implementation of effective support interventions (Poulou et al., 2019).

In the context of this study, the "Structural Programme" refers to a set of interventions specifically designed to support teachers' psychological well-being, particularly in rural high schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This programme is grounded in two theoretical models: the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

The programme aims to address both the demands placed on teachers and the resources needed to counterbalance these demands, ultimately promoting their mental health and improving their educational outcomes.

Instances/ dimensions of the framework

1. Job Demands and Stress Reduction:

Workload Management: One key dimension of the programme is the reduction of teacher workload, which may have been exacerbated during the pandemic due to remote learning and health protocols. Structural support could include measures like workload redistribution, the provision of teaching assistants, or more flexible scheduling to alleviate time pressure.

Emotional and Psychological Support: Teachers face significant emotional and psychological strain due to the challenging nature of the pandemic. Structural support could include access to counselling services, mental health workshops, or peer support networks, aiming to reduce the emotional burden of teaching in a crisis.

2. Job Resources and Support Systems:

Social Support: Social support from colleagues, school leadership, and the broader educational community is a crucial dimension. This could take the form of collaborative workspaces, mentoring programmes, or regular check-ins with school leadership to ensure teachers feel connected and supported during times of isolation.

Professional Development: A core feature of job resources is the opportunity for teachers to engage in professional growth. The Structural Programme can include workshops on trauma-informed teaching, resilience-building, and digital teaching skills to enhance teachers' confidence and competence in the face of new challenges.

Autonomy and Flexibility: Providing teachers with more autonomy in their teaching methods, scheduling, or decision-making processes can be vital in increasing job satisfaction and reducing stress. The programme could also offer teachers a degree of

flexibility in how they structure their online or in-person classes, allowing them to feel more in control of their work environment.

3. Intrinsic Motivation and Autonomy:

Empowerment through Decision-Making: Drawing from Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the programme can promote teacher empowerment by allowing teachers to participate in decision-making processes related to school policies, teaching methods, and support services. This sense of ownership and autonomy boosts intrinsic motivation, which, in turn, enhances well-being.

Recognition and Feedback: The programme could emphasize regular positive feedback and recognition for teachers' efforts, promoting feelings of competence and accomplishment. This can be achieved through formal recognition programmes, positive evaluations, or opportunities for teachers to share successes with their peers.

4. Psychological Well-Being and Competence:

Stress Management Techniques: Programmes might include practical stress management techniques, such as mindfulness training, resilience-building activities, or relaxation sessions, which directly contribute to psychological well-being.

Fostering Competence: Ensuring that teachers feel competent in their roles is essential. The programme could provide opportunities for teachers to attend training sessions on pedagogical skills, technological integration, and emotional intelligence, reinforcing their confidence in handling both their professional and personal challenges.

5. Community Building and Relatedness:

Building Teacher Communities: The programme could emphasize the development of teacher networks, where educators can share experiences, strategies, and emotional support. Virtual or in-person group sessions could be established to foster a sense of belonging, reducing isolation and promoting a supportive school culture.

Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships: Given the importance of teacher-student interactions, especially in a crisis, the programme could incorporate strategies to help teachers manage the emotional needs of students affected by the pandemic, thus promoting a positive and supportive learning environment that benefits both teachers and students.

In summary, the "Structural Programme" is a comprehensive intervention framework that integrates both external resources (e.g., social support, professional development) and internal motivation factors (e.g., autonomy, competence) to address the challenges faced by teachers, particularly in rural high schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. By emphasizing the importance of both job demands and resources, and aligning with principles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness from Self-Determination Theory, this framework seeks to enhance teacher well-being, alleviate stress, and promote positive educational outcomes.

1.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study is based on integrating several key concepts and theoretical perspectives related to teacher well-being and support programmes in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the core of the conceptual framework is the concept of teacher well-being, which encompasses various dimensions, including physical, emotional, and psychological aspects (Barni et al., 2019). Teachers' well-being is influenced by various factors, including job demands, job resources, and personal characteristics (Bakker, 2018).

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model provides a theoretical lens to understand the impact of job demands and resources on teacher well-being (Bakker, 2018). Job demands such as workload, time pressure, and learners' behaviours can contribute to stress and burnout among teachers (Barni et al., 2019). Conversely, job resources such as social support, autonomy, and opportunities for professional development can buffer the negative effects of job demands and promote well-being (Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen, 2015).

Similarly, the JD-R model and SDT offered insights into the role of intrinsic motivation and psychological needs satisfaction in promoting teachers' well-being (Poulou et al., 2019). According to SDT, individuals thrive when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied (Fathi et al., 2020). Support programmes that empower teachers, foster positive relationships, and provide opportunities for growth and development can enhance intrinsic motivation and contribute to overall well-being (Barni et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the conceptual framework incorporates the socio-ecological perspective, which recognises the influence of environmental factors on individual well-being (Mukuna, 2021). In this study, environmental factors such as organisational culture, leadership support, and community resources play a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of support programmes and their impact on teachers' well-being (Mukuna, 2021).

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the conceptual framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teachers' well-being and the effectiveness of support programmes in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights the interplay between job demands, job resources, intrinsic motivation, and environmental factors to inform the development and implementation of targeted interventions to support teachers' well-being in this context.

1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

1.10.1 Research paradigm

This study used the interpretive paradigm, which prioritises comprehending individuals' subjective reality (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). This paradigm recognises the complexities of human experiences and holds that reality is socially produced and context-bound (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). This paradigm lets people interpret their experiences considering their unique viewpoints, values, and cultural origins.

This paradigm is beneficial for qualitative research since it emphasises understanding the depth and breadth of human experiences. This paradigm enables researchers to investigate the complex meanings and interpretations assigned to these experiences.

Furthermore, this paradigm was important in this study because it tries to expose the richness and depth of human occurrences, which is complementary to the interpretive paradigm's emphasis on comprehending subjective reality. This study elicits rich and nuanced data on teachers' experiences and perceptions of structural support programmes using the interpretive paradigm. This leads to a better understanding of teacher well-being in rural school settings.

1.10.2 Research approach

This study used a qualitative research approach, ideal for obtaining nuanced meanings from participants' perspectives on events or phenomena (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Qualitative research allows for subjective and descriptive investigation of phenomena, making it especially useful for understanding teachers' nuanced experiences and the efficacy of assistance programmes in rural schools (Chivanga and Monyai, 2021). As a result, this study employs qualitative research techniques to investigate the specific meanings of teachers' well-being initiatives in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.9.3 Research design

This study adopted a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is ideally exploring individuals' lived experiences and understanding the essence of those

experiences (Kumar in Chivanga and Monyai, 2021). This design aligns with the study, allowing researchers to uncover the underlying meanings and essences of participants' experiences, thus addressing the research questions and objectives.

1.9.4 Participants

This study selected participants from the population of teachers working in rural schools in the Free State Province, South Africa. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique, which allowed for the deliberate selection of individuals who could provide rich insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling is commonly employed in qualitative research to ensure that participants possess relevant knowledge and experiences related to the research topic (Mukuna, 2021). Multiple phases are possible in qualitative research designs, with each phase building on the one before it (Sharma, 2017).

In these situations, several sampling techniques can be needed at each stage. This study selected teachers based on teaching experience, qualifications, and subject specialisation criteria, aiming to capture diverse perspectives within the sample (Nel et al., 2016). The sample comprised fourteen teachers, including an equal representation of male and female teachers from the two rural schools selected for the study. The study included male and female teachers to capture potential gender differences in experiences and perceptions of structural support programmes promoting teachers' well-being during COVID-19. The selection of participants from rural schools in the Free State province ensured that the study captured the unique challenges and experiences faced by teachers in these settings. The study aimed to provide insights specific to rural education's context by focusing on rural schools, thereby contributing to a better understanding of teachers' well-being in such environments (Du Plessis and Mestry, 2019).

1.9.5 Data collection instruments

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary instrument for data collection in this study. Semi-structured interviews are widely regarded as the "gold standard" for qualitative research, allowing for flexibility while maintaining a standardised approach to data collection (Bauman, 2015). In addition, Rahman (2015) emphasises that the

interview guide was developed based on the research objectives. It aimed to elicit rich and detailed responses from participants regarding their experiences and perceptions of structural support programmes promoting teachers' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. The open-ended interview questions allowed participants to provide in-depth insights and reflections on their experiences (Poulou et al., 2019). Before data collection, the interview guide was piloted with a small group of teachers to ensure clarity and relevance. This pilot testing helped refine the interview questions and ensure they effectively captured the information needed to address the research objectives (Poulou et al., 2019). Data collection occurred through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with participants at their respective schools. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate data capture and facilitate subsequent analysis (Bauman, 2015). Semi-structured interviews allowed a comprehensive exploration of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward structural support programmes. These provided valuable insights into the factors influencing teachers' well-being in rural school settings during the pandemic (Poulou et al., 2019).

1.9.6 Data analysis

This study's data analysis used a thematic analysis approach, popular in qualitative research, to uncover patterns, themes, and meanings within the data. Thematic analysis entails methodically coding and categorising data to identify major themes and patterns in participants' responses. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and ease of analysis (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). The transcripts were organised and coded using qualitative data analysis software (Creswell and Poth, 2016). The study began with open coding, which involved carefully reviewing the transcripts to identify initial codes indicating the data's concepts, ideas, or trends (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). These codes were classified into broad groups and themes based on their relation to the research questions and objectives. The researchers matched fresh data to previously coded data throughout data processing to refine categories and maintain consistency (Creswell and Poth, 2016). This iterative procedure enabled the identification of overarching themes that reflected the essence of participants' experiences and views of structural support schemes boosting teacher well-being in rural schools during the COVID-19 outbreak. After the theme analysis was completed, the

researchers performed member checking to validate the findings and assure the accuracy and reliability of the interpretations (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Member verification entailed discussing the summarised themes with participants to ensure they accurately represented their experiences and viewpoints (Creswell and Poth, 2016). This study intended to offer deep and nuanced insights into the determinants influencing teacher well-being in rural school settings during the epidemic, adding to the current body of expertise on the subject (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

1.9.7 Credibility and trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the truthfulness of the results, the systematic integrity of the study design, the researcher's credibility, and the application of the research methodologies are all considered aspects (Johnson and Parry, 2015a; Lincoln and Guba, 1985 in Rose and Johnson, 2020, p. 3). According to Johnson and Parry (2015a) and Lincoln and Guba, 1985 in Rose and Johnson (2020), the truthfulness of the results, the systematic integrity of the study design, the researcher's credibility, and the application of the research methodologies are all considered aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Rose and Johnson (2020. p.4) further believe that enhancing the credibility of a qualitative research study entails several factors, such as the epistemological perspectives, the extent of literature examined and discussed, the proper theoretical orientation of the argument, the choice and application of various, frequently contradictory methods for gathering and generating data, the analytical processes carried out, the relationship between the empirical data and broader theories and discourses, and how these aspects of the research are interconnected. According to Ahmed (2024), establishing the credibility and reliability of qualitative results requires ensuring trustworthiness. Confirmability is therefore supported by the researcher's data compiled from the participants. analysis is validated by the information;(Lincoln & Guba, 1985; in Rose, and Johnson, 2020. p.5).

1.9.8 Ethical considerations

Firstly, ethical approval was obtained from the University of the Free State's Ethics Review Committee before commencing the research. This approval ensured that the study met the University's ethical guidelines and standards.

Additionally, permission was sought and obtained from the Department of Basic Education and the principals of the two selected schools to research their premises. This step ensured the study was conducted with the relevant authorities' full cooperation and support.

Moreover, before providing informed consent, participants were given thorough information about the study's purpose, process, potential risks, and benefits. Written consent forms were distributed to participants, and their voluntary participation was emphasised. Participants were assured of confidentiality and maintained their anonymity throughout the study. Personal information collected from participants was kept confidential and stored securely, with access limited to the research team only (Perez et al., 2013). Measures were implemented to ensure participants could withdraw from the study without facing any consequences. This study aimed to uphold the research process's integrity and prioritise the participants' welfare and rights by upholding these ethical principles.

1.10 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.10.1 Teachers' experiences

According to Mukuna (2021), the teachers' experiences are the perceptions, feelings, and insights that teachers encounter into various aspects of their professional lives, such as interactions with learners, colleagues, and administrators, and experiences with curriculum, teaching methods, and professional development opportunities. In this study, the teachers' experiences combine acquired skills, exposure, and training to help them do their current job more effectively and prepare them for a teaching position.

1.10.2 Structural support programmes

Introduction of the term “structural support programmes”

Structural support programmes refer to organized interventions or strategies designed to provide teachers with resources, tools, and psychological assistance to help them manage job-related stressors and enhance their overall well-being. These programmes may include access to mental health resources, professional development, social support systems, and changes in work structures to alleviate job demands.

It is the organised initiatives or interventions implemented within educational institutions to help, guide, and provide resources to teachers in addressing challenges related to their professional roles and responsibilities (Bakker, 2018). In this study, the structural support programme refers to a basic framework that assists the teachers in developing the well-being required to influence cognitive and work processes.

1.10.3 Teachers' well-being

Teachers' well-being refers to the physical, emotional, and psychological health and satisfaction of teachers within their professional roles. It refers to the overall state of contentment, fulfillment, and resilience experienced by teachers in their work environment, workload, relationships, and personal development (Fathi et al., 2020). In this study, the teachers' well-being includes all aspects of health-related quality of life for teachers interacting directly with learners in the school setting.

1.10.4 Rural schools

Rural schools are educational organisations in rural or remote areas marked by low population density, unique socio-economic constraints, and restricted resource access (Du Plessis and Mestry, 2019). In this study, the rural schools are mainly located in rural areas. They are distinguished by geographical isolation, low population density, and location. For this reason, the study is being carried out at rural schools in the Gariep region of the Free State province.

1.11 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

This research consists of five chapters:

Chapter 1: An introduction and orientation

This chapter includes the study's introduction, background, and problem statement. It supports the study's research questions, objectives, rationale, and significance. Similarly, it briefly examines the study's theoretical and conceptual underpinnings, and the research technique and design used. Finally, it defines the essential concepts employed throughout this study.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

This chapter develops the literature related to the teachers' experiences in rural high schools, structural support programmes at schools, and factors affecting teachers' work and well-being during COVID-19. Similarly, it discusses the theoretical framework adopted in this study. The summary chapter concludes this chapter.

Chapter 3: Research methodology and design

This chapter primarily focuses on the research methodology and design. It covers the research approach, paradigm, and design of the study. It underpins the research sites, selection of participants' techniques, data collection instruments, and data analysis and interpretation data. It outlines ethical considerations and trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Presentation and discussion of the findings

The study results are presented in this chapter. These are the findings outlined, explained, and discussed.

Chapter 5: Study conclusions

This chapter concludes the study and provides a summary of the findings. The conclusions of the theoretical framework are further discussed. The recommendations and implications are covered in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Teachers in rural areas face significant challenges that can lead to mental health issues, underscoring the importance of awareness and utilisation of existing well-being programmes designed to support them (Bakker, 2018). Past research has highlighted the necessity of addressing teacher well-being and its impact on educational continuity. (Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell, and Wang, 2009, in Acton and Glasgow, 2015) emphasised the disruption caused to educational programmes due to the ongoing need to mentor and support new teachers. Despite well-being programmes, many teachers in rural areas are unaware of their availability and have not utilised them, leading to a lack of attention to teachers' well-being in these settings. Furthermore, studies have shown the detrimental effects of teacher burnout on various aspects of professional and personal life, including absenteeism, increased healthcare costs, decreased job performance, and mental health concerns (Naghieh et al. in Acton and Glasgow, 2015). This highlights the urgency of addressing teacher well-being to ensure the overall effectiveness of the education system.

2.2 TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF THEIR WELL-BEING IN RURAL SCHOOLS IN COVID-19

Teachers enormously influence society's future development since they impart knowledge and support learners' growth. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for teachers worldwide, particularly those working in rural high schools. In these settings, teachers have encountered unique obstacles that have significantly impacted their well-being and ability to perform their duties effectively. The sudden onset of the pandemic necessitated rapid adjustments to teaching practices,

including adopting remote or hybrid learning models. This transition has placed immense pressure on teachers to adapt to new technologies and methodologies, often increasing workloads and stress (Oyedotun, 2020). It is essential to consider that teachers experience challenges in rural schools. However, teachers in rural areas faced challenges due to limited access to resources and support services. Many teachers have reported feeling isolated and overwhelmed, lacking access to professional development opportunities or mental health support (Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen, 2015). Several researchers have reported on the influence of COVID-19 on schools, especially on teachers.

Some contributing factors cause teachers' well-being to be in danger; for instance, teacher stress at the workplace may cause a negative relationship with the school management team (SMT) and school governing body (SGB) among teachers, and it may involve parents and learners. As per Hanafi, Amat, and Kamarudin (2023), stress is a global issue that is commonly discussed in various stages, and in the current environment (WHO, 2021 p 4041 in Hanafi, Amat, and Kamarudin, 2023), workplace stress is a significant contributor to global health issues. Supporting programs should be available for teachers to be content at work. Li (2020) stated that integrating job satisfaction into employee well-being increases the balance of psychological and social demands at work. Since the study was conducted during COVID-19, everyone's health was at risk, even the teachers in rural areas. As a result, everyone's wellness was in jeopardy. Hou, Mao, Dong, Cai, and Deng (2020) conducted a study focusing on the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on senior high school learners in rural China. They indicated that there has been a lot of research on the psychological effects of COVID-19, but not much has been found on how the virus affects senior high school students living in rural settings. Furthermore, Hou et al. (2020) outlined their findings as high rates of depression, PTSD symptoms, and anxiety. Mukuna and Aloba, 2020 on the other hand, conducted a study focusing on the challenges of online learning for teachers during COVID-19 at a rural school in South Africa, where there was a lack of internet connectivity and low parental involvement, which led to teacher stress and other psychological challenges. Other researchers have defined teacher stress as "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of

their work” (Kyriacou, 2001, p. 28 in Carroll, Forrest, Sanders-O’Connor, Flynn, Bower, Fynes-Clinton, York, and Ziaei, 2022, p. 442). Rural teachers who suffer from various problems are unable to function effectively, which has a severe impact on their well-being. Positive affect and subjective well-being are required for teachers to generate the appropriate learner's results. In addition, one study found that individuals with higher positive affect and subjective well-being levels had smaller physiological responses to stress, such as lower blood pressure and cortisol levels (Steptoe et al., 2005). Some scholars have argued how the lockdown affected teachers’ psychological well-being, drawn up broader mental health measures, and offered evidence that some teachers were more impacted than others.

In contrast, others felt that COVID-19 affected them differently (Allen, Jerrin, and Sims, 2020). Similarly, research carried out throughout the COVID-19 epidemic found that the wellbeing of teachers was adversely affected. The COVID-19 epidemic has caused significant changes in teaching structures worldwide, negatively impacting teachers' personal and professional well-being (Reimer and Schleicher, 2020, in Alves, Lopes, and Precioso, 2021, p. 205). In South Africa, the epidemic claimed the lives of approximately 3,500 educators. COVID-19 was a life-threatening illness that placed the lives of teachers at risk.

2.3 STRUCTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES AT SCHOOLS

The structural support programmes encompass a range of initiatives designed to provide teachers with the resources, tools, and assistance they need to navigate the challenges of their profession effectively. These programmes are particularly crucial in rural schools, where teachers often face unique obstacles due to limited resources and isolation from urban centres.

These programmes promote teachers’ well-being and enhance teachers' and learners' overall educational experience. These initiatives address teachers' professional and personal needs, including professional development, mental health support, and resource access (Barni et al., 2019). Professional Development could be considered a structural support programme to help teachers cope with school challenges. Professional development opportunities for teachers could be an essential component of structural

support programmes. These may include workshops, training sessions, and mentorship programmes to improve teachers' pedagogical skills, subject knowledge, and classroom management techniques (Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen, 2015). By investing in ongoing professional development, schools can empower teachers to stay abreast of best practices and innovative teaching methods, ultimately enhancing the quality of education provided to learners.

Mental health support could be considered a structural support programmes that assists teachers in coping with their challenges at rural schools. In addition to professional development, structural support programmes also address teachers' mental health and well-being. The demanding nature of the teaching profession can affect teachers' mental and emotional health, particularly in rural settings where resources may be scarce (Mukuna, 2021). Therefore, initiatives such as counselling services, wellness workshops, and peer support groups are essential components of these programmes, providing teachers with the resources and support they need to cope with stress, anxiety, and burnout. Access to resources is another critical aspect of structural support programmes. In rural schools, teachers may face challenges related to limited access to teaching materials, technology, and facilities (Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen, 2015). Structural support programmes aim to bridge this gap by providing schools with funding, equipment, and other resources necessary for effective teaching and learning. These programmes help level the playing field for learners and teachers by ensuring equitable access to resources. Structural support programmes facilitate collaboration and networking among teachers within and across different institutions. Platforms such as teacher forums, online communities, and professional associations enable teachers to share resources, exchange ideas, and support one another in overcoming common challenges (Bakker, 2018). This collaborative approach fosters a sense of solidarity and collective responsibility among teachers, ultimately benefiting the school community.

2.4 FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHERS' WORK AND WELL-BEING

It is essential to consider that many factors negatively affect teachers' work and well-being. For example, working in poor infrastructure and environment may affect teachers' well-being. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) indicated that in South Africa, many rural

schools lack sanitation, electricity, and water. Their teaching and learning spaces are in a terrible state. In 2018, Basic Education's National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) revealed that 3 500 schools were operating in darkness due to lack of electricity, over 3 million were still using pit toilets, while more than 2,500 were dry without water (Matika, 2018:1). Teaching under such adversities led over 4000 teachers to quit their jobs in 2017. Msila (2017) stated that teachers left their profession because of teacher burnout and an environment that is intolerable due to poor service delivery (Ebberson, 2014:569)

The overcrowded classrooms could prevent teachers from pursuing their profession, and producing quality learners' education is critical. Moreover, it deteriorates their health. It is essential to consider that overcrowded classrooms may affect the quality of education. This could be a worldwide problem. However, Khan and Iqbal (2012) indicated that this challenge could affect teaching and learning in Pakistan. They found that overcrowded classrooms, including physical, discipline, and evaluation problems, affect teachers (Khan and Iqbal, 2012). Similarly, In South Africa, Muthusamy (2015) indicated that 'overcrowding in classrooms breeds inadequate classroom space in Kwazulu Natal province.

Consequently, minimal teacher and learner participation, health and safety challenges, and disincentive behaviours are disruptive. Due to overcrowded classrooms, teachers pass through emotional and psychological problems, and the workload increases and teaching and learning time (Khanare, 2015, p. 1). Those are factors that contribute to stress for teachers. It is important to note that various studies have been conducted on teachers coping with poor working relationships amongst teachers. However, there is a gap in how teachers in rural areas in South Africa can cope with such adversity. In Australia, McCollum and Price (2010) said teachers should develop strategies to build relationships between young teachers, learners, and experienced staff members to bring change in their lives, health, and well-being. In Kenya, it was found that there are very few trained teacher counsellors. Then, the minister of education and the teachers, service Commission were advised to implement the developed guidelines to hire and train qualified teacher counsellors and remunerate them suitably (Chemwei and Cheruiyot, 2022:1).

It is essential to note that support programmes could influence teachers' well-being without good infrastructure. Lack of infrastructure has been identified as one of the adversities that contributes to the unnecessary workload of teachers, resulting in unnecessary stress levels. There is a gap in the information on how South African teachers can cope with the lack of infrastructure in their schools. Findings by Zambian Scholars have recommended that the government should prioritise education after health by providing enough funding for teaching and learning resources, specialists, and infrastructure (Chulu 2022:5). In 2019/2020, during the COVID-19 era, South African department suggested that teaching and learning should be moved to online learning, the possible suggestion was convenient for both learners and teachers. However, the lack of resources challenged other learners and teachers. Martin et al. (2012 in Kwatubana and Molaodi, 2021) argue that other government leaders recommend adaptability in adjusting thoughts, actions, and emotions for teachers' well-being.

It is essential to consider that support programmes enable teachers to cope with overcrowded classrooms. An overcrowded classroom not only causes havoc in teaching and learning but also contributes to the deterioration of health for teachers and learners due to lack of ventilation and other challenges. Studies have recommended how schools can operate to minimise overcrowded classrooms. However, there is a gap in information on how teachers can cope with overcrowding in rural schools in South Africa. Mukuna (2021) outlined resilience and teacher self-efficacy, enabling teachers to cope with school adversities.

There are further concerns about teachers' safety at rural schools. The health risks associated with in-person teaching during the pandemic have heightened teachers' anxieties, particularly in communities with limited healthcare infrastructure. Fear of contracting COVID-19 has added to the already significant stress levels experienced by teachers (Oyedotun, 2020). They are affected by the emotional toll at rural schools. Witnessing the influence of the pandemic on learners and their families has taken an emotional toll on teachers. The loss of loved ones, financial hardships, and increased social disparities have contributed to helplessness and burnout among teachers (Mukuna, 2021). It is essential to consider that although teachers encounter challenges, some can be resilient and dedicated to their professional careers at rural schools. Despite these

challenges, teachers have demonstrated remarkable resilience and dedication to their profession. Many have gone above and beyond their traditional roles to support learners academically and emotionally, highlighting their commitment to ensuring continuity of education during these challenging times (Muremela et al., 2021).

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.4.1 Background of the theory

According to Bandura's (1997), the self-efficacy framework provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding rural teachers' experiences, particularly amidst the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Bandura (2012), self-efficacy beliefs play a fundamental role in shaping individuals' functioning, influencing their expectations of success or failure, perseverance in adversity, coping mechanisms, and decision-making processes. Self-efficacy, broadly defined as one's confidence in their ability to achieve desired outcomes, is a key determinant of behaviours and performance (Burić, Slišković, and Sorić, 2020).

In teaching, teachers' self-efficacy significantly affects classroom dynamics and student outcomes. Research by Poulou, Reddy, and Dudek (2019), Barni, Danioni, and Benevene (2019), and Fathi et al. (2020) highlighted the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy, instructional practices, and student engagement. Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to exhibit effective teaching strategies, foster positive learning environments, and ultimately enhance student achievement.

Conversely, low self-efficacy among teachers may lead to challenges in classroom management and instructional delivery. Haertel and Walberg (1980), as cited in Tomislava (2021), emphasise the negative impact of a poor classroom climate characterised by tension, apathy, and disorganisation on student academic performance. Thus, understanding teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and their influence on classroom dynamics is essential for promoting positive teaching and learning outcomes, particularly in challenging contexts such as rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. By applying Bandura's self-efficacy framework, this study explores how rural teachers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic have influenced their self-efficacy beliefs and, in turn, their instructional practices and student outcomes. Through rich, detailed accounts of

teachers' experiences, this research aims to provide insights into the factors that enhance or diminish teachers' self-efficacy in the face of adversity, ultimately informing strategies to support teachers' well-being and improve educational outcomes in rural settings.

2.3.3 Relevancy to the study

Bandura's self-efficacy framework is highly relevant to the present study on exploring teachers' experiences in rural high schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. This theoretical perspective offers valuable insights into how teachers perceive and navigate the challenges in their professional roles, particularly in contexts characterised by adversity and uncertainty. In rural schools, where teachers often face unique challenges such as limited resources, isolation, and community dynamics, self-efficacy beliefs can significantly impact teachers' ability to effectively manage their classrooms, engage learners, and maintain their well-being. By understanding the interplay between teachers' self-efficacy and their experiences during the pandemic, this study aims to shed light on the factors influencing teacher resilience, coping strategies, and instructional practices. Bandura's framework also provides a lens through which to explore the role of structural support programmes in bolstering teachers' self-efficacy and overall well-being. By examining how teachers in rural settings perceive and utilise these programmes, the study seeks to identify opportunities for enhancing support mechanisms and promoting positive outcomes for teachers and learners.

Furthermore, the relevance of Bandura's self-efficacy theory extends to the broader educational context, as it underscores the importance of fostering a positive teacher mindset and belief in one's ability to effect change. As schools grapple with the pandemic's long-term effects, understanding and addressing teachers' self-efficacy is essential for building resilient and thriving educational communities. Bandura's self-efficacy framework offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining the complex interplay between teachers' experiences, structural support programmes, and well-being in rural high schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study uses this theoretical viewpoint to develop insights to inform evidence-based interventions and policies to support teachers and promote positive educational results in challenging situations.

2.5 SUMMARY CHAPTER

This chapter has provided a detailed overview of the present study's theoretical framework. By drawing on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, the research explores how rural teachers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic have influenced their self-efficacy beliefs and, consequently, their instructional practices and student outcomes. The relevance of this theoretical perspective to the study lies in its ability to elucidate the mechanisms through which teachers perceive and respond to challenges, and factors that contribute to their resilience and well-being. The subsequent chapters delve into the methodological approach, data analysis, and study findings to contribute to the growing knowledge of teacher well-being and support in rural education contexts.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology and design utilised in this study, which aims to investigate teachers' experiences and the effectiveness of structural support programmes in rural high schools amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It delineates the research approach, paradigm, and design employed to address the research questions and objectives.

"The coding framework was designed to align with the constructs of the JD-R model (job demands/resources) and SDT (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). For instance, interview questions about workload and administrative challenges were analyzed through the lens of job demands, while responses about professional development and peer support were coded as resources. Similarly, teachers' descriptions of self-motivation, skill development, and relational dynamics were mapped to SDT constructs."

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to delve into teachers' nuanced experiences and perceptions regarding well-being programmes in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research approaches encompass a range of strategies and techniques to understand the meaning individuals or groups attribute to social or human phenomena (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). The qualitative approach is particularly suited to this study due to its subjective and descriptive nature, which allows for exploring detailed meanings from participants' perspectives (Vaismoradi et al., 2020). By leveraging qualitative methods, researchers can uncover the intricate nuances of teachers' experiences and perceptions, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of well-being programmes in rural educational settings.

Moreover, qualitative research methodologies are well-equipped to address this study's research questions, aims, and objectives, ensuring valid and reliable results (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Researchers can comprehensively understand the factors influencing teachers' well-being and the implementation of support programmes by employing qualitative techniques such as interviews, observations, and thematic analysis. This qualitative research approach was chosen for its relevance in exploring the research questions and objectives. It elaborates on the characteristics of qualitative research and its suitability for capturing the nuanced experiences of teachers in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. References to Creswell and Creswell (2017) and Vaismoradi et al. (2020) support the qualitative approach's rationale.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The interpretive paradigm was selected for its capacity to delve deeply into the nuanced experiences and perceptions of individuals within specific contexts (Smith, 2009). By embracing the interpretive paradigm, this study aims to uncover the intricate layers of meaning embedded within the experiences of rural teachers and the effectiveness of support programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the key reasons for adopting the interpretive paradigm is its emphasis on understanding the subjective nature of reality and the diverse interpretations of individuals involved (Creswell, 2013). In this study, which seeks to explore teachers' experiences

and perceptions of well-being in rural high schools, this paradigm provides a comprehensive framework for capturing the complex interplay of factors at play.

Moreover, the interpretive paradigm acknowledges the dynamic and context-dependent nature of human experiences, highlighting the importance of context in shaping individual perceptions and behaviours (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). By situating the study within the interpretive paradigm, researchers can understand how contextual factors influence teacher well-being and the implementation of support programmes.

Additionally, the interpretive paradigm offers a flexible and iterative approach to research, allowing for ongoing exploration and refinement of concepts and theories (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). This iterative process aligns with the exploratory nature of this study, which seeks to uncover new insights and perspectives on teachers' well-being and support programmes in rural high schools. The interpretive paradigm is significant in understanding the complex social phenomena under investigation. Drawing on the works of Alharahsheh and Pius (2020), this subsection elucidates how the interpretive paradigm aligns with the study's focus on exploring subjective experiences and meanings attributed to teachers' well-being and support programmes in rural schools.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a phenomenological design that is pivotal for several reasons. Phenomenology is concerned with exploring and understanding the essence of human experiences as they are lived and perceived by individuals (Van Manen, 2016). By focusing on teachers' subjective experiences within the context of rural high schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, the phenomenological approach allows researchers to delve deeply into the intricacies of their lived experiences.

Furthermore, phenomenology emphasises the importance of bracketing preconceived notions and assumptions to approach the phenomenon with fresh eyes and an open mind (Finlay, 2009). This approach enables researchers to uncover rich and nuanced insights that may not be apparent through other research methodologies.

Moreover, phenomenology encourages researchers to explore the underlying meanings and essences of experiences rather than simply describing surface-level phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, delving into the nature of teachers' experiences within

rural schools provides a holistic understanding of their challenges and the support programmes that may alleviate their struggles.

Additionally, phenomenological research prioritises the voices and perspectives of participants, allowing them to co-construct knowledge alongside researchers (Smith et al., 2009). By actively engaging with teachers and eliciting their narratives, this study empowers participants to share their experiences authentically, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Bakker (2018) and Kumar (in Chivanga et al., 2021) provide theoretical support for using phenomenology as the underlying research design. This research design helps emphasise its suitability for capturing the essence of teachers' lived experiences and perceptions.

3.5 PARTICIPANTS

3.5.1 Study setting

School A is situated in a rural community in the Free State province of South Africa. It is characterised by its remote location, surrounded by expansive fields and natural landscapes. The school serves as a central hub for education within the community, catering to the academic needs of learners from nearby villages and settlements.

In terms of infrastructure, School A comprises several buildings, including classrooms, administrative offices, and facilities such as a library and science laboratories. The classrooms have basic amenities such as desks, chairs, and chalkboards, although resources may be limited compared to urban schools. The school also has outdoor spaces for recreational activities and sports, contributing to the holistic development of learners.

Safety measures at School A prioritise the well-being of both learners and staff. Security personnel are stationed at entry points to monitor access to the premises and ensure a safe environment. Additionally, the school implements safety protocols and emergency procedures to address any unforeseen incidents and safeguard the welfare of all individuals on campus.

School B is in another rural community within the Free State province and shares characteristics with School A's. It is nestled amidst the region's natural beauty,

surrounded by rolling hills and open fields. The school serves as an educational beacon for the local community, providing vital learning opportunities for learners.

Infrastructure at School B consists of various buildings arranged across the campus, housing classrooms, administrative offices, and specialised facilities. While the school endeavours to provide adequate resources for teaching and learning, funding and maintenance challenges may impact the infrastructure condition over time.

Safety measures at School B are implemented to ensure the security and protection of learners, teachers, and support staff. Access control measures are in place to regulate entry to the premises, while surveillance systems may be utilised to monitor activities within the school grounds. Additionally, emergency response protocols are established to address any safety concerns promptly and effectively.

3.5.4 Participant selection

The study population consists of fourteen teachers, evenly distributed with seven female and seven male teachers, selected from two rural schools in the Free State province, South Africa district. The selection of participants is crucial in capturing diverse perspectives and experiences related to teachers' well-being and the utilisation of support programmes in rural educational settings.

Data saturation, a key concept in qualitative research, guides the determination of the sample size. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) state data saturation is typically achieved within a homogenous sample after approximately the 12th interview. Therefore, selecting fourteen participants ensures data saturation, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the research topic.

Various factors, including teaching experiences, qualifications, and subjects taught, will be considered during the selection process to ensure a representative sample. By considering these factors, the study aims to capture a broad range of perspectives and insights from teachers working in rural schools, thus enhancing the validity and richness of the data collected. The target population and sampling strategies outline the criteria for participant selection and sample size determination.

3.6 INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Data collection is crucial because it produces the data needed to answer the study questions. Two methods were employed in this qualitative study to gather data. This study briefly describes the significance of the study's data collection techniques.

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the study's primary data collection method due to their flexibility and ability to capture rich, detailed information from participants (Bauman, 2015). Unlike structured interviews, which follow a rigid question format, semi-structured interviews allow for a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions, allowing researchers to explore emergent themes while maintaining some level of structure (Patton, 2022). Semi-structured interviews were important in this study because they further explore teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding structural support programmes in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bauman, 2015). The open-ended nature of semi-structured interviews allows participants to express themselves freely, enabling researchers to capture nuanced insights and understandings of complex phenomena (Patton, 2022). This flexibility was crucial for uncovering the diverse factors influencing teachers' well-being and the effectiveness of support programmes in rural settings.

3.6.2 Use of interview guides

An interview guide was developed to outline key topics and questions to be covered during the interviews, ensuring consistency and rigor in data collection (Patton, 2022). The interview guide serves as a roadmap for the interviewer, ensuring that all relevant areas are explored while still allowing for spontaneity and exploration of new themes that may arise during the interview process (Bauman, 2015). The study maintains methodological rigor while allowing adaptability to each participant's unique perspectives and experiences using an interview guide. This study employed semi-structured interviews as data collection methods, which were advantageous in eliciting rich and detailed insights from participants, supported by references to Bauman (2015) and the importance of standardisation in interview protocols.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, the data analysis process involved several steps guided by the principles of narrative analysis. Firstly, all interview transcripts were carefully reviewed to identify key narratives and themes related to teacher well-being and support programmes (Creswell, 2009). Next, the identified narratives were coded and categorised based on recurring patterns and themes using a thematic analysis approach (Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen, 2015). Through this process, researchers were able to distill the essence of participants' stories and identify commonalities and differences across their experiences.

Following coding and categorisation, researchers engaged in interpretation and sense-making, synthesising the findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research questions (Creswell, 2009). This involved analysing the relationships between different themes and identifying overarching patterns that emerged from the data. The results were presented in a narrative form, allowing for a rich and detailed exploration of teachers' experiences and the role of support programmes in promoting their well-being (Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen, 2015). Narrative analysis was chosen for this study because it allows participants to share their experiences and perspectives in their own words, providing rich and detailed insights into their lived realities (Riessman, 2008). Researchers can uncover the complexities of teachers' well-being and support programmes in rural schools by focusing on narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the contextual factors influencing teachers' experiences and the effectiveness of support interventions (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

Furthermore, narrative research acknowledges the subjective nature of human experiences and the importance of storytelling in sense-making and meaning construction (Riessman, 2008). Through narrative analysis, researchers can explore teachers' unique challenges and triumphs in rural settings, shedding light on the nuances of their well-being and the factors shaping their perceptions of support programmes. The narrative analysis approach is introduced as the primary method for analysing qualitative data. The relevance of narrative analysis in capturing the complexity of participants' experiences is discussed and supported (Riessman, 2008; Creswell, 2009).

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher is committed to upholding stringent ethical standards throughout the research process. Before commencement, the study obtained ethical clearance from esteemed bodies, including the University of the Free State Research Committee, the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee, The Department of Basic Education, and the respective principals of the participating schools. This ensures that the study aligns with ethical guidelines and safeguards the welfare of all involved.

Once approvals are secured, participants receive comprehensive consent documents outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. Participants will be reassured that their participation is entirely voluntary, and they can withdraw at any stage without repercussion. Additionally, strict confidentiality measures will be implemented to protect participants' privacy, with personal information kept confidential and anonymised in all research outputs.

Furthermore, the research prioritises minimising potential harm or discomfort to participants. This includes employing sensitive data collection methods, providing appropriate support services for participants experiencing distress, and conducting debriefing sessions to address any concerns post-study. Additionally, the research adheres to respect, fairness, and integrity principles, ensuring that participants are treated with dignity and their contributions are valued and accurately represented. These ethical considerations include obtaining ethical approval, ensuring informed consent, and maintaining participant confidentiality. The relevant ethical guidelines and frameworks underscore the ethical rigor of the research.

3.9 Research Limitations

The fact that the study only examined one district in the Free state province, Xhariep area, is one of its limitations. The research will be more thorough and applicable if the sample size is increased to include additional teachers from different rural locations in the Free State. An increased number of schools included in the representative sample of the study would make the results more relevant and applicable to a larger segment of the rural teaching community. The sample was extremely tiny and unique, but because the current study used a qualitative research technique, it cannot be extended to a wider population.

3.10 SUMMARY CHAPTER

This chapter comprehensively outlined the research methodology and design for the study. It provided insights into the approach, paradigm, design, target population, sampling strategies, research tools, data collection techniques, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations employed in the research process. The study adopted a qualitative research approach with an interpretive paradigm and phenomenological design. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method, allowing in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences and perceptions. The sample size was determined based on data saturation, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the research phenomenon. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study, with approvals sought from relevant ethics review committees and consent obtained from participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to safeguard participants' privacy and uphold ethical standards. Data analysis involves narrative analysis, facilitating the exploration of participants' stories and experiences. The research methodology employed in the study was carefully selected to elicit rich, detailed insights into teachers' experiences and the effectiveness of structural support programmes in promoting their well-being. This chapter concludes with a summary of the key elements discussed, reaffirming the methodological choices and their alignment with the research objectives. This section also serves as a transition to the subsequent chapters, highlighting the importance of the research methodology in addressing the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of the qualitative research study revealed significant differences between underperforming and performing teachers at rural schools in the Xhariep district. Specifically, the study highlighted a lack of awareness among teachers regarding support programmes aimed at promoting teacher well-being, in contrast to programmes focusing on student well-being. Moreover, the research shed light on the myriad challenges faced by rural teachers, including stress stemming from heavy workloads, as well as issues such as depression.

Importantly, the study underscored the inadequate support rural teachers received from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Despite the prevalence of challenges impacting their well-being, many rural teachers reported a lack of induction and support from relevant authorities, exacerbating their struggles.

Overall, the research findings shed light on the unique needs and teachers' experiences at rural schools within the Xhariep district, emphasising the urgent need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address their well-being concerns and improve overall educational outcomes in these settings.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC RESULTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

In this section, we introduce the participants involved in the study, providing brief profiles of everyone. These profiles include demographic information such as age, gender, language spoken, educational qualifications, teaching experience, and subject expertise. Each participant offers unique insights and perspectives based on their background and experiences, contributing to the richness of the study's findings. Let's delve into the profiles of each participant:

Participant 1

Participant 1 is a 31-year-old Xhosa-speaking female teacher residing in the Xhariep district. She holds a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree and has five years of teaching experience in Physical Science for grades 11 and 12. Currently single.

Participant 2

Participant 1 is a 42-year-old South African female rural teacher proficient in Xhosa, teaching Accounting with ten years of experience. She holds a BEd qualification and is currently single.

Participant 3

Participant 3 is a 30-year-old teacher with an Honours degree in curriculum studies, specialising in History for grade 12. She has four years of teaching experience.

Participant 4

participant 4 is a 54-year-old male rural teacher with an Honours degree in curriculum studies, teaching IsiXhosa home language for grade 12. Married and proficient in Xhosa.

Participant 5

Participant 5 is a 57-year-old male teacher in the Xhariep district, holding an Honours degree in education management with 25 years of teaching experience. Married and teaches Business Studies in IsiXhosa.

Participant 6

Participant 6 is a 39-year-old Sesotho-speaking teacher with a BEd degree and ten years of experience teaching Life Orientation.

Participant 7

Participant 7 is a 38-year-old male Xhosa-speaking teacher with seven years of teaching experience in Mathematics. He holds a BEd degree.

Participant 8

Participant 8 is a 30-year-old female Sesotho-speaking teacher with five years of teaching experience, specialising in History.

Participant 9

Participant 9 is a 49-year-old single male teacher proficient in Xhosa, teaching grade 12 Physical Science with an Honors degree in management.

Participants	Age	Gender	Language	Schools	Highest qualifications	Teaching experiences	Marital status	Teaching grades	Teaching subjects
Participant 1	31	Female	IsiXhosa	Wongalethu	BEd Degree	5 years	Single	Grade 12 & 11	Physical science
Participant 2	42	Female	IsiXhosa	Wongalethu	BEd Degree	10 years	Single	Grade 12	Accounting
Participant 3	30	Female	Sesotho	Wongalethu	Curriculum Hons Ed	4 years	Single	Grade 12	History
Participant 4	54	Male	Xhosa	Trompsburg	Curriculum Hons Ed	20 years	Married	Grade 12	IsiXhosa Home language
Participant 5	57	Female	Sesotho	Trompsburg	Management Hons in Ed	25 years	Married	Grade 12	Business studies
Participant 6	39	Male	Sesotho	Wongalethu	BEd Degree	10 years	Single	Grade 12	Life Orientation
Participant 7	38	Male	Xhosa	Wongalethu	BEd Degree	7 years	Married	Grade 12	Mathematics
Participant 8	30	Female	Sesotho	Trompsburg	BEd Degree	5 years	Single	Grade 12	History
Participant 9	49	Male	Xhosa	Trompsburg	Management hons in Ed	12 years	Single	Grade 12	Physical science

B. Ed: Bachelors in education
Hons. Ed.: Honours in Education

4.3 OVERVIEW OF THEMES

The analysis of the data collected in this study aimed to ensure its adequacy in addressing the research questions and providing meaningful insights into the phenomena under investigation. From the analysis, several themes emerged that directly corresponded to the research questions. These themes include:

1. Teachers' experiences of well-being structural support programmes in rural schools
2. Teachers' challenges encountered in accessing and utilising support programmes
3. Influence of support programmes on teachers' well-being and job performance.

Each theme was further subdivided into subthemes and categories to comprehensively understand the data. The main data source for these themes was the semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants. These interviews allowed for direct participant

engagement, enabling the researcher to extract rich and detailed information about their perceptions and experiences.

Additionally, non-participant classroom observations and analysis of lesson plans were conducted to triangulate the findings and provide additional insights into the integration of support programmes in the teachers' daily practice. These observations and analyses complemented the interview data by offering a firsthand glimpse into the implementation of support programmes in real classroom settings.

4.4 SUMMARY OF THEMES

The themes and subthemes derived from the data are summarised in Figure 1 and Table 1 below to help grasp the data gathered from the research participants.

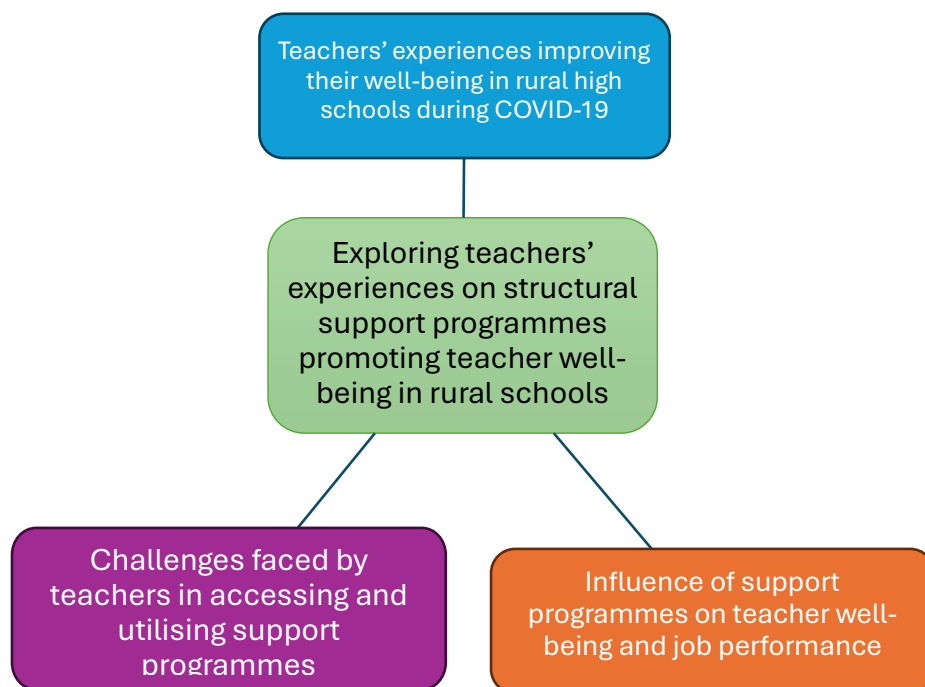


Figure 1: Teachers' experiences on structural support programmes promoting teacher well-being in schools in rural settings.

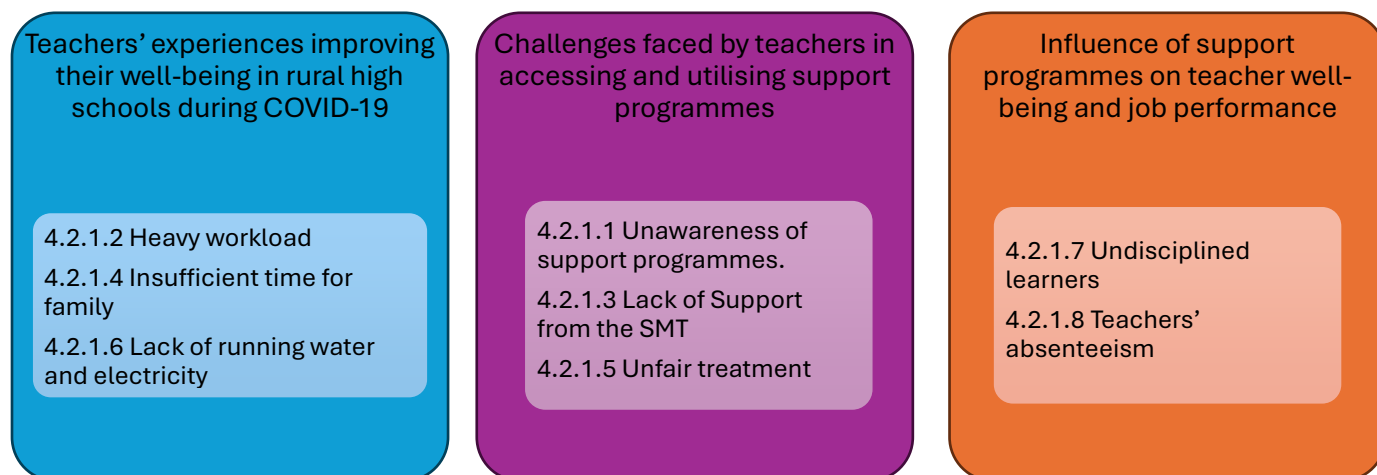


Figure 2: Teachers' various experiences with structural support programmes in rural schools.

Table 1: Research questions and summary of themes and Context

Research questions	Themes	Context
Teachers' experiences improving their well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19.	4.2.1.2 Heavy workload.	Female teachers reported being treated unfairly and burdened with more duties than their male counterparts.
	4.2.1.4 Insufficient time for family.	Teachers cited long hours at school and minimal time spent with their families.
	4.2.1.6 Lack of running water and electricity.	The teaching and learning environment in rural schools is significantly impacted by running water and electricity supply challenges.
Challenges faced by teachers in accessing and utilising support programmes	4.2.1.1 Unawareness of support programmes	Participants expressed limited knowledge about existing support programmes designed to enhance teachers' well-being in the workplace.
	4.2.1.3 Lack of Support from the SMT.	Many teachers felt discriminated against by the SMT, with inadequate support provided, particularly concerning teachers' well-being.
	4.2.1.5 Unfair treatment	Female teachers were particularly affected, reporting unfair treatment by school management.
Influence of support programmes on teacher well-being and job performance	4.2.1.7 Undisciplined learners	Learners' disruptive behaviours, including drug use and carrying weapons, posed safety concerns for teachers.
	4.2.1.8 Teachers' absenteeism	Teachers' absenteeism was attributed to various factors, including heavy workload, ill-disciplined learners, and administrative issues.

Updated Table for Chapter

Research Question	Themes	JD-R Constructs	SDT Constructs
What are the challenges faced by teachers in rural schools?	Heavy workload, unfair treatment, lack of resources	Job Demands (workload, inequity)	Lack of Autonomy and Competence
How do structural support programs influence teacher well-being?	Awareness of programs, professional development	Job Resources (support programs, mentorship)	Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

How does well-being impact job performance?	Mental health, absenteeism, stress	Balance of Demands/Resources	Motivation via Competence
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Literature Linkage: Enhance the Linkage Between Literature and Research Approach

4.2.1 TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH STRUCTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES IN RURAL SCHOOLS

This study suggested that teachers encountered multiple experiences with structural support programmes in rural schools. These included unawareness of the programmes, heavy workload, lack of support from SMT, insufficient time for family, unfair treatment from the management, lack of running water and electricity, undisciplined learners, and teachers' absenteeism at rural schools.

4.2.1.1 Unawareness of support programmes

Corrections

4.2 THEMATIC FINDINGS

4.2.1 Unawareness of Support Programs

A pervasive lack of awareness regarding existing support programs was a dominant theme. Most participants, regardless of teaching experience or subject expertise, expressed that they had not been informed about resources for professional or emotional support.

“I honestly do not know about them, so I do not want to lie. We do not have such at school” (Participant 8).

This lack of awareness is indicative of systemic communication failures and a prioritization of learner well-being over that of teachers. The absence of induction programs for teachers further exacerbates the issue. These findings align with research on rural education systems, where geographic isolation often delays or prevents access to resources.

Implications: Addressing this gap requires structured and consistent dissemination of information about available support services. Regular communication, workshops, and induction programs for all staff members could mitigate this issue.

4.2.2 Heavy Workload

Participants described being overburdened with responsibilities that extended beyond teaching to include administrative duties and emotional support for learners. Female teachers, in particular, felt disproportionately burdened.

“Female teachers are being maltreated. They are given much more work than the male teachers” (Participant 1).

This workload imbalance reflects entrenched gender norms and a lack of administrative oversight. Beyond personal sacrifices, such as strained familial relationships, the heavy workload negatively impacts teachers’ mental health, leading to stress, burnout, and absenteeism. These outcomes are consistent with the Job Demands-Resources model, which posits that excessive demands without adequate resources result in occupational burnout.

Implications: Policies must address workload distribution, and schools should introduce time management training and support mechanisms to alleviate the administrative and emotional burdens on teachers.

4.2.3 Gender Inequity and Unfair Treatment

Female teachers highlighted experiences of discrimination, ranging from unfair workload distribution to lack of respect and support from School Management Teams (SMTs).

“SMT does not treat us the same because there are more females than males; therefore, females are given more work than male teachers” (Participant 3).

This inequity not only affects job satisfaction but also undermines collaborative workplace relationships. The findings align with studies that highlight the intersection of gender and professional inequities, particularly in hierarchical and resource-constrained environments.

Implications: Gender sensitivity training for SMTs is critical. Implementing formal grievance mechanisms could provide a safe space for addressing these issues.

4.2.4 Mental Health Challenges

Teachers frequently reported symptoms of depression, anxiety, and emotional distress linked to workplace challenges, including toxic environments, lack of support, and disruptive learners.

“Yes, I experienced a lot of stress, which caused headaches, sore muscles, and jaws. I also had emotional distress, experiencing depression and anxiety levels shooting up” (Participant 1).

Despite recognizing the need for mental health support, participants noted the absence of readily accessible resources. These findings echo broader trends in underfunded educational settings, where mental health is deprioritized.

Implications: Embedding mental health professionals within rural schools and providing confidential counseling services can significantly improve teacher well-being.

4.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The themes outlined above reveal systemic challenges that hinder teacher well-being in rural schools. Lack of awareness of support programs, gender inequities, heavy workloads, and mental health struggles collectively create a high-pressure environment that affects teachers’ personal and professional lives. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions, ranging from structural changes in school management to embedding mental health resources.

By investing in these initiatives, educational stakeholders can foster an environment where teachers thrive, ultimately improving learner outcomes and community well-being.

The study revealed teachers’ pervasive lack of awareness regarding structural support programmes in rural schools. Participants expressed limited knowledge about existing support programmes designed to enhance teacher well-being in the workplace. Many teachers, both novice and experienced, indicated a dearth of information about available

resources for seeking professional help when faced with psychological challenges like depression. The statements from some participants declare these.

“No, ever since I started working here, the School Management Team (SMT) has not yet inducted me nor had the opportunity to get to know about any of the health professionals at the school” (Participant 1).

“Thank you, Structural support programmes. I believe and think we are not exposed to such things” (Participant 2).

“Since I was here in 2020, I have not received or heard about any structural support programmes from the department AND the NGOS” (Participant 3).

“I am unaware of any departmental structural programmes, other than the feeding scheme” (Participant 4).

“I have never been introduced to any or heard somewhere someone talking about the teacher structural support programmes” (Participant 5).

“I have never heard of any existing structural programmes. I have never got any support from the district or even the principal. The only support I know of is support for learners” (Participant 6).

“I have not come across such or heard maybe the principal mentioning that we need to attend the workshop” (Participant 7).

“I honestly do not know about them, so I do not want to lie. “We do not have such at school” (Participant 8).

“I have never been told or heard of the programmes established to assist the teachers’ well-being at the rural schools; we have not got any support programmes for teachers” (Participant 9).

The study indicates that most teachers are unaware of the existing programmes in rural high schools. The teachers believe that it is perhaps due to them staying far in rural settings; therefore, information takes time to reach them. It has always been a challenge for teachers to get help regarding their well-being. Whenever teachers are faced with psychological problems and seek help from their employers (Department of Basic Education), they do not get any help. Instead, they must seek help outside. Most of the teachers' challenges are related to teaching and learning and are from within the working environment. Most teachers indicate that they have never heard of the support programmes for their well-being, another problem that adds to teaching and learning. However, it suggests DBE lacks professional psychologists and experts to assist school teachers.

4.2.1.2 Heavy workload

The study highlighted that teachers have been overworked in spending extended hours at the workplace without adequate compensation. Female teachers reported being treated unfairly and burdened with more duties than their male counterparts. Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the school's management due to long working hours and heavy workloads.

“We face a heavy workload as teachers” (Participant 1).

“Heavy workload and where I am currently working, I have been a coordinator of NSP for many years. No one wants to take over the responsibility, so I must work on NSP issues, class issues, etc. So, I sometimes must come to work very early and leave the school premises late, affecting my relationship with my kids because I do not have time for them. I remember they held a meeting with me one day, saying that I did not have their time. When do I sit with them and bond like other parents due to their children? So, the workload

is too much sometimes for the school kids. I do not know why they like to come to me when they have problems. They would share their problems at home with me” (Participant 2).

“At the workplace, there is discrimination, I can say, but from my perspective, I can see that there are other teachers who have problems with others, and female teachers are being maltreated. They are given much more work than the male teachers” (Participant 1).

The findings from in-depth interviews have revealed that teachers had heavy workloads. Teachers had to ensure that many classes were assessed (marked) and give feedback. Moreover, according to the CAPS document, they had to cover the curriculum within the given time frame and submit books, teacher files, and other essential documents, such as lesson plans, to the School Management Team (SMT) for school visits from the Department of Basic Education team officials. Additionally, teachers had to play a role in the learners' lives by supporting them emotionally whenever they encountered difficulties at home. Lastly, teachers had to play a role in the learners' credits to ensure they achieved their goals, meaning learners are expected to pass and go to the next grade. All the abovementioned factors could negatively affect teachers' well-being. They cannot cope; they work under pressure within a short period. Teachers who have too much workload are often experiencing stress, which may lead to burnout, too much absenteeism, and reduced self-confidence and self-esteem.

4.2.1.3 Lack of Support from the School Management Team (SMT)

Participants reported a lack of support from the SMT, indicating that the principal lacked strong leadership skills. Many teachers felt discriminated against by the SMT, with inadequate support provided, particularly concerning teachers' well-being.

“The SMT does not support the teachers, and misbehaving learners are not being punished accordingly. There is favoritism among teachers and no equality at our school.

The treatment is not the same; there is no equality at school from the SMT” (Participant 1).

The study indicates that the SMT does not provide enough support and is treated equally, so there should not be discrimination among the teachers. Giving other teachers heavy jobs to do and others lighter work may affect the overworking teacher’s performance at school and may lead to emotional exhaustion and demotivation. All of that could affect teachers’ well-being negatively. Teachers are going through some stress and are not supported by the officials. If teachers are unhappy at their workplace, they will not respect each other and do their duty as expected.

4.2.1.4 Insufficient time for family

Teachers struggled to balance their work commitments with family responsibilities, citing long hours at school and minimal time spent with their families. Some participants reported divorce and strained relationships with children.

“Due to heavy workload, I would knock off late from work did not have time for my kids, I neglected my kids. And eventually my ex-husband divorced me” (Participant 2)

Teachers invest too much time in teaching and have to do all the administration, affecting the time they have to spend with their families. Teachers who come from families who are always fighting end up not focusing on the task given, and that may lead to depression and other mental issues; when teachers suffer emotionally and stay in an unstable environment, that may lead to poor performance at school and, health-wise, not being healthy. Teachers’ well-being is affected negatively. Teachers need their families and spend more time with them, but instead, they spend more overtime at the workplace without getting any reward, and when they get home, they are exhausted and cannot be there for their families. Some end up in mental hospitals, and others lose their families.

4.2.1.5 Unfair treatment

The study revealed favoritism among teachers, with unequal treatment and discrimination observed in school settings. Female teachers were particularly affected, reporting unfair treatment by school management.

“The relationship between SMT and colleagues is not so good. There is intimidation and discrimination, especially against young female and young male teachers. There is always that gap in the treatment of young female and male teachers. The problem is that SMT does not treat us the same because there are more females than males; therefore, females are given more work than male teachers” (Participant 3).

Unfair treatment at the workplace may lead to severe war hatred, and that could affect teachers' relationships and affect their well-being negatively; working in a toxic environment is not healthy. In most cases, teachers sabotage others when it comes to their work. For instance, they may steal from each other in the copy room during exam preparation. It is a bad feeling knowing that you are a list favourite and always given work to do; unlike others, you would have thoughts of resigning or moving to another school.

4.2.1.6 Lack of running water and electricity

Participants highlighted challenges related to inadequate running water and electricity supply in rural schools, impacting the overall teaching and learning environment.

“Rural schools are faced with a lot of challenges to start with. Our school is very far from everything, and we are struggling with water and electricity and children's ill behaviours; on top of that, the department is doing nothing but wants the work to be done” (Participant 8).

Teachers who work in rural areas are affected by the shortage of water and cut down on electricity, and they battle to wash the clothes that they go to school with they are more likely to go to school with dirty clothes and go to school not prepared due to electricity they cannot complete their lesson plans and their daily activities to assess learners. If the work is incomplete, the teachers will be incompetent.

4.2.1.7 Undisciplined learners

Some teachers reported challenges with undisciplined learners, citing a lack of support from the Department of Basic Education and NGOs in addressing disciplinary issues.

Learners' disruptive behaviours, including drug use and carrying weapons, posed safety concerns for teachers.

“I had a case whereby I disciplined the learners, and one of the parents told one teacher whom we do not get along she advised her to report me to the principal. It stressed me because I was afraid to lose my job. So, my stress level was high, and I got high blood and other health issues”. (Participant 6).

Teachers cannot reprimand the learners when they are wrong because they have rights, and the DBE always favors the learners more than the teachers. Teachers are afraid to lose their work, making their lives difficult and negatively affecting their well-being. Teachers are working in unsafe environments and teach learners who are intoxicated by substances, and they go to school with dangerous weapons. In various schools, teachers lost their lives because of undisciplined learners. It negatively affects teachers' well-being because they thought of teaching learners who might kill them. Teachers are always afraid and are not free around learners. They know they are not safe at all, and their life is at risk. Teaching misbehaving learners leads to teacher stress.

4.2.1.8 Teachers' absenteeism

Teachers' absenteeism was attributed to various factors, including heavy workload, ill-disciplined learners, and administrative issues. Some teachers considered leaving the teaching profession altogether due to workplace challenges.

These thematic results shed light on the multifaceted challenges teachers face in rural schools, underscoring the need for comprehensive support mechanisms to promote teachers' well-being and enhance the quality of education in these settings.

“We divorced. I neglected my kids. I was absent every week. But I eventually sought help using my little money-paid psychologists. I remember I was once called by the principal to his office asking if I was well I should seek psychologists, and he referred me to one and gave me their contacts, saying I needed to be booked in because I couldn't cope at all” (Participant 2).

All the dilemmas' teachers face at the workplace pile up. They end up not attending work well, getting sick, and emotionally being affected as their well-being is affected negatively. The teachers would want to avoid an environment where they do not feel safe and protected but instead put their lives in danger. Teachers stay absent from school due to various problems they are encountering. Others are admitted and sick.

4.2.2 STRUCTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES PROMOTING TEACHERS' WELL-BEING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

The results showed that structural support programmes could help improve teachers' well-being in rural schools.

4.2.2.1 Improvement of teachers' well-being

This study showed that structural support programmes could promote teachers' well-being in rural schools. However, participants acknowledged the existence of such programmes, and there was a lack of clarity regarding their definition and implementation. However, participants identified challenges teachers face in their workplaces and expressed a need for support mechanisms to address them.

"I would say it is programmes that are aiming to give emotional support to help deal with different challenges that we face in school as teachers such as workload, dealing with learners' ill behaviours or conflicts between colleagues or School Management Team (SMT)" (Participant 1).

"Let me say psychologists who would come after during the final term. They would motivate us. Tell us that we cannot give up because of the learners failing and other dilemmas we may face at school" (Participant 2).

"If the department can support us by giving every school office where they will place professionals like counsellors and psychologists, anyone, who can help us deal with our well-being" (Participant 3).

"Teachers have psychological challenges, so there should be a platform to address such challenges on an ongoing basis" (Participant 4).

"The support is the help that we need from the department and the NGOs, but when adding it is not just support, we are looking now at the teacher's well-being in rural areas then the teachers need to be included in getting the support regarding their mental problems. That may assist them to produce good results and provide or deliver good content that the learners can carry out throughout their academic journey and so-called life" (Participant 5).

"Promoting structural support programmes would be difficult because I do not know anything about structural support programmes whether they exist or not, ever since I started working as a teacher in the rural area" (Participant 6).

"Structural support programmes are the programmes that are implemented to assist the teachers who are going through the most, facing different challenges at the workplace and cannot handle them or come up with a solution to the problem. As teachers, we suffer financially and emotionally and tend to ignore the signs, hoping everything will be alright" (Participant 7).

"Structural support programmes are the programmes that are supposed to ensure that they support teacher's well-being and that all teachers are happy at the workplace should they come across problems or challenges " (Participant 8).

"I only know that structural support programmes are the programmes that are meant to support us teachers whenever we go through a mental breakdown and come across challenges related to education and challenges that may prohibit teaching and learning from taking place" (Participant 9).

Most teachers have indicated they need help; structural support programmes could be helpful and play a significant role in their lives. Teachers, whenever they are going through

some difficulties, need their problems to be attended to as soon as possible. Teachers at rural schools need professionals who can be placed at schools with offices in their area so that whenever they need help, they can rush to the psychologists and social workers who deal with teachers, specifically learners. Learners already have professionals that are placed to assist them. If the Department of Basic Education and the NGOs can assist the teachers with spreading and avail the information regarding their support programmes to promote their well-being and assist them in becoming well-known if they do exist, they should be transparent to every teacher, not only rural area teachers but to teachers country wide, the study has shown that most teachers seek help outside and have to spend financially to get help, if they cannot afford to pay the professionals others end up taking their lives (suicide). In contrast, other teachers lose or end their career short. An awareness campaign should inform teachers of the help they could get from the DBE or different stakeholders.

4.2.3 INFLUENCE OF SUPPORT PROGRAMMES ON TEACHERS' WELL-BEING AND JOB PERFORMANCE

The results revealed that support programmes could influence teachers' well-being and job performance, especially for mental disorders.

4.2.3.1 Mental disorder

This study highlighted that teachers could potentially be vulnerable to developing mental disorders. Participants reported experiencing and being diagnosed with various mental health issues, including depression and anxiety disorders. These disorders were attributed to a combination of work-related stressors and personal challenges, such as a toxic working environment, heavy workload, strained relationships among colleagues and learners, and disruptive behaviours exhibited by learners.

"Yes, I experienced a lot of stress, which caused headaches, sore muscles, and jaws. I also had emotional distress, experiencing depression and anxiety levels shooting up. I had a panic attack, but then I was able to contain it" (Participant 1).

"When I was stressed and having psychological issues, honestly, when I have stress, I do not know who to contact or where to seek help. I do not know the NGOs who partnered with the department" (Participant 2).

"Yes, it was last year in March, I think until late May. I had a personal case that I was dealing with, and I was diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and emotional stress. The principal did not suggest anything when I was going through psychological trauma" (Participant 3).

"I had a challenge coping with my heavy workload, the toxic working environment, the poor infrastructure, a shortage of toilets, and others. I went to the doctor and was given time off. I was advised to seek professional help, but due to not earning enough money to pay psychologists, I did not go and took things easy" (Participant 4).

"I would panic and not come to school to avoid them, having a severe headache and tension, all sorts of anxiety, and I could not cope with the schoolwork and managing my classroom" (Participant 5).

"Report me to the principal, it stressed me because I was afraid to lose my job. So, my stress level was high, got high blood, and other health issues" (Participant 6).

"The only time I went through a mental health issue was when I got a warning because of getting late to the workplace. It affected my health because the department deducted money from my salary, and my debits bounced back" (Participant 7).

"It is a challenge in our schools, affecting our well-being negatively. We cannot get help from the department; we do not know where to go when we face psychological challenges like depression and fear" (Participant 8).

"Yes, I have had on several occasions been told that I am excluding the child from getting the education he needs. It was a serious case, and I ended up having depression.

Because I had to beg the learner and the father not to sue me, and I was afraid of losing my job. I am the breadwinner at home" (Participant 9).

Support programmes may have a significant impact on teachers with mental illnesses because they allow them to be in a less toxic and distraction-free environment, share their problems with professionals who are trained to keep their information confidential, give them advice, and listen to their problems, as well as help to diagnose them. Mentally healthy teachers are confident and have the energy to handle all teaching-related tasks. Suppose support programmes for teachers' well-being are implemented. In that case, the Department of Basic Education will be able to assist them in reducing absenteeism, tardiness, early retirement, sick leave, suicidal idealisation, a high rate of teacher divorce, and other personal issues that may contribute to mental disorders.

4.3 SUMMARY CHAPTER

The study investigated teachers' experiences concerning structural support programmes and their well-being at rural schools. Findings revealed a concerning lack of awareness among teachers regarding available support initiatives. Many participants felt uninformed about existing programmes and received little induction or support from school management teams.

Heavy workloads emerged as a prominent issue, with teachers feeling overworked and unfairly treated, particularly female teachers. They reported struggling to balance work commitments with family responsibilities, leading to strained relationships and conflicts at home. Mental health challenges were prevalent, with teachers disclosing experiences of depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders. Work-related stressors, including heavy workloads and toxic environments, were identified as significant contributors to these issues. Accessing support posed additional challenges, with limited awareness of available services, financial constraints, and stigma surrounding mental health acting as barriers to seeking help.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study underpins the discussion findings and recommendations. It presents a comprehensive overview of the findings and their implications. This introduction is for a detailed discussion of the main findings, highlighting their relevance and significance. These findings are critically examined to the theoretical framework that underpins the study, which is detailed in Chapter 2. The analysis interlinks the empirical data with existing literature on teacher well-being and support mechanisms, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the experiences of rural teachers. The discussion also aligns the study's objectives with the themes that emerged from the data, providing clear answers to the research questions posed. This section connects the dots between the teachers' experiences and broader educational issues, offering insights into the systemic challenges and personal hurdles that impact teacher well-being.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This research aimed to delve into the experiences and perceptions of teachers regarding structural support programmes and their well-being in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study used a qualitative research approach, utilising semi-structured interviews to gather data from teachers in various rural settings. The purpose was to uncover teachers' realities and the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms in enhancing their professional and personal lives.

To answer this main research question, three research sub-questions were formulated. Table 2 below shows the sub-questions and the relevant instrument used to collect data.

Table 2: Research questions and instruments used to collect data

Research questions	Research instruments
To explore the awareness and accessibility of structural support programmes among rural teachers.	Semi-structured interviews
To investigate the influence of these programmes on teacher well-being.	Semi-structured interviews
To explore teachers' challenges faced in rural schools during the COVID-19.	Semi-structured interviews

Table 2 lists all the sub-research questions and the instruments used to collect data. Data were collected through detailed interviews with fourteen teachers from two rural schools, providing insights into their daily experiences and the support systems in place. The analysis was framed by thematic coding, which allowed for identifying major themes related to teacher well-being, support programme awareness, and the overall impact of these programmes.

The findings revealed a significant gap in awareness and accessibility of support programmes. Many teachers were not only unaware of the existence of such programmes but also expressed feelings of neglect and isolation. The data highlighted:

Lack of Awareness: Teachers often do not know about the support programmes that can assist them, leading to a lack of utilisation.

Inadequate Support Structures: Even when programmes were available, they were either inadequately implemented or failed to meet the specific needs of teachers at rural schools.

Influence on well-being: The absence of support programmes directly influenced teachers' mental and emotional well-being, compounded by the challenges of teaching in rural areas during a pandemic.

5.3 KEY FINDINGS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCES

5.3.1 Explore teachers' awareness and accessibility of structural support programmes among rural

5.3.1.1 Widespread unawareness of support programmes

The findings indicated a significant lack of awareness regarding the availability of structural support programmes. Teachers reported that they were not formally introduced to existing programmes or received information through their school administrations. This gap in awareness suggests systemic failures in communication channels and outreach efforts targeted at teachers. The pervasive unawareness among teachers about support programmes suggests critical inefficiencies in how these programmes are marketed and communicated within the education system. To address this, educational authorities must implement more effective communication strategies, perhaps incorporating regular updates during staff meetings, dedicated sections in teacher newsletters, and active promotion through district education offices. Enhancing awareness is crucial for enabling teachers to access the support they need to manage their professional responsibilities and personal well-being effectively.

5.3.1.2 Barriers to programme accessibility

The findings showed that barriers affect the accessibility to the programme. Even among those few aware of some support programmes, many discussed significant barriers to accessing these resources. Challenges highlighted included geographical remoteness, inadequate internet connectivity, and overly complex bureaucratic procedures required to enroll in or benefit from these programmes. Such barriers often make it impractical for teachers to seek the help these programmes should provide. These accessibility issues point to a need for structural changes in how support programmes are delivered. There is a clear requirement for streamlining processes and perhaps rethinking the delivery modalities to suit rural teachers' needs better. For instance, introducing mobile support units or online platforms that require minimal bandwidth could be potential solutions to overcome geographical and infrastructural barriers.

5.3.1.3 Inadequacy of current support structures

The findings revealed the inadequacy of the structural support programmes in rural schools. Teachers felt that the programmes did not cater to the specific challenges of rural educational settings, such as isolation, limited access to professional development, and unique student needs. The lack of tailored support programmes makes the existing ones less effective and often irrelevant to the teachers' needs. This finding underscores the importance of developing context-specific support programmes that acknowledge and address teachers' unique challenges at rural schools. Educational planners and programmes developers should consider involving teachers in support programmes' design and implementation phases to ensure that the services provided are relevant and beneficial.

5.3.2 Influence of support programmes on teachers' well-being

This section focuses on the second research question, examining the impact of structural support programmes on rural teachers' well-being based on the participants' responses and experiences. The insights provided by the participants underscore the critical role these support programmes play in shaping the professional and personal lives of teachers in rural settings.

5.3.2.1 Positive influence of availability of the support programmes

The findings suggested that the availability of support programmes could positively influence teachers' well-being in rural schools. Moreover accessible support programmes may also bring a change in the teachers' wellbeing .A few participants mentioned specific instances where support programmes helped them manage stress, access professional development opportunities, and improve their overall job satisfaction. However, such instances were the exception rather than the norm, highlighting the potential benefits of well-structured support systems when effectively implemented and accessible. The positive impacts reported underscore the potential of support programmes to enhance teachers' well-being. This suggests that increasing the reach and efficacy of these programmes could have widespread benefits for teachers. Education authorities need to

consider expanding these programmes and ensuring they are responsive to the needs of teachers, potentially leading to improved job performance, reduced turnover, and better student outcomes.

5.3.2.2 General lack of impact due to accessibility and relevance issues

Despite the potential benefits, most participants felt that the support programmes had little influence on their well-being. This was largely attributed to the issues of awareness and accessibility previously discussed and a perceived lack of relevance of the programmes to the specific challenges faced in rural settings. These findings indicate a significant misalignment between the design of support programmes and the needs of rural teachers. To address this, there is a need for a systematic re-evaluation of how these programmes are developed and implemented. Programmes must not only be made accessible but also tailored to meet the unique environmental and professional challenges faced by rural teachers. This might involve directly consulting teachers during the programme development phase to ensure their needs and contexts are adequately considered.

5.3.2.3 Negative influence of the support programmes shortcomings

The findings showed that support programmes negatively influence teachers' well-being in rural schools. Interestingly, some teachers reported increased frustration and disillusionment due to the inadequacy or inaccessibility of support programmes. This sentiment exacerbates feelings of isolation and undervaluation, further detracting from their well-being rather than enhancing it. The indirect negative impacts highlight the importance of providing support programmes and ensuring they are effectively executed. Failure to do so can lead to increased dissatisfaction and stress among teachers, which could counteract any potential benefits of the programmes. It's crucial for programme administrators to regularly evaluate and adjust support initiatives, ensuring they truly benefit the intended recipients.

5.3.3 Challenges affect teachers' well-being

The findings suggested challenges affecting the teachers' well-being in rural schools. The findings reported the multifaceted and often severe implications these challenges have on rural teachers' professional and personal lives.

5.3.3.1 Isolation and limited professional development opportunities

A noticeable challenge identified by rural teachers is the feeling of isolation, both professionally and geographically. This isolation is compounded by limited access to professional development opportunities, which can stifle career growth and create a sense of stagnation and frustration among teachers. Participants frequently noted that their remote locations limit resource access and reduce their networking and professional collaboration opportunities. The sense of isolation can lead to decreased job satisfaction and increased feelings of being undervalued. Developing more robust networks and support systems that can bridge the physical distances between rural teachers and their urban counterparts is crucial to counter these effects. Virtual platforms and regional hubs can significantly mitigate these challenges by providing rural teachers with access to training, resources, and community engagement.

5.3.3.2 Resource scarcity and inadequate infrastructure

Teachers in rural schools often face significant challenges due to the lack of basic educational resources and poor infrastructure. This includes inadequate classroom conditions, insufficient teaching materials, and often, limited access to technology. These conditions make it difficult to deliver quality education and significantly strain the teachers' ability to perform their roles effectively.

The lack of resources directly impacts teachers' well-being by increasing workload and stress, as teachers often must compensate for these deficiencies creatively. Improving physical and technological infrastructure in rural schools is essential to alleviating these pressures and enhancing the working conditions for teachers, which in turn can improve their overall well-being and effectiveness.

5.3.3.3 Economic hardships and additional responsibilities

Economic challenges are more pronounced in rural areas, where teachers may face lower salaries and fewer benefits than their urban counterparts. Additionally, rural teachers often take on extra roles and responsibilities, including administrative tasks, community liaising, and sometimes even tasks like maintenance work due to staffing shortages. The economic and professional pressures contribute to burnout and financial stress among rural teachers. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive policy interventions considering salary adjustments, role delineation, and workload management to ensure teachers are compensated and not overburdened.

5.3.3.4 Student-related challenges

Rural teachers also deal with unique student-related challenges, including higher levels of absenteeism, lower educational aspirations among learners, and sometimes significant socio-economic disadvantages that affect learners' ability to engage with their education. These challenges demand that teachers act as teachers, counsellors, and social workers, adding emotional labor to their professional roles. The additional emotional labor involved in addressing student-related challenges can significantly affect teachers' mental health and well-being. Providing adequate training and support for teachers to handle these complex roles effectively, including access to professional mental health resources, is vital.

5.4 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

5.4.1 Research Question 1: What are the teachers' experiences improving their well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19?

The study revealed a significant gap in the awareness and accessibility of structural support programmes among teachers at rural schools. Many teachers said they were either entirely unaware of such programmes or knew little about them. Furthermore, even among those who were aware, many reported significant barriers to accessing these supports, such as physical remoteness, lack of proper communication channels, and complex administrative requirements that complicate their ability to utilise available resources effectively.

The implications of these findings are profound, as they suggest systemic failures in how support programmes are advertised and administered. The lack of awareness and accessibility prevents these potentially beneficial programmes from reaching and effectively assisting those who need them the most. Enhancing the dissemination of information and simplifying the access procedures could help bridge this critical gap, enabling more teachers to benefit from available resources and support mechanisms.

5.4.2 Research Question 2: What factors influence teachers' well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19?

Feedback from teachers with access to support programmes suggests that these resources can positively influence their job satisfaction and overall well-being. However, such instances were relatively rare, with many respondents indicating that the impact of existing programmes on their professional lives and personal health was minimal. This discrepancy is largely attributed to the previously mentioned issues of poor programme design, lack of relevance, and insufficient outreach. These findings highlight a crucial issue: while support programmes have the potential to benefit rural teachers, structural inefficiencies and misalignments with teacher needs often limit their actual impact. There is a clear need for these programmes to be reevaluated and redesigned to ensure they effectively support teachers' well-being, addressing not just generic needs but also the specific challenges inherent in rural educational contexts.

5.4.3 Research Question 3: What challenges do teachers face in rural high schools during COVID-19?

The findings showed that teachers faced challenges influencing their professional duties and personal well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19. These include severe professional isolation, continuous professional development opportunities, and a lack of necessary teaching resources. Economic difficulties, compounded by additional responsibilities unrelated to teaching, further exacerbate their hardships. Moreover, dealing with complex student needs without adequate support adds to their daily stressors, impacting their mental health and job performance. The challenges highlighted by teachers in rural areas are critical as they provide a deeper understanding of the

adverse conditions under which these teachers operate. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach involving enhancements in infrastructure, professional support networks, and compensation schemes. Such improvements are essential for alleviating teachers' immediate difficulties and ensuring rural education systems' long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

5.5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

5.5.1 Structural support programme and teachers' well-being

The theoretical framework posits that structural support encompassing both tangible resources and intangible aspects, such as emotional support and professional development, is crucial for teachers' well-being. The literature suggests that robust support systems enhance teachers' job satisfaction, reduce stress, and create a more positive work environment. The research uncovered a deficiency in rural teachers' awareness of and access to structural support programmes. Many participants reported a lack of knowledge about such programmes and significant obstacles to accessing existing support due to logistical, administrative, and geographical challenges. These findings illustrate the theoretical assertion that effective support structures are foundational to teacher well-being. The disconnect between the availability of support programmes and teachers' awareness or ability to access them suggests a critical area for intervention. Enhancing the visibility and accessibility of these programmes could dramatically improve teachers' professional lives, thereby fulfilling the theoretical expectations of support structures fostering positive outcomes in education settings.

5.5.2 Teachers' self-efficacy and its influence on professional practice

Teachers' self-efficacy, which refers to their belief in their ability to affect student learning positively, is a central concept in the theoretical framework. High levels of self-efficacy are associated with more dynamic and effective teaching practices, better classroom management, and overall higher job satisfaction. Feedback from the study indicates that

the absence of supportive structures significantly dampens teachers' self-efficacy, particularly in isolated rural settings. Teachers described feelings of ineffectiveness and frustration, compounded by their isolation and the lack of professional development opportunities. This relationship between inadequate support and reduced self-efficacy highlights a critical feedback loop where poor conditions perpetuate low efficacy, which may lead to diminished teacher performance and lower student outcomes. Addressing this gap by providing targeted support and professional development opportunities could break this cycle, enhancing self-efficacy and improving educational outcomes.

5.5.3 Comprehensive challenges influencing teachers' well-being

The theoretical framework recognises that teacher well-being is affected by a broad spectrum of factors, including but not limited to individual capabilities, organisational support, and broader systemic conditions. Challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, resources, and unmanageable workloads adversely affect teachers' mental and emotional health. Participants reported a range of challenges that have significant repercussions on their well-being. These included resource-related issues and socio-emotional stresses such as dealing with difficult student behaviours, administrative burdens, and a lack of recognition for their efforts. The empirical evidence supports the theoretical model that well-being is multidimensional and influenced by many factors. The profound impact of these challenges on teacher well-being underscores the need for multifaceted interventions that address physical resources, organisational culture, and policy frameworks. Therefore, efforts to improve rural teachers' well-being must be holistic, encompassing improvements in physical resources, professional support, and systemic policy changes.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.6.1 Geographical limitation

The study's geographical scope was limited to a specific rural district, which might not embody the diversity and unique challenges in other rural regions, let alone urban areas. This geographic constraint restricts the extrapolation of the findings to broader contexts without additional localised research. The limited geographic focus might overlook

regional variations in educational policy, resource allocation, and community engagement that could significantly influence teacher experiences and the effectiveness of support programmes. Future studies should aim to include a more diverse array of locations to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the rural education landscape across different contexts.

5.6.2 Sample size and composition

The participant pool consisted of a relatively small number of teachers, selected based on availability and willingness to participate, which may not fully represent the wider population of rural teachers. This selection approach potentially introduces a bias towards those with particularly positive or negative views that are strong enough to motivate their participation. The constrained sample size and possible self-selection bias limit the study's ability to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and opinions. To enhance the representativeness of future research, employing randomised sampling methods and increasing participant numbers would provide a more robust dataset from which to draw generalisable conclusions.

5.6.3 Data collection methods

The study predominantly utilised qualitative interviews, which, while providing in-depth insights, are inherently subjective and influenced by the participants' current perceptions and the researcher's interpretive lens. This methodology may miss more nuanced or less explicitly expressed factors impacting teachers' well-being. While qualitative data offers rich narrative detail, its informative nature may not fully capture the complexity or quantify the frequency of observed occurrences. Integrating quantitative methods, such as surveys or longitudinal data tracking, could complement the qualitative findings and provide a more balanced view of the issues.

5.6.4 Temporal constraints

The data collection was confined to a specific timeframe, which may not account for seasonal variations in teacher workload or changes in policy influence over time. This limitation could skew the representation of ongoing or evolving challenges and supports. A longitudinal approach would allow for a dynamic understanding of how teachers'

experiences and the effectiveness of support programmes evolve, potentially revealing trends and impacts that a single-time study cannot. Future research could benefit from spanning multiple academic years to assess the long-term effects of interventions and policy changes.

5.7 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to delve into the realities faced by rural teachers concerning structural support programmes designed to enhance their professional and personal well-being. It specifically sought to understand the level of awareness among teachers about these programmes, their accessibility, and their effectiveness in improving teacher well-being. Additionally, the study aimed to uncover these teachers' broader challenges within their work environments.

The research findings robustly indicate a significant gap in the awareness and accessibility of structural support programmes among rural teachers. Many teachers are either completely unaware of these supports or find them difficult to access due to logistical and administrative hurdles. This lack of accessibility is compounded by insufficient promotion and communication from those administering these programmes. For those teachers who can access support programmes, the benefits are positive, impacting their job satisfaction, reducing feelings of isolation, and enhancing their professional efficacy. This demonstrates the potential effectiveness of well-crafted support programmes in alleviating day-to-day stresses and contributing to a more sustainable teaching career in rural areas. However, the positive impacts are not widespread due to the limited reach of these programmes.

The study also highlighted that teachers face numerous challenges that impact their well-being and professional performance in rural high schools. These challenges are not solely restricted to the lack of support programmes but also include inadequate professional development opportunities, isolation from peers, insufficient teaching resources, and excessive workloads. These factors create a challenging work environment, leading to burnout and high turnover rates. The empirical findings of this study lend strong support to the theoretical framework that posits a direct correlation between structural support and teacher well-being. By validating these theoretical claims with solid data, the study

contributes significantly to the body of knowledge in educational psychology and rural education studies, emphasising the necessity for comprehensive, accessible, and effective support systems for teachers.

5.8 Policy and practical implications

The conclusions drawn from this research have profound implications for educational policymakers and practitioners. There is an urgent need to overhaul the current support structures available to rural teachers. Policies must be reformed to ensure that support programmes are available, effectively communicated, and accessible. Similarly, these programmes should be holistic, addressing teachers' professional and personal needs to foster an environment where they can thrive and perform to the best of their abilities.

This study suggested that future research consider a longitudinal approach to understanding better the long-term effects of support programmes on teachers' well-being. The study suggested expanding the research and including a wider range of geographic locations and a larger sample size, which would also enhance the generalisability of the findings. This study recommended employing a mixed-methods approach that could provide a holistic view and nuanced understanding of the influence of structural support programme on different aspects of teachers' well-being.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Title: EXPLORING TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES ON STRUCTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES PROMOTING TEACHER WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS IN RURAL SETTINGS

The exploration of teachers' well-being has emerged as a topic of profound significance in educational psychology globally and locally. This burgeoning area reflects a growing recognition of the pivotal role of teachers' welfare in shaping the quality of teaching and learning experiences within educational settings. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which precipitated unprecedented challenges for educational systems worldwide, understanding and addressing the well-being of teachers has assumed heightened importance. This study explores the teachers' experiences in improving their well-being in rural high schools during COVID-19. This study adopted a qualitative approach through a phenomenological research design. It employed an interpretive paradigm. It used semi-structured interviews to collect data. These data were analysed through the narrative analysis. The results suggested that teachers encountered multiple experiences with structural support programmes in rural schools. These included unawareness of the programmes, heavy workload, lack of support from SMT, insufficient time for family, unfair treatment from the management, lack of running water and electricity, undisciplined learners, and teachers' absenteeism at rural schools.

The purpose of the interview is to explore teachers' *EXPERIENCES ON STRUCTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES PROMOTING TEACHER WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS IN RURAL SETTINGS*

Section A Biography

1. Age:

18-35 years	1	
35-45 years	2	
45-60 years	3	
Other	4	

2. Gender:

Male	1	
Female	2	
Prefer not to say	3	
Other	4	

3. Home language:

IsiZulu	1	
Sesotho	2	
Afrikaans	3	
English	4	
Other	5	

4. Ethnicity:

African	1	
White	2	
Coloured	3	
Asian	4	
Other	5	

5. Employment status:

Full-time employment	1	
Temporary	2	
SGB post	3	
Substitute	4	
Other	5	

6. Duration of employment

Less than 1 year	1	
1-2 years	2	
2-3 years	3	
Over 3 years	4	
Other	5	
Prefer not to say	6	

7. Professional Background Questions

7.1 How will you describe your career?

7.2 What makes you unique in your profession?

7.3 Where else have you worked, and have you ever got help from the structural support programmes for rural school setting?

7.4 Describe the time Department of Basic education together with school management was rewarding?

7.5 What was the best thing about your job?

7.6 What was the worst thing about your job

7.7 What does a learner's performance in this school look like? What factors contribute to good or bad performance?

7.8 Who, if anyone, or what kind of organisation, do you believe can improve education both at your school and generally? What would be the need for that? What prevents them?

Section B

1. Please begin by telling me about your experiences of structural support programmes in rural schools?

2.Explain in your own words what is meant by structural support programmes for rural school setting?

3. Have you ever had a health issue that negatively affected your wellness diagnosed?

4. What are the most notable experiences you have during your teaching experience?

5. What types of Structural support programmes did you receive from the government (School and DBE) and NGOS ?

6. Have you ever participated in any support programmes, workshops, or inductions? If so, did they assist you deal with your issues? Tell me about the experiences of having structural support programmes at your school

7. In what ways was the structural support programmes helpful to you?

APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

03-Apr-2023

Dear Ms Masabata Anna Dhlamini

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

Exploring teachers' experiences on structural support programmes promoting teacher wellbeing in schools in rural settings

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2022/1770/23

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

Adri
Du
Plessis

Digitally
signed by Adri
Du Plessis
Date:
2023.04.04
18:12:22
+02'00'

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South Africa duplessisA@ufs.ac.za
www.ufs.ac.za



APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTER FROM DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Enquiries: M.Z. Thango
Ref: Notification of research: M.A. Dhlamini
Tel. 051 404 8808
Email: MZ.Thango@fseducation.gov.za



District Director
Xhariep District

Dear Mr. Magwa

NOTIFICATION OF RESEARCH: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT IN XHARIEP DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that Ms. M.A. Dhlamini has been granted permission to conduct research in the Xhariep District under the auspices of the University of the Free State. The details in relation to the research project are as follows:

Topic: Exploring teachers' experiences on structural support programmes promoting teacher wellbeing in schools in rural settings.

1. **List of schools involved:** Albertina Sisulu Secondary School, Reikaeletse Secondary School, Trompsburg Secondary School, Thapelong Secondary School, Ipetleng Secondary School, Beang TSE Molemo Secondary School, Wongalethu Secondary School, LERE La Thuto High school, Itokiseng Bokamoso Secondary and Philippolis Secondary School.
2. **Target Population:** Six teachers teaching in grade 8 to 12 at the selected schools.
3. **Period of research:** From the signature of this letter until 30 September 2023. Please note the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year nor during normal school hours. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
4. **Research benefits:** The study may assist the Department of Basic Education in evaluating existing supporting programmes and ensure that they serve the purpose for which they are implemented. Support programmes must assist the teachers and school principals in coping with the adversities they encounter at schools, ensuring that the teacher's wellbeing is prioritised. This is important because teacher wellbeing is linked to good performance.
5. The Sub-directorate of Research and policy will make the necessary arrangements for the researchers to present the findings and recommendations to the relevant officials in the Department.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. MZAMOLI W. JACOBS
DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE, M&E AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

DATE: 23/03/2023

RESEARCH NOTIFICATION: M.A. DHLAMINI. 23 MARCH 2023. XHARIEP DISTRICT

QASHE, M&E and Strategic Planning Directorate Private Bag X20565, Bloemfontein, 9300 - Thuto House, Room 101, 1st Floor, St Andrew Street, Bloemfontein

APPENDIX D: MOTIVATION LETTER FROM SUPERVISOR TO THE PRINCIPALS



TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

30th of July 2023

RE- Motivation letter from Supervisor

Madam/Sir,

This letter is to certify that **Ms. Masabata Dhlamini** (Student Number: **2010144646**) is my Masters candidate in Educational Psychology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein Campus, and I am the Supervisor.

I am aware that she collected data for her research study from the 31st of July to the 4th of August, 2023. I am satisfied with her progress and have the distinct pleasure of noting that she is dedicated and passionate about her study.

Therefore, do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Yours faithfully

Dr. Mukuna KR
Tel: 058 718 5343
MukunaKR@ufs.ac.za

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Mukuna KR', is written over a horizontal line.

APPENDIX E: LETTER TO THE TEACHERS

90 Paul Kruger

Universitas

Bloemfontein

9301

02 August 2023

Dear Teacher

INVITATION TO PARTAKE IN EDUCATION PSYCHOLOGY MASTER'S RESEARCH INTERVIEW BY RESEARCH STUDENT DLHLAMINI MASABATA ANNA

I, the student at the University of the Free State Masabata Anna Dhlamini and request your assistance to conduct face to face interviews within your directorate.

Currently I am pursuing master's in psychology of education in the faculty of Humanities/Department of Education at the University of the Free State. The topic: Exploring teachers' experiences on structural support programmes promoting teacher wellbeing in schools in rural settings.

I am requesting approximately 30 minutes to 45 minutes each with 5-minute breaks, and the last session will be devoted to questions and answers. The research may not be conducted during the school hours. I will make sure to implement the COVID-19 protocols and precaution during data collection.

I genuinely appreciate your willingness to participate, and the interview is strictly voluntarily.

Looking forward to your response.

Warmest Regards

Masabata Dhlamini

Contact details :(066 386 4646)

Email Address dlamini9@gmail.com

APPENDIX F: LETTER TO THE PRINCIPALS

90 Paul Kruger
Universitas
Bloemfontein
9301
31 July 2023

Dear Principal

REQUEST, MEETING (Interview) WITH THE TEACHERS WORKING AT THE RURAL SCHOOL SETTING ON MASTER'S RESEARCH BY DLHLAMINI MASABATA ANNA RESEARCH STUDENT AT XHARIEP DISTRICT.

I, the student at the University of the Free State Masabata Anna Dhlamini and request your assistance to conduct face to face interviews within your directorate.

Currently I am pursuing master's in psychology of education in the faculty of Humanities/Department of Education at the University of the Free State. The topic: Exploring teachers' experiences on structural support programmes promoting teacher wellbeing in schools in rural settings.

I am requesting if you may allow your schoolteachers to assist me to collect data for my research project, researcher will need interview four teachers (Two male teachers and two female) for approximately 30 minutes to 45 minutes each with 5-minute breaks, and the last session will be used for discussion question and answers. The research may not be conducted during the school hours. I will make sure to implement the COVID-19 protocols and precaution during data collection.

Looking forward to your response.

Warmest Regards
Masabata Dhlamini

Contact details :(066 386 4646)
Email Address dlaminisabi9@gmail.com

APPENDIX G: LETTER FROM LANGAUGE EDITOR



APPENDIX H: ORIGINALITY REPORT

EXPLORING TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES ON STRUCTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES PROMOTING TEACHER WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS IN RURAL SETTINGS

ORIGINALITY REPORT

9%	7%	3%	4%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of the Free State Student Paper	1%
2	Morowane, Sam Mokgapego. "Contextually Responsive Leadership for Successful School-Parent Engagement in Rural Limpopo Secondary Schools", University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2023 Publication	<1%
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