MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING FOR TEACHERS SINCE COVID-19

by

Patricia Van Prooyen

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

May, 2024

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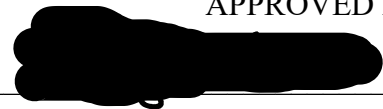
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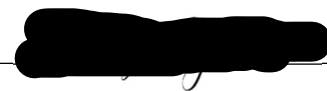of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

This study used a qualitative case study approach to examine teachers' experiences returning to school following the COVID-19 pandemic and determine if mental health training for teachers to support student mental health would ease the return to school. The researcher recruited 12 Christian school teachers that taught in the classroom pre- and post-COVID-19. Inclusive criteria included teaching two years before the shutdown, teaching during the shutdown, returning to in-person teaching, and being at least 25 years old with no gaps in teaching between 2018-2022. All participants participated in a 30-45-minute audio-recorded, semi-structured, one-on-one interview in a discreet safe venue, such as a private counseling office. The study used narrative analysis, identified four key themes: emotional range, educational training's impact, social connection's role, and behavioral challenges. The study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of preparedness of training upon their return to in-person learning following the pandemic. The study provides valuable implications for equipping educators as mental health needs increased post-COVID-19 by increasing training and developing innovative solutions to bridge the gap in mental health support.

Keywords: teacher, COVID-19, stress, schools, mental health

Copyright Page

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Dedication

In loving memory of my mother, Sandi, who always believed in me more than I believed

in myself. Your unwavering faith in my ability to achieve a Ph.D. has been a constant

motivation throughout this journey. Though you couldn't physically be here, your

presence remained in my heart and thoughts. I am eternally grateful for everything you

have given me. You showed me the true meaning of hard work and perseverance, which

has strengthened my resolve. I can still hear you proudly proclaiming to strangers at the

checkout that I would become a doctor, highlighting my intelligence and passion for

helping others. Every step I took, you walked beside me. Every tear I shed, you cried

with me. And every success I celebrated; you were my loudest cheerleader. Thank you

for instilling in me the belief that giving up is never an option. Today, I proudly carry the

title of Dr. Patricia M. Van Prooyen, a testament to the fulfillment of your dream for me.

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Acknowledgments

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Teachers are well positioned to give essential assistance to children following possible traumatic situations and to assist in identifying children who may be having persistent psychosocial challenges. Although teachers may play a significant role in supporting children's mental health, they frequently feel unclear about their role in aiding children in coping with trauma or believe that it is beyond their expertise (Le Brocque et al., 2016). Schools are an integral element of the community's infrastructure and are frequently at the core of recovery efforts that prioritize rapid restoration and return to normalcy after a traumatic event. After potentially traumatic occurrences, schools can play a crucial role in assisting children to reestablish a feeling of stability and safety during a normally chaotic and stressful time (Le Brocque et al., 2016).

Due to the COVID-19 viral pandemic, schools in several nations saw previously unheard-of difficulties in the spring of 2020. Schools had to organize personnel to teach virtually with little warning due to sudden school closures that caused major disruption. The pandemic's effects have altered and hampered the systems and procedures that school administrators typically use to direct and oversee organizational performance. It has also built obstacles in the way of preexisting systems for giving moral, social, personal, and professional assistance, and encouragement to its staff. Worries about the stress that had been put on teachers were widely expressed (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Teachers were stressed about challenges arising from their lack of experience in delivering high-quality teaching and learning remotely, absent the verbal and nonverbal feedback typically provided by the classroom setting (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Some teaching approaches or

attitudes appear to be beneficial in terms of academic success, but they are harmful in terms of emotional growth and psychological turmoil. Productive teaching and acceptable mental health practices are often compatible, but it is vital to identify those approaches or attitudes that appear to be productive but are damaging (Tolar, 1975).

There is a significant gap in the research on the importance of training teachers on how to support the mental health and well-being of students since returning to the classroom from the COVID-19 school closure. Failure to provide this critical training restricts teachers' ability to properly assist students with their mental health. This study examined the teachers' perspective in determining the importance of whether and how mental health training for teachers returning to the classroom following the COVID-19 pandemic would have been beneficial for supporting students.

Background

Students' development has been affected in a variety of ways by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the most striking outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic has nothing to do with contamination, but rather, how school closures have negatively impacted the education of 1.6 billion students worldwide (Gray, 2022). As a result of the pandemic, schools all over the world had been closed for 4.5 months or longer (Gray, 2022). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), one in ten nations had closed schools for more than nine months, and a significant number of children worldwide had not returned to the classroom (Godøy et al., 2022) Following these significant school closures, students then reentered schools dealing with the difficulty and stressors of not only the pandemic but also the removal of school support for lengthy periods, leaving many students with complex academic and

social- emotional issues (Godøy et al., 2022). The impact of these difficulties for students on their mental health has also created unique challenges for teachers as they return to classrooms (Godøy et al., 2022).

Teachers returning to the classroom report struggling with their role in how to best help and support students' mental health needs following the pandemic (Ekornes, 2016). School closures and remote learning have negatively impacted children psychologically and children have lost out on a social connection with classmates and teachers, as well as critical academic and social skills, each of, which impacts development and growth trajectories (Lehmann et al., 2022). Understanding the effects of school closures and reopening, as well as the variables impacting school safety, is essential for restoring schools to regular operations. There is not a lot of research on what school officials know, what teachers and students need, and how to act around school reopening, even though all parties were worried about important information about disease prevention (Li et al., 2022).

Since teachers lack information about effective classroom interventions regarding students' mental health, as well as warning signs and risk factors for growing mental illnesses, many teachers believe they are professionally unprepared to deal with students' mental health issues (Ekornes, 2016). Additionally, teachers face significant challenges in managing both academic and non-academic responsibilities due to time constraints (Ekornes, 2016). Even though mental health development is regarded as beneficial to academic achievement, in the long run, teachers express concern that their participation in mental health-related activities comes at the expense of their instructional

responsibilities (Ekornes, 2016). Therefore, more information is needed to learn how to best support and train teachers related to students' mental health following the pandemic.

COVID-19

On March 11, 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak was declared to be a worldwide pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). A study conducted by the WHO indicates that as of December 31, 2020, there have been 1.7 million documented cases in more than 200 nations around the world. The global total of infection cases will have surpassed 80 million, and the death toll will continue to rise (Hu et al., 2021). Countries were forced to take measures like school closures, lockdowns, social isolation, and social distancing because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which drastically altered people's day-to-day lives. These initiatives were expected to lessen the strain on the healthcare system and prevent the disease from spreading (Hu et al., 2021). Yet policies enacted at the country-wide level may work or make sense in theory, in practice, they are carried out locally and have varying degrees of effects when executed in schools and the classroom.

As more and more classrooms switched to online instruction, students' lives were drastically changed. Although methods of social distancing had been successful in the hopes of halting the virus's spread and providing relief to public health systems (Elmer et al., 2020), these methods may ultimately have exacerbated students' social isolation resulting in a negative impact on students' mental and emotional health. Students' social networks play a crucial role in stress reduction and success (Elmer et al., 2020). Students' mental health may be severely impacted by decreased social connections, a lack of social support, and new and emerging pressures related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Elmer et al., 2020).

Student Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected student mental health in various ways, such as family members getting sick or dying, fear for their health, and possible family financial/job stressors but the biggest contributor is social isolation. Social isolation was also a major issue identified for children contributing to difficulties with student mental health following the pandemic (Elmer et al., 2020). Humans are social creatures; it is innate for them to engage with others and develop diverse relationships (Leal Filho et al., 2021). Social isolation has been regarded as an objective fact experienced by humans, such as loss of social engagement, the actual absence of social bonds, and social disconnectedness (Leal Filho et al., 2021). It is sometimes regarded as an individual's subjective experience, such as a lack of involvement with others, loneliness, or the perceived gap between real and desired social ties (Leal Filho et al., 2021). Students report feelings of worry about the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent money-related implications since the pandemic. Furthermore, they found that the pandemic is having a worrying effect on the stress, anxiety, gloom, and depression that students are experiencing (Leal Filho et al., 2021). Additionally, school closures had left students with quite different school demands which were stressful, such as navigating an online classroom, more independent work and learning, and lack of school support (Elmer et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic, including stay-at-home orders and longer-term public health recommendations, may have had a disproportionately negative impact on adolescents, given that adolescence is associated with the onset of multiple mental health problems, steadily increasing emotion dysregulation, increasing parental conflict, and a

greater emphasis on peer relationships (Breaux et al., 2021). Furthermore, in adolescents with preexisting mental health and neurodevelopmental concerns, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, the impact of COVID-19 is likely to be amplified (Breaux et al., 2021).

Students with a high level of social help may improve their emotional well-being after a traumatic event like a pandemic Ghafari et. al (2021). With teachers at the forefront, often being the first point of contact for students, they are in a unique position to address students' emotional needs (Ghafari et al., 2021). Therefore, there is an important need for mental health training for teachers to help improve the emotional well-being of students following the pandemic. Unfortunately, there have been few studies on mental health training programs for teachers when a traumatic event has taken place (Ghafari et al., 2021). There are three stages in the process of recovering from traumatic events. The first is intended to help the person regain a sense of security. In the second, the person's attention shifts to remembering and grieving. Third, the person must reestablish contact with daily life. There is no standard timeline for passing through these stages, and people might have difficulty at any point. Together, these concepts suggest that members of a community are probably going to experience trauma in various ways and be recovering from it at various stages from one another (Clair et al., 2002).

Teachers

The pandemic has not only significantly impacted student mental health but teacher mental health as well with specific job-related stressors arising from the shift to online instruction due to the school shutdown being at the forefront (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). According to their research, stress from this shift to online instruction has

frequently been followed by symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sleep disruption (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Unfortunately, stress and poor mental well-being for teachers may be detrimental to the mental health of their students as well (Harding et al., 2019).

COVID-19 has introduced new obstacles in education, but it has also exposed and aggravated problems that have long existed. Teachers are frequently expected to offer kids and families instruction, social-emotional advice, and resources without appropriate support from administration and leadership, resulting in frustration and exhaustion (Drescher et al., 2022a). Lack of assistance and resources, lack of control over classroom decisions and curriculum, issues related to student conduct and motivation, and a lack of respect from peers or colleagues are frequently cited by teachers as reasons for stress (Drescher et al., 2022a). Given the importance of the classroom environment in a range of student learning outcomes, it is critical to comprehend the link between teacher compassion for students' emotional well-being following a traumatic incident and the classroom environment (Drescher et al., 2022a). Given the stress and difficulties that teachers already confront daily, mental health-specific training and assistance may be able to assist them in addressing the extra difficulties posed by the mental health issues that arise in students because of catastrophic events like a worldwide pandemic. (Ekornes, 2016).

Academics

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were forced to make a drastic, immediate shift to online learning, which caused significant stressors for teachers, students, and parents alike. Students had to adapt to learning in a whole new way.

Adolescents' mental, physical, and emotional health were all significantly impacted by these social isolation strategies (Lee et al., 2021a). Shifts toward online learning negatively impacted adolescents' attitudes about learning, willingness to study, and academic success (Lee et al., 2021a). Since returning to school, significant problems also exist. As students are returning to the classrooms there are evident declines in how they are applying themselves in class, resulting in poor grades and negative classroom behaviors which results in being sent to the school counselor or office, therefore, missing instruction (Schaffer et al., 2021). Furthermore, there has been an increase in students giving up and dropping out (Schaffer et al., 2021). Teachers have reported these difficulties to be problematic and stressful have been so problematic and stressful and schools have seen more teachers quitting or changing careers, resulting in teacher shortages across the nation (Schaffer et al., 2021).

School is an important resource for promoting the mental health of students. Children spend a substantial amount of time in school, where they learn, play, and interact with others (Yu et al., 2022). School provides a safe place for children to learn how to interact with adults and peers alike, and many positive attachments are formed in the school environment (Yu et al., 2022). Behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement are three separate, yet interconnected, aspects of students' dedication and participation in school and learning (Pöysä et al., 2018). Behavioral engagement refers to students' positive attitudes and actions toward school and learning, as well as their participation in social and academic activities in the classroom and at school. Cognitive engagement entails a self-directed and intentional strategy for learning, such as the quest and effort to grasp complicated ideas and master challenging abilities. The third

component, often referred to as emotional or affective involvement, focuses on children's feelings toward school, such as enjoyment, curiosity, or worry, and their sense of connection with other students, teachers, and the school. In some conceptual frameworks, this factor also includes students' perceptions of support from influential individuals (Pöysä et al., 2018). Schools staff, and teachers in particular, are able to have a favorable effect on the mental health of children and adolescents. According to Greenberg et al., (2017), contemporary schools must go beyond teaching fundamental abilities (such as reading, writing, and arithmetic) and instead focus on developing students' social-emotional competence, character, health, and civic involvement (as cited in Yu et al., 2022). Therefore, schools need to invest in resources to help children's mental health and well-being, particularly following traumatic experiences like the pandemic.

There is growing proof that students' mental health can improve in a supportive school setting (Dimitropoulos et al., 2021). When it comes to creating a secure atmosphere for students dealing with both acute and long-term mental health issues, school staff members play a crucial role. Teachers, who spend the most individual time with students than any other staff members, and consequently form strong bonds with them, not only enhance their academic achievement, but also tend to provide them mental health support. As this support tends to happen organically due to the roles and time spent in close contact, teachers should be better trained and equipped to deal with this kind of support appropriately. Educators have a high degree of concern for the mental health needs of their students and a need for more training and capacity development since they feel their professional preparation was insufficient for their social, emotional, and psychological wellness (Dimitropoulos et al., 2021). When it comes to child and

adolescent development and academic achievement, parents and others in a community frequently rely on teachers as authorities. Teachers are expected to close the gap between their expectations and the achievement of their students (Mbwayo et al., 2019). When parents are concerned about a child's behavior, they consult the teacher, indicating that they expect teachers to have expertise in recognizing mental health issues among students. Studies indicate that teachers are aware that their pupils have mental health issues, but they lament that they lack the knowledge and skills to address these issues. This dearth of knowledge contributes to educators' feelings of inadequacy in identifying and addressing students' mental health issues (Mbwayo et al., 2019).

Schools, being the major settings in which children live and learn, are ideal for early identification and intervention measures for mental health disorders in children and adolescents. Teachers are crucial in detecting kids with mental health concerns who exhibit clinical or subclinical signs. Their constant interactions with students and significant amount of time spent with them enable them to detect early signs of mental health issues and assist in referring students to appropriate mental health professionals for further assessment and diagnosis, thereby closing the gap between the onset of symptoms and the initiation of treatment (Kamel et al., 2020). Teachers are in a unique position to help kids struggling with mental health issues, which may have a good effect on their resilience. Teachers can make significant progress in offering ways to create resilient youth because they spend so much time with their children and because of the professional training they get. Teachers' capacity to promote students' mental health and wellbeing is, of course, contingent on both their own depth of knowledge and the breadth of resources available to them (Andrews et al., 2014).

Biblical Foundations

While others may think the classroom is the same environment as it was before the COVID-19, the students are instead facing significantly more mental health issues that are overwhelming and are looking for help to deal with them. New research has shown that during the COVID-19 pandemic, people who maintained a sense of structure were more likely to maintain a sense of importance in their daily lives and experience less depression (Michaels et al., 2022). Objective and subjective social variables have been used to explain the associations between religious community membership and decreased psychological distress as well as increased well-being (Michaels et al., 2022). When people have wider social networks with more opportunities for others to offer helpful assistance and meaningful social engagement, their social support, which is a key objective social element shown to influence health and well-being, is strengthened. Evidence suggests that social support people receive from participating in religious communities helps them feel better and experience less suffering (Michaels et al., 2022). In Matthew chapter 9:36-38," When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. This indicated that they lacked guidance and structure. Then he said to his disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest (Biblica Inc., 2016b, Matthew 9:36-38)." Throughout the chapter, Jesus invested in the people that were hurting and needed healing, structure and direction. Jesus gives us many examples of teaching in the Bible, many of which take place when a person is afraid or lacks knowledge. In these times Jesus provided peace and understanding. The Bible serves as a guide to train and prepare those who teach.

Problem Statement

Mental health challenges among school-age students increased since schools shut down in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Gray, 2022). Researchers have shown that in the last 3 years, there has been an increase in depression, anxiety, relationships, and suicide (Schaffer et al., 2021). Quarantine has taken a major toll on students, families, and even teachers (Schaffer et al., 2021). As students are returning to the classrooms there are evident declines in how they are applying themselves in class resulting in poor grades and negative classroom behaviors which lead to being sent to the school counselor or office, therefore, missing instruction (Schaffer et al., 2021). Schools have seen an increase in students giving up and dropping out and teachers resigning causing a shortage across the nation (Schaffer et al., 2021).

Some schools have introduced programs to support students as they navigate the changes that have been placed on them due to COVID-19. Unfortunately, few programs exist for teacher training related to students' mental health issues, and from those that do exist, few specifically address the unique challenges that have developed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, schools need to recognize the ever-growing importance of such programs and funding for implementing these programs since the pandemic to support teachers and prevent the loss of teachers.

Now schools are in a place where students need help, and teachers feel that they are not equipped to handle their students' needs (Alexander et al., 2022). This is putting added pressure on the school counselors, many of which are responsible for counseling up to 500 students (Alexander et al., 2022). School counselors are specifically educated

to handle children's mental health difficulties through the establishment of data-driven school counseling programs that encourage social/emotional well-being through preventive and developmental interventions (Alexander et al., 2022). Physical, emotional, or cognitive reactions can occur in people, including headaches, sleep issues, digestive problems, elevated heart rate and blood pressure, emotional numbness from shock, anger, guilt, or grief, anxiety, depression, and difficulty concentrating or making decisions. Some people only struggle for a few days after experiencing trauma, while others battle for weeks or months at a time (Clair et al., 2002). However, the ratio of school counselors to students, along with the ever-increasing mental health issues of students that have resulted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, have placed schools in a unique position where they are simply short-staffed to be able to handle the mental health needs of students. Furthermore, teachers are at the front line of helping students and can play an active role in helping to provide immediate mental health aid to students (Guimarães et al., 2020).

However, teachers at all levels are entering the classroom without the tools to handle the mental health needs of students (Ohrt et al., 2020). To close the gap in the research provided about the impact that COVID-19 has had on the education and psychological needs of our students, this research focused on the importance of the teachers being educated to support those needs. Without the proper training, many teachers are reporting feelings of burnout and desire to give up, many of them leaving teaching altogether (Ohrt et al., 2020). Most teachers have no training in understanding mental health. Schools must find a way to support teachers, while also teaching them ways to support and help the students in the classroom with mental health and educational issues.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory, qualitative case study was to examine teachers' lived experiences of returning to school following the COVID-19 pandemic, including their perspectives related to effectively meeting the mental health needs of students. The ability to better analyze and understand the areas of support and training needed for teachers after returning to the classroom following a traumatic event is critical. The findings of this study provided a significant foundation for further studies in helping better equip teachers to meet the mental health needs of their students.

Research Questions

Research Questions

Q1: How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health before the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q2: How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q3: How would you describe the differences in student needs following the pandemic as compared to before the pandemic?

Q4: How would you describe what current support, resources and training are in place to help meet students' mental health needs after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q5: Do you perceive that you are well-trained and equipped to handle the mental health needs of students after returning to school following the pandemic?

Q6: How would you describe what training might have been helpful to you to address mental health needs when returning to school?

Delimitations, Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

This study assumed that the use of a purposeful sampling strategy will generate a sample of educators from a private Christian school who have a background in classroom teaching pre-COVID-19, virtual teaching during COVID-19, and then back in the classroom post-COVID-19. Purposeful sampling is based on the idea that information-rich samples should be chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Shaheen et al., 2018). For the most efficient use of a few resources, qualitative researchers frequently utilize the approach of purposeful sampling to find and choose samples that are information rich. Finding and choosing individuals or groups of individuals who have expertise in or experience with an interesting phenomenon involve doing this (Palinkas et al., 2013). With this sampling method, the participant's criterion is used to choose only those people who are a good fit for the study's goal (Byrne, 2001).

This study assumed that a sample size of 10- 15 participants will be sufficient for this qualitative case study. Typically, qualitative research methods employ a lower sample size than quantitative research approaches because qualitative research methods are frequently concerned with gaining an in-depth knowledge of phenomena or are oriented on the how and why of a specific issue or process (Dworkin, 2012). One of the most challenging forms of qualitative research to categorize is case studies. Six or more sources of evidence are advised by some researchers (Marshall et al., 2013). Other researchers advise using no more than 4 or 5 instances, and they also advise using 3 to 5 interview subjects for each case study. One issue is that, even when qualitative

methodologists do offer ranges of numbers for the right sample size, they seldom justify it (Marshall et al., 2013).

This study assumed that participants are giving an accurate account of their experiences. Using a variety of appropriate safeguards, such as restricting data access to certain groups (such as university researchers) or specific uses (such as study or teaching), data use contractual arrangements, and utilizing virtual or physical safe places for obtaining highly sensitive contents, sharing of information can refer to information being shared freely and without any restrictions (open data) or, more widely for qualitative data (VandeVusse et al., 2021). Even in cases when participants agree to data sharing, their candor in subsequent interviews may suffer because of increased self-consciousness due to the possibility of a larger audience, which might undermine the validity of research, especially when it comes to delicate subjects (VandeVusse et al., 2021).

This study assumed that mental health training will serve as a tool in aiding the mental health of students. When teachers were asked to navigate through this unknown territory, they not only had to develop their own personal coping skills based on their own COVID-19 experiences but had to try to help students manage and develop their coping skills as well. This all had to be done with basically no structured professional training in this area. Supporting teachers should assist them with conceptualizing proficient norms for guaranteeing that the teacher is focusing on clients well, which reflects devoted stewardship of the trust and position that they have been given (Klemashevich, 2021). The training of teachers will help give consistent assistance to

students throughout multiple aspects of their lives, not simply educational, but social and relational as well.

The study assumed that the researcher maintained an unbiased approach when developing questions, approaching the interview, and asking the questions. Investigative interviews are rife with variables that may have a direct impact on the result as well as the conduct of the interviewer and the subject. Whether or not the participant agrees with the stereotype, when an expectation based on a group stereotype is triggered, the participant is placed in a scenario where they run the danger of adopting unfavorable ideas about the group to which they belong (Adams-Quackenbush et al., 2019).

One limitation of this study is that teachers that participated are teachers involved in this study and are teaching in a private, Christian school. Therefore, generalizability is limited to other populations, such as teachers at public schools. Furthermore, generalization is also limited given that this study is using an exploratory, qualitative case study with a small sample size.

Another limitation is using face-to-face interviews and the use of video recording. Despite the numerous benefits of so-called technology-mediated interviews, past research has shown that these interviews typically provide lower evaluations for respondents than face-to-face interviews. If multiple types of interviews are utilized for the same pool of candidates at the same selection stage, these variations in the assessed interview performance may eventually have detrimental effects on personnel selection (Basch et al., 2020). The level of perceived social presence might vary between interview formats. The level of the other person's salience in the encounter and the subsequent visibility of the interpersonal connections are both considered components of social presence.

Additionally, social presence denotes a person's mental state throughout a communication scenario, including a summary of the other person's awareness of their gaze, para verbal cues, facial expressions, and gesticulations (Basch et al., 2020).

Since the researcher is a school counselor trained in mental health and not a teacher, an additional challenge may be a lack of comprehension of what teachers experience regarding the mental health of students in a learning environment; this can be identified as personal bias. Additionally, because the researcher is trained in mental health, caution must be taken to not project that knowledge into the questioning, possibly having an influencing effect on the responses and in turn, the study results.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

The foundational theory of this study is based on the principles of Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT) (Achenbach 2008, as cited in Walters, 2018). Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) was established by Aaron Beck. Numerous outcome studies have shown its efficacy in treating a variety of psychiatric diseases, including depression, anxiety, eating, and drug abuse problems, as well as personality disorders. Many different age groups as well as adults, couples, and families have been investigated and analyzed in relation to CBT. The focus is on making immediate, positive changes in the patient's mood and way of life through a combination of the therapist's expertise and the patient's active participation in the therapeutic process. It's used to a wide variety of issues, and different treatment methods are employed for each patient's specific diagnosis and set of difficulties (Chand et al., 2023). CBT is a prominent therapy based on the premise that cognitive and behavioral variables cause and sustain mental problems. To alleviate mental health issues, cognitive-behavioral therapy focuses on rectifying these

maladaptive elements (Walter et al., 2018). It is intended to offer individuals the chance to acquire the skills necessary to confront dysfunctional ideas and substitute them with more adaptable and constructive ways of thinking (Walter et al., 2018).

CBT remains the recommended therapy of choice for anxiety disorders (Luxford et al., 2016). Recent studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in treating anxiety in usually developing children and adolescents (Luxford et al., 2016). Clients or victims of traumatic situations, such as educators and students, develop mental health issues such as panic, worry, anguish, a sense of powerlessness, and agitation (Imran et al., 2018). These findings show that educational institutions must develop treatments to assist both staff and students who have experienced traumatic events such as COVID-19 and those living with post-trauma to overcome behavioral and mental health issues. Several treatments, including CBT, have been proposed for educational institutions to help individuals who are coping with or have experienced traumatic experiences such as COVID-19 (Imran et al., 2018).

There has been a growth in the use of group CBT in community settings, such as schools, since CBT may be administered through manualized programs by a variety of specialists in various contexts (Saw et al., 2020). For instance, researchers have effectively utilized group-based CBT to treat depression in teenagers. Both teenagers and their parents saw school as a suitable location for mental health treatments, partly due to its accessibility and convenience (Saw et al., 2020). Again, several researchers have emphasized that school-based early intervention has the potential to lessen the illness burden and contribute to better long-term health outcomes (Saw et al., 2020).

Following the trauma of COVID-19, CBT can be used to increase emotional awareness, minimize feelings of guilt and stigma involved in emotional reactions, and enable participants to respond properly and speak for their needs, just as it was implemented to the essential worker when they dealt with traumatic events. Due to increasing work demands, a lack of adequate personal protection gear, fear of getting the virus, and dread of transferring it to loved ones, essential employees endured elevated levels of anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees impacted by the pandemic are in desperate need of mental health care. Clinicians may use evidence-based therapies developed from CBT (Benhamou & Piedra, 2020). To properly support key employees during these situations, CBT-informed treatments are likely to be required. Clinicians should assist essential worker clients in meeting their fundamental requirements by improving health and sleep habits when possible and assisting them in advocating for their demands utilizing interpersonal effectiveness skills. Empathic listening, validation of the issue at hand, and values definition can help individuals feel a revitalized sense of identity and significance in their employment and with their families, as well as enable behavior change along with selected values (Benhamou & Piedra, 2020). Students demonstrate their understanding of emotions in several COVID-19 tasks, by identifying a feeling they are experiencing and measuring its severity. Most meetings also begin with a feelings check-in to assist with awareness of emotions, normalization of challenging feelings, and acceptance (Rodriguez-Quintana et al., 2021).

Furthermore, this study also examined the teachings of Jesus and His approach to lifting them during troubled times. In Matthew 14: 22-33, the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, and they instantly became afraid. Matthew recounts the story in verse 27,

"But Jesus immediately said to them: Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid (Biblica Inc.,
2016, Matthew 14:27)." Jesus told Peter to get out of the boat and come to him, and after
Peter stepped out of the boat he became afraid. He instantly cried out to Jesus; Jesus
reached for his hand and asked why he doubted. This study helped to guide teachers to
identify behaviors within the classroom that may stem from the mental health challenges
associated with the fears and depression in students. Teachers will then be better
equipped to support them as Jesus did Peter when doubt begins to surface, being able to
reach out and help lift the students closer to Christ.

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Definition of Terms

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The following is a list of definitions of terms that are used in this study.

Mental Health- When a person knows his or her potential, can manage normal stress,
can work efficiently, and can contribute to their communities (Moen & Jacobsen, 2022).

Resources – Items related to educational needs, such as computers, internet, textbooks,
and food (Günaydın, 2021).

COVID-19 – Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious illness caused by
SARS-CoV-2, according to the report Tackling Global Pandemics with Scientific and
Social Tools (Ray, 2021).

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)- is an example of an evidence-based treatment
(EBP) that can enhance results, but young people who need it often face several obstacles
to accessing it (Kilbourne et al., 2018).

School Professionals (SP)- Trained social workers, counselors, and psychologists who
interact with students daily (Kilbourne et al., 2018).

Teacher- Teachers' role is to assist students in learning by transferring knowledge and creating an environment in which students can learn efficiently (Havighurst, 2023).

Student- A student is defined as an individual that is involved and talks to other students and the teachers, takes part in discussions in class, and act in a way that shows you are listening (Duncan, 2022). Within this study, students will include K-12 students.

Significance of the Study

This study aimed to identify if providing teachers with mental health training before returning to an in-person classroom setting from a distance-learning environment due to a pandemic would better equip them to deal with the rise in related mental health challenges of students. With proper mental health training, the hope is that teachers will be able to help their students feel safe within the classroom and can work to lower mental health issues in schools. Ultimately, this research could provide support for teachers to help build their confidence in dealing with the mental health of students following traumatic events so that fewer of them will want to leave the profession.

Many young people attempt to obtain mental health services at schools (Kilbourne et al., 2018). Students express more readiness to obtain mental health services in schools than in other community settings, and 50–75% of youth who receive mental health treatment receive it entirely in schools (Kilbourne et al., 2018). Schools need to be equipped and ready to meet the mental health needs of students, especially following the unique challenges of the pandemic. With teachers at the forefront of working with students, they need to be better equipped to handle the mental health needs and well-being of students. This research used an exploratory study that will hopefully lead to further research on how best to equip teachers with the tools to be able to help

address the mental health of students after traumatic experiences like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

Due to the COVID-19 viral pandemic, schools in several nations saw previously unheard-of difficulties in the spring of 2020. Teachers had to organize personnel to teach virtually with little warning due to sudden school closures. The pandemic's effects have altered and hampered the systems and procedures that school administrators typically use to direct and oversee organizational performance. Teachers were stressed about challenges arising from their lack of experience in delivering high-quality teaching and learning remotely, absent the verbal and nonverbal feedback provided by the classroom setting.

This case study examined teachers' lived experiences of returning to school following the COVID-19 pandemic, including their perspectives related to effectively meeting the mental health needs of students. It will help lay the groundwork for further studies to identify what areas of support and training are needed for teachers after returning to the classroom to better help them address the mental health of students.

This study looked at how teachers feel about getting help and resources to train them on how to help students' mental health after the pandemic. It will help lay the groundwork for future research that will lead to more specialized training for teachers on mental health. Ultimately, this research could provide support for teachers to help build their confidence in dealing with the mental health of students following the pandemic so that fewer of them will want to leave the profession. This study sought to explore how mental health training for teachers can impact the classroom environments and needs of

students. It will also explore the factors that add to the mental health issues of students and the challenges teachers face dealing with them in the classroom. The results of the study could provide significant support for further mental health training for teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools. The study could provide through interviews critical information regarding challenges that teachers have faced while teaching virtually through the COVID-19 pandemic and upon returning to the classroom. Moreover, teachers will have the chance to share their personal experiences of how COVID-19 has affected the mental health of their students as well as themselves and the impact better training could have had on both.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The obstacles of COVID-19 on educators are substantial. Estimates show that many teachers leave the profession during the first five years of teaching, although rates vary (Beames et al., 2021). The stress caused by the pandemic may worsen this trend (Beames et al., 2021). Inadequate mental health and well-being also affect their capacity to instruct and help students (Beames et al., 2021). Every educator has their own unique set of circumstances, personalities, coping mechanisms, and individual abilities and shortcomings that contribute to the stress they feel in the classroom. A poll of teachers who resigned after the 2021 academic year, for instance, indicated that younger instructors were more likely to leave their jobs due to worries connected to childcare obligations, while seasoned educators were more likely to list health hazards as their primary worry (Diliberti, 2021, as cited in Robinson, 2022). Teachers may experience increased stress during the pandemic due to the demands of their daily interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administration (Robinson et al., 2022). How teachers feel and cope can have a direct impact on children; stress can spread from students to teachers. Teachers' heightened stress during COVID-19, as well as any lingering effects, may have contributed to their children's increased stress. There is a substantial benefit in assisting teachers in recovering from the emotional impact of COVID-19, not only for their health but also for the well-being of their students (Beames et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic not only exposed preexisting pressure points and disparities in the educational system but also introduced new obstacles and pressures for educators (Robinson et al., 2022). Even though teachers are paid much less than workers in other professions with comparable educational requirements, polls indicated that teaching was one of the most stressful employments in the United States before the pandemic (Gallup Education, 2014, as cited in Robinson, 2022). Without proper remuneration or backing from administration and leadership, teachers may experience stress, frustration, burnout, and eventually turnover as they attempt to meet the needs of their pupils in the areas of academic instruction, social-emotional assistance, and relationship building (Robinson et al., 2022). With so many educators retiring, fewer and fewer young people are considering teaching as a vocation. The pandemic exposed widespread disrespect for educators. The pandemic also exposed a profession in upheaval, with educators taking on new tasks and responsibilities while being paid less than their counterparts in other fields. Low retention and high teacher turnover can be avoided if school leaders, districts, and governments address teachers' everyday problems (Spiker et al., 2023).

School closings had a wide range of immediate and long-term effects (Almeida et al., 2021). Closing schools impacted children's social and physical activities, leading to a potential rise in screen time, erratic sleep patterns, reduced exercise, and, for some, especially for those with less affluent families, less balanced diets. According to Almeida and colleagues (2021), parental stress rose, especially during the start of the pandemic, when some parents reported experiencing more worry, despair, agitation, and sleep problems (Almeida et al., 2021). Changes in habit, additional obligations brought on by

working from home while raising children, worry about unemployment and financial hardships, and fears of falling ill, dying, or this happening to loved ones may all be contributing factors to these symptoms. A rise in the use of alcohol and other addictive drugs is also suggested by certain publications (Almeida et al., 2021). Even though these later effects are mostly unrelated to school closings, they put additional stress on the family environment, which is crucial to children's well-being. Furthermore, the increased amount of time spent at home may have had a greater impact on the family environment than would normally be the case in the absence of school closings (Almeida et al., 2021).

  Moving from traditional classrooms in schools to virtual classrooms in people's homes is a big problem for families as well as schools, teachers, students, and parents. Even though plans have been made for a lot of home-based online learning, high school students have said that online learning takes a lot more time and effort than face-to-face study (Li et al., 2022). Almost 91% of all enrolled students, or more than 1.6 billion children, have had their schools temporarily closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has motivated schools all around the world to seek a quick transition to remote learning. It is uncertain how prepared students are to meet this challenge, or whether a lack of technology equipment and internet access prevents many students from participating in remote learning. Even when students have access, there is less information on the amount of time they will dedicate to studying. Fewer than fifty percent of low-income students routinely attend school, according to newspaper accounts of American schools. Concerns exist that these issues of restricted access to remote learning tools and poor attendance may be even more pronounced in underdeveloped nations, resulting in minimal instruction during school closures (Asanov et al., 2021b).

Since COVID-19 was labeled a worldwide public health emergency and pandemic, educational institutions were shut down to prevent the global spread of the sickness. For the seamless operation of the education system, face-to-face teaching and learning were replaced with online instruction. This abrupt transition resulted in several difficulties for students, including internet access and a shortage of resources, which in turn hindered their ability to participate more successfully in online learning. Students experienced social isolation because of the shutdown of educational institutions, which hindered their ability to communicate real-time thoughts, knowledge, and information on certain themes (Munir et al., 2021).

Description of Search Strategy

The research for this study is based on articles that were retrieved from the Liberty University Jerry Falwell Library. Keywords that were used in the retrieval of this information are "mental health", "academics", "teachers", COVID-19", and "school closing". Furthermore, to assess how the Bible connects to the suggested topic, a study of applicable Bible verses and Biblical articles was performed. The Bible and Bible Gateway website were used to read, evaluate, analyze and apply specific verses, passages and principles that are associated with the way that Jesus helped the hurting and helpless.

Review of Literature

For young children, lockdowns implied home restrictions, school terminations, and suspension of face-to-face instruction, which antagonistically impacted schooling systems, and students' psychological well-being. For many students receiving free or reduced lunches, not being in school meant losing their two main nutritious meals of the day (Gothwal et al., 2021). Developing virtually poses problems for younger students,

children with disabilities or learning issues, and students whose home environment is not conducive to learning (Klosky et al., 2022). Many working parents, particularly those whose positions are viewed as essential, battled with the contending requests of work and administering children's education from home. In 2020, at the point when many schools used remote learning, 17% of families needed internet and a home PC accessible for student use. These disparities additionally broadened existing instructive holes and disparities and left students and families with even more stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Klosky et al., 2022).

Research shows that since COVID- 19 there has been an increase in students dropping out (Frajerman, 2022; Mian & Chachar, 2020), levels of fear (Mian & Chachar, 2020, (Gazmararian, 2021), depression (Cui & Hong, 2021; Mechili, 2020), increased stress levels (Li & Leung, 2020), skipping class (Klosky et al., 2022), and strain on family relationships (Cui & Hong, 2021). Furthermore, Frajerman et al., (2022) reported there has been 7% of kids who struggle with emotions as a result of the unexpected school shutdown had a decline in benchmark test results, and the number of school dropouts increased, particularly among lower-income households.

Students' Mental Health Post-COVID

To stop the spread of the virus, the abrupt switch to online learning in the middle of March 2020 introduced mitigation strategies like social distancing and stay-at-home orders, which had an impact on students' mental health by leading to feelings of increased loneliness, anxiety, or depression. Current student mental health difficulties have gotten worse and many more students developing new mental health problems increased by social isolation and school closings during the COVID-19 pandemic. The risk of

mental illness is increased for many students due to disruption of routine, social isolation, and feelings of loneliness. A rise in home stress during this pandemic exposed students to much greater risks of mental health issues (Thakur, 2020).

Depression and Anxiety

There has always been a significant problem with student mental health. According to a review, the prevalence rates of depression and anxiety in teenagers before the COVID-19 pandemic were 2.2% and 2.6%, respectively. However, research now being conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic has shown a significant increase in young people's mental health symptoms (Li & Leung, 2020). More than 10% of kids in a normal classroom will exhibit symptoms of anxiety, and young people with anxiety have been shown to have social, intellectual, and behavioral performance that is impaired because of their worry. A growing body of research shows that worry can cause several academic impairments, such as decreased academic success and frequent absences from class. Excessive anxiety is linked to academic impairment not just in the now but also in the future (Ginsburg et al., 2021). In a study of high school-aged teenagers preliminary cross-sectional results showed an increase in depression and anxiety symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gazmararian et al., 2021), a longitudinal study with grades 4 through 8 found a marked rise in depressed symptoms, planning, and attempts to commit suicide during the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods (Gazmararian et al., 2021). Early research since the pandemic suggests that social isolation policies were implemented, more than one-third of adolescents reported significantly higher levels of loneliness and less positive well-being than their parents (Gazmararian et al., 2021) as opposed to 1 in 6 before stay-at-home policies, and nearly half of the young adults (18–24) say they feel

lonely during the pandemic. Although more research is still being conducted in this area

since the pandemic, the results so far have highlighted that school mental health

professionals have been essential in helping to support students' transition back to school

and coping with the effects of the pandemic (Gazmararian et al., 2021). Teachers and

other school staff are having a hard time talking to and helping students during a

pandemic (Weisbrot & Ryst, 2020). However, there are limited numbers of school mental

health professionals in each school, and teachers lay at the forefront of talking to students

and helping them cope with the transition. During this unprecedented time, schools will

need to find creative ways to help teachers in this role (Weisbrot & Ryst, 2020).

Students' anxiety may have been exacerbated by their isolation from others,

particularly those they care about, their worry about future career issues, and the

consequences the infection may have on their academics. According to a recent study, as

many as 25% of students showed signs of anxiety, which is a significant increase

compared to the numbers before COVID-19 (Li & Leung, 2020). The majority of those

affected by COVID-19 cite school interruptions as their greatest concern, with feelings of

loneliness, most students had spent 0 hours outdoors. Over 16% had mental health ratings

that fell below a threshold suggestive of serious depression (Asanov et al., 2021b).

Given the inherent uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., whether

oneself or others were affected when the pandemic would stop, and the effects of the

impact on daily life), this ambiguity of circumstance also likely aggravated pandemic-

related anxieties (Fedorenko et al., 2021). Furthermore, difficulties in emotional

processing, defined as a lower adaptive capacity to modify or accept emotional reactions

to participate in goal-directed behaviors more effectively, are associated with several

types of psychopathologies, particularly fear-based illnesses, and poor health outcomes. Individuals with issues in emotion management may also have maladaptive responses to worries associated with COVID-19 (Fedorenko et al., 2021).

Reflecting the extensive implications of health-related worries, uncertainties, and subsequent academic repercussions, studies have found detrimental effects on the mental health of students (Tran et al., 2022). For instance, a large cohort study comprising mainly Chinese college students revealed a stress prevalence of 35% during the acute period of the outbreak, which decreased to 16% two months later when the outbreak abated. During the same time, however, sadness rose from 22% to 26% and anxiety rose from 11% to 15%. Less physical activity, less social support, and a dysfunctional household exacerbated students' psychological suffering, as well as their awareness of proven or suspected COVID-19 cases in their communities (Tran et al., 2022). Mixed-methods research of 195 US college students conducted in April 2020, one month following the stay-at-home order, revealed that 71% of students experienced greater stress and worry associated with the outbreak (Tran et al., 2022).

Behavior difficulties in children are frequently understood as including externalizing and/or internalizing actions. Internalizing behavior disorders are characterized by symptoms of anxiety and sadness, fearfulness, social withdrawal, and physical complaints, whereas externalizing behavior problems are shown in acting out behaviors, such as violence and hyperactivity (Sun et al., 2022). Early behavior difficulties relate to the development of subsequent problems, and longitudinal studies imply that behavior problems are highly stable from early life through adolescence (Sun et al., 2022).

Fear

Fear is one of the fundamental emotional responses and plays a vital part in the emotional continuity of individual development. Comparable to anxiety or stress, fear may be damaging or injurious to mental well-being when it reaches a specific threshold. In the present literature, researchers have discovered many phobia-related COVID-19 features (Yalçın et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has been linked to an increase in dread and anxiety. Although large levels of social support may be protective against mental health problems in a high-stress environment, this has not been the case related to the pandemic and other traumatic events (Szkody et al., 2020). A lack of social support during a traumatic event, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may raise the risk for mental health disorders. During previous pandemics or traumatic events, researchers discovered that social support was related to decreased incidence of mental health issues (Szkody et al., 2020). However, when social boundaries expand due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social distance and self-isolation may restrict the availability and receipt of social assistance, and the infection may also have harmful psychological effects (Szkody et al., 2020).

As unemployment rates were rising due to the pandemic, many families were suffering financial instability. These pressures may have had an impact on teenage mental health as well, especially in underprivileged areas (Gazmararian et al., 2021). Additionally, the pandemic's wide range of academic and nonacademic stressors, such as severe economic hardship, the loss of social networks, and fear of illness, could make the existing achievement inequalities in education worse (Gazmararian et al., 2021). The terror of COVID-19 was less physical and more psychological, as though thousands were

physically infected, but millions were mentally impacted (Munir et al., 2021). This anxiety intensified as more and more health care professionals contracted and died from illnesses for which there was no medical or psychological therapy. This dread affected all age groups, but students were particularly susceptible since they were simultaneously experiencing a second crisis, the transition from in-person to online schooling. They encountered several obstacles, including a lack of resources, a shift in teaching and learning methodologies, and a dearth of qualified teachers for online instruction (Munir et al., 2021).

Increasing fear is a typical response to virus pandemics. Even though adaptive fear reactions can allow efficient responses to dangers, excessive and persistent fear reactions might raise the risk of psychopathology and physical disease (Fedorenko et al., 2021). Fears of virus infection, that is, a sensation of threat, dread, or worry associated with catching a virus or its repercussions, is particularly important to consider for the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, while different psychological repercussions of infection-control measures, such as social distancing, have been documented (e.g., loneliness, agitation, and insomnia), fears about the impacts of social detachment have been much less researched (Fedorenko et al., 2021). For instance, anxieties regarding the negative repercussions of social distancing might include fears connected to longer house confinement, feelings of loneliness and isolation owing to an inability to visit loved ones, and fears of financial troubles and loss of income due to company closures (Fedorenko et al., 2021). As a result of tighter limitations and an increased risk of viral infection, persons living in a pandemic hotspot may be especially concerned about social isolation. This anxiety may result in greater ruminating or perseverance over distancing guidelines

and coping actions, such as stockpiling goods or making dangerous decisions to meet friends despite stay-at-home instructions owing to isolation anxieties (Fedorenko et al., 2021).

There is an association between social problem-solving skills and the fear of COVID-19 and how it relates to academic drive. While social abilities and problem-solving skills may have a substantial beneficial effect on academic motivation, the circumstances caused by COVID-19 may have had the opposite effect, and a detrimental impact on academic motivation (Günaydın, 2021). Fear and stress can affect the functionality of the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and hippocampus; these disruptions can manifest as unpredictable executive processes and manifest as memory loss, poor motivation, impaired judgment retention, or fast shifts in attention, and decision-driven goals which all significantly impact academic functioning poses even greater challenges for student's adjustment (Barbosa-Camacho et al., 2022). Even four years after the 2003 SARS pandemic, survivors were still diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder, melancholy, anxiety disorders, and, to a lesser extent, obsessive-compulsive disorder (Barbosa-Camacho et al., 2022).

Fear of death or death anxiety is present in all living humans; however, it becomes more evident in situations involving mortality (Pradhan et al., 2020). The current pandemic has not only caused uncertainty, confusion, and turmoil in our lives, but it has also placed us in an endless time of death when no one can be guaranteed their well-being or safety. Though the virus is more hazardous for the elderly than for younger generations, no one is immune (Pradhan et al., 2020).

Altogether, the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of K–12 students have received comparatively little attention in the research. This is especially problematic for students with emotional or behavioral disorders, who face significant mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, compulsion, severe disruptive behavior, aggression, and self-harm, and have the highest dropout, suspension, expulsion, and arrest rates of all students. These challenges were likely exacerbated by pandemic-related school closures, as students may have been exposed to psychological challenges, isolation, and physical challenges thereby adding a layer of risk to a population that was already at risk (Bruhn et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic, along with isolation because of the lockdown, has altered how individuals perceive and behave in social circumstances. Individuals' interpersonal networks and health suffer because of social isolation. However, the shadows of social isolation or social distancing rules keep people always afraid that breaking such standards may lead to infection with the lethal virus. Thus, a constant fear of death or death anxiety may be keeping people preoccupied. COVID-19 has had a greater psychological impact than it has had on mortality. Furthermore, the psychological impacts of lockdown are certainly many, with stress being one of them (Pradhan et al., 2020).

Stress Levels

Stress may be described as a relationship between an individual and his or her environment that the individual perceives as straining or beyond his or her resources. In other words, stress is the relationship between a demanding and challenging environment and an individual's perspective of being able to master these problems or being overwhelmed by them. Consequently, not everyone will regard the same circumstance as

stressful (Yalçın et al., 2021). Between April 4 and May 11, 2021, Frajerman (2022) conducted an online national cross-sectional study with students studying health. The survey asked about sociodemographic factors, working conditions, the Kessler 6-point scale, and numeric scales. They observed a decline in mental health as compared to the initial national survey. The usage of psychiatric medications, substance abuse, and psychological anguish all skyrocketed. These findings demonstrated the necessity of stepping up support efforts for students (Frajerman et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on mental health worldwide. High levels of psychological distress were previously discovered during the first wave of the national survey (Frajerman et al., 2022). According to the research on health anxiety, the stress associated with COVID-19 is rooted in the fear of developing or having the condition. Following the transactional model of stress and coping, events such as the present worldwide pandemic provoke high levels of anxiety and subsequent coping methods. This paradigm implies that individuals utilize both cognitive and behavioral coping mechanisms to manage internal and external pressures (Barron Millar et al., 2021). For some people, these stressful situations may be intrinsically terrifying and/or misinterpreted as signals of physical sickness, hence raising their total worry levels. When confronted with a threat, services can play a crucial part in a person's coping strategy and, ultimately, their capacity to operate. The pandemic is inherently unpredictable, and research shows that issues coping with ambiguity are a key transdiagnostic factor in a variety of anxiety disorders, including health anxiety (Barron Millar et al., 2021).

Numerous research has examined the connections between social ties, disease treatment, and well-being. Individuals benefit from social support both through its direct influence and its buffering effect, which shields them from stressful life situations (Yalçın et al., 2021). According to studies, social support may be good for reducing the negative consequences of stress. The perception of social support may have beneficial consequences on the physical health of individuals. To have a better understanding of the links between life satisfaction and perceived social support and COVID-19 fear, depression, anxiety, stress, mindfulness, and resilience, participants' life satisfaction and perceived social support were analyzed (Yalçın et al., 2021). It is concluded that people who are more afraid of developing an infectious disease may misunderstand physiological feelings. These misunderstandings might lead to a melancholy, nervous, or agitated state. The stresses might be related to psychological, social, or health difficulties, such as disrupting daily routines, social separation from loved ones, and avoiding educational surroundings. Individual doubts about the future are among the negative repercussions of pandemics. Individuals may experience despair, worry, and stress because of such uncertainty (Yalçın et al., 2021).

Individual abilities and trait-like features, such as high general self-esteem, can operate as a buffer against feeling stress in daily life. This includes academic self-efficacy and high general self-esteem (Keyserlingk et al., 2021). In a broader sense, cognitive developmental research has shown that self-regulation and self-control are crucial for behavior and (psychological) clinical outcomes across the lifespan. On the other side, it has been discovered that higher degrees of mental distress, such as symptoms of depression and anxiety, are associated with greater levels of perceived stress in students

(Keyserlingk et al., 2021). During the lockdown, children were deprived of a large portion of their social life, often without being able to fully comprehend the scope of the problem posed by COVID-19, particularly in terms of economic repercussions and health concerns, such as the number of deaths and the collapse of intensive care units. Likewise, children were immersed in a stressful environment comprised of parental concerns, e.g., fear of parents losing their job, anxiety about their health, the denial of their demands, for example, playing outside and hanging out with friends, and school responsibilities. Not just for school personnel and parents, but also for young people, education in such a stressful environment was a significant, unanticipated obstacle, especially if they lacked the emotional resources to deal with the circumstance, such as emotional-regulation skills (Pozzoli et al., 2022). According to a 2011 national study conducted by the American College Health Association, students' emotional and social troubles are exacerbated by stress. It is typically cited as the leading obstacle to children's academic progress (Benson & Whitson, 2022).

Children are affected not just by the stress connected with a pandemic, for instance, fear of infection, but also by the stressors brought by home confinement, for instance, boredom and isolation, which the great majority of children in the United States experienced under stay-at-home orders. For Children with mental health disorders, the difficulty to get necessary mental health care because of COVID-19 may have had particularly harmful effects. In a study of British children up to the age of 25, all of whom had a history of mental illness, 83% reported that the pandemic had worsened their condition, and 26% reported that they were unable to seek mental health care. Certain children, such as those with developmental problems such as autism, who rely strongly

on daily structure and regularity, may find the disruption of their routines (Goldberg et al., 2021). Chronic stress is a well-established cause of mental health problems, especially for those who are at risk owing to biological, psychological, or social factors. The COVID-19 pandemic, such as stay-at-home orders and longer-term public health recommendations, may have a disproportionately negative impact on adolescents, given that adolescence is associated with the onset of numerous mental health problems, steadily increasing emotion dysregulation, increasing parental conflict, and a greater emphasis on peer relationships. In adolescents with preexisting mental health and neurodevelopmental concerns, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), the impact of COVID-19 is likely to be amplified (Breaux et al., 2021).

Psychological resilience is a notion that describes an individual's capacity to recover swiftly in the face of difficult life experiences and situations. Another definition of psychological resilience is the ability of individuals to adjust to changes in their lives by remaining strong in the face of unfavorable life events. Individuals with psychological resilience, such as a sense of purpose in life, are less likely to be influenced by unfavorable psychological events during the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals' degrees of terror during COVID-19 were investigated using a variety of measures, such as the COVID-19 Fear Scale, the Life Meaning Scale, and the Brief Psychological Resilience Scale. (Baltaci, 2021).

On average, families with children with special education endure higher pressures than those with neurotypical children. Such circumstances can impact the quality of family connections, making it difficult at times to parent with patience and empathy (Asbury et al., 2020). Some study suggests that perceived support may be a protective

factor against teachers burning out and quitting special education. Teachers may endure increased stress when working with children who require special education. For children with special education needs and their families, being at home and, in most circumstances, not attending school creates a highly difficult scenario, especially to meet their individual educational needs. The disruption of well-built routines, the disintegration of support networks, and the request of untrained parents to do a task that qualified teachers find tedious. These changes have occurred rapidly, and the repercussions may be especially severe for the special education community. Therefore, it is important to consider how COVID-19 is impacting the mental health of these families to acquire insight into how schools and society might assist them moving forward (Asbury et al., 2020).

Family Relationship

According to the theories of family systems and systemic family development, a family is a dynamic social structure that adapts to both internal and external changes. The family must react and adjust to an external stressor. These theories also contend that family members are interrelated and that a family member's well-being is influenced by their interactions with other family members. Therefore, when a family is faced with an external stressor, such as economic hardship, the stressor can influence unfavorable interactions among family members and ultimately have an impact on the health and well-being of each family member (Li & Leung, 2020). COVID-19 as an external stressor for families led to significant consequences for children on multiple levels, including student learning, development, and improvement; nutrition, for which many students rely on school services; the stress placed on parents, who find themselves in the

role of an educator without the necessary experience or resources; unequal access to learning technologies; family income, with parents playing the dual role of worker and teacher; and schools and child care (Charland et al., 2021).

Unsurprisingly, new evidence indicates that COVID-19 raised stress and impaired the well-being of school-aged children's parents (Martiny et al., 2021). Furthermore, the outbreak and accompanying limitations may have also had both direct and indirect detrimental consequences on children. For example, Martiny et al. (2021), investigated whether family-related characteristics that are associated with child well-being before the outbreak continue to be associated with child well-being throughout the pandemic. In addition, they also analyzed the associations between children's perceptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and related limitations and their (Martiny et al., 2021). According to the research on children's well-being before the pandemic, having a single parent at home was linked to poorer children's well-being and even more negative thoughts during the pandemic, and the mother's well-being was linked to children's well-being (Martiny et al., 2021).

Parents have a significant role in the emotional regulation of their children by recognizing and reacting to their children's discomfort, which can result in decreased distress levels. Due to widespread stressors associated with COVID-19, many caregivers may have had trouble managing their emotions to satisfy the emotional requirements of their children. Children who did not receive emotional support from their parents during lockdowns and school closures may have developed enduring emotional or behavioral issues. During pandemics like COVID-19, it is crucial to address parenting stress and parental psychological well-being (Chen et al., 2022).

Diverse viewpoints on family factors affecting the mental health of children have been explored within the research. Many psychological issues are triggered by dysfunctional family functioning, such as inadequate support. According to Pan et al. (2021), poor family functioning is significantly associated with anxiety, sleep difficulties, and depression. As a result of the shutdown, parents and children had to drastically alter their daily routines. Particularly, parents of elementary and middle school students faced the challenge of becoming their children's constructors, assuming a leadership role in their education, such as ensuring that their children are attached to the school forum at different times of the day, listing homework assignments, assisting their children in completing them and submitting them on time. Therefore, it is not surprising that most parents regarded homeschooling during the pandemic as extremely stressful (Pozzoli et al., 2022). Moreover, these stressors were likely more impactful for families with poor family functioning and parental support.

Clarity and consistency in teacher communications, teacher motivation, excellent curriculum programming, and instructional assistance may have positively influenced the experience of remote learning for children and their parents. Features of online learning are distinct, such as the absence of interpersonal socializing and the lack of variation in the learning environment, as well as the possibility of increased parental supervision. An issue in remote learning is the requirement for parental involvement; yet, many parents are ill-equipped to play a supervisory role due to a lack of time or expertise, and when they do, it can severely impact parent-child relationships (Goldberg et al., 2021). In the setting of children with learning challenges or special needs, the requirement for parents to function as teachers may be greater, since these children may require specific

assistance and regular, clear communication to promote their learning. In addition, children with special needs may be more likely to struggle with online learning and require parental support since teachers are frequently unprepared to provide differentiated instruction to a variety of learners, and professional services for students may not easily translate to an online format (Goldberg et al., 2021).

In early infancy, the home environment is one of the most important ecological settings for children's physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development. Importantly, it is well-established that parental anxiety contributes to child behavior issues (Sun et al., 2022). Children of anxious parents, for example, are at higher risk for psychological dysfunction (Sun et al., 2022). This may arise when disturbed parents exhibit verbally harsh parenting approaches, emotional insensitivity, and a lack of attention to their children. This parenting approach results in behavioral issues for children, such as acting out, withdrawal, and anxiety (Sun et al., 2022).

Despite a global pandemic, parents of children with disabilities have voiced concern over their children's behavioral and emotional disorders, as well as their scholastic and everyday life obstacles. Studies identified themes experienced by parents of children with neurodevelopmental disabilities during the pandemic, such as difficulties with managing their child's behavior, feeling burdened by serving simultaneously as a parent, teacher, and therapist, concerns about their child's socialization, interruption of services, and lack of routine and quality of remote learning (Alba et al., 2022). The disruption of school-based learning and service delivery is a recurrent subject in the COVID-19 literature and a concern frequently voiced by parents. The transition from caregiver to educator, necessitated by the increasing obligations of homeschooling, may

not have been viable for working parents. Due to their inability to satisfy their children's educational demands, parents indicated that this move heightened their concern that their child's academic and social abilities would decline. Schools have been tasked with meeting students' needs, including the requirements of special education students during remote learning and aiding parents in the process (Alba et al., 2022).

Teacher Challenges

Over the past two decades, school-based mental health preventative programs and treatments have become more common, with a rising number of adolescents receiving assistance for their social, emotional, and behavioral needs in school settings (Shelemy et al., 2019). Teachers in schools are increasingly expected to detect students with mental health problems and send them to the right assistance (Shelemy et al., 2019). Teachers are in a prime position to recognize signs and behaviors linked with anxiety, depression, and other prevalent mental health issues, such as irritability, social disengagement, and changes in focus, due to the amount of time they spend with students. Teachers are in a prime position to recommend students to mental health care facilities, as they are frequently the initial point of contact for youth and parents who are concerned about their child's emotional welfare. Teachers are not mandated to learn about and comprehend mental health conditions as part of their first training, and many have poor awareness of the connection between both school exclusion and mental health issues. Teachers usually have limited access to help and supervision from mental health-trained experts (Shelemy et al., 2019).

The importance of teachers' participation in school mental health initiatives cannot be overstated. Teachers' knowledge and opinions surrounding mental health affect

how they respond to mental health emergencies among students. According to Imran et al. (2018), teachers feel overwhelmed and incapable of handling the mental health requirements of their students owing to their lack of expertise and understanding in this area (Imran et al., 2018). Education for teachers has been recognized as an effective mental-health intervention in school settings, fostering positive mental health and a feeling of connectivity, and supporting student learning, to enhance the school environment (Imran et al., 2018). Teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards mental health, as well as their ability to accurately identify adolescents and children with mental health issues, have improved significantly because of educational initiatives involving teachers. In a cluster-randomized study of mental health first-aid education for high school teachers, improvements in knowledge, stigma reduction, and confidence in offering help to students, in addition to indirect positive impacts on students, were seen. Moreover, mental health efforts in schools help teachers feel less stressed, increase their job satisfaction, and save money (Imran et al., 2018).

The personal effects of COVID-19 on educators are substantial. Estimates show that many teachers leave the profession during the first five years of teaching, although rates vary (Beames et al., 2021). Inadequate mental health and well-being also affect their capacity to instruct and help students (Beames et al., 2021). How teachers feel and cope can have a direct impact on children; stress can spread from students to educators. Teachers' heightened stress during COVID-19, as well as any lingering effects, may have contributed to their children's increased stress. There is a substantial benefit in assisting teachers in recovering from the effects of COVID-19, not only for their health but also for the well-being of their students (Beames et al., 2021). As a result of COVID-19,

which has been upending the globe, school administrators were pushed to their limits. According to the research, school administrators struggled to adapt non-traditional ways to manage school operations, reconnect with students, and protect the well-being of many young people. Therefore, COVID-19 was a perfect storm that challenged leaders' crisis management skills. School administrators are managing their school buildings online with fewer students while engaging communities, parents, and supporters. Even though errors occured, the forward momentum and resolve to overcome difficult circumstances are of greater importance (Adarkwah & Agyemang, 2022).

The combination of chronic stress at work plus a lack of support and resources can result in professional burnout. Emotional weariness, depersonalization, and feelings of lack of effectiveness define burnout. Teacher stress and burnout are related to a variety of negative consequences, such as less effective instruction, more disruptive classroom conduct, deteriorating student-teacher relationships, and increased teacher turnover. When teachers feel greater levels of stress and burnout, their students are more anxious and perform less well academically (Baker et al., 2021). Possible association between alterations in teachers' mental health and alterations in their working environment. Data reveals that most educators were unable to handle the technical obstacles posed by the pandemic owing to a lack of digital competences and remote learning pedagogical expertise (Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021). For others, the impact of distance education on academic success is questionable, since it has been claimed that students experience greater psychological anguish because of the pandemic. In this new setting, some teachers can now see the unique characteristics of each student, which can induce stress and feelings of powerlessness. Inequitable increases in their demands and obligations

were also a result of preexisting gender inequities regarding caregiving and housework, which impacted female educators (Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021).

Teachers endure between moderate and high levels of stress, which has been partly driven by the virtualization of education. Lack of knowledge and skills essential for remote education, the time-consuming nature of the process, and the blurring of the lines between private and professional life are the primary causes of the issues. Distance education involves the participation of parents, teachers, and students; however, parents are not always able to be active in their children's education; hence, they attempted to contact teachers outside of work hours, which contributes to the stress and dissatisfaction of teachers. Teachers in Poland also report facing weariness, loneliness, and not being compensated for working extra (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021).

Academic Motivations

Academic motivation includes attitudes and behaviors such as continuing tough assignments, studying diligently to master new material, and choosing effort-intensive projects. Academic motivation is an essential trait for completing academic assignments successfully and evaluating students' present performance. The transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the teacher having a lack of control over the learning process or fewer preferences, together with a diminished sense of competency and autonomy to execute academically focused learning strategies, which led to a decline in academic motivation (Günaydın, 2021). Furthermore, access to resources, especially for economically disadvantaged families, also contributed to significant challenges to academic learning and motivation.

Likely the largest support for the academic consequences of COVID-19 is the high school dropout rates (Saito, 2021). School cancellations due to COVID-19 likely resulted in increased dropout rates. Globally, the economic shock caused by COVID-19 resulted in approximately 7 million elementary and secondary school dropouts. According to separate research, between 2 and 9 percent of children would drop out during the COVID-19 school shutdown (Khan & Ahmed, 2021). It was speculated in the research that children would likely continue to accrue learning deficits even after returning to school, as well as three months of school closure reduces long-term learning by one academic year (Khan & Ahmed, 2021).

Researchers, teachers, legislators, and community leaders continue to be gravely concerned about high school dropout rates, and for good reason (Antoni, 2021) The long list of detrimental quality-of-life outcomes that dropping out of high school is associated with is well-established in the literature, including steady increasing involvement in crime and incarceration, higher unemployment rates, relatively low lifetime earnings, and income tax payment, and increased risk of chronic diseases and mortality (Antoni, 2021). High school dropouts also send a painfully loud message that a system or collection of systems has failed. In previous research, it has been widely assumed that students' decisions to drop out of high school are influenced by the expenditure of time and effort or by a narrow personal outlook (Antoni, 2021).

In addition to its relationship with mental health, there is evidence that a sense of belonging at school influences academic engagement and accomplishment. A major meta-analytic study discovered that students' emotional involvement, including sentiments towards faculty and classmates, as well as a sense of belonging in the

educational institution, influenced their academic accomplishment (Di Malta et al., 2022). Furthermore, successfully creating friends who offered emotional support was associated with student retention, whereas peer connections and a larger feeling of institutional belonging and social integration encouraged adjustment to university and student retention. Degree completion relates to higher class attendance and better academic accomplishment, a stronger sense of effectiveness and competency when studying, more willingness to study, and a greater amount of time committed to learning (Di Malta et al., 2022). Clearly, with school shutdowns due to COVID-19, there were major difficulties for students in finding that emotional connection to the institution, teachers, and classmates.

Chronic absenteeism has been associated with low academic performance, school failure, and dropout rates (Aurini & Davies, 2021). Absenteeism from school tends to exacerbate the consequences of conditions such as disease, mental illness, exposure to domestic abuse, insecure housing, and the need to care for family members. Importantly, the potential equalizing impacts of schools can be neutralized by inconsistent school attendance. Low socioeconomic status children are most likely to have chronic absences, and children living in poverty are most likely to miss three or more school days each month, according to a study conducted in the United States (Aurini & Davies, 2021). Additionally, the distribution of learning supplements given by families, such as excellent preschools, extracurricular activities, and private tutoring, is not uniform. Since the early 1970s, higher socioeconomic status (SES) parents have increased their expenditure on their children's development from four to almost seven times that of lower-income households (Aurini & Davies, 2021).

Thus, school participation helps youth development, and growth in many ways. Increasing amounts of time are spent by teenagers in educational environments. However, the COVID-19 pandemic altered the relationship between adolescents and school by substituting classroom activities with online activities or independent home study. This situation-imposed strain on students' ability to adjust to distance education, self-regulate, and stay organized to pursue school activities from home efficiently, which may have impacted their involvement levels (Núñez-Regueiro et al., 2022). Given that involvement is strongly correlated with educational and psychological results, these decreases in youth involvement may have had detrimental effects. Additionally, COVID-19 affected development in general and may have long-term repercussions comparable to those witnessed in other historical occurrences, such as war, economic catastrophe, or big life events, such as intense health or family problems (Núñez-Regueiro et al., 2022). It is difficult to measure the academic effects of the pandemic, as its interruptions to education also interrupted the evaluation mechanisms used to track students' progress. In all states, annual state exams were canceled for the spring of 2020. Numerous school districts have ceased conducting periodic interim exams meant to determine whether children have mastered grade-level requirements. Even if interim evaluations persisted, many children did not participate, and it seems probable that those who did not participate were the children who were most affected by the pandemic (West & Lake, 2021).

As a result of physical distancing measures taken in response to COVID-19, tertiary education institutions had to change to an emergency online learning style, likely worsening students' academic stressors (Grubic et al., 2020). Based on findings from studies examining the effects of academic disruptions on students, it is reasonable to

hypothesize that students may experience decreased study motivation, increased pressures to learn independently, abandonment of daily routines, and potentially higher dropout rates as a direct result of these measures (Grubic et al., 2020). Thus, by increasing academic stressors in a population with elevated pre-existing stress levels and a potentially reduced ability to rely on typical coping strategies, such as family members who themselves may be experiencing elevated distress, the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed an unprecedented mental health burden on students (Grubic et al., 2020).

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, several school districts shifted to remote teaching within weeks, resulting in the unprecedented broad and sustained application of this approach on a massive scale. Earlier research on remote learning concentrated mostly on skill development in higher education and training programs, as opposed to replacing regular classrooms in pre-school and primary school settings. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, remote learning met previously reported hurdles, including issues with technological availability and poor student participation, particularly for low-income families and children receiving disability services (Colvin et al., 2021).

Parents of children with disabilities were unprepared for distance and home-schooling, which functioned as a further obstacle to inclusive education. This was especially problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic when parents had limited access to education counseling and resources. When schools were closed, parents were frequently expected to continue their children's education at home. In contrast to parents of non-disabled students, who can assist their children's studies using online school lessons or the two platforms mentioned earlier, parents of students with disabilities had

limited educational guidance, as the online lessons of mainstream schools do not include a disability perspective (Jia & Santi, 2021).

Given the diversity of abilities and resources among parents, many were ill-equipped or unable to give the considerable help that certain children required. Concerns have been raised regarding fair access to learning opportunities during school closures considering these differences. Understanding the experiences of children with special education needs during COVID requires a thorough comprehension of the role of parents in at-home learning, as demonstrated by these findings. Studies investigated the perspectives of Canadian parents of children with special education needs about their self-efficacy and school support during the first phase of school closures due to COVID-19 (Whitley et al., 2022). As schools face the prospect of months of continued remote learning and pandemic-related disruptions, these systems, and practices, which have proven crucial for supporting students with disabilities, will be crucial for supporting all students as school systems contend with student disengagement, learning losses, and the severe social, emotional, and mental health impact of the pandemic. In times of crisis, schools frequently disregard the needs of children with disabilities. Previous research determined that the presence of a special education representative on the school leadership team ensures that the needs of students with disabilities are prioritized in school-wide decisions and that school-wide practices are flexible enough to accommodate students with varying needs (McKittrick & Tuchman, 2020).

It is known that in-person education is essential. Schools are essential to child and adolescent development and offer students' academic teaching, nutritious food, and mental health care. In turn, school closures can worsen children's and families'

socioeconomic, economic, and health disparities. As the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved, there is increased recognition of the disproportion impact of school closures on children, particularly vulnerable children, across the nation (Pattison et al., 2021).

Children from more disadvantaged communities that included the lowest socioeconomic percentile, indigenous students, students whose mothers have a secondary degree or less, and those without internet connection had less access to online learning technology and were less likely to be engaged in homework during at-home learning. For instance, 22 percent of learners without online access did not complete any coursework the previous day, as contrasted to 9 percent of learners with internet access and a tablet or computer. Despite these disparities, most learners in the lowest income quartile and those without Internet access continued to engage in remote learning (Asanov et al., 2021b). Since COVID-19 was designated a worldwide public health emergency and pandemic, educational institutions throughout the world were forced to close to limit the spread of the illness. For the seamless operation of the educational process, the new form of teaching was changed from face-to-face to online instruction. This abrupt move generated various issues for students, such as internet access and a lack of resources, limiting their ability to participate more successfully in online learning. Due to the closure of educational institutions, students experienced social alienation, which limited their ability to communicate real-time thoughts, expertise, and information about certain issues (Munir et al., 2021). As students and teachers have transitioned back to in-class learning, further challenges have impacted mental health and learning in the classroom. Teachers are challenged with the task of meeting these student needs, both academically and

emotionally; therefore, schools needed to be equipped to provide teachers with the support they needed for the unique transition.

Biblical Foundations of the Study

COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on students' emotional and mental health, especially as they have transitioned back to in-class learning. Students have been brought back into the classroom to stress and anxiety that have resulted from the various effects of COVID-19. This is changing the dynamics of the classroom, and both students and teachers are shutting down. Some of these emotions that are being faced are anxiety, sadness, fear, and stress. Churches may provide social and psychological resources that relieve anxiety and foster emotions of relaxation and tranquility among their members. Briefly, religious groups provide possibilities for the building of friendships and the pursuit of social activities among individuals who have similar interests (Ellison et al., 2009).

Anxiety can be associated with doubt, this doubt can be associated with the person and even toward God. Throughout the Bible, God gives His people tools to help in a time of need. God gives many examples and situations that can be a form of growth for individuals. Throughout this study issues such as anxiety and depression, stress, fear, family relations, and academic challenges are addressed during and post-COVID- 19. In a time when teachers and students were lacking navigation, trusting God was the only answer. As students are dealing with anxiety, teachers need the tools to help the students find the source of the anxiety. It is hard for students to identify the source of the problem. In 2 Corinthians 4:7-18, the Bible states, we are having trouble, but we are not devastated, bewildered, or despondent. We carry the mortality of Jesus in our bodies to

demonstrate his life to the world. You work for life, while we work for mortality. Believe and communicate with the same spirit of faith, knowing that Jesus will resurrect us and bring us to Himself. This is for your benefit, so that God's goodness may overflow into your lives. (Biblica Inc, 2016, 1 Corinthians 4:7-18). God explains that everyone tends to get overwhelmed, but He is showing His people that in times of anxiety, they can trust in him. During the time of COVID-19, stress levels were on the rise. God brings comfort through his word in Psalms 23: 1-6, The Lord is my guide and gives me peace and direction. He takes me to green fields, calms my mind, and shows me the right way to go. Even if I'm in a dark valley, I won't be afraid of bad things because your rod and staff comfort me. Your kindness and love will always be with me, and I will live in the Lord's house for the rest of my life (Biblica Inc., 2016, Psalms 23: 1-6). God promises complete comfort in dark times, He calms the mind and promises life with Him. God also asks to bring fear to Him and he will give strength and help His children through it. In Romans 8:38-39 we are told that God called you from the ends of the earth, and He chose you. Do not fear or be dismayed. He is with you, and He will strengthen and help you, upholding you with His righteous hand (Biblica Inc., 2016, Isaiah 41:9-10). The Bible does not want us to hold on to negative feelings, 1 Peter 5:7 states, "Give all your worries to Him because He cares for you (Biblica Inc., 2016, 1 Peter 5:7)."

A significant effect of school closures is the widening of educational gaps amongst students. Children from low-income households are less likely to enroll in online classes, spend 30 percent less time learning at home, and have restricted access to educational materials, according to new research from the United Kingdom (Spitzer & Musslick, 2021). According to reports, these discrepancies in learning styles exacerbate

achievement gaps between low-performing and high-performing students (Spitzer &

Musslick, 2021). Given favorable links between socioeconomic status and mathematics

success, as well as better adult earnings, these disparate impacts on the education of

children with varied socioeconomic statuses are alarming, particularly considering Every

Student Succeeds Act (Spitzer & Musslick, 2021), which seeks to give equitable

educational opportunities for low-income Children, minorities, students with weak

language abilities, and those who require special education in the United States. The

results of these studies support the finding that students with a tiny edge in academic

performance continue to excel, but those with a slight disadvantage continue to fall

behind, as documented for reading, vocabulary development, and mathematics (Spitzer &

Musslick, 2021). This phenomenon has been tied to biblical scripture, popularly known

as the Matthew effect — a reference to a biblical declaration, the fact that the affluent

become richer in the Gospel of Matthew can be linked to the interaction between

motivating beliefs and self-regulated learning ability (Spitzer & Musslick, 2021). The

verse that the Matthew effect was based on was, Matthew 25:29, "Everyone who has will

be given more. They will have more than enough. And what about anyone who doesn't

have one? Even what they have will be taken away from them (Biblica Inc., 2016b)." The

fact that the wealthy tend to become increasingly wealthier and the powerful even more

powerful in societies is known as the Matthew effect. The idea of preferred attachment,

which states that highly connected nodes are likely to gain much more linkages in the

future than auxiliary nodes, is closely linked in network research. Success-breads-success

and cumulative advantage both refer to the tendency for advantage to lead to more

advantage (Perc, 2014).

The Bible provides a wealth of insight into the subtleties of the human mind and emotions. Consider three distinct responses to a strong storm at sea to summarize the book's message about stress. Jonah, who was in denial and fleeing God, was in a deep sleep below the ship's deck, Jesus' 12 disciples panicked, and the apostle Paul replied with calm and deeds of kindness. The life-threatening storm condition induced anxiety in everyone. However, the responses varied according to the individual's heart. Jonah was satisfied in his resistance, the disciples behaved in disbelief, and the apostle Paul believed in God and attempted to practically love others, according to the tales. Paul's experience indicates that we need not be at the mercy of circumstances, even if we are unable to alter the stormy environment. The Spirit of God inside us empowers us to choose obedience with pleasure and serenity as in the verse Hebrews 4:12 (NIV) (Rice, 2015). Put God's wisdom against man's cunning, his love and mercy against man's malice and cruelty, his power against man's weakness, God's truth, omniscience, and righteousness against man's slanders and lies, and God's promises against man's threats, and if you're still afraid of people, you need to admit that you don't psalms believe in God (Rice, 2015).

The Bible is full of the influence of a teacher. In John chapter 3, Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, he says to Jesus we know that you are a teacher that comes from God. He expresses that no one can do these things unless God is with him. The Bible then goes on to tell us in John 3:16-18, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only

Son (Biblica Inc., 2016, John 3:16-18)." Due to the environment-altering effects of COVID-19 regulations, it is possible for a general rise or fall in religious devotion to differentially appear in a variety of religious behaviors. For instance, unless people can maintain a sense of belonging in their community, COVID-19 social distancing rules and regulations surrounding gathering for spiritual services may make it particularly difficult to engage in more extrinsic religious behaviors like going to church and conversing about religion with others (Leonhardt et al., 2023).

Summary

Teachers play a significant role in supporting children's mental health, but they often feel unclear about their role. Schools are an integral element of the community's infrastructure and can play a crucial role in assisting children to reestablish a feeling of stability and safety (Le Brocque et al., 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruption to schools, disrupting systems for moral, social, personal, and professional assistance and encouragement (Bubb & Jones, 2020). This study examined the importance of mental health training for teachers returning to the classroom following the COVID-19 pandemic. It examined the teachers' perspective in determining the importance of whether and how mental health training would have been beneficial for supporting students. There is a significant gap in research on the importance of training teachers on how to support mental health. The prevalence of depression and anxiety in teenagers before the COVID-19 pandemic was 2.2% and 2.6%, respectively (Li & Leung, 2020). Research now being conducted after the pandemic has shown a significant increase in young people's mental health symptoms, such as decreased academic success and frequent absences from class. Early research suggests that social isolation policies

were implemented, and more than one-third of adolescents reported significantly higher levels of loneliness and less positive well-being than their parents (Ginsburg et al., 2021). School mental health professionals have been essential in helping to support students' transition back to school and coping with the effects of the pandemic. Schools will need to find creative ways to help teachers in this role (Weisbrot & Ryst, 2020).

As many as 25% of students showed signs of anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic, with school interruptions as their greatest concern (Li & Leung, 2020). Additionally, difficulties in emotional processing are associated with psychopathologies and poor health outcomes, and individuals with issues in emotion management may have maladaptive responses to worries associated with COVID-19 (Fedorenko et al., 2021). Studies have found detrimental effects on the mental health of students due to health-related worries, uncertainties, and academic repercussions. Chinese college students experienced a stress prevalence of 35% during the acute period of the outbreak, while sadness rose from 22% to 26% and anxiety rose from 11% to 15%. Mixed-methods research of 195 US college students revealed 71% experienced greater stress and worry associated with the outbreak (Tran et al., 2022). Behavior difficulties in children are highly stable from early life through adolescence (Sun et al., 2022).

The pandemic has had a significant impact on both student and teacher mental health, with stress from the shift to online instruction being followed by symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sleep disruption (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Teachers are often expected to offer students and their family's instruction, social-emotional advice, and resources without appropriate support from administration and leadership, leading to frustration and exhaustion (Drescher et al., 2022a). Mental health-specific training and

assistance may be able to assist teachers in addressing the extra difficulties posed by mental health issues (Ekornes, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused schools to shift to online learning, which negatively impacted adolescents' mental, physical, and emotional health. Since returning to school there have been declines in how students apply themselves in class, leading to poor grades and negative classroom behaviors. Teachers have reported these difficulties to be problematic and stressful, leading to teacher shortages (Schaffer et al., 2021). Schools are an important resource for promoting mental health. School is intended to provide a safe environment for children to learn how to interact with adults and peers. Behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement are three components of students' dedication and participation in school and learning (Pöysä et al., 2018). Schools should focus on developing students' social-emotional competence, character, health, and civic involvement, and invest in resources to help children's mental health and well-being (Greenberg, 2017, as cited in Yu et al., 2022).

This research looked at how teachers feel about getting help and resources to help students' mental health after the pandemic. The goal is to provide information to help teachers build their confidence in dealing with the mental health of students following traumatic events. Schools need to be equipped and ready to meet the mental health needs of students, especially following the unique challenges of the pandemic. This research was an exploratory study that will lead to further research on how best to equip teachers with the tools to help address the mental health of students.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Overview

The purpose of this exploratory, qualitative case study was to examine teachers' lived experiences of returning to school following the COVID-19 pandemic, including their perspectives related to effectively meeting the mental health needs of students. Students had entered back into the classroom, many of them unable to cope with their thoughts and feelings, and teachers were being left to deal with students' mental health issues. Teachers had not received the essential training needed to help students cope (Alexander et al., 2022). Loss of assistance and resources, absence of control over instructional decisions and curriculum, school performance and motivation issues, and lack of peer or colleague respect were major teacher concerns (Drescher et al., 2022). When conversations about resuming in-person training began, many of these issues were also voiced, and they were exacerbated by safety and well-being anxieties and instructional style problems (Drescher et al., 2022). Instead, these issues were being handled by principals as discipline issues, and students were not able to be in the classroom to learn. Training teachers in mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, fear, and stress would have helped students be able to remain in class as well as build relationships and trust. This study will employ face-to-face interviews to determine if mental health training for teachers would better equip them to assist students' mental health needs post-pandemic.

Research Questions

This study focused on the importance of mental health training for teachers since COVID-19 to help deal with the emotional state of students. Due to the shutdown,

students were required to learn virtually, and research shows that there has been a decline in the mental health of students since that time (Frajerman et al., 2022). This research discussed and examined these questions:

Q1: How do teachers describe their experiences in the classroom with student mental health after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q2: How do teachers describe the differences in student needs following the pandemic as compared to before the pandemic?

Q3: How do teachers describe what current support, resources and training are in place to help meet students' mental health needs after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q4: Do teachers perceive that they are well-trained and equipped to handle the mental health needs of students after returning to school following the pandemic?

Q5: How do teachers describe what training might have been helpful to them to address mental health needs when returning to school?

Q6: How would you describe what training might have been helpful to you to address mental health needs when returning to school?

Research Design

This study aimed to explore real-world lived experiences of teachers upon returning to the classroom following the COVID-19 pandemic, including their perspectives related to effectively meeting the mental health needs of students, and how well, or how little, they were equipped to meet these needs. Qualitative research is a method of investigating and gaining a greater understanding of real-world issues. Qualitative research collects the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals. At

its foundation, qualitative research asks unqualified open-ended questions, such as 'how' and 'why,' that are difficult to quantify. As a result of the open-ended characteristics of the study at hand, qualitative research designs are typically not as linear as quantitative designs. One of the benefits of qualitative research is its capacity to describe difficult-to-quantify processes and patterns of human behavior (Tenny et al., 2022).

In social and health research, one-on-one interviews are frequently employed as a data-gathering technique (Ryan et al., 2009). Individual interviews are a useful tool for learning about people's perspectives, understandings, and experiences with a certain issue and may help with comprehensive data gathering. However, the interview involves more than just a two-person dialogue and calls for the interviewer to have extensive knowledge and experience (Ryan et al., 2009). Depending on their new ideas and theories, interviews can take a variety of forms (Ryan et al., 2009). Case study research entails an in-depth examination of a single unit to comprehend a wider class of (similar) units seen at a particular moment in time or over a certain time (Baškarada, 2014). As such, case studies provide the researcher the chance to get a comprehensive picture of the study topic and may aid in articulating, comprehending, and explaining a research problem or circumstance (Baškarada, 2014).

Case studies were one of the first types of research to be used in the field of qualitative methodology. Case studies have been widely utilized in the social sciences and have proven to be particularly beneficial in practice-oriented professions (such as education, management, public administration, and social work). However, despite its long history and broad usage, case study research has gotten little consideration among the numerous social science research approaches (Starman, 2013). A case study will give

a close in-depth approach to examining teachers' experiences and perceptions of helping students with their mental health post-pandemic.

Participants

This study assumed that a minimum of 10 participants was sufficient for this qualitative case study, due to the number of teachers working in the school. Typically, qualitative research methods employ a lower sample size, between 5-50, than quantitative research approaches because qualitative research methods are frequently concerned with gaining an in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon or are oriented on the how and why of a specific issue or process (Dworkin, 2012). Considering the phenomenological nature of this study, purposive sampling is being applied with particular consideration to scope and subject matter of the study and the value of the expected data from the interviewees. The researcher believes that, given the specific nature of the study, saturation can be achieved by including a minimum of 10 participants with quality responses to 6 in-depth interview questions (Bekele & Ago, 2022). Saturation is a fundamental premise for determining the size of the sample in qualitative research, however, there is a limited methodological study on the characteristics that affect saturation (Hennink et al., 2016). The participants included 12 teachers from a private Christian school, which consisted of elementary, middle, and high school teachers that have taught pre- and post-COVID-19. The inclusive criteria consisted of (a) must have taught two years before the COVID-19 shutdown, (b) must have taught during the shutdown, (c) returned to in-person classroom teaching, and (d) at least 25 years of age. The exclusion criteria consisted of (a) under the age of 25, (b) certified through the Association of Christian Teachers and Schools (ACTS), and (c) no gaps in teaching between the years of 2018- 2022.

Study Procedure

Procedures

Upon IRB approval from Liberty University's Research Department, the

participant recruitment and data collection process began. An email was sent to the

principal to receive approval to proceed with the research (see Appendix B). Participants

were recruited via their work e-mail with a flyer attached explaining the research and the

criteria to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Participants that respond through

email agreeing to the study were asked the following qualifying questions:

Q1: Are you a full- time, 1st through 12th grade teacher at a Christian school?

Q2: Are you over the age of 25?

Q3: Have there been any gaps in teaching from 2018-2022?

Q4: Are you certified through the Association of Christian Teachers and Schools

(ACTS)

The data collected from initial questions; the participants that answered yes to all

the questions were scheduled with an appointment for the interview from a variety of

times offered by the researcher. Informed consent was signed at the beginning of the

interview. The informed consent (see Appendix D) comprised information about the

study's total voluntariness, the flexibility of withdrawal, and the confidentiality of all data

and responses. Participation was entirely voluntary, and volunteers were not reimbursed

for their time. Participants were made aware of the risk associated with the study. Risks

included the potential for mental stress from the impact COVID-19 had on the classroom

environment and learning. Participants were also provided information about various

local resources they could engage with should any of these risks be realized, including

various church-based counseling programs and centers. The informed consent also addressed the confidentiality of the study's records. A cloud-based file storage service was set up (this researcher utilized Dropbox) and only the researcher had secure access to the study documents. After written documentation was scanned it was shredded.

Instrumentation and Measurements

There are several various interview formats used in qualitative research, including unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews. Unstructured interviews resemble conversations in which the researcher and subject are given a subject but are not given predetermined questions or answers. The interview was conducted in the manner indicated by the participant's replies. In a structured interview, questions are predetermined, and the researcher follows the interview guide exactly (Baumbusch, 2010). The participants took part in a 30-45-minute audio-recorded, semi-structured, one-on-one interview in a discreet safe venue, such as a private counseling office in a Christian school. Semi-structured interviews are the most popular sort of interviews used in qualitative research and incorporate the use of planned questions with the researcher's ability to request an explanation. A framework for conducting interviews is created to collect comparable sorts of information from all participants and to establish a feeling of order (Doody & Noonan, 2013). For a semi-structured interview, it's essential to focus on relationships and practice your teaching skills. Skills include: (1) figuring out the objective and nature of the study; (2) finding participants; (3) thinking about ethical problems; (4) planning technical details; (5) making an interview guide; (6) building trust and a connection; (7) performing the interview; (8) taking notes and thinking about them; (9) analyzing the data; (10) showing that the research is reliable; and (11) writing up the

results in a paper or report (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interview can be fluid, with open-ended questioning and the opportunity to explore spontaneously arising topics. Depending on the purpose of the interview, the researcher may alter the sequence and language of the questions and ask new questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The participants were asked the following questions during the interview:

Q1: How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health before the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q2: How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q3: How would you describe the differences in student needs following the pandemic as compared to before the pandemic?

Q4: How would you describe what current support, resources and training are in place to help meet students' mental health needs after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q5: Do you perceive that you are well-trained and equipped to handle the mental health needs of students after returning to school following the pandemic?

Q6: How would you describe what training might have been helpful to you to address mental health needs when returning to school?

All the interviews were recorded to provide accurate records for the research. The initial phase in data analysis is the representation of auditory and visual data in written form, which is an interpretative process that involves making judgments. Transcribing decisions are influenced by the method of learning behind a given research effort; hence, there are several methods to record the same data. Researchers must choose the amount

of transcribing detail necessary for a specific project and how data will be conveyed in writing (Bailey, 2008).

The interviews were recorded then transcribed using the Transcribe function in Microsoft Word. These files were then be saved in a password protected cloud storage area (Dropbox for this researcher as previously stated) that to which only the researcher had access. Each interview was meticulously analyzed after it is completed, and if the researcher was unclear about a response, clarification was requested. The identities of the participants were be used in the research or interviews.

Credibility and Dependability

Credibility and dependability are critical to the establishment of trustworthiness in qualitative studies. Credibility is the degree to which the researcher's interpretation and presentation of participant perspectives and data are accurate (Cope, 2013). Possible threats to the credibility of this study include researcher bias, interpretation validity and descriptive validity. This researcher addressed researcher bias by utilizing a minimum of two pilot interviews. The purpose of these pilot interviews was to allow the researcher to practice the interview and potentially identify and mitigate possible areas of bias that may be present. The researcher may then adjust to mitigate this prior to conducting the actual research rather than adjusting in the middle of the process and therefore tainting the data set (Chenail, 2016). This researcher considered this inherent challenge when performing the interviews and analysis and made every attempt to ensure personal bias was removed from consideration.

Member checking is also a mechanism for aiding in establishing credibility (Rolfe, 2006). The researcher applied member checking by ensuring that at the

conclusion of each interview, after notes and recordings had been reviewed, these notes were reviewed directly with the participants to ensure that the researcher had not only correctly documented the interviews, but also correctly analyzed the data. Interpretation validity, ensuring the interviewee's meaning, rather than the interviewer's meaning, is recorded as part of the study, was addressed by this researcher through the member checking process. Member checking was also utilized by this researcher to address the threat of descriptive validity, ensuring that elements of the interview that the researcher was unable to record, such as body language or other non-verbal elements that may not have been captured in the recording, were addressed to the best extent possible.

Credibility can also be established through the utilization of clear documentation for auditing purposes (Tobin & Begley, 2004). This researcher established credibility through a structured process that included the following documented artifacts for each participant interview:

a) A single, established set of qualification criteria, ensuring only qualified individuals are included as participants,

b) A clear set of open-ended questions that will be consistent for each interviewee, but allow for variance in follow up-questions,

c) An audio recording of each interview,

d) A transcript of each interview derived from the audio recording,

e) Clear notes and analysis by the researcher with clearly marked, non-name inclusive identification of which interviewee the notes are associated with.

The combination of audio recording, notes and analysis, transcription, and member checking, ensured accuracy and provide credibility to the study.

Dependability entails the evaluation of the study's results, interpretation, and suggestions by the participants in such a way that each is backed up by the data collected from the participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Dependability of a study is centered around the ability of the study to be duplicated, or repeated, with generally the same findings. This researcher utilized an inquiry, or external, audit to ensure dependability. This audit was performed by a party who was not a participant in the initial data collection, possibly the department chair. The external auditor reviewed all aspects of the study, primarily focusing on the structured artifact set previously identified, to ensure the findings and analysis performed by the researcher are justified, and where necessary provided appropriate challenges to the researcher for consideration. This process, together with the clear steps identified in the study procedures, provided the study with an appropriate amount of dependability.

Data Analysis

The meaning of a data set is derived from analyses of qualitative data, which may contain various elements. Since qualitative data analysis is frequently associated with a particular technique, theoretical perspective, research tradition, and/or topic, it carries a variety of connotations. There are several practices that frequently (but not always) remain true across qualitative approaches to analysis, such as the following: incorporating codes into a set of field observations or interview notes; noting in the margins any reflections or other comments; sorting and filtering these resources to look for similar words, connections between variables, themes, patterns, and clear contrasts across groupings; identifying these commonalities and differences, separating these patterns and processes, and applying them in the field during the subsequent round of data gathering;

progressively developing a limited selection of generalizations that address the trends identified; (Lester et al., 2020). For a researcher whose objective is to find solutions to practical problems and social situations with immediate global implications, the capacity to analyze qualitative data rapidly and exhaustively is of the utmost importance. In addition, the resources of applied researchers may be limited, and their requirements for data evaluation may include rapid dissemination and implementation of the results to improve the living, learning, and working conditions of underserved areas (Watkins, 2017).

The researcher (referred to henceforth in this section as the interviewer) organized data collected during an interview, such as session notes and recordings, for analysis. To avoid analyst bias, the interviewer provided information based on the interviewee's response data. The interviewer must keep in mind that some respondents may be unable or unwilling to provide a complete response, that they may be exceedingly hesitant, and that they may have their thoughts and objectives that are not always conducive to revealing the whole truth (Diefenbach, 2008). To be more exact: The interviewee may engage in deliberate attempts to deceive the interviewer. An example of this tactic is the socially acceptable replying attitude, which occurs when the interviewee predominantly provides the answers, they believe are expected of them, the answers the interviewer wants to hear, which are viewed as the socially acceptable responses. The interviewee attempts to share only information that appears plausible, appropriate, and sufficient, rather than what they truly believe. Typically, political-minded actors are the interviewees who utilize this tactic (Diefenbach, 2008).

The primary emphasis of the first stage is the alignment of research questions and interview questions. This alignment can make interview questions more useful in the research procedure (by affirming their intent) and ensure that they are essential to the study (by eradicating those that are not) by ensuring their alignment with the research objectives. People have complex experiences that do not readily disentangle in front of a researcher; consequently, a researcher must ask thoughtful and pertinent clarification questions. In contrast, assisting participants in describing their experiences requires perseverance, attentive listening, and purposeful follow-up (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Guiding a discussion and utilizing conversation and response in order to advance a query and elicit more detailed information from an interviewee requires deliberate thought and effort. In phase two, the researcher created an inquiry-driven conversation through an interview protocol that included: a) interview questions that are not identical to the research questions; b) an arrangement that follows the social conventions of everyday conversation; c) a variety of questions; and d) a plan of action with probable follow-up and immediate questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Through phases 1 and 2, the researcher developed an interview technique that was communicative and likely to elicit data pertinent to the study's research objectives. Step three was concluded when the researcher had received feedback on the created interview protocol. To enhance the reliability and credibility of the interview protocol as a research instrument, input was solicited. Feedback can inform the researcher of how well interviewees comprehend the questions and whether their comprehension is consistent with the researcher's expectations or hypotheses. Several exercises can provide insight into interview procedures, but the following two are particularly useful: Examining the

interview procedure and protocol through a think-aloud exercise that requires attentive reading (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

After completing the first three phases, the researcher successfully designed san interview procedure consistent with the study's objectives. The methodology entailed conversational yet inquiry-driven inquiries. The researcher reviewed each query for readability, simplicity, and answerability. The researcher also received feedback on the questions through thorough perusal of the procedure and think-aloud exercises. The researcher was then prepared to evaluate the enhanced interview procedure on individuals who closely match the characteristics of the study's sample (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Narrative analysis is distinguished from other qualitative methods by its emphasis on recollected experiences that reflect a complete life story or elements of it. By analyzing how people think and speak about their experiences, the researcher obtains a comprehensive understanding of how people interpret their lives. Notably, when using this method, the researcher distinguishes between narrative truth and historical or objective truth. Thus, the emphasis is on constructed narratives of experiences, i.e., how individuals subjectively experience, perceive, and comprehend life events, as opposed to factual records of what actually or genuinely transpired (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015). To analyze, the researcher read the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with them, then emphasized significant aspects of the participant's narrative and identify key points. As the researcher examined the data, bias was uncovered and mitigated. Extensive data was extracted from follow-up interview data. Once all data had been examined by the researcher, the data was merged to identify common themes and a narrative was created based on those themes.

Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations

One delimitation of this study is its scope. This study used an explorative, qualitative case study, examining teachers' experiences of returning to school following the COVID-19 pandemic, including their perspectives on meeting the mental health requirements of students effectively. Another delimitation of this study was the participant criteria which must be met to qualify for the study. Participants were required to be full- time, 1st through 12th-grade teachers at a Christian school, over the age of 25, have no gaps in teaching from 2018-2022, and be certified through the Association of Christian Teachers and Schools. This research chose a Christian school with hopes that interviewing teachers with a Biblical background and a sense of faith will deliver a focused result on how that faith impacts dealing with mental health challenges in the school environment. This study ran for about 3 weeks. Data collection can also be delimited; a recruitment pamphlet summarizing the research and participation requirements was emailed to the workplaces of potential participants. To ensure the confidentiality of the interviews, they were recorded, transcribed using Microsoft Word's transcribe function, and saved in a password-protected Dropbox subdirectory only accessible to the researcher. Each interview was meticulously recorded, and if the researcher had any concerns about a participant's response, he or she asked them for clarification.

Potential limitations for this study included teachers' mental health status. Stress hurts teachers' personal lives, which can lead to a decrease in life happiness, as well as their professional careers, which can lead to reduced work dedication and satisfaction, as well as a decline in student accomplishment. Stress is linked to weariness and

professional burnout. Furthermore, stress hurts teachers' health, increasing the likelihood of psychiatric and behavioral illnesses (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021a). Another limitation was teachers' self-report questionnaires. Some teachers may have had a lack of classroom management which could appear as student behaviors. Classroom management can be described broadly as the actions that teachers take to establish an environment that promotes and encourages both academics and socialization. The method stresses prevention through planning and integrates key components of classroom organization, administration, and discipline. Effective adaptive classroom management includes monitoring, low-threshold interventions, and rule clarity to enable effective time utilization and maximize the quantity of actively employed learning time and learning success (Scherzinger & Wettstein, 2022).

Assumptions in this research were that teachers will answer in the same manner. Assume that all the teachers answered the questions honestly. Assume that all teachers did not want to receive help in their classroom and with their students.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the mental health needs of students and the impact it had on the classroom since COVID-19. This qualitative case study used an interview process to ask teachers questions about the classroom since returning to in-person learning.   `

The first step was to complete the online survey answering the following questions (1) how teachers describe their experiences with returning to school after the COVID-19 shutdown; (2) how teachers described what training might have been helpful to them when returning to school; (3) how teachers described their need for mental health

training as they transitioned back to school falling the COVID-19 shutdown. Secondly,

there was an interview process to discuss qualification and eligibility questions.

Individuals that met the criteria of the study participated in an interview lasting 30-45

minutes. During the interview, the participants were asked open-ended questions, and all

data was recorded and transcribed word for word. Lastly, the data was compared and

analyzed by looking for similar themes and comparisons across the questions and

establishing conclusions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this exploratory, qualitative case study was to examine teachers' lived experiences of returning to school following the COVID-19 pandemic, including their perspectives related to effectively meeting the mental health needs of students. The ability to better analyze and understand the areas of support and training needed for teachers after returning to the classroom following a traumatic event is critical. A researcher may perform an exploratory case study on an emerging technology to better understand its possible influence on society. The researcher obtains data from a variety of sources, including research interviews, observations, and documents, and then analyzes it using approaches such as grounded theory or content analysis. An exploratory case study's finding might be utilized for developing new research topics, theories, or policy recommendations (Hassan, 2024).

In this chapter, the results of twelve interviews are rendered with the goal of answering the following research questions:

Q1: How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health before the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q2: How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q3: How would you describe the differences in student needs following the pandemic as compared to before the pandemic?

Q4: How would you describe what current support, resources and training are in place to help meet students' mental health needs after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q5: Do you perceive that you are well-trained and equipped to handle the mental health needs of students after returning to school following the pandemic?

Q6: How would you describe what training might have been helpful to you to address mental health needs when returning to school?

Twelve one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data, resulting in the identification of four distinct themes. Twelve subthemes were identified within those overarching themes. All themes were derived from the unique experiences shared by each participant.

Descriptive Results

The population of the participants in this study included 12 teachers from a private Christian school, which consisted of elementary, middle, and high school teachers who have taught pre- and post-COVID-19. Participants were recruited via their work e-mail, which included a Flyer detailing the research and the requirements for participation in the study. Participants answered by email, saying yes to the following qualifying questions: Are you a full- time, 1st through 12th-grade teacher at a Christian school? Are you over the age of 25? Have there been any gaps in teaching from 2018-2022? Are you certified through the Association of Christian Teachers and Schools (ACTS)? Based on the information gathered from the preliminary questions, participants who selected "yes" for every question were asked to arrange an appointment for the interview at one of the several times the researcher suggested.

This study assumed that the use of a purposeful sampling strategy generated a sample of educators from a private Christian school who have a background in classroom teaching pre-COVID-19, virtual teaching during COVID-19, and then back in the classroom post-COVID-19. The informed consent was comprised of information about the study's total voluntariness, the flexibility of withdrawal, and the confidentiality of all data and responses. The participants engaged in a 30-minute audio-recorded, semi-structured, one-on-one interview at a private counseling office located in a discrete venue within a Christian school. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Transcribe feature of Microsoft Word. The files are stored in a password-protected cloud storage location that only the researcher may access. Every interview was thoroughly analyzed.

At the time of the research, all participants had returned to teaching in the conventional face-to-face setting. Table 4.1 below shows the number of participants and their teaching level.

Table 4.1

Teaching levels of Study Participants

Level Teaching	Number of Participants*(n)*
Elementary School	6
Middle School	3
High School	3

Note. N= 12

Table 4.2 displays the participants' years of teaching experience. One of the criteria for participating in the study is the individuals must have been teaching before 2018, which would be five or more years of teaching experience.

Table 4.2

Teaching years of Study Participants

Years Teaching	Number of Participants *(n)*
5-15	5
16-25	4
26-40	3

N=12

The study included a population of 12 teachers now employed at a private

Christian school who were teaching prior to the 2018-2019 school year. Every participant

scheduled a one-on-one interview with a researcher, which took place in a private setting

in the researcher's office.

Purposeful sampling is commonly employed in qualitative research to pick

specific cases that are rich in information relating to the topic being studied (Palinkas et

al., 2013). This study employed a purposive sampling technique to select educators from

a private Christian school with experience in classroom teaching before COVID-19,

virtual teaching during COVID-19, and returning to classroom teaching after COVID-19.

Study Findings

Data Analysis Procedure

The following are the essential components of a case study design: (a) the study's

purpose; (b) the type of research conducted, such as exploratory, explanatory, or

descriptive; (c) research questions; (d) the study of one case or multiple cases, depending

on the purpose, research questions, and the availability of resources in terms of money,

time, and manpower; (e) the epistemological underpinnings that guide the case study's

direction in the field; (f) a review of the literature; (g) data collection; (h) methods of

gathering data adopted; (i) data analysis; and (j) the presentation of the data clearly and

cohesively that can further our understanding (Priya, 2020). Interviews are essential sources of information and the main data source for case study research because they allow researchers to acquire case participants' viewpoints and interpretations of actions and occurrences. Interviews are valuable for comprehending intricate situations by exploring the different ways individuals see, interpret, and influence their reactions to specific issues (Subudhi & Mishra, 2019).

Preparation of the Data

Upon reaching the private researcher's office, the study participants were assigned numerical identifiers, ranging from 1 to 12, to ensure anonymity and facilitate organization during the interview process. The interview materials, comprising of audio recordings and transcripts, were labeled using these unique participant numbers and securely stored on a cloud-based platform, specifically Dropbox. The interviews were conducted and recorded using Microsoft Word software, which also facilitated the transcription process.

The participants were first informed about the interview procedure and were subsequently asked to provide their consent by signing a consent form. Once the consent was acquired, the process of recording and transcribing was explained to them. A recording mechanism was positioned between the researcher and the participant, after which the interview commenced.

Upon concluding the interview, the recording was ceased, and the researcher promptly selected the transcribe button on the recording mechanism to generate the transcript. Then the researcher conducted a preliminary review of the transcript while the

participant was still present in the room. This review aimed to ensure that all research questions had been accurately transcribed.

Following this initial review, the participant was invited to review the transcript for accuracy. It is noteworthy that none of the participants expressed any concerns or problems with the transcription. Once the participants had completed the review, the researcher dismissed them from the room, concluding the interview session. The researcher then reviewed the transcripts in private while listening to the recording to examine whether the participants' inquiries had adequately addressed each question within their responses, thereby determining the need for follow-up interviews. While doing this review, the researcher also corrected grammatical errors, punctuation, and typos made by the transcription software. Out of the twelve participants, five necessitated a follow-up interview, as per the researcher's assessment. To uphold the principle of confidentiality, the transcripts of each participant's interview were systematically categorized and securely stored with a password.

To ensure the credibility and dependability of the study, this process upheld, to the fullest extent possible, the validation of the accuracy of the transcripts (i.e., confirmation), making of necessary adjustments (i.e., modification; fixing typos, grammatical errors, etc.), and verification of the content to align with the participants' responses (i.e., verification).

Data Analysis

To prevent researcher bias, two pilot interviews were conducted. The pilot interviews serve to enable the researcher to practice the interview and to recognize and address potential biases that may exist. With a decade of experience as a school counselor

at a private Christian school, holding a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in counseling psychology, the researcher was well-versed in recognizing behaviors linked to mental health. Consequently, the researcher was aware of the profound effect that COVID-19 has had on the mental well-being of students. The objective of this research was to get insight into the viewpoint and firsthand encounters of teachers on mental health issues within their classrooms. The research questions aimed to assist teachers in identifying pre and post COVID-19 behaviors and investigating what strategies they would have found advantageous in navigating through these uncertainties. The researcher assumes that the teachers are observing the same mental health behaviors in the classroom as the researcher is witnessing during sessions with students. An inherent bias of the researcher lies in the fact that the data is gathered exclusively from colleagues within the same educational institution.

Upon concluding the two pilot interviews conducted at the researcher's office, it was observed that the office provided a private setting and all the technology functioned effectively. Both interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Word. The transcriptions were reviewed by a team member for accuracy and then securely stored in a cloud storage space protected by a password (Dropbox).

Pilot Interviews

Q1: How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health before the COVID-19 shutdown?

Pilot 1- The students didn't share much and went on with their normal day-to-day life.

Pilot 2- Students maintained good social skills and had pretty good resilience.

Q2: How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Pilot 1- Staff could tell a difference, students felt like they could talk about how they feel because everyone was in the same boat.

Pilot 2- Students do not have the resiliency or stamina in social emotional situations, they struggle to stick and work through it. Students seem deeply troubled.

Q3: How would you describe the differences in student needs following the pandemic as compared to before the pandemic?

Pilot 1- Students needed a lot of affirmation, they wanted to know if what they are doing is right. Students needed constant encouragement, they needed everything affirmed.

Pilot 2- Students are far mor needy and need support in basic tasks. Issues that used to be small are now much larger.

Q4: How would you describe what current support, resources and training are in place to help meet students' mental health needs after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Pilot 1- More training is needed but not sure what training, because no one knew what we were stepping into. Probably training how we grow after being shut off from the world.

Pilot 2- The school has implemented social skills classes, also, having a full-time counselor to support the students. Teachers are noticing students are two years behind emotionally.

Q5: Do you perceive that you are well-trained and equipped to handle the mental health needs of students after returning to school following the pandemic?

Pilot 1- No.

Pilot 2- No, we have deeper issues than before the COVID-19 shutdown.

Q6: How would you describe what training might have been helpful to you to address mental health needs when returning to school?

Pilot 1- Training that would have been helpful is learning how to help students process and navigate their feelings or social isolations. Training in how to deal with the low maturity in the classroom.

Pilot 2- Training on how we can better support our students.

Mitigate Bias

To mitigate potential bias, the researcher took specific measures in conducting the study. Two pilot interviews were conducted where they positioned themselves opposite the participants to ensure balanced interaction. Additionally, the computer that was recording the interviews was placed to capture the voices of both parties, helping to ensure accurate recording of the conversation is possible. Upon completion of each interview, both the participant and the researcher took part in transcript analysis. This process served as an additional step in reducing bias as it not only allowed both parties to review the content and verify its accuracy but helped to provide a fair representation of the interview data, avoiding any potential researcher bias.

Coding

The process of analyzing qualitative data, commonly known as "coding," involves a step-by-step approach. During this process, researchers assign codes - short representations - to capture the key features of the main ideas conveyed by participants in a qualitative study through their responses (Clarke et al., 2021). The researcher of this study applied three rounds of coding to establish the emergent themes.

The initial coding phase implemented structured coding techniques. Structured coding involves the process of categorizing and organizing research data based on predetermined research questions or specific topics. It allows for the systematic analysis of a large collection of semi-structured data by breaking it down into smaller, more manageable segments (Johnson et al., 2010). The researcher evaluated the responses to each interview question. During the assessment, the researcher identified and extracted phrases that directly addressed the intended meaning of the question. These phrases were grouped together for further analysis. During this phase of the analysis, only responses that directly addressed the question under investigation were considered.

The second round of coding applied an inductive coding approach. The primary goal of the inductive approach is to facilitate the emergence of research findings from raw data, without being bound by structured methodologies (Thomas, 2006). In this round, the researcher reviewed the phrases from the first round of coding and identified some key words or ideas that stood out from the phrases. The initial key words and ideas were isolation, anxiety, fear, mental health, COVID-19, conduct, communication, interaction, and stability. The key words and ideas were then divided into similar groups based on their respective contexts, resulting in four emerging themes: range of emotions, educational training, social connections, and behavioral challenges. The key words and ideas then were analyzed for focus and context within these groupings, from which the twelve sub-themes emerged, with conduct expanding to behaviors and three different types of issues: anger, academic, and conduct.

The third and final round of the analysis applied deductive coding. In deductive coding, a top-down approach to coding is utilized. This involves creating a structure with

a set of codes, which can be derived from research questions, an existing research framework, or theory. As the researcher reviews the data, relevant excerpts are assigned to the codes in your structure (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). To accomplish this, the researcher conducted a re-review of the interview data, in context of the established themes and sub-themes, or codes, to identify any data not included in round one which warranted inclusion within any of the sub-themes.

Emerging Themes

Several themes and subthemes emerged during the analytical process. Table 4.3 displays the four main themes: (1) range of emotions, (2) educational training, (3) social connections, and (4) behavioral challenges that emerged from the interviews. Twelve subthemes also emerged: (1) stable, (2) needy, (3) anxiety/fear, (4) mental health, (5) behaviors, (6) COVID-19, (7) isolations, (8) interactions, (9) communication, (10) anger issues, (11) academic issues, (12) conduct issues. These are also displayed in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3

Themes, Subthemes and Frequency

Themes	Subthemes	Frequency
Range of Emotions	Stable	P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P10
	Anxiety/Fear	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
	Needy	P1, P2, P9, P10, P11, P12
Educational Training	Mental Health	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12
	Behaviors	P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P10, P11
	COVID-19	P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P9, P12

Social Connections	Isolation	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P10
	Interaction	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12
	Communication	P2, P3, P4, P6, P9, P10, P12
Behavioral Challenges	Anger Issues	P3, P4, P6, P10, P11, P12
	Academic Issues	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12
	Conduct Issues	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12

Range of Emotions

Participant responses indicated significant observations of a wide range of emotional and behavioral transformations in students before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions elicited diverse responses. Stability, driven by engagement, was a clear sub-theme, with certain participants reflecting on the level of students' engagement before the pandemic while noting the perceived lack of stability upon returning post-pandemic. Other respondents reported a noticeable surge in anxiety and neediness after returning to the classroom post-pandemic. These findings underscore the significant impact of the pandemic on students' emotional well-being and behavior, necessitating a closer examination of the support systems and strategies in place to address these evolving needs.

Stability. Question 1 stands in some level of contrast to the other five questions, as it looks at pre-pandemic situations, while the other questions all focus on realities after the pandemic had begun. This question asked participants how they would describe their experiences in the classroom with student mental health before the COVID-19 shutdown. The common sub-theme of stability stood out, driven by key words such as typical and

engaged. Participant 8 described most students as being fully engaged. Participants 2 and 7 both echoed this opinion of engagement with Participant 2 agreeing with the general feeling of student engagement, adding that they "were very happy in general." Similarly, Participant 7 described students before the shutdown as "more engaged, eager" and "self-starters". Participant 10 reported that mentally the students were "well-adjusted." The response from Participant 4 indicated that student behavior was "typical", based on pre-pandemic norms, for "middle school aged kids." The response of Participant 1 focused more on the relationship between engagement and stability, noting that "students were more attentive", believing in the best of who they were and exhibiting less self-doubt. In contrast, but in the same theme, Participant 3 noted in response to Question 3, referencing differences in student needs post-pandemic, that students "were not as confident."

Anxiety/Fear. Responses to several questions provided glimpses into the sub-theme of anxiety. Question 3 sought to identify differences in students' needs post-pandemic. Participant 3 specifically noted the idea of anxiety, indicating that the return to in-person activities "caused anxiety more than we know." The responder supported this observation by indicating the belief that students "shoved it down or hid it (their anxiety)." Question 2, in addressing the experiences of the teachers dealing with students' mental health needs after returning to the classroom after the pandemic, elicited similar responses. Participant 7 observed "that students were a little bit clingier, and anxious," pointing out that the responder "had to reteach a lot. I had to split the lessons in half. It would take two days to do one lesson, so I noticed that they needed a lot more attention." Participant 6 observed "a lot of anxiety," blaming the vast amount of "unknown and having to do everything so differently, they got out of the habit of being in school." Other

responses to Question 2 focused more on students' fears, with Participant 8 observing

that students were "definitely happy to be back, but that some "students were fearful

about COVID-19" and the new phenomena of "wearing the mask or staying at a distance

from each other and thinking 'am I going to get it?'." Participant 5 supported that same

notion, observing that "the students were just fearful a lot, if someone sneezed or

coughed, just wondering if they had COVID-19." Question 4 inquired how participants

would describe what current support, resources and training are in place to help meet

students' mental health needs after returning to school following the COVID-19

shutdown. To this question, Participant 4 responded by alluding to not only students'

anxiety but also those of the teachers, noting "I have a hard time dealing with [students']

emotions."

Needy. Another sub-theme that emerged was that of neediness. In response to

Question 3, inquiring on the differences in student needs following the pandemic as

compared to before the pandemic, Participant 1 observed that students were "more

needy" due to seeming degradation of their comprehensive skills. The responder

observed that it seemed that they were "answering more questions now that I was not

answering before" simply because of "basic comprehension things." Participant 2 felt

"that students need a lot of one-on-one" post-pandemic, in comparison to pre-pandemic.

Participants 9 and 10 had similar observations to this question. Participant 9 observed that

students "are more needy" and require "more hand holding." This respondent

underscored this by noting the extra time they had to spend to teach lessons post-

pandemic, sharing they were "spending more time in class teaching the same lesson."

Participant 10 expressed similar observations, noting that when teaching resumed in the

classroom post-pandemic "it was like starting over." Participant 10 continued that there was a "need for more counseling, the need for more guidance, and needs for more just everything." Participant 11 observed that students "needed a lot more direction" and that they needed "to be coddled a lot more." Participant 12 shared their opinion that students now "need of more individualized attention versus prior to the pandemic."

Educational Training

A prevalent theme that emerged from the responses revolved around educational training, which encompassed a wide range of topics and skills. This theme focused on the need to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and expertise to effectively support students, especially in the aftermath of significant events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This overarching theme materialized in the form of several sub-themes, namely the areas of need for improved training, which included mental health, individual behaviors, and the unprecedented global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. By delving into these sub-themes, it becomes evident that enhancing educational training is crucial in fostering preparedness among teachers, enabling them to adeptly navigate the challenges they encounter in the classroom following such occurrences.

Mental Health. The sub-theme of a lack of training provided to participants in dealing with students' mental health challenges was pronounced, with almost every participant alluding to it in some way. Question 5 addressed this directly in asking participants the somewhat binary question of whether they believed they were well-trained and equipped to deal with these challenges or not.

To this question, Participant 5 responded, "I'm equipped as a teacher, but mental health wise I do not feel like I am equipped." Participant 9 had an initially blunt response,

simply stating "No." The participant expounded that they "feel inadequate" when having to deal with the students' "mental health issues." The responder added that they "feel untrained in the classroom" to deal with these issues. Participant 2 fell in line with the bulk of the responses, stating "I don't think I am equipped enough." Participant 3 echoed this, noting initially they didn't believe they were, but offered the perspective that "as time goes on and seeing how…the counselor is handling things" has benefited their readiness and ability to "back up" the counselor. Participant 4 continued the theme, noting that they "don't think we've had any special training" to deal with situations like this. Participant 12's response was the most adamant, bluntly stating "Absolutely not. No, I don't. I don't think that I am. I think that I would need a lot more training." Participant 1 opined the "we weren't trained as much as we could have been." Similarly to these responses, Participant 11 stated "No, not really."

Participant 10 had a slightly different perspective, opining that they feel "trained enough to know what I can handle and what I need help with" but recognized the limitations of that training to deal with effects of events like the pandemic on students' mental health. Participant 7 was confident in their response that "I do feel very equipped to handle their needs." Participant 6 pondered both possible answers, initially answering "yes and no." In explanation, the respondent noted their own traditional views and subsequent resilience to deal with what life brings. However, the respondent did note that it feels like they are doing "on the job training" post-pandemic, agreeing that there is always room for better training.

Question 6 delved more directly into the specific types of training participants thought would be helpful in these situations. To this question, Participant 5 observed,

"We have different meetings as staff, and different types of workshops to help us be more effective and better teachers, training on CPR, and MAT certification, even if there is an intruder. But we don't have training on mental health, workshops on what to do would be helpful." Participant 1 responded bluntly that "any kind of training" on how to handle the "mental breakdowns" of students would be helpful. Participant 6 added an element not mentioned by other respondents, noting the lack of these kinds of trainings in bachelor's degree studies. The respondent observed that the coursework did not get into this kind of thing, focusing on the "day-to-day" and "teaching", rather than the issues being discussed in this study.

Behaviors. The interviews revealed a plethora of varying behavioral issues, indicating a broad scope of possible training needs. Question 2 asked participants about observed behaviors after returning to the classroom, to which Participant 6 observed an enhanced level of selfishness, calling it a "more of an about me kind of attitude." The responder opined that this was "because at home they could do what they wanted" but in the classroom they could not. Participant 7 noted a "clingy" nature by students. Participant 10 observed multiple negative behaviors, noting "we had a lot of problems." This participant mentioned "talking back", a lack of respect, "fights breaking out in the classroom", dress code issues, overall restlessness, and "just every little thing about how to act in school was not the same as it was before COVID." Participant 11 identified "discipline problems." Participant 12 interjected the behavior of "laughing" things off and treating everything as a "joke", possibly as a coping mechanism behavior. Participant 1 observed a loss of "interest or focus" by students. Participant 2 noted a

decline in the ability to "interact with their peers socially." Participant 4 identified students having a "hard time dealing with their own emotions."

Though Questions 5 and 6 did not directly ask student behaviors but focused on the readiness by participants to deal with mental health issues upon return to the classroom and subsequent training observations, responses did include some notable behavior observations. Participant 11 noted that it would have been good to have a better understanding of what kinds of things they would face in the classroom after returning. Participant 1 specifically noted the need for any kind of training on "how to handle the mental breakdowns." Participant 6 specifically noted that "it would have been helpful to be trained in how to deal with the students who already had a diagnosis such as ADHD or Oppositional Defiance." Participant 2 offered a unique view as compared to other responses, noting the feeling that "a lot of parents and students needed a lot of guidance." This participant felt that "having different skills like coping mechanisms, being able to help them" would have been helpful as a teacher.

COVID-19. The sub-theme pertaining to the importance of accurate information and adequate training surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic emerged through the participants' responses, albeit often relayed in more indirect manners compared to other subsidiary themes within the broader context of educational training. Responses that alluded to this came from all but one inquiry direct toward participants. However, it was Question 6, which delved into the realm of specific training that would have been beneficial for teachers during a post-pandemic return to the classroom, that accounted for the majority of these explicit or implicit references. Participants 4 and 9 homed in on the element of isolation during a pandemic, and the value better understanding of the impact

of this isolation on students and families might have had to them. Participant 4 stated this almost verbatim, while Participant 9 echoed this with the addendum of the value of "training dealing with isolation" and how to teach "them to work in groups again." Participant 12 commented on the need for "professional development on how the pandemic affects staff and students." While less direct, Participant 2 indicated the need for better ways to help students "who are in tears because they're fearful" because of COVID-19 related uncertainties.

Question 2 prompted the most direct COVID-19 related response, as it investigated the environment upon returning to the classroom post-pandemic. Participant 5 emphasized the uncertainty aspect again, noting students "were just fearful a lot." Further, the respondent noted that "if someone even sneezed or coughed, just wondering if they had COVID." The participant connected this to the fact that some students had dealt with the "loss of somebody due to COVID." COVID related uncertainty again was noted by Participant 8's response, observing that "we're still fearful about COVID, you know, with wearing the mask or staying at a distance from each other and thinking 'am I going to get it?'."

Other questions contributing responses to this sub-theme included one response to Question 1's inquiry about pre-pandemic classroom environments. Participant 2 noted a general "common sense" that seemed to disappear after COVID. Question 4, regarding post-pandemic support, resources, and training available, led Participant 3 to opine regarding changes in "protocols" and the effect this had on students and the classroom environment. Participant 3 also raised the isolation issue in this response. Question 5 elicited one response regarding COVID-19, when asking about being well trained and

equipped to deal with post-pandemic classroom engagement. Participant 4 simply noted that they "don't think we've had any special training to work with kids coming back after COVID."

Social Connections

A notable theme of the impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns on students' mental health was identified through responses as social connections. This theme can be further explored through three sub-themes: isolation, interaction, and communication. Overall, the theme of social connections in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns amongst school students emphasizes the importance of addressing the negative impacts of isolation, promoting meaningful interaction, and finding ways to enhance communication to mitigate the long-term consequences on their social well-being.

Isolation. The ramifications of isolation were a clear sub-theme presented throughout the interviews. A significant portion of these were in response to Question 2, which inquired regarding the teachers' experience with student mental health observations upon returning to the classroom post-pandemic. Participant 3 offered the most robust thoughts on this subject, noting that many students had to "internalize a lot of things" with no "outlet…like they had before." This respondent also noticed that younger students especially struggled with this, after "feeling isolated for a while and then trying to come back and resume supposedly normal activity." Participant 6 observed that students were "more isolated" during the initial lockdown period of the pandemic. Participant 1 shared the thought that "kids didn't seem as sure of themselves" and that they thought this was a "harder time" for them because "of the isolation". Participant 2 identified the effects of isolation on the students, noting "they lacked social skills."

Participant 9 brought up this theme in responses to several questions, but to Question 2 observed students talking "about isolation." This participant went on to say that they "have a couple of them (students) that are still in isolation mode." Participant 5's response indicated that some students were maintaining isolationist tendencies, observing they are "very reserved" and keep "to themselves."

Question 3, which focused on the differences in students' needs before and after the pandemic lockdowns, elicited a response dealing with isolation as well. Participant 2 noticed the impact of isolation affecting students "maturity-wise or socially" and that they came back to the classroom lacking "a lot of adaptive skills."

Question 6, which requested thoughts on what training may have helped teachers be better prepared to address students' mental health issues upon returning to the classroom, also saw respondents identify the topic of isolation. Participant 10 hinted at this by observing students "have not been in the classroom for two years. These are things, some of the things we may be seeing. You know, absenteeism." Participant 9, again very verbose on this subject, responded "maybe training dealing with isolation." This respondent continued by opining that students were turning to technology more quickly and that this could be a way of "dealing with the" feelings of "isolation." Participant 9 continued, noting that training to help teachers bring "kids that have been isolated back into group formation would have been something interesting." Participant 4 observed that "it could have been helpful to have had a training that first year we were back of ways that this isolation could have affected the students and could have affected their families." This participant also noted a perceived link between increased depression and self-harm tendencies and students "feeling that way as a result of the isolation."

Interaction. The social-connection related sub-theme of interaction, manifesting itself in multiple directions, was noted by an abundance of interview responses. Several of these comments focused on the peer-to-peer interactions between students. Question 2's inquiry into students' behaviors after returning to the classroom elicited significant feedback on this area. Participant 2 directly noted the "very difficult time" some students had interacting "with their peers socially." Participant 3 noted the fact that many students had begun "internalizing a lot of things" as they "didn't have the outlet with their friends in person like they had before." Participant 5 introduced a different perspective, pointing out the fact that some students were dealing with not being able to interact with some friends who may no longer be at school for some reason, putting them in a "different frame of mind." Participant 6 added to the discussion the idea that some older students may have adjusted better than younger students, some of whom "had not dealt with being around other kids" due to their age when the pandemic began. Different still was the view of Participant 8 who focused on the fact that despite social distancing rules in place, were "just so excited that they would hug each other. You know. It's like my friend!" Participant 9 noted conversations among students regarding "not being able to see my friends" indicating impact the lack of interaction had on their psyche. One response to Question 3, dealing with the before and after differences in student behavior, also spoke to this area. Participant 2 noted that "socially" the students lacked "a lot of adaptive skills." In response to Question 6 regarding future training opportunities, Participant 9 noted this interaction in observing that students "still do not know how to work in groups."

While peer-to-peer interaction was a key part of this sub-theme, so was teacher-to-student interaction. Many of these comments were in response to Question 3, noting differences in students' behavior upon returning to the classroom post-pandemic. Participant 4 identified that some students exhibited a "need to see a counselor more often" and that they have "had to talk to kids about their emotions more" than prior to the pandemic. Participant 9 indicated a greater need for more "handholding" by the teachers. Participant 10 greatly expounded on this entire idea, beginning by noting that "it was almost like starting over on some of the curriculum things." This respondent continued that it required teachers to "take things very, very slow and really guide them through" the things they were being taught. Participant 10 also noted that even getting students to do things that had been normal pre-pandemic became tough, causing teachers to feel "like we were coddling every one of them, just so we could get them through the school year." The participant wrapped up the thought broadly and supportive of ideas presented by other respondents, stating that "the needs for more counseling, the need for more guidance and needs for more just everything, intensified greatly." Participant 11 noted that it was hard as a teacher because students needed "to be coddled a lot more" and "needed a lot more direction." This participant also pointed out difficulties teachers experienced because students "didn't know how to structure anymore." Participant 12 echoed the "need for more individualized attention versus prior to the pandemic." Participant 4, in response to Question 4 regarding current support and resources, reinforced the idea that students are requiring more direct interaction with some to help them "walk through these emotions that they don't necessarily know how to deal with." Participant 11, responding to Question 2's inquiry of their experience in the classroom

post-pandemic, reinforced the observation that students struggled with "social interactions" and "discipline problems." Participant 8 had a unique viewpoint as part of their responses to both Question 5 and Question 6, dealing with perceived training level and what training might be helpful in the future, respectively. This participants response to Question 5 noted that a "personal relationship with Christ" provided them "a way of being able to reach out to kids in a way that I really was not at freedom to relate to with kids in the public school." The participant continued that this "just makes a big difference" and allows the ability to share a different perspective with the students, one of faith and being able to "pray" for support in dealing with whatever the student is facing. In response to Question 6 this respondent noted the "difference is my own perspective on how I view things and who God is in relationship to my life" which enables the ability to "reassure kids that it's going to be OK" which "helps them get through the rest of their year."

Several responses noted varying other perspectives and interactive relationships that were not as closely connected. Participant 5, in response to Question 3, noted challenges faced upon returning to the classroom after students had been for so long "told to stay away from others in general." Participant 2 commented on interactions with parents as well as students, responding to Question 6 about future training that would be helpful, noting both the parents and the students "needed a lot of guidance." Participant 6 supported this idea in their response to Question 3 regarding differences in student behaviors pre- and post-pandemic, noting that parents were not dealing well with things either, blaming teachers for everything and saying, "it's not my child's fault." This participant directly stated that "kids just don't deal with it as well, and parents don't deal

with it as well" referring to the massive environmental changes encountered upon returning to the classroom. Participant 12 addressed staff-to-staff interactions, in response to Question 6 regarding future training, opining that some endeavors to understand "how the pandemic shutdown affected the staff" would have allowed "time to reflect and think about if it affected us as adults this way, how is that going to affect the students?" Participant 3, responding to Question 3, differences in behavior, noted the challenges some students were having simply due to having to "come back in person."

Participant 7 summed this theme up concisely in response to Question 3 regarding differences in behavior post-pandemic. This participant observed, "I think after there's still almost a readjustment period" going on, which encompasses basically every type of interaction students have. The respondent continued the point, stating, "they're gradually starting to reacclimate" but that it is "still a work in progress."

Communication. The sub-theme of communication was primarily manifested in two separate paths: how students received instruction and the need for avenues for students to communicate their feelings. How students received, comprehended, and absorbed instruction and information was a very common response. Responses to Question 2's inquiry to teachers' experiences upon returning to the classroom included Participant 1 noting that teachers "have to do more it seems to keep them focused" not necessarily "entertain, but you have to introduce new stimulus a lot more than prior" to the pandemic. Participant 7, responding to the same question, noted that teaching took longer due to students' inability to comprehend as well as before the pandemic. The respondent noted "it would take two days just to do one lesson." This contrasted with the participant's response to Question 1 regarding student behavior before the pandemic,

when they felt students "were a bit more engaged, eager, self-starters" and it was "easier for me to get through to the end of the lesson." Question 3, focusing on the differences between students' behavior pre- and post-pandemic, included similar comments. Participant 1 reiterated struggles with "basic comprehension" and the fact that "I'm answering more questions now that I was not answering before." Participant 6 expressed this view as well, noting students were suffering "because key concepts and things that they had known, they don't know as well now" which is leading to them becoming "frustrated" and acting out more. Participant 9 echoed the idea that students "have lost the capacity to stay at a steady pace" requiring teachers to spend "more time in class teaching the same lesson." Participant 10 supported the common idea, stating that "it was almost like starting over on some of the curriculum things" and students comprehension required teachers to take it "very slow and really guide them through." Participant 12 also felt that students "are in need of more individualized attention versus prior to the pandemic." This participant attributed these adjusted communication needs to "social and mental delays of the students possibly due to the pandemic, and also the academic delays possibly due to the pandemic." Question 5's looks at how well-equipped teachers are elicited a response from Participant 6 who noted that these changes were necessitating that respondents' "having to learn how to sometimes be more patient" in dealing with these adjustments in how they communicate lessons to the students. Question 6, looking at possible future training that could be provided, introduced the idea that "curriculum training" as well as earlier access to curriculum would have been helpful. The participant further added that having "student information a lot sooner than the first week of school"

would have assisted in them being able to better "tweak and adjust the curriculum" to counter the challenges they were facing.

Another avenue of communication that was highlighted by respondents was the enhanced need for students to have an outlet to communicate their feelings and emotions. Participant 2, responding to Question 6 regarding future training, noted that "having the skills of a counselor to help support each of their needs is very helpful. I feel like I'm not 100% there for the students and their needs." In response to Question 2, dealing with experiences after returning to the classroom, Participant 3 noted that students "feeling like they were behind or that they had no continuation of the norm often made it difficult for them to express their feelings." Participant 3 added, in response to Question 4 regarding current support and resources in place to assist, said that "knowing that they can access the counselor anytime they want, well anytime they need really, but it is somewhat anytime they want has been a stress reliever for some of them." Participant 4, responding to Question 3, differences in student behavior, also noted that students "need to see a counselor more often. I feel like I've had to talk to kids about their emotions more so, I just think that just really affected them internally."

Two respondents brought up the subject of staff preparation in their answers, which also can be considered an element of communication. Both responses were to Question 6, asking about ideas for future training. Participant 10 posited the idea that the school should have helped the teachers be more prepared by "talking to us ahead of time, getting the faculty together, which they never did, and talking to us to say 'hey, this is what we need to be prepared for." Participant 12, similarly, introduced the idea that a staff professional development day might have been helpful, going over some key

information, exploring "how the pandemic shutdown affected you as a staff, and allowing us the time to reflect and think about if it affected us as adults this way, how is that going to affect the students?"

Behavioral Challenges

As teachers returned to the physical classrooms after the pandemic, this research found that they encountered a significant number of behavioral challenges. This section examines this theme of behavioral challenges through the spectrum of three sub-themes: anger issues, conduct issues, and academic issues. Through analyzing these findings, educators and policymakers can gain insights and develop targeted interventions to address the diverse needs of both students and teachers, ensuring effective teaching and learning environments.

Anger Issues. A variety of responses addressed issues pertaining to student conduct, and the majority of these will be covered in the conduct issues section. However, a specific, significant subgroup became evident, consisting of behaviors that appeared to be motivated by frustration and anger. Participant 12, in response to Question 1 regarding student behaviors pertaining to mental health before the pandemic, noted the opinion that "students were able to regulate their emotions." This provided a contrast to other responses in this sub-theme. Responses to Question 2, investigating experiences in the classroom with students' mental health following the pandemic, included a synopsis from Participant 4 that "kids get frustrated more easily." This respondent continued, noting that due to multiple factors, students displayed "maybe more anger" and reiterated that this behavior was "accentuated." Participant 6 offered that many students had fallen behind scholastically and socially, which resulted in them "getting frustrated and acting

out more." Participant 10 noted "we had fights breaking out in classrooms." Participant 11 discussed the evidence of anger manifesting itself with struggles with "social interactions" and "discipline problems", describing this as "what's going on inside…coming out in their behavior." Question 3, asking specifically about the differences in student behavior before and after the pandemic, prompted Participant 3 to echo that thought, noting the many frustrations being faced by students, and noting that many would "internalize their feelings and then it just seemed like they bottled it up and then sometimes it would just come out, all at one time." Participant 10 again brought up fights in response to this question, twice noting the increase in anger as a primary driver. Participant 10 also noted similar thoughts in response to Question 6, regarding potential future training that could aid in better preparedness for teachers, summarizing the lack of preparedness they felt for dealing with "all of the anger issues" and so many "kids that just…didn't want to be there."

Academic Issues. The behavior of students when it came to academics was also a topic well addressed by participants. Question 1, offering insights into the environment before COVID, prompted Participant 7's general assertion that "students were a bit more engaged, eager, self-starters" and noted students could generally take what the teacher put on the board and do it themselves with very few questions. Participant 10 added that students were "eager to learn" and were regularly "doing their work."

Question 2, looking at experiences with students' mental health following the return to the classroom, provided 4 responses from participants. Participant 2 noted that students had a "very difficult time problem solving or trying to work through different situations." Participant 3 observed that many students felt "like they were behind" which

"made it difficult to express their feelings" and prompted negativity. Participant 6 felt that it was like students "got out of the habit of being in school" which required teachers to have to help them get back into the habit. Participant 7 found that students seemed to find it "hard to remember and keep information."

Question 3 prompted the most responses in this space, investigating the differences in behavior pre-and post-pandemic. Participant 2 noted that students seemed to "lack a lot of adaptive skills." Participant 3 and Participant 12 homed in on a similar theme, noting that students were "more reliant on extra help" and were "in need of more individualized attention versus prior to the pandemic", respectively. Participant 4 observed that students were less independent and felt "very insecure with their answers, with their responses with doing their work, or they just don't do it." Participant 5 noted that there were "learning gaps." Participant 6 identified that students seemed to be "struggling with basic concepts that they should have already had." Participant 8 stated that there were "greater academic needs" and that "parental involvement was very limited." Participant 9 felt that students had lost the capacity to learn quickly. Participant 10 noted that "it was almost like starting over on some of the curriculum things," and that some students seemed apathetic, and some basically gave up. Participant 11 noted that students "needed a lot more direction, more structure, because they didn't know how to structure anymore."

Conduct Issues. Conduct issues were far and away the most addressed behavioral challenge identified by respondents, with all but one respondent noting these issues at least once, most multiple times. Question 1's inquiry into what teachers' experiences were in with students' mental health in classrooms prior to the pandemic elicited similar

responses of "typical", "normal", "well-adjusted", and "well-behaved" from Participants 4, 5, and 10. Other responses included Participant 1 noted students were more "focused" prior to the pandemic. Participant 2 added that students were "very much engaged, had a lot of common sense." Participant 7 offered the same thought, noting the "students were a bit more engaged, eager, self-starters." Participant 12 took a different approach, focusing on the behaviors of students relating to germs and sickness, noting that before COVID-19 "students were not as aware of germs" and that were not worried "about distancing or germs or getting sick."

Question 2, asking about experiences with students after the pandemic, drew the bulk of the remaining responses. Participant 1 responded that teachers "have to do more it seems to keep them focused" and that "you have to introduce new stimulus a lot more than prior." This respondent added that if teachers do not add this stimulus, students "just go to sleep or start to lose interest or focus." Participant 2 noted that students were more "easily distracted" post-pandemic. Participant 5 observed that some students seemed more "reserved" and withdrawn, while some seemed more "fearful", paranoid that they would catch COVID if anyone "coughed or sneezed." Participant 8 offered similar observations about paranoia regarding COVID, noting that some students "were still fearful about COVID, you know, with wearing the mask or staying at a distance from each other and thinking 'am I going to get it?'." Participant 6 noted increased selfishness, noting that "it became more of an about me kind of attitude", observing and increased "immaturity level" among students generally. Participant 9 added that many students remained withdrawn, noting "disconnection from the rest of the group." Participant 10 stated that "after COVID it was totally different." This respondent continued, "we had a

lot of problems. We had kids that didn't' know how to sit still in the classroom, kids that didn't know how to talk to teachers, kids that didn't respect teachers, were talking back." The participant expressed the feeling that it was like students "had never been in a school before and we had to retrain them." Participant 11 concurred, noting "discipline problems." Participant 12 again had a different perspective, focusing on the fact that many students seemed "very cautious and more self-aware of being accepted."

Question 3, looking at differences in student behaviors pre- and post-pandemic, added responses from Participant 2 and 6 on this subject. Participant 2 noted a "lack of adaptive skills", while Participant 6 viewed changes in parental attitudes as contributing to student conduct issues, noting that parents would argue "it's not my child's fault, it's the teacher not doing what they're supposed to."

Research Question Analysis

How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health before the COVID-19 shutdown?

The participants discussed their mental health before the COVID-19 shutdown, focusing on the students' engagement, common sense, and happiness. They noted that students were more attentive and morally positive before the shutdown, but there was more uncertainty about their identity and ability to work after the pandemic. The participants also mentioned that middle school students faced typical drama and emotional ranges before the shutdown. They did not see as much discussion about mental health issues in their area, but they did notice some improvement in students' behavior and learning. The participants also mentioned that there was less discussion about self-care. However, they did not see as much anxiety and other issues in their area.

The participants also mentioned that before the COVID shutdown, students seemed well-adjusted to their environment, with no problems or issues. They believed that the classroom worked well for most of the students. The participants also noted that students were able to regulate their emotions better before the shutdown, as they were taught to understand and not worry about germs and getting sick. In conclusion, the participants found that students were more attentive, morally positive, and engaged in their studies before the COVID-19 shutdown. They also noted that there was less discussion about mental health issues, but they still saw improvements in students' emotional regulation and overall well-being.

How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

After the school shut down, students experienced increased isolation and difficulty in communication and problem-solving. They lacked social skills and needed redirection, making it difficult for them to interact with peers. The anxiety and separation from school made it difficult for some students to express their feelings, especially younger ones. Students became more reserved and fearful, constantly thinking about loved ones or friends who were not at school. This led to a different frame of mind and increased anxiety. When students returned to the classroom, they had not dealt with being around other kids and had to readjust to their new environment. The anxiety and newfound uncertainty caused them to break the habit of being in school. The students' understanding of key concepts and concepts became less clear, leading to frustration and immaturity. The situation highlights the importance of understanding and supporting students during times of uncertainty and change.

The participants discussed the challenges faced by students during the COVID-19 pandemic, including increased clinginess, anxiety, and difficulty remembering and retaining information. They also noted that students needed more attention and help to stay on level tasks. Some students were excited to return to the classroom, while others were still fearful of the virus. Some students were happier being back in the classroom, fostering a healthy mental relationship with each other. Some students were more bearable about the pandemic, but some still struggled with isolation and disconnection from their peers. The participants also noted that the seniors seemed to handle the situation better, as they had built relationships with their teachers before the pandemic. However, younger students who had been in the classroom for only a few years were more affected, with issues such as lack of respect, fights, and inappropriate behavior. The participants also noted that some students were more nervous and had social interaction issues, while others struggled with discipline problems. They were also cautious and self-aware of being accepted in the classroom. Overall, the participants found the pandemic to be a challenging time for students, but it was essential for teachers to adapt and support their students in their new environment.

How would you describe the differences in student needs following the pandemic as compared to before the pandemic?

The participants discussed the need for support and assistance in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic. They felt that some students needed more one-on-one help and support, as they lacked adaptive skills. The pandemic caused uncertainty and increased reliance on extra help, which some students may not have experienced before.

They also noted that some students struggled with learning gaps due to the pandemic, especially in the context of homeschooling or shutting down at different times. The participants also noted that students struggled with basic concepts they should have received during the pandemic, possibly due to being homeschooled or the closure of schools. The administrative level also changed due to the changing environment and the lack of communication between students and parents. The participants also noted that students are still in a readjustment period, as they don't have the instant gratification or tangible things they had during remote learning. They believe that they are gradually starting to reacclimate themselves to doing it by themselves, but it is still a work in progress. The pandemic has led to a significant shift in the educational landscape, with students needing more support and assistance in the classroom. The participants emphasized the importance of adapting to these changes and ensuring that students received the necessary support and resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the academic needs of students, with some students experiencing greater access to one-on-one tutoring and support. However, others have had to work and lack parental involvement, leading to a lack of support for their children. Some students have been able to continue working with tutors even after school is out, allowing them to focus on their studies and improve their skills. In math, students are more needy due to the lack of a steady pace in their lessons. Teachers have been spending more time in class teaching the same lesson than before the pandemic. The pandemic has also intensified the need for more counseling and guidance for students, especially in the classroom. The teachers have been directed to basically not fail anyone, as they would have to fail half the students. This has led to a more

challenging atmosphere for students, who may have given up or become less interested in learning. Participants noted they have seen more trouble following the pandemic, with students needing more direction and structure. Teachers have been more aware of the individual needs of students due to social and mental delays, possibly due to the pandemic and academic delays. In conclusion, the COVID pandemic has made teachers more hyper-aware of the individual needs of students, particularly in the classroom. While some students still need individualized attention, the pandemic has made teachers more hyper-aware of the social and mental delays that students face. By addressing these needs and providing more support, teachers can help students overcome challenges and achieve success in their academic and personal lives.

How would you describe what current support, resources and training are in place to help meet students' mental health needs after returning following the COVID-19 shutdown?

The participants discussed the challenges faced by students during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how they have found ways to improve their support systems. They mentioned that the school has implemented mechanisms to help students, but the number of people available to help has made it difficult to provide adequate support. However, with the help of research and online resources, the participants were able to adjust their support methods better. The increase in Social-Emotional Learning support for students' specialties has been beneficial, as it has provided them with a safety net to talk to counselors or anyone available. This has been particularly helpful since the pandemic. However, some students have experienced frustration, depression, and anger due to the pandemic, which may be due to their emotional struggles. The participants also noted that

the school is providing resources and support for both teachers and students, ensuring that their academic and emotional needs are met. They believe that the difference between having to return to a school without support is foundational, such as being able to write letters and know math facts. They believe that they are doing what they need to be doing and are going to keep moving in that direction. In conclusion, the participants acknowledged the challenges faced by students during the pandemic and the need for more support systems. They also highlighted the importance of ongoing training for teachers and the support provided by the school to ensure that students receive the necessary support and resources.

One participant specifically noted their experience in a Christian school, where they believe they are well-equipped to handle the mental health needs of students after returning from COVID. They mention that being in a Christian school allows teachers to openly discuss their relationship with God, which helps them understand that there is a higher power watching over them. This differs from public schools, where teachers may feel on edge and be hesitant to talk about their fears, beliefs and experiences. That participant also mentioned the lack of support in public schools, where teachers often neglect to ask for help when needed. However, they acknowledge the importance of having support from the administration and teamwork within the school. They believe that the school has been able to better understand the causes and effects of the pandemic and provide necessary support in the classrooms post-pandemic. Overall, they believe that the Christian school system is a better fit for students' mental health needs and the support provided by the administration.

Do you perceive that you are well-trained and equipped to handle the mental health needs of students after returning to school following the pandemic?

The participants discussed their perceptions of their training and resources in dealing with students during the COVID-19 pandemic. They acknowledged that they were not as well-equipped as they could have been, partly due to the lack of awareness about the widespread fallout and the ramifications of the pandemic. They also acknowledged that they could use more resources to help their students. The participants also mentioned that they had not been trained immediately, but they learned from watching counselors handle situations and listening to their responses. They felt that mental health is an ongoing issue that changes over time and with different situations. They also noted that they were not always sure how to support students with outbursts or other disruptive behaviors, which was a natural part of their behavior. They acknowledged that they are doing on-the-job training with some of their students and that it never hurts to have more training. They acknowledged that while the COVID-19 season has been unique, teachers still need to feel cared for and available to their students. The participants discussed their experiences in a school setting, highlighting the importance of personal relationships with Christ and the ability to connect with students in a way that was not possible in public schools. They shared their experiences with prayer and the importance of praying together for students' well-being.

The participants felt inadequate in dealing with these issues and often sought help from a counselor. The participants agreed that they are well-trained enough to identify and handle problems, but also recognize that they need help with areas that they are not proficient in. They believe they are well-equipped to handle situations at their level and

to know what they can handle without needing help. In summary, the participants highlighted the importance of personal relationships with Christ and the need for support in a school setting. They also acknowledged the importance of seeking help when needed, as they believe they are well-equipped to handle situations at their level and to identify areas where they need help.

How would you describe what training might have been helpful to you to address mental health needs when returning to school?

The participants discussed their lack of experiences with student's mental breakdowns and the need for guidance and support from parents and administration. They mentioned the importance of having coping mechanisms and counseling skills to help students cope with fear and anxiety. They also mentioned the ongoing contact with their other teachers, which they believe is crucial for handling various situations. The participants suggested that training on how isolation could affect students and their families could have been beneficial. They also mentioned the lack of mental health training in their school, which they believe would have been beneficial. The participants also mentioned that mental health should be treated like CPR, MAT certification, and lockdown drills since it also is a safety measure. They also mentioned that their degrees helped with teaching but not on the deeper issues of mental health and felt they needed more training in dealing with children with mental health issues. Lastly, they mentioned the potential benefits of curriculum training. For example, in the first year after the isolation, the teachers had to split lessons and give two days for one lesson, especially in math, which was significantly lower than usual.

A participant shared her perspective on how she views on mental health challenges and the role God has in her life, which is a strength and a stronghold when dealing with kids. She believes that having this perspective allows kids to have hope and confidence in their abilities, which can help them through crises. The participants mentioned that training in dealing with isolation is important. They suggest that teachers should be more prepared by talking to the administration ahead of time about what they need to handle, such as absenteeism and the potential impact of the pandemic on students. The participants believe that training on knowing how to help students who are dealing with anger issues, many of them taking it out on each other. To better handle these situations, teachers should have been informed about the expected behavior in the classroom and the programs available to help them. The participants questioned if there could have been training on a complete shutdown to back gate full in session, as no one knew the long-term cause and effect of a shutdown. However, they suggest that a mental health session or professional development day could have been given to help staff understand the effects of the pandemic on them and how it will affect students.

Summary

In the qualitative case study examining teachers' experiences of returning to school post-COVID-19, four themes and twelve subthemes emerged from interviews conducted with 12 teachers from a private Christian school. The participants shared insights on student mental health before and after the pandemic, highlighting changes in students' needs, available support resources, and training requirements. The study found that students exhibited a range of emotions, with increased anxiety and social challenges post-pandemic, emphasizing the need for enhanced support and training for teachers to

address these evolving needs effectively. Notably, the participants expressed a desire for more training on mental health issues, social connections, and behavioral challenges post-COVID-19 shutdowns to better support their students.

The study identified the importance of ongoing support and resources for teachers to navigate the complexities of student mental health needs in the face of the pandemic's impact. Participants acknowledged the need for additional training and resources to address the heightened emotional and social challenges faced by students, particularly in the post-pandemic educational landscape. The findings underscored the significance of equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to support students' mental well-being effectively in the aftermath of the pandemic. The study's insights shed light on the evolving mental health needs of students as they transition back to the classroom environment post-COVID-19.

Additionally, prior to initiating the interviews, the researcher carefully formulated a structured dialogue consisting of a proper salutation, an outline of the interview process, the research inquiries, and a concluding expression of gratitude. By following this standardized script, the researcher aimed to maintain consistency in the delivery of questions and minimize any potential variations in intonation or pace. Once the interviews were completed, participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts. Their involvement in this process allowed them to ensure that their perspectives and responses were accurately captured. Following this, participants left the researcher's office, maintaining a clear separation from any further influence or interactions. By creating an equal and transparent environment, promoting participant

involvement, and following a standardized interview structure, the researcher aimed to ensure the reliability and validity of the study outcomes.

The researcher implemented various strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of the data, including pilot interviews, member checking, and secured in a password protected file, ensuring credibility and dependability of the study. In chapter 4 the research questions were answered and explained. Quotes from the participants were provided and explained in the discussion. Analysis of the findings, including implications, limitations and recommendations are explored in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

Due to COVID-19, children, adolescents, and college students have had to endure prolonged periods of quarantine, physical isolation from their social circle, educators, and extended family, and were compelled to adjust to remote learning. As a result of this abrupt and compulsory change, children and college students may have lacked sufficient academic resources, social interaction, and support, as well as a conducive learning environment at home (Almeida et al., 2021). Additionally, circumstances of COVID-19 may have also resulted in heightened feelings of isolation, distress, anger, and boredom, leading to an increased number of negative psychological effects (Elharake et al., 2022). The review of literature exploring the impact COVID-19 shutdowns and associated actions had on the educational and psychological needs of students. The review also included literature examining the readiness, or lack of readiness, of teachers to handle these students' educational and psychological needs.

In this chapter, a summary and discussion of the findings of this exploratory case study will be provided, along with presenting the implications, limitations, and the recommendations for future research. The results of the study have been discussed considering the theoretical framework used in this research, to argue that teachers need better resources to help meet the emotional needs of their students.

Summary of Findings

This exploratory, qualitative case study aimed to investigate teachers' lived experiences of going back to school after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their perspectives on how best to address students' mental health needs. It is essential to have a

deeper understanding of the areas in which teachers require training and assistance when returning to the classroom after a traumatic experience such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study participants were twelve Christian school teachers that taught: (1) before COVID-19 pandemic, (2) during remote learning as a result of COVID-19 shutdowns, and (3) back in the classroom after the COVID-19 pandemic were interviewed. The participants were asked six open-ended questions, examining their perspectives on if they were properly equipped to handle students' emotional needs before returning to the classroom. Follow-up interviews were set up if clarification was necessary. Upon completion of thematic analysis, the findings of this study show that teachers felt unprepared to deal with the emotional needs of their students during the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and that additional training would have been beneficial.

Discussion of Findings

During the interview, educators were asked questions regarding the state of the classroom environment prior to the COVID-19 lockdowns, as well as the subsequent conditions that occurred since resuming in-person instruction. Preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers consistently reported a predominantly positive learning environment, wherein students exhibited optimistic emotional states and engaged in generally positive peer interactions. However, post the closure instigated by the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers conveyed a stark shift in student emotional disposition, characterized by an upsurge in negativity, thereby creating a perceived atmosphere of heightened stress within the learning environment. Given the fact that this study was conducted within a Christian educational setting, it is noteworthy that two participants specifically disclosed

feeling adequately prepared to confront the challenges of returning to the classroom. This attitude was primarily due to the opportunity it afforded them to engage in communal prayer with their students as well as share their views on the strength their faith provides them during trying times. These individuals asserted that communal prayer facilitated a transformative effect on students' disposition during the adversities brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic. When questioned on the disparities discerned in student needs pre- and post-pandemic, teachers unanimously noted a substantial escalation in student demands, a decline in social competency, and palpable gaps in academic achievement, leading to diminished feelings of self-worth when students fail to attain success.

Emergent Themes

The findings of this study highlight significant observations regarding the range of emotional and behavioral transformations experienced by students before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The diverse responses highlighted the pandemic's effect on students' emotional well-being and behavior, as well as the teachers' lack of preparedness to meet their evolving needs.

Range of Emotions

Stability. The findings of this study identified a sub-theme of stability in the context of the greater theme of range of emotion. The concept of stability is recognized within the responses as both loss of environmental stability and the loss of emotional stability, the relationship of which supports the observations of several previous studies on the impact of environmental disruption on the emotional stability of students (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Longaretti, 2020; Painter et al. 2023) The abrupt and extensive upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the general support

structure of children, as they faced the loss of physical contact with their families, friends, and schools, resulting in a diminished perception of control over their daily lives (Painter et al., 2023). Participant responses to this study confirmed the assertion by Painter et al. (2023) that the pandemics' unprecedented life disruptions led to a new source of stress for individuals and communities worldwide. Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the development of school belonging, emphasizing the pivotal role of Person-Process-Context-Time (PPCT), where process encompasses the structural interactions that transpire between students and the structural systems present within their school, both in close proximity and at a distance (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). The responses to this study indicated this loss of process through the contrast of several stability related observations, such as the use of terms like "typical", "well-adjusted", "normal", and "engaged" to describe student's pre-pandemic and "angry", "anxious", "frustrated", and "disconnected" post-pandemic. The potential consequences of an interruption within the structured school environment can be detrimental to students' sense of belonging and lead to various long-term effects on their emotional development (Longaretti, 2020). According to Longaretti, (2020), these effects may surface as a decrease in self-esteem, a decline in academic achievements, and heightened levels of anxiety and depression, all of which were indicated as being increasingly exhibited post-pandemic by students by respondents to this study.

Trauma categories vary in their levels of seriousness and are categorized into three types. Type I trauma pertains to a single distressing event, such as the death of a cherished individual. Type II trauma is characterized by a prolonged exposure to multiple

intense stressors, such as instances of sexual abuse. Finally, Type III trauma represents the most severe form, manifesting as recurring and enduring traumatic stress (Kira et al., 2021). The profound impact of the lockdown measures on students' lives, causing a sudden upheaval that affected all aspects of their daily routines (Painter et al., 2023), was unique. Unlike many Types I and II traumatic events, which are typically followed by an immediate entry into the mental health healing process, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns resulted in a prolonged state of destabilization, a Type III trauma, that became the new norm. This prolonged period of continuing stress and trauma likely delayed the students' ability to begin the process of healing and returning to normalcy (Longaretti, 2020), but research also suggests that it put them at risk of developing an increased and likely more severe posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kira et al., 2021). This collapse in basic stability supported assertions by Li & Leung (2020) regarding students heightened anxiousness regarding COVID-19 inducing cognitive distortion leading to irrational and ambiguous thinking, a variation from norms. This sub-theme also reinforced the assertion made by Le Brocque et al. (2016) that schools, and more directly teachers, are a foundational piece in the structure that must play a larger role in re-establishing that level of pre-pandemic stability. Ensuring teachers are better prepared for this task, being supported appropriately by academic institutions who employee them, and being properly trained in the correct areas would have significant and lasting impact on mitigating and reversing the destabilizing effects of pandemic-like events.

Anxiety/Fear. The participants of this study overwhelmingly emphasized the sub-theme of anxiety and fear, corroborating research and indicating that anxiety and fear have a substantial impact on various aspects of students' lives, including their social life

(Archbell & Coplan, 2021), family life (Pan et al. 2021), academic life (Pascoe et al., 2019), and physical being (Clair et al., 2002). Participant responses noted the words "anxiety", "fear", "anxious", "nervous", or "panic" a total of 15 times, significantly more reference than any other supporting sub-themes. Among the feedback received, the sub-themes seemed to be focused on one of two general areas: anxiety relating to isolation related societal changes, or fear driven by uncertainties in the pandemic's possible effects on health. These areas align with the findings of Grubic et al. (2020) on the mental health impact of the pandemic, including heightened anxiety and depression symptoms, as well as increased concerns about health and uncertainty.

Bobek & Schnieders (2023) noted that high schoolers, close to the end of their secondary school years, are most affected by the unprecedented disruption of established norms, such as virtual college tours and canceled extracurricular activities. This suggests the logic that high school students may have increased fears or anxieties about their prospects in college and the job market, possibly due to decreased scholastic achievements. However, participants in this study, including some high school teachers, did not mention any comments about students' worries or fears regarding the pandemic's impact on their future careers, as examined by Di Pietro (2023) and Bobek & Schnieders (2023). Although this study was small, the 12 participating teachers collectively represented over 500 students across all grade levels, making the lack of any comments of this nature a curious observation. This data broadens the existing literature for future investigations into students' concerns regarding the repercussions of these disruptions on their future educational and career prospects.

The results of this study provide additional support for research indicating that viral outbreaks are associated with an increased sense of fear across various domains of an individual's life. These findings suggest a greater manifestation of symptoms in response to the isolating effects and social transformations caused by the outbreak (Fedorenko et al., 2021). Two respondents identified the idea of repressed anxiety, with one of these delving directly into a level of speculation, suggesting that some students may be suppressing their anxiety, and that this phenomenon might be more significant than currently acknowledged. Though speculative, this notion builds upon the ideas Kira et al. (2021) proposed by questioning whether COVID-19 might potentially be categorized as a novel form of psychological trauma, considering the subjective nature of the perceived threat compared to its objective reality. This idea supports research investigating the disproportionality of the physical versus psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Munir et al., 2021). Research conducted on the concept of suppressed anxiety during situations like the pandemic did not yield enough evidence to substantiate the speculation, underscoring the necessity for additional investigation in this field. Future research should also be expanded to explore the potential association between suppressed anxiety and peer pressure within the school setting, where students may abstain from expressing outward signs of fear or anxiety due to apprehensions of being mocked or ridiculed by their peers.

The several responses within this study centering on the students' fears concerning a variety of social aspects, particularly in relation to COVID-19, validate Fedorenko et al. (2021) assertions, and support Tran et al. (2022) findings on the impact of health-related fears on students' mental health. The study conducted by Fedorenko et al. (2021)

identified a dearth of existing literature addressing the fear associated with the consequences of social distancing. This research presents supplementary findings that could bolster further investigation into this subject. Respondents' references to various behavioral issues, both academic and conduct related, supported assertions by Tran et al. (2022) that students' mental health is negatively affected because of health-related fears, uncertainty, and the subsequent academic consequences, indicating the extensive reach and impact of these factors.

Fedorenko et al. (2021) noted that one of the most extensively examined apprehensions surrounding pandemics centers on the fear of viral contamination, which pertains to a prevalent sense of peril, anxiety, or unease associated with acquiring a viral infection or facing its repercussions. The responses by two participants raised concerns specifically of fears and anxiety focused on the possibility of contagion. This aligns with the findings of Fedorenko et al. (2021) supporting the notion that prolonged and intense fear reactions can increase an individual's vulnerability to developing psychopathology.

Additionally, a participant brought up the concern of anxiety among not only students, but teachers as well, supporting research exploring the various stressors teachers experienced before the pandemic, and the numerous additional stressors that have been added to their list since the pandemic (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Overall, the findings emphasize the prevalence of anxiety among students following the pandemic and shed light on the various concerns and fears expressed by both students and teachers. It also continues to raise areas of foundational concern regarding the sufficiency of existing support systems for addressing students' mental health needs in the post-pandemic school environment.

Needy. Forty-two percent of respondents expressed those students displayed a need for increased individual attention, extensive guidance, and one-on-one support from teachers, highlighting the sub-theme of students' manifestation of neediness within the broader theme of the range of emotions. Two participants used the term "coddled" to characterize the level of neediness displayed by students, underscoring the stark contrast in behavior observed before and after the pandemic (Williams, 2023). Notably, two participants drew attention to the fact that teaching lessons now requires significantly more time compared to the pre-pandemic period (Williams, 2023). Although numerous studies have examined the difficulties faced by educators and pupils when they resumed in-person schooling, most of the research predominantly concentrated on conduct-related behaviors. Limited research was found that explored or discussed the heightened need for increased individual accommodative measures for many students in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Additionally, two respondents remarked on the post-pandemic lack of comprehensive skills, including students' lack of retention of previously retained core knowledge, one of them specifically linking this to the prolonged duration required for lesson instruction. This respondent noted that the impact of this was almost like having to start all over in the education process. The research conducted on this subject yielded an intriguing combination of results, or in most cases, the absence of results. While the research revealed a range of evidence supporting a general decline in comprehensive skills, the focus was specifically on reading comprehension (Almasi & Yuan, 2023). This lack of available research on the reduction of comprehensive and retention skills post-pandemic in areas other than reading provides an opportunity for future research to

further understanding on the topic. Almasi & Yuan (2023) explored the impacts of school closures resulting from the pandemic on reading comprehension, with a focus on the impact of potential learning loss, which aligns to findings of this study generally but only speaks to the single specific area of reading comprehension loss. Furthermore, the existing body of research concerning the observed decline in reading comprehension suggests that the primary factors contributing to this decline are largely centered on the excessive utilization of social media and screen time (Williams, 2023). No mentions regarding media, social media, or screen time were found in any context within the responses of this study, suggesting a possible absence of perceived associations between these elements and indicators of student dependency amongst participants. Further research is needed to examine the notable deficiencies in the findings of this study in relation to available research.

Other investigations have concentrated on the transition from in-person learning to online learning as a contributing factor to students' difficulties (Grubic et al., 2020). Nevertheless, none of the survey responses directly supported this claim, although two participants mentioned online learning only in the context of its occurrence. Interestingly, one of these respondents highlighted some positive aspects of the online teaching environment, emphasizing the advantage of increased flexibility in scheduling off-hours to offer individual assistance. This observation supported the qualitative research by Goudarzi et al. (2023) as well as observation by Abramson (2021) that teachers dealing with online learning noted flexibility as a key benefit, reducing dependencies on time, place, and physical space for engagement. This provides evidence of a counterargument to the prevailing research focus, which predominantly highlights the drawbacks of online

learning rather than its potential advantages. Consequently, it presents a specific area of investigation for future research (Goudarzi et al., 2023).

The responses that led to the identification of the sub-theme of neediness present substantial evidence, noteworthy for future studies due to the scarcity of available research in this area. The lack of supporting evidence suggests that future studies expand their scope to include these parameters and the possible direct and indirect causes related to increasing individual student needs post-pandemic.

Educational Training

The second thematic aspect of this qualitative study involved the identification and exploration of spheres of educational training for teachers, with a particular emphasis on their potential utility in the educational environment. This theme consisted of several interconnected sub-themes, namely the requirement for enhanced training for teachers in the general areas of mental health, individual behaviors, and COVID-19.

Mental Health. The first educational training sub-theme identified in the study's responses was particularly prominent, evoking a heightened sense of emphasis and passion in certain participants' feedback. 83% of respondents expressed varying degrees of inadequacy in their preparedness to address students' mental health issues upon resuming in-person teaching post-pandemic. Notably, a significant 66% unequivocally indicated that they were completely unprepared. Teachers are generally not required to initially be trained in understanding student mental health needs (Shelemy et al., 2019). In their examination of the opinion's teachers hold regarding their role in the mental health of students, Roeser & Midgley (1997) found that an overwhelming majority (99%) of elementary school teachers strongly believe that addressing the mental health concerns

of their students is an integral aspect of their professional responsibilities. These figures highlight a significant disparity between teachers' views of the importance of their role in a students' mental health and the inadequate level of training they receive in relation to this role, as indicated by the responses to this study. The findings of this study further support the idea posited by Imran et al. (2018) that teachers are incapable of handling these mental health requirements, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and stress.

One respondent pointed out that while teachers are regularly required to undergo various trainings such as CPR certifications, active shooter training, and medication administration training, they receive minimal to no training on how to effectively address students' mental health issues. This response furthered the primary theme of Ekornes (2016) study suggesting a lack of teacher training regarding mental health issues, and the significant disparity between the subject matter addressed during professional training and the practical skills required to effectively navigate real-world educational settings. Extensive research provided no information regarding the question of "why" some types of safety and health trainings are required for teachers while others are not. However, there is significant evidence that schools and teachers play a multifaceted role in communities during times of disasters (Mutch, 2014; Fu & Zhang, 2024; Le Brocque et al., 2016). Despite the strength of this evidence, in Mutch (2014) study on the relationship between schools and communities when facing disasters, there appears to be a lack of sufficient time and effort dedicated to adequately prepare teachers for such events. The findings of this study provide further available data in support of this assertion and indicate the necessity for further inquiry in order to enhance comprehension of the ways to narrow this disparity.

Behaviors. Responses to the study expressed a need for improved training to effectively handle the heightened behavioral issues exhibited by students upon their return to the classroom following the pandemic. Participants presented numerous and diverse instances of disciplinary issues when compared to before the pandemic, validating research examining the increased disruptive behavior in student's post-pandemic (Prothero (2023); Schaffer et al., 2021; Sun et al. 2022). These ranged from general selfish behavior and lack of respect on one side of the spectrum to a significant increase in fights on the other. The responses from participants regarding training in this aspect, though less direct and with little unification, demonstrated a prevailing belief that teachers would have been more effective in managing the growing discipline challenges through better training, supporting Blazar & Kraft (2016) findings that teachers need to be trained in an expanse of various skill sets. These findings reflect the results of the 2022 Learn Together Survey which indicated that roughly two-thirds of teachers wished their training programs had included more training on dealing with student conduct (Doan & Berdie, 2023). It is important to acknowledge that this study did not categorize respondents based on their gender, unlike the Learn Together Survey. As a result, the findings of this study do not provide any supporting or contradicting evidence regarding the variations in views between male and female teachers' responses within the survey. Although school administrators were not included in this study, it is important to highlight the alignment of the research and the findings of this study to their perspectives. Notably, 60% of school principals not only hold similar viewpoints, but there has also been a considerable 20% increase since before the pandemic (Perera & Diliberti, 2023). Although it is not difficult to find evidence of a rise in behavioral issues in classrooms,

and findings from existing research indicate that teachers often feel ill-equipped to effectively handle these challenges, as supported by their responses in this study, there is, surprisingly, a lack of significant research specifically addressing this connection. This study therefore expands the available data and enforces the need for expanded research to connect these two intertwined elements.

Robinson et al. (2022) assert that within the classroom, stressors experienced by teachers relate to their relationships with students and their concerns for their education and well-being, making it impossible to separate them. Responses to this study validated this assertion, identifying the benefit "having different skills" would be to addressing the vast number of behavioral issues teachers are facing upon return to the classroom, and indicating the increased stress of not having skills to deal with them, noting "any kind of training" would have been helpful. One participant directly supported Breaux et al. (2021) observation that the potential consequences of chronic stressors, exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, are expected to be amplified among adolescents with pre-existing mental health vulnerabilities, including ADHD. This respondent specifically identified the need for more training to deal with behaviors exacerbated within adolescent individuals with limited pre-pandemic emotion regulation capacities (Breaux et al., 2021).

COVID-19. The final educational training sub-theme that emerged was the need for better training regarding the COVID-19 virus itself. This sub-theme included the idea of attaining better accuracy of information, including the various societal changes being driven by the pandemic (i.e., how it can spread, deterrence effectiveness, social distancing, etc.). This sub-theme was unique within the other themes and sub-themes

within this study, as it was the only sub-theme that was identified less by analysis of direct responses and more by analysis of inference from most responses scattered across all questions. Among the more direct responses were students' fears about contracting COVID-19 from someone coughing and other related social contact virus impacts, supporting research exploring the physical and psychological impacts of the pandemic and the heightened existence of this fear within students (Munir et al., 2021). One participant specifically mentioned the advantages of providing teachers with improved training on the impact of the pandemic on students. The responses to this study generally inferred the overarching impact of COVID-19 lockdowns and the associated stressors it generated on the mental well-being of both students and teachers, supporting Munir et al. (2021) research regarding student impact and Beames et al. (2021) findings on the significant personal impact of COVID-19 on the teacher community.

Research fell short, however, in addressing the critical needs for increased accuracy of information and improved training regarding COVID-19 itself and societal changes that continue to be driven by it. Moreover, subsequent research also failed to establish direct connections to this specific sub-theme. Responses by some participants regarding the impact of the fears of the students and the subsequent impacts to heightened anxiety and stress fully supported existing research Munir et al. (2021).; Wu et al. (2023). The range of responses supporting this sub-theme, directly and indirectly, showcase the perspective that additional research should explore the numerous potential indirect consequences stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, which cannot be adequately addressed in a single study. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that these indirect

effects underscore the significance of steering future research efforts towards pediatric studies and providing the imperative support they necessitate (Mulkey et al., 2023).

Social Connections

The findings of this study featured a prominent theme that underscored the examination of the repercussions of the pandemic on social connections. Analysis of research was supported significantly by participants' responses pertaining to the social impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on individuals of all age groups, especially children. Such a comprehensive exploration of this theme presents multiple intricate avenues of investigation, which are likely to captivate researchers for years to come. However, within the realm of participant responses, three specific sub-themes emerged. These sub-themes encompassed the detrimental repercussions of isolation, the dynamics of interactions, and the challenges faced in communication.

Isolation. Seven of the twelve participants in the study identified behaviors of students which they directly attributed in some way to the effects of isolation, offering support for Larsen et al. (2021) exploration of the effects of the pandemic's lockdowns on students. Returning to previous societal norms after an extended period of abnormal societal anomalies, forgetting social skills that had once been second nature, and withdrawing into themselves were general observations made by participants within the interviews. These observations are in lockstep with research assertions that isolation policies drove higher levels of loneliness (Gazmararian et al., 2021) and degradation of social skills (Li & Leung, 2020), Furthermore, the comments from three participants insinuated that certain students were still experiencing isolation, making them highly vulnerable to previously existing depression and self-harming tendencies, supporting

research suggesting that challenges associated with isolation can worsen existing mental health issues among students (Bruhn et al., 2022). The findings of this study also provided supporting evidence to research suggesting that individuals who choose to isolate themselves or withdraw from social interactions due to fear, anxiety, or similar factors may experience restricted access and utilization of vital forms of support (Szkody et al., 2020). In total, the responses to this study strengthen the wealth of available research examining the impacts of social isolation on the mental health of students.

   Interaction. The second sub-theme within the theme of social connections was one of only two sub-themes to have directly related comments from 11 of the 12 study participants. This sub-theme focused on the dynamics surrounding interactions, which could be further broken down into three general relationships: student peer-to-peer, student-to-teacher, and to a lesser extent but notable, teacher peer-to-peer.

   Eight responses by six participants within this study focused on observations of peer-to-peer relationships between students. The observations spanned a wide spectrum of behaviors, revealing the challenges some students faced when interacting with former friends, as well as instances where social distancing protocols were disregarded in favor of embracing their friends enthusiastically. Some observers in this study focused on the idea that certain students, particularly those who experienced the pandemic lockdowns at a young age, demonstrated significant struggles in social interactions due to limited exposure to other children, supporting ideas explored by (Mulkey et al., 2023).These responses lend support to existing research investigating the idea that the impact of COVID-19 on children is closely tied to their age and prior experiences at the onset of the pandemic (Chaturvedi et al. 2021; Mulkey et al., 2023). Furthermore, a few respondents

raised concerns regarding the deterioration of classroom dynamics, as students seemed to have either forgotten or never acquired, depending on their age, the skills required for effective group work, offering further evidence supporting the key tenant of (Mulkey et al., 2023) study, as well as Chaturvedi et al. (2021) examination of the pandemic's effects on students' education by age. Research revealed targeted findings regarding the relationships between students where one had pre-existing ADHD (Breaux et al., 2021), but existing research primarily focused on the overall impacts of student peer interaction, rather than examining the specific manifestations of peer-to-peer interactions as portrayed by the participants in this study. This absence of focused research provides a window of exploration for future researchers, which should consider focusing on specific modalities of interpersonal exchanges among students and the impacts of the pandemic on them. It is noteworthy that other studies examining the preservation of social interactions at various social levels beyond primary and secondary school did yield findings consistent with the present study (Perez-Brumer et al., 2022).

The subject of teacher-to-student interactions was also noted in eight different responses. Most of these remarks revolved around the dynamics of students requiring additional platforms for the secure expression of their emotions or the necessity for more personalized and gradually paced instructional approaches. The idea that teachers play a larger role in assisting with students' mental health in a post-pandemic education environment (Weisbrot & Ryst, 2020) in the research is supported by these responses, which also align with the assertion that more pioneering student mental health provisions will be needed post-pandemic (Hamilton & Gross, 2021). The responses in this study identifying a significant change in learning pace and individual learning attention support

evidence identifying the many challenges students face in learning and recovering the significant learning loss driven by the pandemic (Kuhfeld et al., 2022). Further responses supporting this sub-theme were unique. One participant emphasized the significance of the spiritual dimension in human interactions, valuing the opportunity working in a Christian school allows to impart a faith-based perspective on coping with adversities to students, thereby fostering a positive mindset and bolstering resilience in challenging situations. This feedback advances (del Castillo, 2020) exploration of the link between spirituality and an individual's well-being.

A single participant specifically highlighted the difficulties that teachers encounter and the consequential effects on their interpersonal relationships, directly supporting existing studies pertaining to stressors from the pandemic and their effects on relationships between teachers and their colleagues (Robinson et al., 2022). It is evident that numerous opportunities exist to enrich our understanding in the field of post-pandemic interactions. This study provides evidence to further this endeavor and assist in understanding more isolated parameters in future research efforts.

Communications. The final sub-theme within the social connections theme was that of communication. Responses from the study participants indicated a concentration on a sub-theme that encompassed two broad areas. The first area centered on the growing demand for additional outlets to facilitate effective communication of students' emotions. The second area revolved around the variations in communication techniques employed by teachers to deliver classroom instructions.

Participants in this study provided numerous interview responses corroborating the idea that there is an increased need for mental health support in schools (Shelemy et

al., 2019). The responses suggested that student's post-pandemic require more outlets to communicate their emotions appropriately and in a trusted situation. Their responses additionally supported the concept explored by Imran et al. (2018) that teachers, although they can help and should receive improved training in mental health, are not experts in the field of mental health. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, it is important to acknowledge that these conversations were already underway within research but have experienced significant growth in the aftermath of the pandemic (dos Santos Costa et al., 2022). Research indicates that educational institutions were not prepared to handle this surge prior to the pandemic and are therefore lacking the necessary capacity to address the situation adequately after the pandemic (Abrams, 2022). This study provides further evidence to support this idea, emphasizing the growing necessity for mental health professionals to facilitate the expression of students' emotions, even within the relatively small setting of a private school (in comparison to the student body size of most public schools).

Communications challenges faced by participants focused as well on the impacts of the pandemic on how teachers must adapt how they communicate their lessons. Responses attributed this necessity to several factors, including reduced attention spans of students due to factors such as isolation, reduced ability to comprehend and retain information, and the loss of prior knowledge. Barbosa-Camacho et al. (2022) hypothesized that the extended duration of time away from the traditional classroom setting could potentially alter the attention span of students, a theory that was found to be fully supported by the findings of this study. Respondents' observations, noting loss of learning, concentration issues, and other similar challenges in learning due to multiple

COVID-19 related factors, furthered exploration about regressive tendencies driven by the pandemic, and the ability of students to access and receive information effectively (Barbosa-Camacho et al., 2022; Larsen et al., 2021).

It is worth mentioning that despite conducting a thorough examination of the existing research, no direct studies were found that specifically acknowledged the decreased cognitive capacity of students in comprehending and retaining information within the confines of a traditional classroom setting. However, research has revealed a notable decrease specifically in reading comprehension skills among students in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Almasi & Yuan, 2023). In their study Almasi & Yuan (2023) observed that there is limited data available around student comprehension post-pandemic, as studies in this area are only just starting to surface. Research tying any type of comprehension or data retention by students to how information is communicated was also not found, providing opportunity for future investigation. According to Zhao & Selman (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic has expedited the long-awaited changes in teaching practices, particularly in the context of technology integration. The necessity for teachers to adapt their instructional communication methods upon returning to the classroom was reinforced by the findings of this study, as indicated by the responses received.

According to Betthäuser et al. (2023), the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented disruption to the field of education, with profound implications for learning on a global scale. Responses to this study provide further evidence of this assertion, as well as the idea that modifications in how teachers communicate are imperative. This study advances investigations into this idea by Ratten (2023) examining

this concept and affirms that, in a post-COVID-19 context of transitioning from online learning back to classroom instruction, various modifications in the way instructions are delivered to students is now necessary. These modifications encompass a broader spectrum of instructional techniques and the provision of customized educational materials tailored to the individual learner (Ratten, 2023).

The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding communication in the educational environmental, shedding light on the role that instructional communication plays in educational settings, particularly in times of change and transitioning. Consequently, it is crucial for educators to recognize the significance of modifying their instructional communication methods to address the evolving needs and challenges faced by their students in the classroom. Schools should also recognize the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has increased the necessity for students to have multiple avenues through which they can express and address their emotional and mental health concerns.

Behavioral Challenges

The study's findings revealed a final thematic element focusing on behavioral challenges. These challenges were further divided into three sub-themes which included anger issues, academic issues and conduct issues.

Anger Issues. Most responses pertaining to student conduct will be discussed under the sub-theme of conduct issues. However, during analysis of select responses, the researcher discerned implicit indications that warranted the establishment of a distinct sub-theme dedicated solely to anger issues, separate from the overarching category of conduct issues. It is worth mentioning that half of the participants provided comments,

either directly or indirectly, pointing towards behavioral manifestations influenced by anger. Among these respondents, one-third explicitly mentioned the terms "anger" and "anger issues" in their responses. Research into the realm of mental health referrals within the educational setting indicates that a notable proportion of them stem from instances of explosive anger and aggressive behavior (Galarneau et al., 2022). In their study, Sukhodolsky et al. (2016) investigated the impact of behavioral interventions on anger in children and adolescents, noting a correlation between anger-driven behavior and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of evidence suggesting that although participants are unable to make specific diagnoses, they do observe a correlation between the display of angrier behavior and an increase in mental health problems among students. Additional research has also proposed the concept of a rise in childhood anxiety and stress-related behaviors, influenced by children's subjective perception of the health risk posed to them by COVID-19 (Meade, 2021). Elharake et al. (2022) investigate the idea that the impacts of the pandemic, such as transition to online learning and lack of resources, loss of social contact, and lack of support can lead to anger in children. This suggests that the overall heightened anxiety levels experienced in the pandemic-affected world might have played a role in the observed increase in behavior difficulties. These findings align not only with the reported instances of anger-related issues in this study, but also draw connections to various other sub-themes identified. Two distinct responses by separate participants in the study referred not only to the fact that fights had broken out several times within the classroom since returning post-pandemic, but expressed a significant level of surprise, indicating that this behavior had not been the norm prior to the pandemic in their school.

Responses to this study serve as further substantiation for the claims put forth by Meade (2021) and Elharake et al. (2022) that the widespread stressors induced by the pandemic could have significantly amplified behavioral problems across all levels.

 Academic Issues. The second behavioral issue sub-theme centered around the idea of academic issues. 92% of the participants provided comments, in various forms, regarding the behavior of students in the academic setting. Several specific responses within this sub-theme are addressed within other sub-theme analysis based on the defined nature of the comments, but collectively they present a picture of behavior in an academic setting that has been significantly altered by the pandemic. These findings confirm research evidence identifying the historic changes to the educational landscape, including the altered relationship between students and academics, due to lockdowns, massive interruptions, and subsequent changes to previous norms (Núñez-Regueiro et al., 2022; Betthäuser et al., 2023; Colvin et al., 2021); Tri Sakti et al., 2022). Participants provided diverse responses, but among them the issues pertaining to decreased ability to problem-solve and propensity to give up were identified, supporting findings by Günaydın (2021) linking COVID-19 fears with academic motivations and problem-solving skills. Tri Sakti et al. (2022) argues that low participation in extracurriculars and younger age were key factors in poor academic motivation, findings that cannot be substantiated by this study, though some inference may be made regarding the involvement in extracurriculars. This does, however, indicate the wide spectrum of possible ideas for academic related issues, and the need to pursue investigation into these issues to provide data to support corrective measures to assist students academically post-pandemic. The findings from participant responses provide support and evidence for the

claim that students' academic performance declined in all areas following their return to school after the traumatic event of the pandemic (Schaffer et al., 2021). Moreover, the results further reinforce the findings put forth by Terada (2020), which assert a direct correlation between the academic performance of students and their mental well-being.

Conduct Issues. The sub-theme of conduct issues is the third and final sub-theme within the overarching theme of behavioral issues. It is important to recognize that not all instances of student conduct that were identified necessarily conformed to the conventional definition of negative or unfavorable behavior. Rather, they were simply behaviors that deviated from the established norm prior to the pandemic. Similarly to responses to the sub-theme of academic issues, 92% of respondents referred in some way to general conduct issues. The scope of these issues encompassed a broad range. Supporting Fedorenko et al.'s (2021) investigation into the heightened fear of viral and health related issues and their impacts on behaviors, several findings among the participants indicated a notable shift in students' attitudes towards germs. They began to acknowledge the existence of germs and started considering them as a significant factor in their daily lives, which was not the case before the pandemic. According to response data, students displayed heightened paranoia concerning getting sick by proximity to others, other individuals coughing or removing masks, or just general exposure to other people as opposed to the isolation of home. This supports Pedrosa et al. (2020) assertion that psychological and social impacts of COVID-19 were greater than risk of contracting the virus. The findings from certain participants' responses revealed that certain students demonstrated enduring fear responses, aligning with previous research suggesting that

such persistent fear, particularly amidst a pandemic, is associated with a higher
susceptibility to psychopathological consequences (Fedorenko et al., 2021).

The other side of the spectrum included findings from the respondents regarding
student conduct such as restlessness, disrespect, increased selfish attitudes and behaviors,
fighting, and lack of adaptive skills. Research regarding the negative effects on student
behaviors by the events surrounding the pandemic (Schaffer et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2022)
were supported by this response data. Further research noted the correlation between
more aggressive behavior, such as disrespect or fighting, to conduct disorder (CD)
(Sukhodolsky et al., 2016). Based on findings from participants, this may imply a
pandemic related correlation between the sub-theme of increased anger issues and the
sub-theme of increased conduct issues, supporting Sukhodolsky et al.'s (2016) connective
assertion of a potential association with the overall rise in potential diagnoses of either
CD or ODD. Consequently, this indicates the need for further comprehensive
investigation. The results of the study also supported the hypothesis identified by Breaux
et al. (2021) that students who already had mental health challenges like ADHD were at
an increased risk of amplified conduct issues due to the impact of the pandemic. The data
from these collective responses regarding student conduct issues not only reaffirm the
existing research but also provide additional support for the main objective of this study
which is to highlight the urgent need for teachers to be better equipped to address the
increasingly complex and diverse mental health needs of students in the aftermath of the
pandemic.

Biblical Foundation

The findings of this study brought into focus various themes that were previously identified in the literature review and were rooted in the biblical foundation of the study. However, several of these themes were fundamentally associated with the impact of anxiety.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exerted a profound impact on the emotional and mental well-being of students, particularly as they transition back to in-person learning. The resumption of classroom activities has engendered feelings of concern and unease stemming from the various repercussions of the pandemic. Moreover, anxiety, fear, and tension are among the complex array of emotions with which students are grappling. This overarching theme of exacerbated anxiety levels was at least referenced in much of the literature review, including direct statistics noting the overall increase of anxiety (Li & Leung, 2020), the anxiety-inducing effects of returning to in-person learning (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021), and increased anxiety due to home stress (Thakur, 2020). This theme prevailed as well within the findings of the study. Respondents noted terms related to anxiety directly 15 times, more than any other theme or sub-theme throughout the study. Further research observed that very few studies regarding post-pandemic life failed to identify some connection to anxiety, however, few focused on it more than Archbell & Coplan, 2021, in their study focusing on effects of social anxiety among students and the link to academic and social mental health struggles. This relationship of anxiety to a myriad of challenges within a pandemic as well as the post-pandemic world was not solely in the realm of students, but also had significant impacts on teachers themselves. Findings within the literature review noted already high levels of feelings of anxiety amongst teacher's pre-pandemic which have persisted and grown during the

pandemic and beyond (Baker et al., 2021). Respondents shared feelings of inadequacy, ill-preparedness to deal with situations they were confronted with during and after the pandemic, and other anxiety related expressions of feelings. Further research noted that student behaviors such as those identified through responses to this study significantly increase teacher anxiety, and that the statistics from several studies identify critical levels of teacher anxiety, necessitating the need for more attention to this issue (Agyapong et al., 2022). Taken together, a picture emerges of a veritable powder keg of anxiety related effects on all aspects of life, expressly within the classroom environment. Several respondents identified the biblical aspect of the situation, noting the strength, peace and support found when focusing on the Word of God, rather than the things going on in the world, and how faith guided through the these untreaded waters. One respondent stressed the benefits of being able to talk openly about having a relationship with God to the students, and how it made a big difference and gave the students a better perspective, helping to calm some students' feelings of anxiety. These responses align directly to the study's biblical foundation suggestion that anxiety and doubt are related, and the Bible offers a myriad of direction on how this should be dealt with, offering promises of comfort in darkness (Biblica Inc., 2016, Psalms 23:4) direction to give our feelings of anxiety over to Christ (Biblica Inc., 2016, 1 Peter 5:7), and offering comprehensive support including strength, help, and protection in times of fear and doubt (Biblica Inc., 2016, Isaiah 41:10).

The study recognizes that the transition back to in-person learning has significantly impacted students' well-being, directly linked to anxiety related impacts in all aspects of life. Literature review suggested that due to the considerable amount of

time that students spend interacting with their teachers, the significant role and opportunity that teachers possess in terms of observing, identifying, and supporting students with mental health issues cannot be overstated (Shelemy et al., 2019). This suggests that teachers can and should play a crucial role in providing social and psychological support to alleviate anxiety within their students which based on the responses requires the need for better mental health training for teachers.

Implications

The education system has been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with teachers and students facing numerous challenges as a result. These challenges have had a noticeable impact on students, leading to difficulties in expressing their emotions, increased disciplinary issues, the emergence of virus-related behaviors that were previously unobserved, a decline in academic proficiency, and a deterioration of social and communication skills. Teachers, on the other hand, have had to grapple with the complex task of managing the evolving psychological and physical behaviors displayed by students, experiencing stress due to a perceived lack of effectiveness in navigating the unfamiliar classroom environment, and facing the difficulties of adapting their teaching methods to the new circumstances. This study adds to the current knowledge base on the impacts of COVID-19 on students by highlighting the insufficient training provided to teachers. By analyzing the firsthand experiences and observations shared by interviewed teachers, the research confirmed an assumption of this study that teachers had to navigate this changing environment with no structured professional training. At a minimum, the findings can be utilized by school administrators and mental health professionals to

inform improvements in the understanding of the role of teachers and to enhance training to facilitate their preparedness for future pandemic related classroom challenges.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework of this study establishes Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) as one possible solution to combat the increase in anxiety related student behaviors in the classroom. Previous studies have indicated that the COVID-19 shutdown has resulted in an elevated prevalence of depression and anxiety. This increase in anxiety has been linked to a decline in academic performance (Gazmararian, 2021), while the reduction in social interactions has had a significant negative impact on the mental well-being of students (Elmer, 2020). The study also revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted students' behaviors in the classroom (Schaffer, 2021). Results of this study confirm these findings exist within the Christian school environment.

CBT is the leading type of therapy used to identify the thinking patterns of individuals to gain understanding of the behavior exhibited, with the perspective that changing the way someone thinks can change the way they behave. CBT has been used for several years in relation to interventions dealing with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with a level of success (Luxford et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the implementation of this technology in schools has been impeded by a range of obstacles, preventing its extensive utilization beyond limited areas such as ASD. These challenges have caused delays in adopting it among numerous educational institutions and in a broader scope (Forman & Barakat, 2011). Studies suggest that exploration of adapting CBT for inclusion of faith, or religious, aspects could produce potential benefits (de Abreu Costa & Moreira-Almeida, 2021). Additional studies have provided compelling evidence

suggesting that the incorporation of religious elements into psychotherapy protocols may yield superior outcomes compared to secular approaches (Anderson et al., 2015). The findings from this study suggest that the enduring consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is classified as a Type III trauma, may have ushered in a new normal characterized by a prolonged period where previously typical behaviors exhibited by students are now manifested in less disciplined forms (Kira et al., 2021). As a result, this situation presents a confluence of circumstances that warrants a re-evaluation of previous reservations regarding the integration of CBT and similar therapeutic approaches into standard teacher readiness training programs. The results of this study, coupled with indications from other research, provide compelling evidence that CBT should be integrated with faith-based elements to not only make it more effective in general, but more appropriate for utilization in a Christian school setting.

Responses from participants regarding Question 5, which directly inquired about their perception of their training and preparedness to address the mental health needs of students in the post-pandemic classroom, as well as their responses to Question 6, which sought their opinions on the type of training that would have been beneficial prior to returning to the classroom, strongly support the theoretical implication. The findings overwhelmingly suggest that teachers felt ill-equipped and inadequately trained to address the mental health needs of their students. Furthermore, most participants expressed that training specifically focused on addressing the impact of mental health issues would have greatly aided them in their roles. The introduction of CBT training within the Christian school environment holds immense theoretical implications, not only in enhancing teachers' preparedness, but also in serving other crucial purposes. These

include equipping teachers with a screening tool to determine whether students should be referred to a trained counselor, as well as using CBT techniques to effectively de-escalate various types of challenging behaviors exhibited by students, as demonstrated throughout this study. According to Ghafari et al. (2021), it is widely recognized that teachers play a vital role in addressing students' mental health needs and identifying behavioral patterns. Thus, it can be contended that teachers, equipped with additional training like CBT, have the potential to serve as key facilitators in implementing early detection and intervention programs.

Practical Implications

Based on data collected from the 2016 through 2020 National Surveys of Children's Health in the United States, a concerning trend of rising anxiety and depression among young individuals was observed even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data further revealed an exacerbation of these mental health conditions, as well as an increase in behavioral problems, in response to the pandemic (Oblath et al., 2024). The present study's discoveries enrich our comprehension of the diverse range of manners through which these student behaviors manifest within the context of a Christian educational institution. Furthermore, these findings substantiate the data that these behaviors have indeed seen significant increase since the resumption of in-person classroom activities following the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the provision and accessibility of mental healthcare services have decreased during this taxing time, compounded by the fact that there was already insufficient capacity to meet the mental health needs of students. The existing strains on resources have now been exponentially exacerbated, making it increasingly challenging to provide adequate preventive mental

health care (Oblath et al., 2024; Abrams, 2022). Christian schools generally do not include dealing with students' mental health concerns as part of academic training for their teachers, nor do they tend to offer it as in-service training. Consequently, as this study's data demonstrates, a significant number of Christian school teachers feel ill-prepared and inadequately equipped to handle these distressing matters (Dixon, 2019).

The findings of this study, however, have practical implications to not only the Christian school community, but other private and public school, church counseling & youth programs, and mental health scientific communities. Collectively, all these communities can utilize this study to begin, or further, conversations about the need to enlist more front-line youth practitioners, whether teachers, pastors, or other similar roles, to begin to alleviate this growing need. The upward trend in school-aged student's mental health needs, coupled with the downward trend in capacity of mental health counselors to deal with these needs, calls for innovative solutions to bridge this widening gap.

In the Christian school setting, as well as other private and public-school settings, school administrators can utilize this study to gain a better understanding of the realities of the myriad of mental health related challenges their student populations face, including significant and non-traditional needs, previously unrealized anxieties and fears, and an extended collapse in basic stability driven by a Type III traumatic event. By drawing insights from this study, school administrators can gain familiarity with the needs of their teaching staff to effectively address the rising incidence of mental health issues and associated behaviors within their classroom settings. Administrators can also use this data to facilitate the integration of appropriate training within the mental health field for their teachers, making it part of the required teacher professional development program.

Additionally, administrators can leverage the findings of this study to enhance their comprehension of teachers' requirements for innovative instructional methods in the post-pandemic era, considering the alterations in students' comprehension and retention abilities. Teachers can apply these findings to gain a deeper comprehension of the emerging post-pandemic realities, which will require a substantial shift in their traditional approaches to classroom teaching. Both administrators and teachers can gain insights from this study as to the importance of faith and biblical wisdom in combating the effects of anxiety and fear driven mental health challenges within the student population. Although implementing this concept in a public-school setting may pose challenges, particularly due to the prevailing resistance to incorporating spiritual aspects in such environments, the notion of establishing religious and spiritual safe zones within public school counseling frameworks is not a novel idea (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011) and this study could drive further thought in this direction.

This study's findings hold significant implications for churches and their counseling and youth programs in terms of gaining a deeper understanding of the distinct and evolving challenges that post-pandemic youth encounter within their sphere of influence. Church counselors, pastors and other related practitioners in the church could gain insights from this study to help them investigate the need for training opportunities that might fit within their frameworks to assist in appropriately scaled application of mental health tools to aid in supporting mental health needs of the students in their care.

In the mental health scientific community, this study could contribute to the identification of specific mental health needs among students and inform the development of training programs that cater to these needs and can be utilized within

teacher professional development programs within schools of various types and sizes. Armed with the knowledge gleaned from this study, these training programs can effectively equip educators with the necessary tools to identify and support students grappling with anxiety-related behaviors. Additionally, these programs can help teachers provide students with adequate coping mechanisms and arm themselves with valuable de-escalation techniques.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that the participating teachers are only from a private, Christian school. Hence, the extent to which the findings may be applied to different demographics, such as educators in public schools, is potentially restricted. In addition, the ability to generalize is constrained due to the utilization of an exploratory, qualitative case study approach with a limited sample size.

Limitations in the study can arise when collecting data. Possible limitations identified in the introduction included the assumption that participants would give an accurate account of their experiences. Despite the implementation of suitable sampling techniques, certain studies are nonetheless constrained by the utilization of data solely obtained from participants who voluntarily enrolled in the study. Occasionally, individuals may offer prejudiced information by answering questions they perceive as advantageous to the researcher rather than providing their genuine reaction. Proving this limitation is a challenging undertaking as it inherently involves subjective elements. Nevertheless, it is critical to acknowledge that during the research process, there was only one interview conducted where the researcher perceived a potential presence of biased information from the participant. This bias seemed to emanate from the way the

participant's information could reflect upon them as a teacher. In this scenario, the researcher's perspective indicates that the participant might have had concerns about the researcher's perception of their teaching abilities being negatively influenced if the researcher became aware of the participant's personal difficulties. It is important to note that no specific measures were implemented by the researcher to address or counteract this perceived bias. However, efforts were made to carefully review and verify the accuracy of the data through discussions with the participant. Consequently, it can be acknowledged within the context of this study that all possible steps were taken to alleviate this limitation.

Recommendations for Future Research

The examination of the responses from the study and their correlation to existing research revealed several areas that warrant further investigation. While some of these areas were broad in scope, others were more nuanced.

One area recommended for further investigation in future research is student peer-to-peer relationships in the classroom after the pandemic. Research revealed a noticeable gap in understanding this aspect. The responses obtained from participants highlighted the concept of suppressed anxiety among students and its potential impact on their relationships with their peers. However, more comprehensive research is needed to explore this phenomenon in depth.

Another issue highlighted by multiple participants, but lacking extensive research, pertains to the decline in students' comprehension and retention abilities upon their return to the classroom following the COVID-19 pandemic. While existing studies have mainly focused on reading comprehension, there is a deficiency of research exploring the wider

scope of challenges students face in these domains across diverse subjects within the classroom setting. Conducting more targeted investigations in this area would enhance the overall comprehension of educators and psychologists specializing in education and child development.

Several survey participants noted an emerging trend among students following the pandemic: a heightened demand for individual attention and increased instructional time. However, the existing research on this topic is limited in scope and it is strongly advised that further investigation be conducted to explore this idea in greater depth. Additionally, it is recommended that future research expand its parameters to include a comprehensive examination of both direct and indirect factors that may have influenced this demand, taking into consideration the unique circumstances of a pandemic.

Although the participants responses were more inferred than directly stated, their reactions implied a significant impact on the accuracy, or lack of accuracy, of information surrounding the COVID-19 virus and the resulting changes in societal norms. Unfortunately, the research conducted did not uncover sufficient evidence to establish a direct correlation between the scarcity of accurate information and the enhancement of training concerning COVID-19, specifically in terms of teachers' ability to address students' anxieties related to the pandemic. Nonetheless, the implications drawn from this study suggest that future research endeavors could potentially provide valuable insights, enabling better collaboration among the educational, healthcare, and mental health communities towards enhancing teachers' capacity to navigate pandemic-related issues within the classroom setting.

The responses highlight the significance of incorporating strong biblical principles and personal adherence to these principles by educators within a school environment. Furthermore, the findings suggest that these principles could have far-reaching effects if incorporated into mental health training programs in non-Christian schools. Additional studies examining the specific impact of biblical foundations and religious practices on student well-being and academic outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Nonetheless, the insights provided by the results of this study offer a meaningful starting point for future research and discussions in the field of biblical foundations for addressing student mental health challenges.

A recommendation particularly relevant to the Christian school setting, would involve further integration of a Christian perspective into the study. Some respondents specifically acknowledged the significance of faith in God in assisting them in promoting students' mental well-being. Conducting additional research focused on this idea would provide a more comprehensive understanding of this relationship. This could be achieved by incorporating specific inquiries aimed at examining the impact of faith in God on students' mental health, as well as how this faith influences teachers' ability to support their students in the classroom. Expanding on this recommendation, it would be beneficial to conduct similar studies in schools affiliated with other religious traditions, such as Jewish, Muslim, or Catholic schools, to discern the similarities and differences in how faith supports the management of students' mental health issues following traumatic events.

The findings of this study illuminated the experiences of teachers who taught prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, during the period of remote learning necessitated by the COVID-19 shutdowns, and upon their return to traditional classroom settings amidst the ongoing pandemic. The responses of participants of the study highlighted the changes in the mental health of students and the training needs of teachers, however, should be noted that the results are limited to a single private Christian school. To comprehensively address the mental health needs of students and provide Christian schools with effective tools to support them. It is recommended that additional studies be conducted, expanding this investigation to encompass other types of private schools, such as charter schools, as well as various regions. This expansion would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of similarities and possible discrepancies in findings as compared to Christian schools. Similarly, including public schools in future research would facilitate meaningful comparisons between diverse learning environments. To enhance the research value, it is recommended that forthcoming studies consider variations in school settings, including urban and rural schools, as well as explore various grade levels. By collectively expanding the scope of research, mental health professionals and educators would be equipped with a powerful resource to develop targeted and structured training programs and techniques for teachers, ensuring they are optimally prepared to address students' mental health needs following traumatic events in the classroom.

During the analysis, two nuanced recommendations were identified for further research. The first recommendation focuses on examining the possible connection between the impacts of the pandemic and students' apprehensions regarding their future careers, a topic briefly touched upon in the literature review. Although the current study

did not detect any concerns in this area among the participants, it is plausible to expect that in a broader research scope, more insights could be uncovered regarding this issue. Particularly, exploring this topic in different educational contexts, beyond the small Christian school setting of this study, could shed light on the extent of these concerns and inform strategies to address them effectively.

The final overall recommendation and second of the more nuanced recommendations highlights the potential correlation between the ongoing pandemic and the surge in behavioral problems, as well as the diagnosis of disorders such as CD and ODD. By delving deeper into this connection, not only can we enhance our comprehension of the impact of these issues within an educational environment, but we can also gain insight into the potential challenges that may intensify as the children who experienced the pandemic during their formative years' transitions into adulthood. This avenue of research holds potential value not only for schools but for society at large by facilitating proactive measures to address these repercussions.

Summary

The study conducted examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school shutdown on the mental health needs of Christian school students. Furthermore, it explored the experiences and preparedness of teachers upon returning to the classroom post-pandemic, as well as their perspectives on addressing the mental health needs of students. Findings from teacher interviews indicated that teachers felt ill-equipped to handle the emotional needs of students and suggested that additional training would have been beneficial. Thematic analysis revealed four key themes: range of emotions, educational training, social connections, and behavioral challenges.

The study highlights the urgent need to address the mental health of students, particularly in the post-pandemic context. The experiences shared by the participating teachers demonstrate a decline in students' mental well-being, limited social connections, and an increase in behavioral challenges. As a result, it underscores the importance of implementing a comprehensive teacher training plan to provide mental health support and guidance to students. This includes updating teacher training requirements to include tools like cognitive behavioral therapy and providing mental health training and support for teachers. Practical implications of the study emphasize the need for schools to prioritize students' mental health needs and equip teachers with the necessary skills to address these needs effectively and proactively.

It is important to note that this study has certain limitations, such as a small sample size and a focus on a specific private Christian school. Future research should consider expanding the study to include a broader range of schools and demographics to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the mental health needs of students in the post-pandemic period. Additionally, further research could explore the impact of faith-based approaches on students' mental health in educational settings. Ultimately, addressing the mental health challenges of students in the post-pandemic era is vital for creating a supportive and conducive learning environment.

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APPENDIX A: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1: How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health before the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q2: How would you describe your experiences in the classroom with student mental health after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q3: How would you describe the differences in student needs following the pandemic as compared to before the pandemic?

Q4: How would you describe what current support, resources and training are in place to help meet students' mental health needs after returning to school following the COVID-19 shutdown?

Q5: Do you perceive that you are well-trained and equipped to handle the mental health needs of students after returning to school following the pandemic?

Q6: How would you describe what training might have been helpful to you to address mental health needs when returning to school?

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER

May 19, 2023

Mrs. Ashleigh Burnette
Head of School
███████████████

Dear Mrs. Ashleigh Burnette,

As a graduate student in the School of Psychology at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral degree. The title of my research project is Mental Health Training for Teachers since COVID-19 and the purpose of my research is lay the groundwork for further studies to identify what areas of support and training are needed for teachers after returning to the classroom after a traumatic event to better help them address the mental health needs of students.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct interviews among your professional teaching staff. The initial screening with take approximately 15 minutes, formal interviews would last approximately 45 minutes and if necessary, a follow up interview would take around 15 minutes. It can be scheduled at a time that is convenient to the participant. Participation in these interviews is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participate. All information provided will be kept in utmost confidence and will only be used for academic purposes. The names of respondents will not appear in any dissertation or publication.

If you agree, please send acknowledgement of your consent and permission for me to conduct the study/interviews at ████████████████ with some members of your teaching staff. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance with this research.

Sincerely,

Patricia Van Prooyen
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT FLYER

Seeking
Christian School teachers that have taught pre-COVID-19, online teaching, and post-COVID-19

Purpose
Identify what areas of support and training are needed for teachers after returning to the classroom after a traumatic event to better help them address the mental health needs of students.

Participants will be asked to participate in:
- initial screening (15 minutes)
- formal interview (45 minutes)
- follow-up interview (if needed, 15 minutes)

Are you eligible?

- full time, 1st -12th grade Christian school teacher
- over the age of 25
- no gaps in teaching from 2018- 2022
- certified through the Association of Christian Teachers and Schools (ACTS)

You are not eligible to participate if you:
- started teaching after the 2018-2019 school year
- public school teacher
- if retiring at the end of the 2022-2023 school year

Interested? Want to Enroll? Need Additional Information?
contact
Tricia Van Prooyen

███████████████

"This study is part of the researcher's doctoral education program."

Primary Researcher	Dissertation Chair
Tricia Van Prooyen	Dr. Kelly Gorbett

IRB Information:
1971 University Boulevard, Green Hall Suite 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

APPENDIX D: CONSENT LETTER

Title of the Project: Mental Health training for Teachers since COVID-19
Principal Investigator: Patricia Van Prooyen, Doctoral Candidate, Psychology
Department, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study identifying what areas of support and training are needed for teachers after returning to the classroom after a traumatic event to better help them address the mental health needs of students. To participate, you must be a full-time teacher for grades 1-12 in a Christian School setting, over the age of 25, and certified through the Association of Christian Teachers and Schools (ACTS). Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to identify what areas of support and training are needed for teachers after returning to the classroom after a traumatic event to better help them address the mental health needs of students.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Complete an initial screening to identify if the qualifications are met to participate in the study, this process will take approximately 15 minutes.
2. Researcher will conduct a formal interview with participant, this will last 45 minutes. This interview will be conducted in a private room. The researcher will be audio- recording as well as taking notes throughout the interview.
3. If needed, the research will conduct a follow-up interview, this will take approximately 15 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include identifying the importance of teacher receiving mental health training to support the needs of the students in the classroom, to help further the educational needs of the students, and identify the difference of mental health needs and behavioral student issues.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Participant responses will be confidential. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Data should be retained for at least three years after the completion of your study.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher serves as a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, the study will be anonymous, so the researcher will not know who participated. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

 If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Patricia Van Prooyen. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact the researcher

at██████████████ or ██████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Kelly Gorbett, at██████████████

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX E: EMERGING THEMES

Table 4.3

Themes, Subthemes and Frequency

Themes	Subthemes	Frequency
Range of Emotions	Stable	P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P10
	Anxiety/Fear	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
	Needy	P1, P2, P9, P10, P11, P12
Educational Training	Mental Health	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12
	Behaviors	P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P10, P11
	COVID-19	P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P9, P12
Social Connections	Isolation	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P10
	Interaction	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12
	Communication	P2, P3, P4, P6, P9, P10, P12
Behavioral Challenges	Anger Issues	P3, P4, P6, P10, P11, P12
	Academic Issues	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12
	Conduct Issues	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12

APPENDIX F: RECORDING DEVICE

Device name   DESKTOP-CQH7MSA

Processor   11th Gen Intel(R) Core(TM) i5-1135G7 @ 2.40GHz   2.42 GHz

Installed RAM8.00 GB (7.65 GB usable)

Device ID   E4E8D1DB-CEE0-4F1A-B454-520AAB16D2D2

Product ID   00325-81921-31412-AAOEM

System type   64-bit operating system, x64-based processor

Pen and touch Pen and touch support with 10 touch points