

EDUCATOR ATTRITION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN CAPE TOWN,
SOUTH AFRICA: FORMER PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATOR
PERCEPTIONS

by

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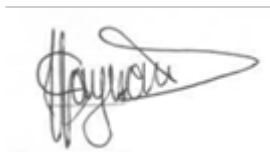
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6 January 2026

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I, Dr D.C. Lees, declare that this dissertation has been submitted to originality-checking software.

6 January 2026

Dr D. Lees

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to three very special people.

To my husband, Michael “Babe” Cleophas. This dissertation is dedicated to you. Thank you for your unwavering support and belief in me. Thank you for all the coffees, the meals, the cuddles, and the body-doubling. Thank you for your patience with me and for always making me feel like the most important woman in the world. I couldn’t have done this without you.

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ABSTRACT

Educator attrition is a growing concern in South Africa, with significant implications for the quality of teaching and learning. Understanding why educators leave the profession is critical for developing effective retention strategies. This research aimed to gain a deeper insight into the personal and professional experiences that influenced former primary school educators in Cape Town, South Africa, to leave the profession before retirement age, viewed through the lens of Fisher and Royster's Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. The study investigated the interplay between educators' needs being met and their motivations to leave the profession.

The study adopted a qualitative research design within an interpretivist paradigm, focusing on understanding participants lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 former educators, selected using purposive sampling based on defined criteria. Interviews were conducted either in person or online.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes, revealing several factors that influenced the decision to leave the profession, including a lack of support, overwhelming workloads, emotional exhaustion, systemic challenges within the education system, and limited opportunities for personal and professional growth.

This study highlighted the urgent need for retention strategies that address the holistic well-being of educators. By understanding the lived experiences of those who have left the profession, the findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, school leaders, and educator training institutions.

KEY TERMS

Educator Attrition	The act of educators leaving the teaching profession before retirement age.
Educator Retention	The act of educators staying in the teaching profession.
Former Educator	A person who has held a teaching position.
Novice Educator	Newly qualified educators with less than 5 years of in-service experience in teaching.
Primary School	A primary school is a school offering education from Grades 1 to 7.
Primary School Educator	Any person who teaches or educates learners from Grade R to Grade 7.
Retirement	A person who has held a teaching position until retirement age.
Retirement Age	Retirement age for South African educators is the age of 65 years old.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPTD	Continuous Professional Training and Development
DBE	Department of Basic Education
HOD	Head of Department
PAM	Personnel Administration Document
QMS	Quality Management System
SACE	South African Council of Educators
SADTU	South African Democracy Teacher Union
SMT	Senior Management Team
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: The relationship between Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs and Fisher and Royster’s (2016) Teachers’ Hierarchy of Needs.....	16
Figure 3.1: Facebook Flyer to recruit participants... ..	45
Figure 4.1: Candidate thematic map showing the two main themes and three sub-themes.....	62
Figure 4.2: Final thematic theme map showing the two main themes and three sub-themes.....	63

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Participant demographics and study relevant details	48
Table 4.1: Initial codes generated during thematic analysis.....	59
Table 4.2: Initial codes merged to form new codes during thematic analysis	60
Table 4.3: Final themes and sub-themes	61
Table 4.4: The connections between the research questions, interview questions and themes... ..	65
Table 4.5: Summary of themes and research findings... ..	91

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance Certificate	131
Appendix B: Consent Form and Reply Slip	133
Appendix C: Interview Questions and Interview Protocol.....	137
Appendix D: Poster posted on Facebook seeking former educators	140
Appendix E: Example of Interview Transcript	141
Appendix F: Editing Certificate	150
Appendix G: Screening Questionnaire	151

CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
KEY TERMS.....	vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vii
TABLE OF FIGURES.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF APPENDICES	x
CONTENTS	xi
CHAPTER ONE	1
ORIENTATION	1
1.1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH	3
1.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	5
1.4. ELUCIDATION OF CONCEPTS	5
1.4.1. Basic Concepts	5
1.4.2. Related Concepts	6
1.5. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	6
1.5.1. Main Research Question.....	7
1.5.2. Sub-Questions	7
1.6. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES	7
16.1. Research Aim.....	7
16.2. Objectives of the Study	7
1.7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	7
1.8. CHAPTER DIVISION	10
1.9. CHAPTER SUMMARY	11
CHAPTER TWO	13

LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1. INTRODUCTION	13
2.2. THEORY UNDERLYING THE STUDY	13
2.3. LITERATURE REVIEW	18
2.3.1. Educators in the South African Context	19
2.3.3. Educator Attrition.....	20
2.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPIRICAL STUDY.....	37
CHAPTER THREE	39
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	39
3.1. INTRODUCTION	39
3.2. RESEARCH PARADIGM	39
3.3. RESEARCH APPROACH	40
3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN	41
3.4. RESEARCH STRATEGY	42
3.5. RESEARCH PROCESSES	42
3.5.1. Selection of Participants.....	42
3.5.2. Data Collection	49
3.5.3. Data Analysis	50
3.6. MEASURES FOR TRUSTWORTHINESS	51
3.6.1. Credibility	52
3.6.2. Transferability.....	52
3.6.3. Dependability	52
3.6.4. Confirmability	52
3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	53
3.7.1. Ethical Clearance and Approval.....	53
3.7.2. Participant Recruitment and Informed Consent	53
3.7.3. Voluntary Participation.....	54
3.7.4. Confidentiality	54
3.7.5. Data Protection	54
3.7.6. Transparent Communication of the Findings.....	54
3.7.7. Minimising Risks to Participants	55
3.8. CHAPTER SUMMARY.....	55
CHAPTER FOUR	56

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	56
4.1. INTRODUCTION	56
4.2. RESEARCH PROCESS	56
4.3. DATA ANALYSIS	57
4.3.1. Phase 1: Familiarising Yourself with the Data	58
4.3.2. Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes	58
4.3.3. Phase 3: Search for Themes	61
4.3.4. Phase 4: Review the Themes	61
4.3.5. Phase 5: Define and Name the Themes	63
4.3.6. Phase 6: Produce the Report	63
4.4. OVERVIEW OF THEMES	64
4.4.1. Theme 1: Educator Experiences Leading to Attrition	66
4.4.2. Theme 2: The Decision to Leave the Profession	81
4.4.3. Theme 3: Life After Teaching	82
4.4.4. Theme 4: Recommendations	84
4.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS	92
4.6. CONCLUSION	93
CHAPTER FIVE	94
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	94
5.1. INTRODUCTION	94
5.2. SUMMARY OF LITERATURE	94
5.3. SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS	95
5.4. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS	98
5.5. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATOR RETENTION	99
5.5.1. Enhanced Support Systems	100
5.5.2. Mental Health Support	100
5.5.3. Independent Human Resource Support	101
5.5.4. Workload reduction and Professional Support	101
5.5.5. Addressing Toxic Work Environments	101
5.5.6. Improved Remuneration and Incentives	102
5.6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	103
5.7. AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	104
5.8. SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS	104

5.9. CONCLUDING REMARKS	106
REFERENCES.....	108
APPENDIX A: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	131
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM AND REPLY SLIP	133
APPENDIX C: RESEARCH STUDY INTEREST FORM	137
APPENDIX D: POSTER POSTED ON FACEBOOK SEEKING FORMER EDUCATORS	140
APPENDIX E: EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT.....	141
APPENDIX F: EDITING CERTIFICATE.....	150
APPENDIX G: SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE.....	151

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a complex and demanding profession. It requires significant intellectual and emotional effort, as well as practical, organisational, and social skills, while teachers manage responsibilities within and beyond the classroom (Connel, 2021). Despite these demands, educators remain fundamental to the success and sustainability of education systems.

Education systems, the foundation of societies, ensure future generations receive the necessary education and gain the skills needed to overcome challenges and sustain growth and development (UNICEF, 2021). Education has transformative power that fosters global citizenship, contributes to community development, and reinforces democratic principles. Additionally, it plays a key role in healing and establishing cultural identity (UNESCO, 2024). As posited by UNESCO (2016), educators are critical for ensuring access to quality education and equality, which makes them essential for global development.

Within this context, educators fulfil a wide range of responsibilities. According to the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document (1999), educators in South Africa are responsible for teaching, overseeing extra- and co-curricular activities, managing administrative tasks, and engaging with stakeholders. These responsibilities often extend beyond formal school hours, increasing the overall demands placed on educators.

Within the primary school context, the demands are particularly significant, as educators are required to support learners academic, social and emotional development during critical formative years (DBE, 2011). This places additional pressure on primary school educators, who must balance instructional responsibilities with administrative duties and learner support.

The increasing demands placed on educators have significant implications for their experiences within the profession. Educators often face heavy workloads, administrative pressures, learner discipline challenges, and limited support from

parents, which contribute to stress and reduced job satisfaction (Bantwini, 2010). Despite expectations to maintain a positive attitude and remain committed to promoting effective teaching and learning (Mboweni & Taole, 2022), these challenges may negatively impact educators' well-being.

These challenges are closely linked to educator attrition, which refers to the premature departure of educators from the profession before reaching retirement age (Ingersoll, 2001). Educator attrition is therefore not only a workforce concern but also an issue shaped by educators lived experiences within the profession.

Globally educator attrition has contributed to an increased demand for educators. According to the Global Report on Teachers, an additional 44 million educators will be required by 2030 to achieve universal primary and secondary education (UNESCO, 2024). The most critical shortage is in Sub-Saharan Africa, which required approximately 15 million additional educators.

South Africa reflects this global trend and is currently experiencing an educator shortage, with significant implications for learners and their access to quality education. The country is producing insufficient numbers of educators to meet demand. With approximately 15, 000 educators entering the profession each year and between 18, 000 and 20, 000 leaving, this falls short of the estimated 25, 000 educators required to maintain a satisfactory educator-learner ratio (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2019). To compound this, a notable surge in retirements in South Africa is expected around 2030, as a large portion of the workforce reaches retirement age over the next decade. Because of this, it is essential to recognise that the demand for new educators will rise sharply until it peaks at a demand for approximately 55, 000 new educators around the year 2030 (van der Berg, Gustafsson & Burger, 2022).

Within the South African context, and more specifically in Cape Town, these challenges are experienced within diverse schooling environments (Spaull, 2013). While national statistics highlight the scale of the issue, they do not fully capture the lived experiences of educators in specific contexts. Understanding the experiences of educators in Cape Town is therefore essential in identifying the factors that contribute to their decision to leave the profession.

Given the critical role that educators play in society, ongoing attrition poses a serious threat to the sustainability and effectiveness of education systems. If the issue is not addressed, it may have significant consequences for educational outcomes and broader societal development. This highlights the need to better understand the factors contributing to educator attrition in order to inform strategies aimed at improving educator retention (Yu, Feng & Tesic, 2023).

This study aimed to investigate the reasons behind educator attrition in Cape Town, by examining the experiences of former primary school educators. By gaining insight into both the personal and systemic factors that drive educators to exit the profession, those in charge of the education system can devise strategies to enhance educator retention.

The following section presents the background to this research.

1.2. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

International research indicates that educator attrition is a global challenge that is often complex and constantly evolving, and there is no single cause (Glazer, 2018; McJames, Parnell & O'Shea, 2022; See, Gorard, Morris & Ventista, 2022). International studies have widely investigated the phenomenon of educator attrition, for example, by exploring the impact of administrative support on educator retention in the US (Haynes, 2024), the motivations behind teaching and leaving the profession in the UK (Perryman & Calvert, 2019), early career retention strategies in 31 countries (van den Borre, Spruyt & van Droogenbroek, 2021), and educator targeted bullying and harassment as a challenge to educator well-being in Australia (Burns, Fogelgarn & Billett, 2020).

The implications of educator attrition are far-reaching and place financial responsibilities on districts and education departments to retain and replace educators. It directly impacts workloads, as the remaining educators who need to cover for those who have left the profession experience increased workloads (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). International research reports that school climate, workload, employment conditions, high amounts of stress, and remuneration are the most significant reasons for leaving the teaching profession (Bayrak, 2023; Craig, Hill-Jackson & Kwok, 2023; Tompkins, 2023). This situation leads to several

negative consequences, including lower learner achievement, reduced continuity for learners and parents, and increased educational costs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

In South Africa, research reports that the current working conditions of the teaching profession are not up to standard, for instance, as noted by the former National Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga, who confessed that educators work in an environment that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is not proud of (Siebritz, 2022). The South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) has warned that educators are under immense stress due to the conditions they are exposed to, and this is having far-reaching consequences in the education environment. It has been established that the consequences of educator stress include low performance, ill health, lack of well-being, increased absenteeism, and high turnover (Leah, Antiquina, Cericos, Bacus, Vallejo, Dionio, Bazar, Cocolan, & Clarin 2021; Marais-Opperman, Rothman & van Eeden, 2021; Siebritz, 2021). The CEO of SADTU has suggested that the pressure educators are under might be contributing to the high number of resignations within the DBE (Siebritz, 2022). Hofmeyr, Pampallis, Qvist and Swelindawo (2024) surveyed 1,500 educators in South Africa and found that half of the educators who participated considered leaving the profession within the next 10 years, mostly due to workload and high stress levels.

In August 2024, schools in the Western Cape of South Africa received devastating news: owing to budget cuts, 2,407 educators' jobs would be affected, as contracts would not be renewed or permanent educators would be reassigned to other schools (Western Cape Education Department, 2024). This educator-post cut has had serious implications for the education system. Owing to the reduction in the number of educators, the class sizes have increased, which has had repercussions on both teaching and learning, with some Grade 3 classes reported to be accommodating up to 93 students (Paoli, 2025; Serra, 2025). These conditions place additional pressure on educators, increasing workload, limiting individual learners' support, and contributing to stress and job-satisfaction. Such challenges may influence educators' decisions to leave the profession, thereby contributing to ongoing educator attrition (Palm, 2020).

The aim of this study was to investigate the reasons why primary school educators in Cape Town are leaving the teaching profession before retirement age. It is vital to understand the unique factors contributing to educator attrition in Cape Town, considering the expected increase in educator retirements in South Africa over the next 10 years and the significant implications of losing these educators. The findings of this research are intended to enhance the existing body of knowledge and offer insights that could shape future strategies to improve educator retention in South Africa.

Against this background, an overview of the theoretical framework for this study follows.

1.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, which Fisher and Royster presented in 2016 as a modification of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, was employed to understand educators' needs. This theoretical model was used to investigate various educator needs, including subsistence, security, esteem, and respect needs, and self-actualization, with a focus on analysing educator turnover in Cape Town. If these needs are not adequately addressed, it may affect educators' dedication to their profession and potentially lead to their departure from the field. Fisher and Royster's (2016) framework offers a perspective for understanding how the unmet professional and personal needs of educators influence their decision to leave the field, providing a practical method for identifying which specific needs are not being met. Further details on this theoretical framework are provided in Chapter Two.

1.4. ELUCIDATION OF CONCEPTS

Several key terms used in this research study require clarification, as they are critical to understanding the scope and focus of the study. Basic and related concepts are listed and described below to ensure clear comprehension.

1.4.1. Basic Concepts

Educator Attrition: The act of educators leaving the teaching profession before retirement age (Crispin, 2020; Ozge, 2023).

Primary School Educator: Any person who teaches or educates learners from Grade R to Grade 7 (Employment of Educators Act, 1998; Palm, 2020).

Primary School: A primary school is an institution that offers education from Grades 1 to 7 (O'Connor & Geiger, 2009).

Former Educator: A person who has previously held a teaching position (Devers, Duyar & Buchanan, 2024; Employment of Educators Act, 1998).

1.4.2. Related Concepts

Retirement: The act of terminating employment due to age (Employment of Educators Act, 1998).

Retirement Age: Retirement age for South African educators is 65 years old (Employment of Educators Act, 1998).

Educator Retention: The act of educators staying in the teaching profession (Crispin, 2020; Fessehatsion & Peng, 2021).

Novice Educator: Newly qualified educators with less than 5 years of in-service experience in teaching (Makoa & Segalo, 2021; van den Borre et al., 2021).

1.5. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

South Africa is facing a critical shortage of educators due to them exiting the profession faster than they can be replaced. As more educators leave the profession, classrooms are becoming increasingly crowded, staff are facing greater pressures, and the ability to provide high-quality education is being undermined, potentially affecting the nation's social and economic progress (van der Berg et al., 2022). It is crucial to identify and tackle the reasons behind educator attrition to maintain a stable and effective teaching workforce.

Considering the problem statement, the next sub-section details the research questions for this study.

1.5.1. Main Research Question

Considering the research context and the problem statement outlined above, this study was guided by the following main research question:

What are the reasons for primary school educators in Cape Town leaving the teaching profession before retirement age?

This research question was guided by two research sub-questions as articulated below:

1.5.2. Sub-Questions

Sub-question 1: How have primary school educators who have left the teaching profession experienced being educators in Cape Town?

Sub-question 2: Based on these primary school educators' experiences, what can be done to retain primary school educators in the teaching profession in Cape Town?

1.6. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

16.1. Research Aim

The aim of this study was to determine the reasons for primary school educators leaving the teaching profession in Cape Town and to understand their challenges and gain deeper insights into what measures can be taken to mitigate educator attrition.

16.2. Objectives of the Study

Objective one of this study was to determine how primary school educators in Cape Town have experienced being primary school educators in the teaching profession. Objective two was to determine what can be done, based on the experiences mentioned in objective one, to retain them in the field of teaching in Cape Town.

1.7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the reasons why educators in Cape Town are leaving their jobs before reaching retirement age were explored by analysing their personal experiences and pinpointing the main factors influencing their choices. An exploratory research design was utilised to gain a deeper understanding of how the experiences of primary school

educators relate to their decision to leave the teaching profession prematurely (Singh, 2021).

A qualitative method was chosen because it enabled me, as the researcher, to delve into the participants' experiences, emphasising the meanings they attribute to their choices, which cannot be quantified with numerical data (Hennik, Hutter & Bailey, 2020). The interpretivist paradigm facilitated an exploration of the personal and professional experiences of former educators, enabling me to gain a deeper understanding of their reasons for leaving the teaching profession.

This research employed a phenomenological research strategy. To select 12 former educators, purposive sampling was implemented, facilitating the intentional choice of participants who could offer the most informative and insightful contributions to the research (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Furthermore, snowball sampling was utilised, where initial participants recommended other potential participants, thereby broadening the sample (Noy, 2008).

Interviews were carried out either face-to-face or online using Microsoft Teams, and these interviews employed a semi-structured format. This method was selected for its adaptability, enabling participants to express their ideas freely in response to open-ended questions (George, 2022). Participants gave their explicit permission for the interviews to be recorded. The data gathered were then transcribed and analysed thematically. Thematic analysis is particularly useful for identifying, examining, and detailing patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This approach enabled me to uncover important insights into the motivations and experiences of educators, specifically addressing the research question of why primary school educators in Cape Town are leaving the profession before reaching retirement age. By concentrating on themes that emerged from the participants' narratives, Braun and Clarke's (2020) thematic analysis offered a structured approach to interpreting data through the theoretical framework of Fisher and Royster (2016).

The City of Cape Town in South Africa was chosen as the geographical focus of this study. I chose Cape Town because I am a resident and I have taught Foundation Phase in a primary school in Cape Town. Consequently, through personal experience, I have a broad understanding of the educational landscape in Cape Town, including

the policies and procedures, and the challenges that educators face. Cape Town is a diverse city with many races, languages, religions, and cultures, with schools ranging from well-resourced to severely under-resourced. This diversity in Cape Town makes it possible to investigate, across different contexts, the reasons why primary school educators leave the profession before retirement age.

As a Foundation Phase educator for 11 years, serving at the grassroots level, I gained valuable insights into the education system in Cape Town. My teaching experience significantly broadened my understanding of the personal and systemic issues faced by educators. The combination of my teaching experience and residency in the city made Cape Town a practical and valuable setting for this study.

Following Stahl and King (2020), trustworthiness played a vital role in shaping the research methods and outcomes. This study relied heavily on the four fundamental aspects of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which were achieved as detailed below.

To build credibility, I employed semi-structured interviews that encouraged participants to share their thoughts freely, along with thematic analysis, which enabled themes to emerge organically from the data. I focused on establishing rapport with participants and had them verify the transcriptions to ensure the interview recordings were accurate (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, member checking was employed to further validate the credibility of this research.

By conducting research in a systematic and transparent manner, transferability was achieved. This approach facilitated the precise documentation of data and the truthful presentation of results, allowing for their application in similar future research settings. To guarantee dependability, I carefully recorded all research procedures to ensure they can be accurately replicated (Trochim, 2023).

By maintaining an objective stance and acknowledging my own biases, I ensured confirmability. Application of this strategy means that the results authentically reflect the participants' views as derived from the research data, without being tainted by my personal interpretations (Nassaji, 2020).

Ethical considerations played a vital role in safeguarding participants and bolstering the validity and reliability of the study findings (Abbas, Babikir, Mirghan & Kabbashi, 2012). For this research, I secured ethical approval from UNISA (2023/08/10/48242098/55AM), and I strictly followed all ethical guidelines from the outset. Participants were thoroughly informed about the research's nature, goals, and procedures. Written consent obtained from each participant confirmed their voluntary involvement, without any coercion or financial incentives (Kang & Hwang, 2021).

In accordance with the recommendations of Laryeafio and Ogbewe (2023), the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of the participants were carefully safeguarded. To ensure personal information remained protected, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The data was stored on a password-protected system to prevent unauthorised access.

By following these ethical principles, I was able to uphold the integrity and reliability of the research (Bhandari, 2022). Throughout the study, my focus was on ensuring that all collected data was accurate and original, which has enabled the findings to genuinely represent the participants' experiences. This approach aimed to make a meaningful contribution to the existing knowledge in the field while respecting the rights of the participants.

1.8. CHAPTER DIVISION

The remainder of this study is divided into chapter and are briefly described below.

Chapter Two:

Chapter Two will commence with an introduction to the chapter, followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework. A review of international and local literature connected to the study, exploring possible reasons for educator attrition and best practices concerning educator retention through the lens of The Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, is provided. The chapter ends with a summary.

Chapter Three:

After an introduction to this chapter, the rationale for the research is articulated, and the research design and paradigm that were used for this study are described. The

research approach, strategy, and methods are stated and explained. The steps that I took to adhere to the measures of trustworthiness and ethical considerations are discussed. To conclude, a summary of Chapter Three is provided.

Chapter Four:

Chapter Four starts with an introduction to the chapter. The data interpretation is thoroughly discussed. The thematic data analysis, which was employed to analyse the collected data and consisted of five phases, is described. The coding process is discussed, concluding with four final themes and 10 sub-themes detailing the lived experiences of being primary school educators in Cape Town and their recommendations for educator retention. Each theme is discussed in detail, viewed through the lens of Fisher and Royster's' (2016) Teachers Hierarchy of Needs and compared with the literature. The chapter ends with a summary and concluding remarks.

Chapter Five:

Chapter Five begins with an introduction to the chapter. It includes a summary of the research findings, followed by the conclusions derived from the study. Subsequently, recommendations for retaining educators in the teaching profession are presented. Potential areas for future research are also examined. The limitations of this study are addressed, and the chapter concludes with final remarks.

1.9. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a thorough introduction to the research study by detailing the research background, defining key terms, identifying the problem and objectives, and explaining the theoretical framework and methodology. It emphasised that educator attrition is a significant issue both globally and in South Africa, greatly affecting the nation's education system. This chapter examined the complex factors leading to educator shortages, such as overwhelming workloads, unfavourable working conditions, and insufficient support. It introduced the Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, as the theoretical framework for this study. This chapter then outlined the research methodology, focusing on thematic analysis. It also detailed the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and adherence to ethical standards throughout the study, along with

outlines of each chapter in this dissertation. Additionally, Chapter One provided the reasoning behind investigating strategies for reducing educator attrition and improving retention.

The following chapter will explore the theoretical framework in greater depth and will critically examine both international and local studies that investigate educator attrition through the lens of The Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework that guided this study, emphasising how Fisher and Royster's (2016) adaptation of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs was crucial for understanding the former educators' experiences. This framework addressed the main research question of why primary school educators in Cape Town leave the profession before retirement age. Following the theoretical discussion, this chapter presents a literature review, which discusses international and local studies investigating educator attrition and retention, and illustrates how unmet educators' needs contribute to educator attrition. Each level of Fisher and Royster's (2016) hierarchy is explored, relating to factors such as excessive workloads, inadequate remuneration, lack of administrative support, poor working conditions, and the emotional toll of teaching. This literature review contextualises this study within the broader trends and challenges in the education field, reinforcing the need to explore this topic to improve educator retention.

In the following section, the theoretical framework used as a foundation for this study, namely the Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs (Fisher & Royster, 2016), is discussed.

2.2. THEORY UNDERLYING THE STUDY

A theoretical framework provides the foundation upon which a study is built, including the plans for research and a lens through which to conduct the study (Kivunja, 2018). Grant and Osanloo (2014) support this fact, describing a theoretical framework as a foundation for structuring and supporting research.

Some studies on educator attrition (Bantwini, 2018; Crispin, 2020; Holmqvist, 2019; Mngomezulu, Mabusela & Lawrence, 2021; Palm, 2020) have used competency theory, self-efficacy theory, variation theory, social justice theory, as well as human capital theory as lenses to investigate the phenomena of educator attrition. Whereas these theories have been valuable in exploring educator attrition in their prospective

studies, they each have limitations that make them less suited for the specific focus of this study.

Competency theory and self-efficacy theory primarily centre on individual educator characteristics, such as skills and confidence, rather than addressing the broader, systemic factors influencing educator retention (Bantwini, 2018; Palm, 2020). In contrast, this study sought to explore broader systemic factors through former educators lived experiences of being primary school educators in Cape Town collectively, not through their individual educator characteristics.

Variation theory provides insights into how differences in teaching environments contribute to educator attrition (Holmqvist, 2019). This approach emphasises variations in experiences but does not necessarily offer a solid understanding of why these differences happen and how these experiences impact educator attrition on a larger scale. Social justice theory addresses issues of inequity within the teaching profession, relating to disparities in working conditions (Mngomezulu, Mabusela & Lawrence, 2021). While equity is an important factor, this research study focused more on a broader scale of factors that influence educators' decisions to leave the profession.

Human capital theory provides a lens for understanding the economic aspects of retaining educators, including the costs and returns on investment in their professional development (Crispin, 2020). This theory highlights financial incentives and disincentives; however, it overlooks non-economic factors, such as emotional and psychological needs, which are also crucial in understanding educators' overall satisfaction and decision-making processes.

Many researchers have applied Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs to investigate educator attrition, examining whether educators' basic needs are being met and how this influences their decisions to stay in or leave the profession (Adiele & Abraham, 2013; Agashi, Petinga & Ekwutosi, 2019; Evans & Yuan, 2018; Khadka, 2021; Okafor & Nwogu, 2021; Yazar, Hazar, Keşan & Özer, 2021). Maslow's (1943) theory suggests that unmet needs create desires and internal tension. This internal tension drives motivation and leads to actions aimed at achieving desired outcomes. When there is a gap between an individual's expectations and their actual experience, they

adjust their behaviour to alleviate the tension and fulfil their goals (Adiele & Abraham, 2013).

In the context of teaching, understanding attrition requires acknowledging the internal shifts that occur when an educator's fundamental needs are no longer fulfilled. When educators experience a lack of fulfilment in needs such as security, recognition, or professional growth, it can lead them to reassess their commitment to the profession (Crispin, 2020). This insight helps highlight the role of unmet needs in driving educator attrition.

For the theoretical framework for my study, I initially decided to use Abraham Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs theory, which is a motivational theory in psychology consisting of human needs presented as hierarchical levels in a pyramid (McLeod, 2018). As I did further research, I discovered an adaptation of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs by Fisher and Royster (2016) named the "Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs". These authors adapted Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs theory to specifically address the unique context and needs of educators.

In their adaptation, Fisher and Royster (2016) aligned the levels of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy with factors that impact educators' satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to the profession. For example, Maslow's (1943) "physiological" needs, the most basic level, were reframed as "subsistence" needs for educators, encompassing basic resources, fair salaries, and physical working conditions. The "safety" level was adapted to "security" needs, reflecting job stability and professional safety. Similarly, "love and belonging" was adapted to emphasise educators' needs for association and collegial support within the school environment. The "esteem" level evolved into respect and recognition for educators' professional efforts, while "self-actualisation" focused on educators' opportunities for growth, fulfilment, and autonomy within their careers.

While Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs offers a valuable perspective, it does not directly address the educational environment and the aspects that influence educators' commitment to their teaching careers. In comparison, Fisher and Royster's (2016) adaptation translates each of Maslow's (1943) levels into a context that directly relates to the teaching profession. The Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs provided an appropriate

framework for examining former educators' experiences and needs in a way that aligned more closely with the educational context in which they taught. This framework helped to clarify how specific unmet needs impact educators' motivation and satisfaction, which influence their decision to stay in or leave the teaching profession.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the relationship between Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs and Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. The two theories are presented side by side to facilitate a clear comparison of their similarities and differences.

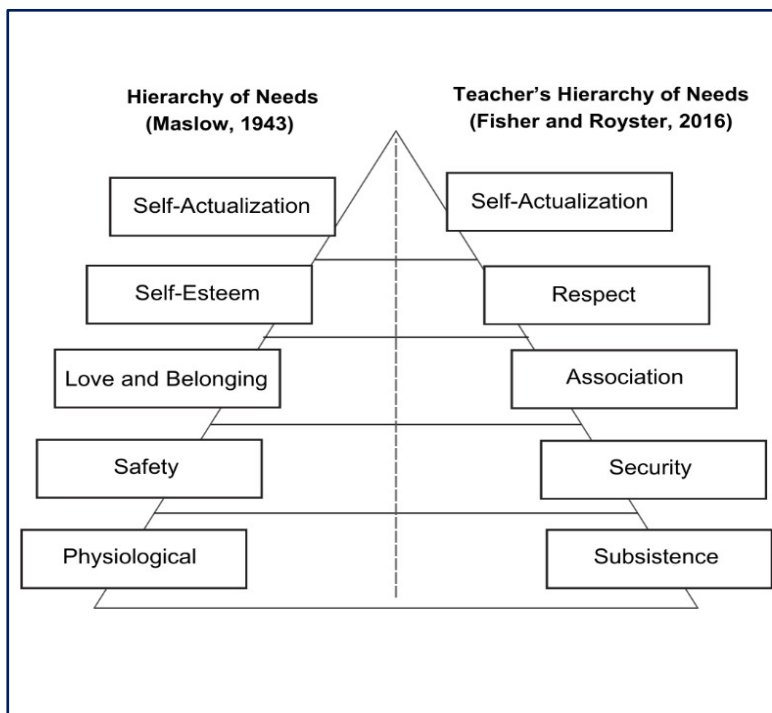


Figure 2.1: The relationship between Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs and Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs

Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs was essential for interpreting the empirical research findings gained from this study providing a lens through which to explore former educators' experiences of teaching and to better understand why they left the profession before retirement age (Kivunja, 2018). Koerber, Marquez-Mendez, Mensah, Fasching-Varner and Schrader (2023) asserted that meeting educators motivational needs is strongly connected to critical retention factors. This framework was particularly useful in examining the experiences of former

educators in Cape Town by assessing whether their needs were met and by identifying what could be done to retain educators in similar circumstances in the profession.

The first level of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs is the physiological level, encompassing basic needs such as food, water, shelter, sleep, and air (Yazar et al., 2021). For educators, Fisher and Royster (2016) adapted this level to subsistence needs, which include sufficient time to meet personal basic needs such as restroom breaks, access to food, adequate rest, and ongoing professional development. These needs are crucial for educators to function effectively in demanding school environments. When educators lack consistent access to these basic needs, they may face physical and mental challenges, making it difficult to meet other professional demands and sustain a long-term commitment to their work (Worth, 2023).

The second level of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs is the need for safety and security, which includes a home, safety, health security and access to health services, fearlessness, and laws that protect the safety of people (Yazar et al., & Özer, 2021). For an educator, the need for safety and security includes a stable income that covers essentials such as housing, food, clothing, and healthcare, allowing them to feel secure in their personal and professional lives (Fisher & Royster, 2016).

Crispin (2020) has stated that ensuring fair compensation is fundamental in supporting educators' dedication and well-being and that financial stability provides educators with peace of mind and reduces the stress associated with meeting daily living costs. In contrast, financial instability can lead to significant job dissatisfaction and stress, ultimately affecting job performance and retention.

The third level, namely love and belonging, addresses the human need for supportive relationships, friendships, and a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1943). In the context of educators, this translates to the need for positive interactions and a sense of community with colleagues, management, and learners, as well as supportive relationships outside of work (Fisher & Royster, 2016). Collaboration and emotional support are fostered when educators feel valued and heard. The opposite is also valid; when educators feel isolated or lack support, they may struggle with stress and lose motivation to stay in the profession.

The fourth level is the need for self-esteem (Maslow, 1943). This involves the need for recognition, respect, and independence. It includes feeling valued and respected, as well as participation in social activities, hobbies, and academic success (Yazar et al., 2021). Maslow (1943) classified esteem into two separate categories, namely esteem for oneself and the desire for reputation or respect from others (McLeod, 2018). Fisher and Royster (2016) refer to this as the stage of respect. Educators need to feel respected and appreciated by learners, parents, colleagues, and senior management teams (SMTs) for their efforts and hard work. How appreciated and respected educators feel impacts their sense of worth and motivation to remain in the teaching profession.

The fifth and final level of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs is called self-actualisation, which involves the realisation of personal fulfilment, personal goals, and career ambitions (Yazar et al., 2021). According to Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, reaching self-actualisation in teaching requires fulfilment of all previous needs as the foundation. This stage is characterised by a sense of purpose and reaching career aspirations. By applying Fisher and Royster's (2016) framework, this research study explored the complex relationship between the needs and experiences of former educators, providing an understanding of factors contributing to educator attrition in Cape Town, South Africa.

The following section presents the literature reviewed for this study.

2.3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review critically explored existing research on educator attrition and retention, focusing on the challenges educators face and best practices that address these issues. Using Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs as the lens through which to analyse the existing research on educator attrition and retention highlighted how unmet needs contribute to educator's decisions to leave the teaching profession. This review also provides insights into international and local perspectives on educator retention, enabling an understanding of the factors driving educator attrition and potential strategies to mitigate them.

2.3.1. Educators in the South African Context

The quality of basic education in South Africa is facing significant scrutiny. According to the Global Competitiveness Index Report for 2017–2018, which assessed the education systems of 124 countries, South Africa was ranked 114th (World Economic Forum, 2017). South Africa's education system is considered costly, inefficient, and underperforming compared to other developing and emerging nations, and it continues to struggle to address modern challenges and benefit from global achievements (Workman, 2020). Despite significant financial investment in education in South Africa, several factors threaten the education system's sustainability, including the loss and shortage of qualified educators (Maphalala & Mpfu, 2019).

South Africa's basic education system is governed and regulated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), which is responsible for policies, curriculum implementation, school administration, and overall educator placement across the country. The public education system comprises of approximately 24, 850 schools, employing 459, 993 educators and servicing approximately 13 527 283 learners from Grade R to Grade 12. Within this system there both public and independent schools, with majority of learners attending public schools (Department of Basic Education, 2025). In 2024, South Africa had 22, 381 public schools, employing 412, 638 educators and servicing 12 785 821 learners, whereas there were 2, 469 private schools, employing 47, 355 educators and servicing 741, 462 learners (Department of Basic Education, 2025).

The education system is structured according to a GET (General and Education Training) Band, ranging from Grade R, foundation Phase (Grades 1-3), intermediate phase (Grade 4-6) and senior phase (Grades 7-9) followed by the FET (Further Education and Training Band (Grades 10-12) (Department of Basic Education, 2025). In South Africa, there are generally primary and high schools. Primary schools offer grades R-7 and secondary or high schools offer grades 8-12. Primary education lays the foundation for literacy, numeracy and social development (Department of Basic Education, 2011), making the role of primary school educators crucial for establishing learners' academic and development trajectories.

Within South African schools, educators are responsible for a range of instructional and non-instructional duties. According to the Personnel Administrative Measures

(PAM) document (1999), educators are tasked with classroom instruction, assessment, administrative responsibilities, extra and co-curricular supervision, and engagement with parents and other stakeholders. These diverse responsibilities underscore the multifaceted nature of teaching, and the broad roles educators must face.

Despite the vital role that educators play in South Africa's education system, the teaching profession faces significant challenges. At a local level, the Department of Basic Education (2025) reports that although there are approximately 412, 638 educators employed in public schools, the number of educators entering the profession each year (approximately 18, 000) falls short of the annual demand for educators at a level of between 25, 00 and 40, 000 by 2023 (Gustafsson, 2023).

Primary school educators are often confronted with high workloads, large class sizes, and extensive demands for administrative and instructional duties. These conditions reflect broader systemic challenges within the South African education landscape, including uneven resource distribution, varying school contexts and infrastructure disparities (Joubert & Jacobs, 2024). Recognising these contextual factors is essential for understanding the specific pressures encountered by South African educators and how these pressures may contribute to decisions to exit the profession.

2.2.3. Educator Attrition

Educator attrition refers to educator turnover or the phenomenon where educators leave the profession due to retirement or resignation (Garcia, Han & Weiss, 2022). Educator attrition can occur voluntarily or involuntarily through retirement, resignation, transfer, dismissal, redeployment, ill health, or death, all of which have a negative impact on teaching and learning (Mabusela, 2021). Maintaining steady educator retention is crucial for the stability of overall education processes. This stability provides educators with sufficient time to acquire essential competencies through on-the-job experience and structured professional development activities (Bennell, 2023).

The following sections will discuss the factors contributing to educator attrition according to Fisher and Roysters' (2016) Teachers Hierarchy of Needs.

2.3.3.1. Subsistence Needs of Educators

According to Fisher and Royster's (2016) adaptation of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, the subsistence stage emphasises the need for basic human requirements, such as the ability to use the restroom, take breaks, and have access to professional development opportunities to effectively fulfil their roles. Research consistently highlights that educators, both locally and internationally, face excessive workloads, a factor that contributes to the challenge of meeting subsistence needs.

Before an educator can enter the profession, they need to obtain a qualification in education, with requirements varying from country to country. Educators undergo stringent pre-service training and, in some cases, must obtain teaching licenses. Unfortunately, research shows that educators are often inadequately prepared for the profession and may even be deterred from it by their pre-service experiences. This reflects the need for educators to have their basic professional and personal needs met before they can focus on higher-level goals, such as career satisfaction and growth (Al-Busaidi, 2019; Metherell, 2019).

Typically, when a person decides to get their relevant teaching qualification to become an educator, they are excited and optimistic. However, it has been found that as they progress through their studies, they begin to realise the harsh realities of the teaching profession. A study done by Al-Busaidi (2019) in Oman found that the way in which student educators perceive the profession influences their motivation, as well as their decisions to pursue teaching and their future dedication to their careers. In Fisher and Royster's' (2016) framework, inadequate preparation may impact the satisfaction of subsistence needs, such as time for personal and professional development.

Pre-service educators may not be prepared for the realities of teaching which include not only classroom demands but also political pressures like standardised testing and public scrutiny (Metherell, 2019). In a Canadian study by Williams, Tingle, Morhun, Vos, Murray, Gereluk & Russel-Mayhew, (2022a) pre-service educators were exposed to narratives of teaching, for example, educators alluding to work that is labour-intensive and emotionally draining, which increased their anxiety about entering the teaching profession. According to Fisher and Royster's (2016) model, this emotional and professional burden inhibits the fulfilment of basic subsistence needs, leading to factors that cause attrition before careers in education even begin.

After completing their studies, many educators feel underprepared in key areas, such as classroom management, social-emotional skills, and cultural competence (Mpisi & Zoutendijk, 2022; Trujillo, 2021). According to a study done by Foord (2022), a significant portion of educators in the United States felt that their preparation programs did not adequately prepare them for teaching in the real world, directly affecting their sense of preparedness and professional efficacy. According to Fisher and Royster (2016), in the subsistence stage, educators are more likely to feel stressed and consider leaving the profession early if their basic needs, such as feeling competent and prepared, are not satisfied.

Entering the profession as a novice educator comes with numerous responsibilities equal to those of seasoned educators, which adds to the pressure (Hachmon & Marulevska, 2023). Besides getting to know staff members and learners, and adjusting to the school environment, novice educators must also cope with the emotional demands of teaching (Lindqvist, Weurlander, Wernerson & Thornberg, 2023). The continuous demands on their time and energy make it difficult to meet the basic needs as outlined in Fisher and Royster's (2016) subsistence stage, such as rest, stress relief, and personal care, which are crucial for their well-being.

Nearly half of educators quit within the first five years of their careers, according to international research, which consistently demonstrates that early-career educators are the most likely to do so (Reeves, 2018). An Iranian study by Ghasemi (2021) found that new educators have much higher stress levels than their more seasoned peers, which supports this trend. Additionally, Israel reported that within three years, the dropout rate for novice educators increased by 60% (Hachmon & Marulevska, 2023). These results highlight how crucial it is to provide for the subsistence needs of educators at an early stage of their careers to prevent attrition.

A study done in South Africa by Mpisi and Zoutendijk (2022), corroborates international research on novice educators. They found that mentorship programs for novice educators are informal and conducted on an ad hoc basis. Their study also found that there is a crucial shortage and need for formal, documented mentorship programs in schools. Mkhabele, Kgwete, and Sing (2024) found that SMTs did not have the knowledge, experience, or time to implement the necessary mentorship programs in their schools.

Educator workload refers to the various job demands placed on educators that extend beyond teaching responsibilities. These include administrative tasks, multiple meetings that cut into preparation and personal time, and the need to adapt to constant changes, such as new technological systems and educational planning requirements (Foord, 2022). Many educators perceive their workload to be increasing due to added administrative and organisational duties, such as grading, learner assessments, and developing individual plans for each learner (Worth, 2023). This has been confirmed by Du Plessis and Letshwene (2020) who also found that assessments, particularly, added tremendously to the workload of educators, leaving very little time for teaching and learning to take place. These added responsibilities, often without the removal of current tasks, significantly contribute to the perception of an excessive workload (Arvidsson, Leo, Larsson, Hakansson, Persson, & Bjork, 2019).

International researcher, Foord (2022), has indicated that educators are burdened by a growing list of responsibilities, with workload being a significant factor contributing to their professional dissatisfaction. This was confirmed in a study conducted by Wock (2014) in Canada, in which participants expressed that they had to juggle numerous roles, with the overwhelming workload playing a key role in their decisions to leave the profession.

Similarly, a study conducted in Australia by Heffernan, Bright, Kim, Longmuir and Magyar (2022) involving 2,444 primary and secondary school educators revealed that only 41 participants intended to remain in the teaching profession. A heavy workload emerged as the primary factor influencing their decision to leave, sending a clear message that educators are struggling under increasing workload demands.

Worth (2023) reported similar findings in England, where workload was a significant issue affecting educator retention. The educators in his study expressed a desire to work fewer hours, further illustrating how excessive workloads contribute to educator attrition.

The impact of such heavy workloads goes beyond professional burnout. Educators are overwhelmed by their responsibilities and often lack time for essential self-care, such as using the restroom, eating, or taking necessary breaks. This inability to meet basic needs directly hinders their subsistence need, as outlined by Fisher and Royster

(2016), ultimately affecting their well-being and job satisfaction (Engelbrecht-Aldworth, 2024).

Administrators play a pivotal role in reducing workloads for new educators. This can be accomplished by evaluating existing responsibilities and expectations, strategic division of responsibilities among staff, providing support and prioritising hiring additional personnel to alleviate pressures, and providing a healthier and more sustainable working environment (Tompkins, 2023).

There are multifaceted responsibilities that contribute to educators' workloads locally. According to the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document (1999), educators' core duties and responsibilities include teaching, extra-curricular activities, administrative tasks, stakeholder interaction, and communication responsibilities. SADTU has warned that educators are under immense stress due to the conditions they are exposed to, and this is having far-reaching consequences in the education environment. It has been established that the consequences of educator stress include low performance, ill health, lack of well-being, increased absenteeism, and high turnover (Siebritz, 2021).

A study conducted in the North-West Province of South Africa found that 61.3% of participants reported experiencing job dissatisfaction due to stress at school (Boweni, van der Westhuizen & Meyer, 2020). Owing to excessive workloads and pressure, many educators in South Africa are facing stress and burnout, which causes job satisfaction to decrease and eventually leads to them exiting the teaching profession (Palm, 2020; Hofmeyr et al., 2024). Drawing from Fisher and Roysters' (2016) subsistence stage, these workload burdens add to unmet basic needs of time to rest and personal well-being, making it challenging to balance their professional and personal lives. Workload often competes with the responsibilities of teaching during working hours, causing educators to work after hours, the pressure of which induces stress in their personal lives (Hofmeyr et al., 2024).

Mabusela (2021) has stated that when an educator leaves, the remaining educators and staff must take on a higher workload, which affects educator morale and can, in turn, influence staff attendance and potentially lead to educator attrition. When a new educator enters the school, this affects the social cohesion of the established

organisational culture. McPherson, Lampert and Batista (2025) confirmed this by reporting that educators feel guilt and anxiety when they need to be absent from school. Furthermore, the impact of educator attrition extends beyond individual workloads. The implications of educator attrition are far-reaching and place financial burdens on districts and education departments to retrain and replace educators. It directly impacts workloads that increase for the remaining educators who must cover for the educators who have left the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). This aligns with Fisher and Royster's (2016) subsistence needs, leading to diminished job satisfaction and well-being.

Mc Ilrath and Govender (2021) conducted a national study to determine what affects an educator's morale. Their study recognised that remuneration, learner discipline, parental interference, and extrinsic factors such as policy changes influence educator morale. These factors prevent educators from meeting their subsistence needs, thereby increasing the likelihood of burnout and attrition. Without addressing these basic concerns, the likelihood of long-term professional fulfilment becomes increasingly unlikely, perpetuating the attrition cycle.

Continuous professional development can be defined as a tool for empowering educators with up-to-date knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to meet the demands of the teaching profession (Mthanti & Msiza, 2023). Locally, the South African Council of Educators (SACE) (2020) encourages professional development by allocating points to various development activities that educators can participate in. Some are compulsory and some are educator-initiated, meaning that educators may decide to engage in professional development in their own capacity. Depending on the educator's post level, they need to accumulate a minimum amount of Continuous Professional Development (CPDT), specifically 150 points within a three-year cycle. In a study done by Johns and Sosibo (2019), educators expressed feelings of demotivation, distrust, and frustration with the way the CPTD policy was implemented, and that they were not treated as professionals. They stated that the CPTD website was dysfunctional and that there was an overall negative attitude among educators towards the CPTD policy (Johns & Sosibo, 2019).

Lawrence (2019) has highlighted the importance of the DBE consulting with educators in the development of a professional development program. In addition to giving

educators more autonomy and authority, this consultative approach guarantees that programs take into account the unique challenges they face. This will assist educators in meeting their subsistence needs by identifying and addressing their developmental needs. Equipping educators with knowledge gained from professional development programs better prepares them to navigate classroom challenges, directly supporting their subsistence needs for development. This preparedness lessens the stressors related to uncertainties in managing diverse learner needs and enables educators to create more supportive and effective learning environments, which enhances both their teaching efficacy and emotional resilience (Okafor & Nwogu, 2021).

In a case study done by Bertram and Mxenge (2022) in South Africa, which aimed to discover the performativity, managerial professionalism, and purpose of professional development, they reported that the professional development done with the educators included clarification of and teaching strategies for difficult content, as well as results analysis on previous assessments. However, all the topics covered in the professional development are consistently targeted at improving test results. Of course, test results are important, but so are the needs of the educators.

Poorly structured or designed continuous professional development may fail to meet educators' needs and can leave educators feeling unprepared and unsupported, exacerbating feelings of frustration (Engelbrecht-Aldworth, 2024). Tailoring training and development programs to meet the distinct needs of rural and urban districts, as discussed by Johns and Sosibo (2019), is also critical as educators who receive specific training that caters to the unique challenges of their different contexts are more likely to feel competent and prepared to tackle their roles. Such a targeted approach helps fulfil their subsistence needs for professional development. When educators receive the appropriate training that aligns with their specific contexts, they can better navigate the complexities of their work, thereby enhancing their overall job satisfaction and reducing attrition rates.

Additionally, for educators to meet the evolving demands of the educational landscape, customized opportunities for continuous development are essential (Hachmon & Maluleka, 2023). For example, in Oceania, educators have access to excellent online development programs that give them the freedom and confidence to advance at their own pace (Williams et al., 2022b). This method recognises and

honours educators' unique circumstances and enables them to participate in professional development without sacrificing time or well-being.

The tasks and responsibilities of educators need to be reassessed and amended. Education managers should ensure that the tasks assigned to educators, including attending meetings and participating in professional development, are tailored to each educator and represent meaningful rather than redundant experiences (Tompkins, 2023). Educators need to be informed timeously of changes and need clear instructions on how to perform their duties (Mpundu, Assan & Mokoena, 2023). Clear lines of transparent communication with educators need to be formed and maintained. If there are any large-scale changes regarding policy, curriculum, or contracts, a clear timeline and details must be provided, and all stakeholders, including educators, should be allowed to give input and have decision-making power (Tompkins, 2023). An educator's well-being and ultimately their commitment to the profession can be improved by investigating how their time is spent and rearranging their schedules based on their suggestions and needs.

2.3.3.2. Security Needs of Educators

The demanding nature of the teaching profession poses significant challenges to educators' mental and physical health, closely aligning with Fisher and Roysters' (2016) concept of security needs, which encompass financial stability, health, and mental well-being.

The continual strain faced by educators can lead to burnout, decreased self-confidence, and various mental issues (Foord, 2022; Koch, 2024). Burnout causes educators to feel trapped with no viable options except to leave the profession (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Chan (2013) also found that stress and burnout are prevalent problems within the teaching profession and are recognised as global concerns. In an Australian study done by Corbett, Bauman, Peralta, Okely and Phongsavan (2023), more than 30% of participants reported experiencing high levels of burnout during their teaching careers. Burnout is characterised by fatigue and depersonalisation, leading to negative feelings towards their responsibilities (Williams et al., 2022b).

Experiencing emotional and physical exhaustion creates a vicious cycle in which educators feel less capable and effective. This cycle shows the link between mental

health and job performance, where high stress levels decrease satisfaction and increase the likelihood of attrition (Engelbrecht-Aldworth, 2024). Similarly, Madigan and Kim (2021) have found that the combined symptoms of burnout (exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced accomplishment) were causes of extreme avoidance behaviour and contributed to their need to leave the teaching profession.

Another factor leading to poor mental health in educators is being required to work with learners who have experienced their own trauma and are struggling to deal with their emotions. Educators often feel compelled to take on the role of carer as well as educator for the learners because mental health resources are lacking in some schools, forcing educators to invest more of themselves than just their professional skills to achieve high-quality professional performance (Fourie & de Klerk, 2024). The more stress educators experience, the less likely they are to be satisfied, and the more likely they are to leave the profession (Foord, 2022). This is supported by Murray (2021), who highlighted that educators are experiencing “compassion fatigue” on an unprecedented level and that the expectations put on educators have a direct effect on their mental health. This depletion of mental resources not only jeopardises their health but also impacts their ability to perform effectively in their roles, further compromising their sense of security. It is evident that immediate action is needed to alleviate the causes of burnout. Madigan and Kim (2021) have highlighted that increasing job satisfaction is one method of preventing attrition, however, taking steps to prevent burnout, in turn increasing job satisfaction, would be more effective.

The mental health of educators is closely tied to the economic factors that impact their financial security. International research shows that compensation is a major factor in educator attrition. Higher wages are linked to lower turnover rates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammons, 2019) indicating that educators’ commitment and job satisfaction are greatly impacted by financial stability. Educators’ feelings of insecurity and frustration are made worse by their perceptions of inadequate pay, especially when salaries do not correspond with their performance or the cost of living (Hofmeyr et al., 2024). Educators are highly educated and if they perceive that their salary does not match the effort they put into their qualifications and their workload, attrition is likely (Elyashiv & Navon, 2021).

The participants in a study conducted in Nepal stated that their salaries should be based on their performance rather than the current pay system, which is based on time in the profession and seniority, with which they disagree (Khadka, 2021). They explained that they need a certain level of pay to sustain their lives, which was not forthcoming (Khadka, 2021). Evans and Yuan (2018) have highlighted that economic development worldwide, as well as increased inflation, reduces the real wages that educators earn.

A UNESCO (2016) recommendation highlights the need for creating an appealing teaching environment, including salaries and working conditions, that would attract interest from teaching candidates and motivate current educators to remain in the profession. However, while providing extra limited benefits, such initiatives have not been able to compensate for the high volume of educators leaving the profession and could also add to the problem of educator attrition because they do not focus on the root of the problem (Bowles, Christensen, Davies, Hanks & Harris, 2019).

In local research, results from a survey conducted by Hofmeyr et al. (2024) indicated that 60% of participants experienced work-related stress, and 68% of participants stated that teaching does not allow for a work-life balance. Regarding their health, 32% of participants reported that teaching has a negative impact on their mental health, and 24% stated that teaching negatively influences their physical health.

Concurring with international research, local research has also identified low salaries as a concern for educators. In a study conducted by Mlambo and Adetiba (2020), it was found that insufficient salaries are a major reason for educators leaving the profession. South African educators teaching in the United Kingdom earn 465% more than they would in South Africa (Mlambo & Adetiba, 2020). In Zambia, the causes of educator attrition include low salaries, poor working conditions, a lack of administrative support, low social status, and inadequate opportunities for continuous professional development (Crispin, 2020). A study conducted in South Africa indicated that 94% of participants identified low status and 73.2% identified low salary as key reasons for wanting to leave the teaching profession (Kruger, Hompashe & Swalindawo, 2024).

The type of contract that is available for educators to enter into also plays a role in educator retention, as recruitment on a temporary contract basis could cause

demotivation (UNESCO, 2016). This likelihood is supported by a study conducted by Saks, Hunt, Leijen and Lepp (2021), who found that job security and stability are two of the most pertinent factors in educator retention.

In South Africa, there is a single salary schedule with an annual increase for all educators, regardless of their performance or qualifications. A 1% increase in salary 'notch' is available for all educators who meet the minimum requirement in their annual QMS (Quality Management System) process (Sayed & de Kock, 2019). Mampane (2012) has stated that the duties and responsibilities of educators place a massive burden on them because of these demands not being balanced by the improvement of salaries and benefits, which results in high attrition. Research evidence thus shows that salaries play a vast role in the retention of educators.

Local research (Baxen, 2021; Hofmeyr et al., 2024; Michael, Kgomotso & Malatji, 2023) has shown that alarming levels of violence and bullying faced by educators in South Africa profoundly affect their security needs, as set out by Fisher and Royster (2016). Workplace bullying of educators includes being bullied by other educators, school managers, learners, parents, and the administration staff of the school (Michael et al., 2023). Studies have shown that South African educators are three times more likely to experience a form of workplace bullying than educators in other parts of the world (Jacobs & de Wet, 2018).

Principals use managerial powers over staff, which could lead to and include instances of bullying, such as verbal abuse, withholding information, embarrassing or harassing staff members, work overloading, harsh demands, physical aggression, gossip, favouritism, isolation, or silent treatment (Baxen, 2021). Workplace bullying has a profound effect on the victim's physical, psychological, and economic well-being. The victims' professional lives seriously suffer (Makhasane & Khanare, 2018) and partners and families are also affected. Educators who have been exposed to workplace bullying may become boring and indifferent educators who have lost empathy towards their learners. In addition, workplace bullying may cause positive working relationships to disintegrate, and gifted educators may decide to leave the profession (Jacobs & de Wet, 2018).

Educators are not spared from being exposed to criminal violence in South Africa, and this is a serious concern (Makhasane, 2022). The safety of educators in South Africa is severely compromised by learners bringing dangerous weapons to school with the intention of doing serious harm to other learners and the educators (Michael, 2020). Violence in national schools is so concerning that SACE has recognised this challenge and launched a handbook for educators to know and understand their safety and security rights (SACE, 2020).

Educators in South Africa are not immune to criminal violence, as schools often reflect the broader societal issue of pervasive violence (Kgosimore, 2018). For example, in Pietermaritzburg, a principal was murdered, and in a separate incident, a learner set an educator's car on fire (Siebritz, 2022). Mosito and Sitoyi (2024) conducted a study investigating school violence and its impact on educators' well-being in South Africa. They reported that educators experience rampant violence in their jobs, consequently their health and well-being were being negatively affected, and no tried interventions seemed to reduce the violent episodes. In their study to discover educators' perspectives of learner-on-educator violence, Makhasane and Khanare (2018) reported that educators are exposed to various forms of violence that occur in different areas within the school premises and range from teasing and humiliating educators to holding principals captive in their offices. In the Western Cape, educators in Nyanga, Philippi, Mitchells Plain, and Samora Machel have been approached by armed men demanding protection money from them in an attempt at extortion (Phaliso, 2025). Educators are not adequately trained or prepared for learner-on-educator violence, and staff development is lacking in this regard (Makhasane, 2022). de Wet (2024) found that educators who were victims of violence had left or had considered leaving the profession. The prevalent violence and bullying faced by educators locally significantly undermine their security needs as set out by Fisher and Royster (2016).

2.3.3.4. Association Needs of Educators

According to the Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs (Fisher and Royster, 2016), the need for association emphasises the importance of creating a positive and supportive environment both inside and outside the classroom. This need includes maintaining positive working relationships and leading a balanced life that allows for spending

quality time with family and friends. Whether this need is fulfilled directly impacts on their sense of belonging, morale, and professional development.

There is empirical evidence indicating that if educators have sufficient support in dealing with the demands of the profession from colleagues and the principal within a democratic culture, the educators will have an increased commitment to the profession and a higher tendency to persevere (Hachmon & Marulevska, 2023). School leadership plays a key role in educators' job satisfaction and retention. In an Australian study done by Brandenburg, Larsen, Simpson, Sallis and Tran (2024), it was found that school leadership was the most prominent reason for educators leaving the teaching profession. A sense of belonging is particularly vital for novice educators, as meaningful relationships with colleagues, learners, and parents can significantly reduce the stress they face during their early years in teaching (Metherell, 2019). This is supported by Koch (2024), who stated that an environment of sincere support in the first few years can reduce attrition and deter overhead costs for organisations.

When educators have positive relations and receive constructive feedback, it raises their confidence in their professional abilities and supports their will to work as educators (Saks et al., 2021). Dobson (2022) has highlighted that if educators collaborate with colleagues, they feel valued and heard and they will experience better time management, enhanced confidence, and self-efficacy. These relationships help meet the need for association because they reinforce educators' beliefs that their efforts and contributions matter and make them feel included in the team. Educators flourish in relationships that are supportive, constructive, and mutually beneficial, giving them a sense of fulfilment and purpose (Saks et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, insufficient support from leadership can undermine this sense of belonging, particularly in areas such as classroom discipline. In a local study conducted by Sitoyi (2020) in the Western Cape of South Africa, 100% of the participants indicated that their SMT provided inadequate support in classroom discipline. A study in KwaZulu-Natal found that educators were most dissatisfied with their workload and the ill-discipline of learners (Dludla, 2019). In a study done by Mohammed (2024) in Elliotdale in South Africa, educators reported that they felt undervalued and underappreciated and that their commitment and sacrifices were not being acknowledged.

Class size is another key factor that impacts educator attrition. In local research, it was reported that the number of learners in a class in North West Province is 77.5% more than the South African class-size average. Some schools in the Eastern Cape have over 130 learners in a classroom (Guardian Africa Network, 2013). A study conducted by Marais (2016) investigated the views of student educators on classroom overcrowding in the North West Province. After the final-year students had returned from their teaching experience, they reported that they were reconsidering their career choice because they felt discouraged, disappointed, and disheartened. They felt that they were not capable of teaching in overcrowded classrooms and that they needed training and development to equip them for the challenges that come with overcrowded classrooms.

Classroom overcrowding causes increased workload, including marking, providing feedback, and handling discipline issues and can cause educators to feel demotivated and frustrated. Overcrowding of classrooms can also be unhygienic and have negative effects on health (Tshangana, Nomtshongwana & Buka, 2023). In a study done by West and Meier (2020), it was found that overcrowded classrooms cause two main challenges, namely lack of infrastructure and a high learner-educator ratio, leading to negative effects including didactical neglect, problematic behaviour, a lack of discipline, and negative educator attitudes. In addition, overcrowded classrooms hinder an educator's ability to form meaningful, supportive relationships with their learners and colleagues, which are essential for fulfilling their professional needs, as defined by Fisher and Royster (2016). This lack of connection and sense of teamwork in a crowded environment can lead to feelings of isolation and increased stress, reducing job satisfaction and increasing the risk of educator attrition (Botha, 2022).

2.3.3.5. Respect Needs of Educators

International research (Engelbrecht-Aldworth, 2024; Smith, Benson, Levinson & Stengel, 2019; Tompkins, 2023) shows that there is an outcry for support, respect, empathy, and consideration from educators, reflecting their need for respect as framed by Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. This relates to educators' need to feel accepted and recognised as valuable members of their professional community. Respect not only affirms educators' identities but also reinforces their credibility and commitment to their roles (Engelbrecht-Aldworth, 2024).

This is particularly relevant considering international concerns regarding the treatment of educators and their perceived status in society.

In the US, moral dilemmas that arise from educators' salaries being tied to test scores as well as their need to defend their professional integrity and social value against a well-funded media onslaught were found to be factors influencing attrition (Smith et al., 2019). Educators are not presented as the educated professionals that they are, and the narrative around educators is often that they are not working hard enough or do not know enough, leading to a pervasive lack of respect for educators in broader society (Smith et al., 2019).

In Israel, educators hold one of the lowest statuses within the national economy, dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to their profession while facing unfavourable treatment from learners, parents, and society at large (Hachmon & Marulevska, 2023). In a Dominican Republic study, 80% of participant educators felt that their profession is increasingly undervalued and under-appreciated (Nunez, 2022). Further, they perceived that the profession's low social status stemmed from government policies that implied educators were inadequate, leading many to leave the profession (Nunez, 2022). Another viewpoint is that educators leaving the profession create a vicious cycle. The reputation of schools and teaching deteriorates as educators leave the profession, causing the quality of instruction and school climates to deteriorate. This causes a deterioration of respect for the teaching profession from the community and society at large (Balow, 2021).

American researcher, Reeves (2018), has pointed out that true professional respect is not about being instantly liked or approved of by learners or parents, rather, it comes from understanding that excellence in practice demands patience and the courage to challenge others. He states that just like doctors, lawyers, engineers and accountants, educators sometimes need to communicate messages that may not be well received. This is part of what defines a professional: someone who stands for honesty and acts in the long-term best interests of those they serve. He asserts that restoring this mindset in education could greatly strengthen the profession (Reeves, 2018).

The points made above are profound because educators are professionals just as are nurses and attorneys; however, there is a big imbalance of respect for educators. In

addition, educators are often blamed for many aspects beyond their control (Swanepoel & Saurombe, 2022). There is a need to rewrite the negative narrative of being an educator by shifting the focus towards the benefits and rewards of becoming an educator, for example, the option to leave the profession to raise children and then return to teaching, and the fact that education is a great foundational career that can prepare one for a variety of other professions (Williams et al., 2022a). The way educators feel about the profession impacts the way that the public and potential educators see the education system and the profession itself. This deeply impacts potential educators' decisions to enter the profession (Tompkins, 2023).

Nunez (2022) has emphasised the importance of inclusion and the active participation of educators in educational decision-making processes. Educators cannot be expected to work and remain in a profession that constantly places blame on them. Rather, effort should be made to strengthen collaboration within schools and between schools and communities. In response to educator attrition in Oman, policymakers have started paying attention to factors such as the number of educator preparation programs, increasing financial perks, implementing more rigorous recruitment criteria, giving schools more decision-making authority, reducing workload, and professionalising teaching (Al-Busaidi, 2019).

International research highlights the concept of “glocalization”, which encourages countries to learn from each other's experiences (Al-Busaidi, 2019; Du Plessis & Mc Donagh, 2020; Williams et al., 2022b). This approach offers an opportunity for educators and researchers to adopt effective strategies from their global counterparts, promoting innovation and best practices to address the educator shortage across different regions and within the education sector (Williams et al., 2022b). It is pertinent for educators to have access to other educators and to have the means to learn from each other and share ideas and strategies to fulfil their need for respect, as defined by Fisher and Royster (2016).

It is essential to recognise the efforts of employees (Khadka, 2021). When educators do their best and go over and beyond, they expect and deserve recognition for their efforts. This increases their sense of self-efficacy and confidence, which, in turn, motivates them to remain in the profession.

Appreciation and acknowledgement of educators' hard work significantly boost morale and fosters a supportive and positive school culture as well as contributing to educators' feelings of being respected and valued (Swanepoel & Saurombe, 2022). When educators are recognised for their efforts, they are more likely to engage fully in their roles and create more productive and fulfilling teaching environments (Mohammed, 2024). Creating a culture of respect not only enhances educators' emotional and social well-being but also encourages their engagement and commitment. A sense of respect is fundamental to moving on to reaching self-actualisation.

2.3.3.6. Self-Actualisation

In the context of educator attrition, self-actualisation plays a crucial role in fulfilling educators' potential and job satisfaction (Engelbrecht-Aldworth, 2024). Self-actualisation, according to Fisher and Royster (2016), includes the needs for personal development, recognition of one's potential, and pursuing one's objectives, all of which are critical for educators to succeed in their careers. According to Dobson (2022), educators are more likely to remain in their jobs when they feel empowered to pursue their goals. For instance, chances for professional growth and progress not only improve educators' abilities but also add to their sense of fulfilment and purpose in their work (Swanepoel & Saurombe, 2022; Tompkins, 2023). Additionally, an atmosphere where educators feel appreciated can be facilitated by a supportive school culture that promotes creativity and innovation, which is crucial for educators' professional and personal development (Williams et al., 2022a).

The alignment of educators' goals and values with the mission of the schools they work at is another essential element of self-actualisation. Educators feel more content and commit to their work when they feel that their efforts are having a positive impact on their learners and communities (Nunez, 2022). This internal drive enhances the resilience of educators and reinforces their dedication to their jobs.

Furthermore, developing strong relationships with colleagues and education leaders enhances the sense of belonging that educators need to reach self-actualisation. Research shows that educators who collaborate with peers and receive constructive feedback are more likely to feel confident and motivated (Dobson, 2022; Saks et al.,

2021). This creates a sense of community that is essential for educators' emotional well-being and professional identity.

Overall, encouraging educators to reach their full potential requires a deliberate effort to establish environments that foster professional development, harmonise personal and organisational objectives, and foster a feeling of community. By addressing these factors, educational leaders can drastically lower attrition rates and cultivate a workforce that is dedicated, involved, and content in their positions (Swanepoel & Saurombe, 2022).

2.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPIRICAL STUDY

This chapter delved into the theoretical foundations of the study, focusing on the Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs framework as set out by Fisher and Royster (2016) and its connection to educator attrition. It also reviewed literature on educator attrition experiences at both international and local levels, as well as effective educator retention practices.

Fisher and Royster's (2016) theoretical framework (a modification of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs) posits that educators have distinct needs that, when met, contribute to job satisfaction and retention. Their hierarchy includes subsistence needs (e.g., enough time to use the restroom, have something to eat, and rest); security needs (e.g., stable income, health, and mental health); association needs (e.g., collaboration, belonging to a group or team, and healthy work relationships); respect needs (e.g., feeling accepted as part of a group, and respected as an educator); and self-actualisation needs (e.g., fulfilling career ambitions and goals).

By applying the Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs framework, this study aimed to explore whether educators' needs are being met within their professional context and how this impacts attrition rates. It sought to understand if unmet needs, such as lack of support, low job satisfaction, or limited growth opportunities, contribute to educators leaving the profession or changing schools frequently. The literature review was analysed through the lens of Fisher and Royster's (2016) framework, which emphasises the importance of understanding educators' needs within their professional context.

This study focused on the experiences of former primary school educators in Cape Town. It aimed to identify the factors contributing to educator attrition and explore effective retention practices within the local educational context. In the following chapter, Chapter Three, the research methodology used in this study will be discussed, including the research approach, the process of data analysis, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an overview of existing literature about educator attrition and framed the study within the theoretical framework of Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. Chapter Three begins with the rationale for this study, followed by a discussion of the research design and paradigm and an explanation of the research approach that I used. The chapter then proceeds to a discussion of the research methods employed in this study, including the selection of participants, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.

The chapter then addresses the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Thereafter, an explanation of the data analysis process that was used to make sense of the data, following the steps in Braun and Clarke's (2020) thematic analysis, is provided. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations in the research, including participant confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and adhering to ethical standards throughout the study, as well as a chapter summary.

3.2. RESEARCH PARADIGM

Research paradigms shape both the study and interpretation of knowledge, acting as frameworks that guide what we choose to examine, how we observe it, and how we make sense of our observations (Pabel, Pryce & Anderson, 2021). Positivism and interpretivism are the two most widely used paradigms in research and analysis (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022).

The research paradigm utilised in this study was the interpretivism research paradigm. Interpretivism posits that truth and knowledge are subjective, shaped by cultural and historical contexts, and rooted in individuals' experiences and interpretations (Ryan, 2018). Interpretivism is more concerned with the contexts of humans' experiences and creating depth in meanings than with physical phenomena. It considers cultures, circumstances, and different social realities (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Interpretive

researchers explore reality through the perspectives of individuals, usually those who hold experiences within a specific group (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Any one phenomenon could be interpreted in multiple different ways by different people, instead of as a fact proven by measurement (Pham, 2018).

The interpretivist paradigm has been criticised for its limited contributions to social analysis; its focus on multiple perspectives, which can lead to relativism; the undermining of researchers' ethical responsibilities; and the questioning of the existence of objective knowledge. Additionally, while seeking a deeper understanding, interpretivism may introduce bias from researchers' personal values, and overlook the impacts of ideology and politics on issues like educational discrimination (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). However, every person has different experiences, cultures, and beliefs that affect their lives. Thus, interpretivism enabled me to take my participants' backgrounds, experiences, and views into consideration when obtaining information from them, and to use this essential information to gain a full picture of their reality, which resulted in rich and detailed data.

3.3. RESEARCH APPROACH

This study aimed to understand educators' experiences in their specific professional contexts and to develop retention strategies based on those experiences. The theoretical framework used in this study offered a lens through which the many variables affecting educator attrition could be investigated, especially in relation to how well or poorly educators' needs are being met.

Research can be categorised into three different research approaches, namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches (Taherdoost, 2022). A qualitative research approach was adopted in this study to address both the main research question and the research sub-questions.

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is well-suited for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups attribute to social or human problems. In this case, the problem of educator attrition is not just a statistical issue, but a deeply personal experience for each educator, shaped by various emotional, psychological, and professional factors. Hennik et al., (2020) describe qualitative research as an approach that enables the researcher to understand issues and

experiences from the participants' perspectives that cannot be measured by numbers. By employing qualitative rather than quantitative methods, this study aimed to gain a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of the reasons educators leave the profession before retirement age, their experiences within the profession, and the measures that could be taken to improve educator retention.

The quantitative research approach uses numerical data to describe and explain phenomena (Taherdoost, 2022). Owing to its primary focus on numerical data and generalisable findings (Taherdoost, 2022), quantitative methodology would have overlooked the rich, subjective experiences of former educators. Thus, a quantitative approach was deemed not suitable for this study. As this study aimed to investigate former educators' subjective experiences and the meanings they attached to those experiences, obtaining a clear picture of their contexts, motivations, and needs being met might have been missed if a quantitative approach had been used.

Qualitative research enabled an in-depth investigation into the lived experiences of former educators, as it elucidated insights that quantitative methods might not have captured. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were used to gather data for the study, which explored the subjective experiences of former educators and identified the underlying issues that led them to leave the teaching profession.

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed an exploratory research design. Whereas a descriptive or action research design could have been used, the nature of the research question, which aimed at uncovering the reasons why educators in Cape Town, South Africa, have left the profession, necessitated an exploratory approach. An exploratory design is used to answer a question or investigate phenomena when the researcher is unable to control or manipulate variables. Exploratory research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between variables by employing an inductive approach to identify general themes that explain observations, rather than testing a specific hypothesis (Singh, 2021). In my study, a thorough grasp of the fundamental causes of educator attrition was made possible by using this design, which gave me, as the researcher, freedom to examine the intricate and varied viewpoints of the former educators.

In the following sections, the research paradigm, research approach, and research type utilised in this study are discussed.

3.4. RESEARCH STRATEGY

My research adopted a phenomenology research strategy. Phenomenology is a research strategy that seeks to explore and understand a phenomenon by examining the experiences of individuals who have directly encountered it (Usman, Al-Hendawi & Bulut, 2025). According to Denscombe (2017) phenomenology enables researchers to gain a genuine and detailed understanding of the topic by taking a human-centred approach that focuses on participants' lived experiences and it is particularly suitable for studies involving a small number of participants. In this study, 12 participants were purposively selected, and their personal experiences as primary school educators, as well as their experiences of leaving the profession before retirement age, constituted the phenomena that this research aimed to explore and understand.

3.5. RESEARCH PROCESSES

In conducting research, the tools and processes used are essential for ensuring reliable and valid results. Research processes involve the strategies and techniques employed to collect and analyse data, offering a structured approach for exploring a study's research questions (Rahi, 2017). For this study, which explored the experiences of former educators in Cape Town, a qualitative approach was chosen to enable a deep understanding of the participants' perspectives. These deep insights may not have been fully captured using quantitative methods. This section outlines the research process, beginning with a detailed discussion of participant selection via Facebook, followed by a description of the data collection process, which involved semi-structured interviews, and concluding with the approach to data analysis.

3.5.1. Selection of Participants

A mixture of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was utilised for this study. Purposive sampling is considered representative of the population concerning the characteristics being examined. This method is employed in case studies involving a small sample, where chosen cases provide valuable insights into the topic being studied (Muzari, Shava & Shonhiwa, 2022). I selected this type of sampling as my

main sampling method because it is a type of non-probability sampling where participants are selected based on the characteristics needed for a study. I selected participants who could provide the most valuable information to achieve the study's aim (Nikolopoulou, 2022). To qualify, participants needed to: (1) hold a relevant teaching qualification; (2) have taught in a primary school in Cape Town, South Africa; (3) have resigned from the profession before retirement age, which is 65 years old in South Africa; (4) have left the profession within the past 5 years; and (5) be willing to participate in the study without compensation. Snowball sampling is a procedure whereby contact details of other potential participants are supplied by current participants (Noy, 2008). I asked each of my participants if they could refer me to someone who would meet the sampling inclusion criteria for the study. Participant 2 was referred by Participant 4. Participant 10 was referred by Participant 7. Both Participants 11 and 12 were referred by Participant 9.

Participants for the study were initially sought on social media, in Facebook Educator groups. These groups were used because a wide demographic of current and former educators are members of these groups and actively participate in group discussions regarding education, including describing the challenges they face, seeking advice, and sharing experiences. It was the former educators in these groups that I wanted to target. These Facebook groups included: *Onderwysers! Teachers!*, *Teachers Ask Teachers*, *Teachers Unite SA*, *Western Cape Teachers Forum*, *Teacher Career Coach*, *Teacher2Teacher*, and *Teachers for Real Change in South Africa*.

Seeking study participants on Facebook or other social media platforms is not a common practice. However, social media has proven effective for recruiting study participants. For example, Adam, Manca and Bell (2016) found that 39% of their participants learned about their study via Facebook, significantly reducing recruitment time. A systemic review by Sanchez, Grzenda, Varias, Widge, Carpenter, McDonald, Nemeroff, Kalin, Martin, Tohen, Filippou-Frye, Ramsey, Linos, Mangurian & Rodriguez (2020) reported that Facebook was the most commonly used platform, employed exclusively in 68.8% of studies alongside other platforms in many other studies. Wiener et al. (2017) recruited 178 participants within 13 days using social media for a hard-to-reach population.

In the current study, Facebook was chosen as the participant recruitment tool for its affordability, accessibility, and capacity to connect the researcher with former educators in Cape Town who had left the teaching profession before retirement age. Facebook groups devoted to educators, like the ones listed above, are a good way to connect with more people who fit the study's inclusion requirements, as many educators, both former and present, participate actively in them. The target population for this study may not have been as effectively reached by traditional methods.

Research supports the growing use of social media for participant recruitment, particularly among hard-to-reach populations (Adam et al., 2016; Sanchez et al., 2020; Wiener et al., 2017). By utilising relevant Facebook educator groups, I was able to identify participants who voluntarily opted to participate and who could provide rich, relevant insights into why primary school educators are leaving the profession before retirement age in Cape Town.

The Facebook post seeking participants read as follows:

Good day, all. I am a master's student currently completing research investigating educator attrition in Cape Town, Western Cape. I am seeking former primary school educators who left the profession before retirement age and are willing to participate in an open-ended, semi-structured interview about their experiences in the profession. Participation in this research is completely voluntary, and no financial or other compensation is provided. Please click on the flyer if you are interested in participating in this interesting and exciting research.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the flyer posted on Facebook to recruit participants.



Figure 3.1: Facebook flyer to recruit participants

The above flyer and message were posted on each of the afore-mentioned groups. Interested participants were asked to click on a link that led to a pre-populated Google Form. The Google form asked five preliminary screening questions to ascertain whether they were eligible to participate based on the eligibility criteria. The Google form asked the following questions: “Do you have a valid teaching qualification?”, “Have you taught in a primary school in Cape Town, South Africa?”, “Did you resign from teaching before retirement age of 65 years?”, “Are you willing to take part in this research study knowing that there is no compensation?”, “Do you give permission for the researcher to contact you via email?”. Over the course of four months, 14 people responded to my Facebook post and completed the Google Form. Of these, eight people met the inclusion criteria and were contacted via email, thanked for their interest in the study, and sent a follow-up screening questionnaire (see Appendix G). Meeting the inclusion criteria was essential to ensure that the data collected was reflective of participants who had been actively engaged in the local education system, enabling an in-depth exploration of the experiences of former educators that had led them to leave the teaching profession.

Although the sampling process for the study aimed to recruit a diverse range of former educators, it did not result in an even spread of participant demographics. In terms of race, the sample included one black participant, three coloured participants, and eight white participants. Additionally, there was only one male participant and 11 female participants, indicating a skewed gender representation. The fact that there are typically more female educators in the primary education sector may be a contributing factor to this gender representation gap. Research supports this gender disparity in primary school education, noting that primary school educators are predominantly female worldwide, particularly in countries such as South Africa (Wills, 2019). Two participants (P5 and P7) were aged 65 and 66 respectively when the interviews took place; however, both had resigned from the teaching profession before reaching the standard retirement age of 65, within the previous five years. Their inclusion aligns with the study's purposive sampling criteria, which targeting educators who exited the profession prior to retirement age, as the focus was on understanding the experiences of leaving the profession early rather than on the participants' age at the time of the study.

Table 3.1 presents each participant's information, specifically their pseudonym, gender, age, race, and years of experience, grades taught the sampling method employed to recruit them, the interview mode used, and a background note.

Table 3.1: Participant demographics and study-relevant details

Participant:	Pseudonym:	Gender:	Age:	Race:	Years in profession:	Grade/s Taught	Private/Public School	Sampling Method:	Online/ In Person Interview:	Background:
Participant 1	P1	F	32	White	7	Grades 1, 2, and 3.	Private and Public Schools	Purposive Sampling	Microsoft Teams	Worked as a music educator in both private and public schools. She started her own business while still teaching music occasionally.
Participant 2	P2	M	28	Colored	3	Grade 7	Public School	Purposive and Snowball Sampling	Microsoft Teams	Served as head of department in a public school and is moving to Bahrain to continue his teaching career there.
Participant 3	P3	F	31	White	2.5	Grade R	Private School	Purposeful Sampling	Microsoft Teams	Has taught in China and worked in a private school. She is currently working in learning design.
Participant 4	P4	F	32	Colored	4	Grade 3	Public School	Purposeful Sampling	Microsoft Teams	Served as head of department in a no-fee paying public school. After leaving the profession, she entered lecturing.
Participant 5	P5	F	66	White	41	Grades 4 and 5	Public School	Purposeful Sampling	Microsoft Teams	Taught in public schools. She is currently retired.
Participant 6	P6	F	35	White	11	Grades 1,2,3, and 6	Public and Private Schools	Purposeful Sampling	In-Person	Taught in public schools. She opened a remedial education company.
Participant 7	P7	F	65	White	40	Grade 1	Public School	Purposeful Sampling	In-Person	Taught in public schools. She is currently retired.
Participant 8	P8	F	31	Colored	7	Grade 1 and 2	Private School	Purposeful Sampling	Microsoft Teams	Taught in a private school. She started her own tutoring company.
Participant 9	P9	F	34	White	10	Grade 1 and 2	Public School	Purposeful Sampling	Microsoft Teams	Taught in public schools. She is currently homeschooling her own child.
Participant 10	P10	F	45	Black	20	Grade 5	Public School	Purposive and Snowball Sampling Snowball Sampling	Microsoft Teams	Taught in public schools. She is currently a home executive.
Participant 11	P11	F	37	White	6	Grade R	Public School	Purposive and Snowball Sampling Snowball Sampling	Microsoft Teams	Taught in public schools and is currently working in the hospitality industry.
Participant 12	P12	F	38	White	8	Grade 4	Public School	Purposive and Snowball Sampling Snowball Sampling	Microsoft Teams	Taught in public schools and started her own remedial education company.

3.5.2. Data Collection

In this study, semi-structured, open-ended interviews (SSI) were utilised and conducted in-person as well as in an online mode. This approach enabled me to guide the interview in an open-ended, flexible way, supporting each participant to offer rich, detailed responses, which would not have been obtained with closed-ended, question-style interviews (George, 2022). Semi-structured interviews are a combination of structured and unstructured interviews, forming an exploratory tool that facilitates flexibility and easy comparison among participants (Muzari et al., 2022). Semi-structured interviews were advantageous to this study because they supported flexibility and spontaneity, providing opportunities for further follow-up research questions, not planned for, to gain more information and data (George, 2022; Muzari et al., 2022).

Before each interview was conducted, I reviewed each point of the consent form and reply slip (Appendix B) with the participant to ensure that they had a thorough understanding of what was expected of them and what they could expect from me, and I requested that they sign to confirm their consent.

The participants were given the option to choose between being interviewed in person (face-to-face) or remotely on a meeting tool such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. A remote option was necessary because some participants did not live close to me or did not have the means to travel to meet with me. Conducting remote interviews was advantageous because they saved time and money by eliminating the need for travel. Two participants opted for the in-person interview, and 10 participants opted for the remote interview via Microsoft Teams.

In conducting interviews, I utilised an interview protocol (see Appendix C) and structured questions to guide the conversations and ensure that the participants remained focused on the questions asked, so that the research questions were appropriately addressed. My first interview was a valuable learning experience as the participant frequently went off-topic, resulting in insufficient time to cover all the questions. To complete the interview, a second meeting had to be scheduled. Reflecting on this first interview experience, I realised how important it was to use my prepared interview protocol to keep participants on point and to efficiently manage the

time. I was able to run more efficient sessions after the second interview, concentrating more on time management and gaining comprehensive answers without interrupting.

Some participants were less forthcoming with information than others, which required me to employ more probing questions to encourage deeper, richer responses from these individuals. This process of refining my interview technique aligns with common qualitative research practices where flexibility and adaptation are essential to gathering comprehensive data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In my study, such adjustments improved the overall flow of the interviews and facilitated more detailed responses from the participants.

3.5.3. Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded with explicit permission from each participant. The face-to-face and remote interviews were recorded on my mobile phone and on Microsoft Teams, respectively. I found that the remote interviews were more successful as there were fewer distractions for me as the interviewer and for the participants. In addition, using Microsoft Teams enabled me to record the video with automatic transcription whereas the in-person interviews were not video recorded. The in-person interview recordings were transcribed by hand while listening to the audio to ensure that I captured all the nuances and removed any dysfluencies.

The automatic transcripts generated by Microsoft Teams were often lengthy and inaccurate, with errors such as broken sentences and misinterpretations of spoken words. This meant I had to listen to each audio recording while reading the transcript to make sure it was accurate. I frequently had to stop to correct and change text while ensuring that all speech nuances were recorded and retained without losing any context of what was being said (Ruslin, Mashuri,, Rasak, Alhabsyi & Syam, 2022).

This meticulous process was necessary to ensure that the final transcript accurately reflected the content of the interview. After completing this detailed editing process, I assigned each participant a pseudonym to protect their privacy of personal information (George, 2022). I then sent the finalised transcripts to the participants for them to review and confirm that all the information in the transcript of their interview had been correctly captured to ensure validity (Frances, Coughlan & Cronin, 2009).

After the transcriptions were approved by the participants, I began the thematic analysis, using Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs as a theoretical framework to analyse and code the data.

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, this theoretical framework consists of five levels of needs for educators to reach self-actualisation in their careers. The five needs, as per Fisher and Royster's (2016) theoretical framework, were utilised as variables to determine if these needs have an impact on educator attrition. Thematic analysis was chosen because it enabled me to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes evident in the data and to describe the data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was useful in this study because it revealed the participants lived-reality, knowledge about which is essential for understanding the experiences and perspectives of educators who have left the teaching profession.

I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases for thematic analysis of my data. The first phase involved familiarising myself with the data. The second phase involved generating initial codes within the data by assigning codes to certain topics, ideas, and patterns that came up repeatedly, according to the five hierarchical levels mentioned in the theoretical framework, namely subsistence, security, association, respect, and self-actualisation. The third phase required me to search for themes within the data. The fourth phase involved reviewing the identified themes and the fifth phase involved defining and naming these identified themes. The sixth and last phase required that I produce the research report.

3.6. MEASURES FOR TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness is imperative as it guides research practice and the utilisation of findings, in addition to instilling confidence in the reader (Stahl & King, 2020). Qualitative research gains credibility through establishing trustworthiness, which ensures the accuracy and reliability of data collected from participants. Trustworthiness acts as a quality checking measure, enabling researchers to confirm the validity of their findings. For qualitative studies, specific evaluation criteria are essential to assess the validity and authenticity of the results (Muzari et al., 2022). There are four measures for trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A discussion of these measures follows.

3.6.1. Credibility

Credibility refers to how believable the study is and to the internal validity of the study (Stahl & King, 2020). To ensure credibility in this study, I utilised the well-established method of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to determine patterns and themes to represent the data collected.

Furthermore, I used voluntary participants, checked for understanding during the interviews, and built a good rapport with them. I conducted debriefing sessions with the participants after the interview process. I utilised peer scrutiny by asking my colleagues to scrutinise my study and provide feedback. After the interviews were transcribed, I asked the participants to check the transcriptions and verify whether I had recorded the correct information (Shenton, 2004).

3.6.2. Transferability

Transferability refers to the external validity of a study, determining whether its findings can be applied to similar situations (Trochim, 2023). It is important that the study be carried out systematically and honestly for the findings of the study to be applied to similar situations. This study was carried out systematically and honestly by thoroughly recording all the data and reporting on the findings honestly.

3.6.3. Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which the same results would be reached if the work were to be repeated (Trochim, 2023). To achieve dependability in this study I ensured that I documented all processes of this study in detail, so that if my study were to be repeated there would be a good chance of producing the same results.

3.6.4. Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the fact that researchers are human and have biases and, therefore, are not objective beings. Nassaji (2020) stated that steps should be taken to ensure that a study's findings are the result of the informants' experiences and ideas, rather than the researcher's beliefs. To ensure confirmability, I identified my

own bias and kept an objective view while basing my reporting of the findings strictly on the data gathered.

3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Conducting research is both a moral and ethical responsibility and prioritising the protection of participants' interests to ensure they are not adversely affected by the study is essential (Halai, 2006). Six ethical considerations guide the design and practices of qualitative research, including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality, data protection, results communication, and participant presentation. These considerations aim to protect the rights of the research participants, enhance the validity of the research, and uphold academic integrity (Bhandari, 2022).

3.7.1. Ethical Clearance and Approval

To ensure adherence to ethical standards, I applied for and obtained an ethical clearance certificate from UNISA, meeting all the necessary requirements (See Appendix A).

3.7.2. Participant Recruitment and Informed Consent

Researchers are required to obtain informed consent from everyone directly involved in the research. This principle reflects the broader ethical standard of respecting participants by ensuring they are not pressured into participating and are provided with all necessary information before consenting (Halai, 2006). To ensure informed consent, prospective participants received a detailed letter and consent form. This letter outlined the aim of the research, the reasons why this person was invited to participate, the nature of the participation, the right to withdraw from the study at any time, information regarding possible benefits, confidentiality measures, the lack of remuneration, ethics approval, and how they would be informed of the study's findings. Participants provided written consent after reviewing this information (See Appendix B).

3.7.3. Voluntary Participation

Voluntary participation ensures that people participate in research of their own volition and without coercion or pressure (Bhandari, 2022). Participants can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and without any negative repercussions. Each participant in this study was fully informed about the research methods and anticipated results. Each participant gave written consent attesting that their participation was entirely voluntary and free from financial compensation or coercion, and they were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. No participant received financial compensation or was coerced to participate in this study.

3.7.4. Confidentiality

The management of confidentiality is closely tied to the process of obtaining informed consent. Participants must be informed about and understand what will happen to the data collected, how the findings will be reported, whether their identity could be discerned from the data, and what that might mean for them (Wiles, 2013). To ensure confidentiality in this study, participants were informed in writing and in person about the research study process. The process of data collection and storage was explained. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity. All schools mentioned in the interviews were also assigned pseudonyms. All research-related data and information were securely stored on a password-protected system, ensuring the protection of sensitive data.

3.7.5. Data Protection

Data Protection was ensured by securely storing all research-related data and information on a password-protected system, thereby protecting sensitive data.

3.7.6. Transparent Communication of the Findings

According to Bhandari (2022), research findings should be reported in an honest way, free of false data and misrepresented results, and should be of excellent academic quality and free of plagiarism. I ensured that my master's dissertation was free from plagiarism and that all findings were reported accurately and transparently.

3.7.7. Minimising Risks to Participants

Research participation should involve no more than minimal risk to participants. Researchers must evaluate potential risks and ensure that participants are fully informed about both the potential risks and benefits of their involvement in the research (Wiles, 2013). In this study, both the potential risks to and benefits for study participants were communicated to them in writing and in person.

Ethical considerations form the foundation of responsible research, encompassing principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, data protection, and transparent communication of results. Adhering to these principles aimed to protect and respect all participants, ensuring the credibility and integrity of the research.

3.8. CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter Three provided a comprehensive overview of the rationale for the study, the research design, paradigm, and the research approach and type. It explained the research processes such as participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

The chapter also addressed the measures undertaken to ensure trustworthiness of the study, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, the chapter highlighted the ethical considerations fundamental to this research study, including participant confidentiality, informed consent, and adherence to ethical standards.

In the next chapter, an in-depth description of the data analysis and an overview of the themes will be provided, followed by a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter detailed the research methodology employed in this study, setting the stage for this chapter, which focuses on the data analysis process. This chapter presents a thorough examination of the data, utilising thematic analysis in line with the guidelines established by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis aligned with the study's aims and objectives, which were to understand why primary school educators have left the profession, and to identify recommendations from educators to enhance educator retention in Cape Town, South Africa.

The chapter begins with a short summary of the research process carried out in this study, followed by an overview and discussion of the findings. The findings are divided into themes, according to those that emerged from the data analysis. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

4.2. RESEARCH PROCESS

This study adopted a qualitative, phenomenological approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of former educators in Cape Town, as discussed in Chapter Three. Purposeful and snowball sampling were employed to select participants who had exited the teaching profession. Twelve former primary school educators were selected, with the sample being limited to former educators from the Western Cape to maintain geographical relevance. Participants were contacted via email and provided with consent forms before interviews were conducted either online or in person.

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the data collection method. The interviewer guided the participants using a set of six questions designed to explore their perceptions of the factors influencing educator attrition and retention. The data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis. The process began with familiarisation with the data, followed by generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, and defining and naming them. The final step involved producing a detailed report of the findings.

The analysis initially revealed two main themes: Primary school educators' experiences and recommendations made by the former educators.

Throughout the process, ethical considerations were consistently upheld, including obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality. The data gathered provided valuable insights that can contribute to improving retention strategies and addressing the challenges that educators face in the profession.

4.3. DATA ANALYSIS

Reflexive thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Thematic analysis is a technique used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data. It provides systematic processes to generate codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2017). The thematic analysis conducted in this study was theory-driven in that this study posed a research question around which the data were coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen for this study because of its flexibility as a research tool (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Taking this approach was particularly important for this study because it facilitated an in-depth examination of the experiences and perceptions of former educators, capturing the complexities of their views. This enabled me to critically consider my role and influence in the interpretation process and ensure that the analysis was true to the participants' voiced experiences. This method provided a framework to unpack the various factors contributing to educators leaving the profession before retirement age in Cape Town, South Africa. This method also facilitated a deeper understanding of the complexities of this topic, enriched the findings, and provided meaningful insights that other more rigid approaches such as qualitative content analysis and phenomenological analysis might not have been able to capture (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest six phases of thematic analysis. I followed these carefully to analyse the data I collected to construct themes related to the research question. The process involved familiarising myself with the data by transcribing the interviews, re-reading the transcriptions, and extracting possible codes. Next, I generated initial codes and looked for patterns in the data. Thereafter, I searched for

themes within the consolidated data, reviewed these themes for accuracy and validity, and defined and named themes. Finally, I produced a report on the findings.

4.3.1. Phase 1: Familiarising Yourself with the Data

During Phase 1 of the analysis, I fully immersed myself in the data collection process. I manually transcribed each interview and carefully re-read the transcriptions while cross-referencing them with the original audio recordings to ensure accuracy and identify any inconsistencies or errors. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), transcription plays a crucial role in the early stages of data analysis, enabling the researcher to begin forming a systematic understanding of the data. After transcribing the interviews, I revisited the transcriptions multiple times, searching for recurring patterns or codes that stood out. As I reviewed the data, I highlighted key phrases and points from the participants' responses that were relevant to my research questions and would later be extracted for further analysis.

4.3.2. Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

The coding process is flexible and dynamic, enabling the code to develop and adapt as the researcher progressively gains deeper insight into the data. It is an inherently subjective practice (Braun & Clarke, 2020). I created a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel for each participant and began manually identifying possible codes. Braun and Clarke (2017) describe codes as the smallest unit of analysis in qualitative research, which are used to extract segments of data relevant to the research question. I added these codes to the spreadsheet as I identified them and transferred the phrases or points to the corresponding codes. I kept adding as many codes as I needed. After completing this process for each transcription, I re-read the codes and checked for accuracy and context. There were initially 29 codes identified, as presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Initial codes generated during thematic analysis

<u>INITIAL CODES</u>	
Demographics	Working Environment
Workload	School Image and Values
Exiting Teaching	Learners
Post Teaching	Colleagues
Possibility of Growth	Suggestions
Altruism	Unions
Remuneration	Teacher's Rights
Health	Management
Mental Health	Student Educators
Effects of Personal Life	WCED (Western Cape Education Department)
Identity	Private vs Public Schools
Parents	Teaching Overseas
Personal Values	Curriculum
Resources	Entering Teaching
COVID-19	

Using Microsoft Excel, a consolidated spreadsheet was created to combine all participants and their corresponding codes. This spreadsheet was then scrutinized according to the research question, possible themes were identified, and the codes were sorted into themes. Some codes were merged, some were used to create single themes, and others were discarded. By the end of this phase, I had a collection of possible themes, including 11 final codes.

Microsoft Excel is a flexible and user-friendly tool that facilitates effective organisation and analysis of qualitative data; thus it was used to code the interview data. Creating and managing coding frameworks, allocating codes to data segments, and monitoring patterns were all made simple using Excel's grid format. Its sorting and filtering features made it easier to retrieve and compare data, and the use of colour coding facilitated the identification of patterns within the dataset. Additionally, using Excel enabled systematic and transparent data management, which ensured accuracy and traceability throughout the analysis process.

Table 4.2 presents the initial codes that were merged to form new codes.

Table 4.2: Initial codes merged to form final codes during thematic analysis

<u>INITIAL CODES MERGED</u>	<u>FINAL CODE</u>
Workload	Workload
Curriculum	
Exiting Teaching	Life after Teaching
Post Teaching	
Health	Well-being
Mental Health	
Personal Life	Effects on Personal Life
Identity	
Personal Values	
School Image and Values	
Working Environment	
Working Environment	Working Environment
COVID-19	
Possibility of Growth	
Private vs Public Schools	
Resources	
Teaching Overseas	
Colleagues	
WCED (Western Cape Education Department)	
Management	
Unions	
Teacher's Rights	
Entering the Teaching Profession	Entering the Teaching Profession
Student Educators	
Altruism	
Recommendations	Recommendations
Learners	Learners
Remuneration	Remuneration
Parents	Parents

4.3.3. Phase 3: Search for Themes

At the beginning of this phase, I had a list of different codes that needed to be sorted between the various candidate themes. I considered these codes and how they could be collated or combined to form different themes. A theme highlights an aspect of the data that is significant to the research question and reflects a recurring pattern or meaningful response within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes provide a framework for organising and reporting findings from the data. Themes consist of codes that form the building blocks of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2017).

I considered the relationship between the themes and the sub-themes in relation to the research question and ensured that the true meaning and context of the data were captured. The 11 final codes were collated into two main themes consisting of three sub-themes. Table 4.3 presents the final themes and sub-themes.

Table 4.3: Final Themes and Sub-Themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Theme 1: Educator Experiences Leading to Attrition	Sub-Theme 1: Excessive Workload and Multiple Responsibilities
	Sub-Theme 2: Strained Relationships with Stakeholders
	Sub-Theme 3: Work-Life Balance
	Sub-Theme 4: Societal and Institutional Devaluation of the Profession
	Sub-Theme 5: Remuneration
Theme 2: The Decision to Leave the Profession	
Theme 3: Life After Teaching	
Theme 4: Former Educator Recommendations	Sub-Theme 1: Enhanced Support Systems
	Sub-Theme 2: Mental Health Support
	Sub-Theme 3: Workload Management
	Sub-theme 4: Professional Respect and Work Environment
	Sub-Theme 5: Remuneration

4.3.4. Phase 4: Review the Themes

During this phase, I refined my candidate themes and sub-themes. I also ensured that they were appropriate and accurate according to the coded extracts.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this phase consists of two levels. The first level takes place at the level of the coded data. I re-read the collated extracts for each theme and ensured that they formed a coherent pattern that matched the context of the study. Figure 4.1 presents the candidate thematic map, including the process flowing from the research question to the codes to the candidate themes and sub-themes.

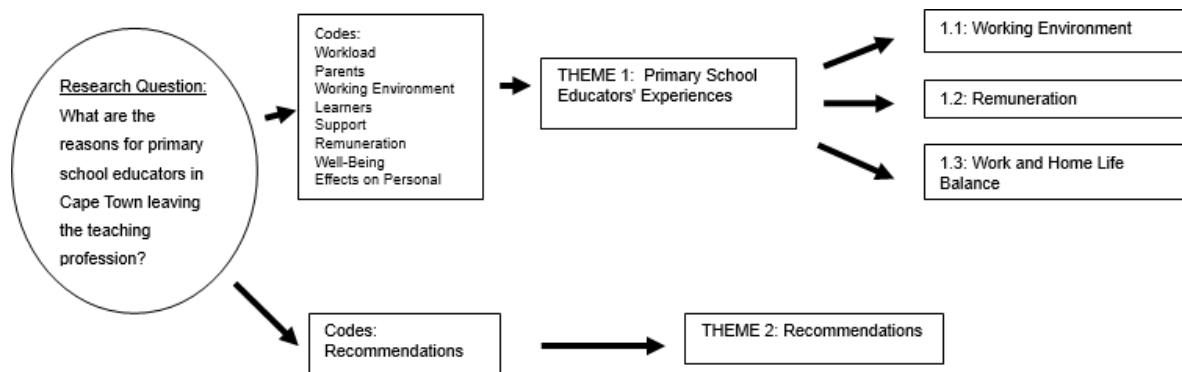


Figure 4.1: Candidate thematic map showing the two main themes and three sub-themes

At level 2 of the thematic analysis process, the analysis shifted to reviewing the entire data set and proposed themes and sub-themes. Following Braun and Clarke (2023), each theme was assessed for its accuracy in reflecting participants' experiences. Based on this review, four overarching themes were developed for a total of 10 sub-themes. These themes provided a more nuanced representation of the data, capturing the challenges that influenced educators' decisions, their experiences after leaving the profession, and their suggestions for improving retention. Data extracts were reviewed and re-coded where necessary to ensure that each theme accurately represented the full range of participants' perspectives. This approach ensured that the final thematic structure offered a clear and comprehensive reflection of the dataset while addressing research questions.

Figure 4.2 presents my final thematic map.

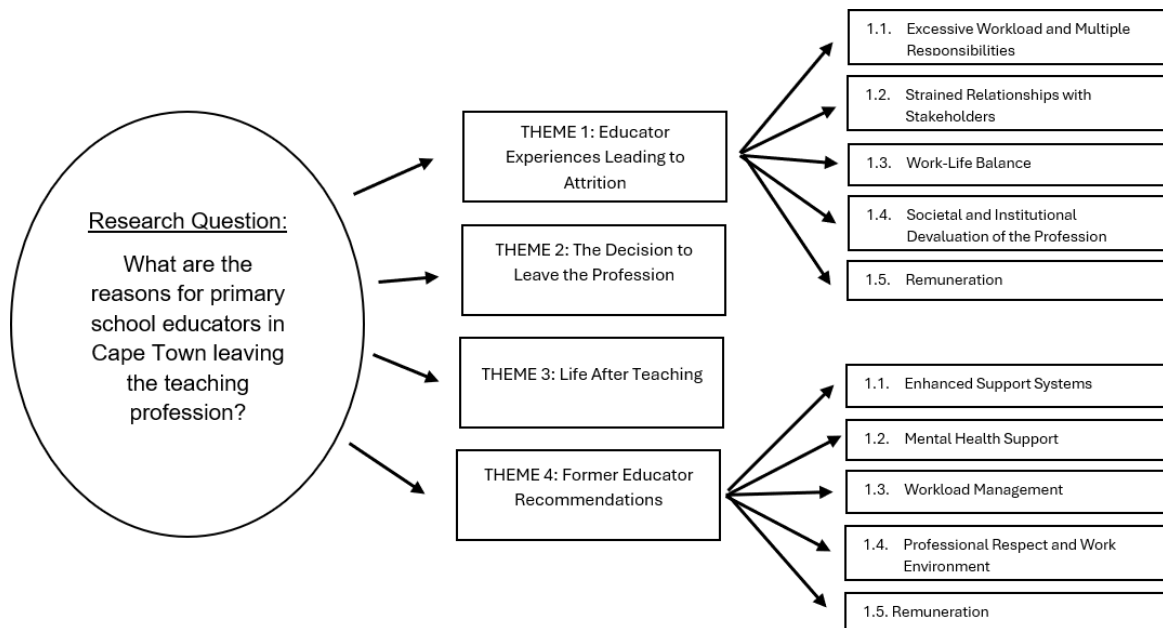


Figure 4.2: Final thematic map, showing the four main themes and a total of 10 sub-themes

4.3.5. Phase 5: Define and Name the Themes

Entering this phase, I had a final thematic map and a good understanding of the essence of my data. Braun and Clarke (2023) advise researchers to define and refine themes during this phase. I reviewed my collated data for each theme and started organising the themes and identifying how they fit into the narrative. I wrote a complete analysis of each theme and sub-theme in relation to the research question. I considered the name of each theme and sub-theme to ensure that I had chosen the name that best described the content theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.3.6. Phase 6: Produce the Report

This phase involved the final analysis and development of a report to communicate the narrative of the data. I identified which extracts would be used to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme. I was careful to develop a report that was concise to provide a valid answer to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the following section, an overview of the themes derived from the data analysis process is provided.

4.4. OVERVIEW OF THEMES

The findings address the research questions: What are the reasons for primary educators in Cape Town leaving the profession before retirement age? How have primary school educators who have left the teaching profession before retirement age experiences being educators in Cape Town? Based on these primary school educators' experiences, what can be done to retain primary school educators in the teaching profession in Cape Town?

The findings are presented across four themes. Theme 1, Educator Experiences Leading to Attrition, explores the lived experiences of primary school educators and the factors that contributed to their decision to leave the profession. This theme is further categorised into five sub-themes: excessive workload and multiple responsibilities, strained relationships with stakeholders, work-life imbalance, societal and institutional devaluation of the profession, and remuneration. Theme 2, The Decision to Leave the Profession, captures the point at which the participants chose to exit the teaching profession. Theme 3, Life After Teaching, explores participants' experiences following their departure from the profession. Theme 4, Recommendations to Reduce Educator Attrition, presents the recommendations provided by former educators for improving retention within the teaching profession.

This section outlines and discusses these themes, providing a deeper understanding of educators' perspectives and suggesting strategies for addressing the identified challenges.

Table 4.4 shows the connections between the research questions, themes, and interview questions

Table 4.4: The connections between the research questions, interview questions, and themes

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	THEMES	SUB-THEMES
What are the reasons for primary school educators in Cape Town leaving the teaching profession before retirement age?	1. Tell me about your experiences of being a primary school educator?	Theme 1: Educator Experiences Leading to Attrition	Sub-Theme 1: Excessive Workload and Multiple Responsibilities
How have primary school educators who have left the teaching profession experienced being educators in Cape Town?	2. Tell me how you felt about these experiences?		Sub-Theme 2: Strained Relationships with Stakeholders
	3. Could you please explain your current employment status and if you feel that you made the right decision to leave an educator position at a primary school?		Sub-Theme 3: Work-Life Balance
	4. Could you explain what motivated you to leave the teaching profession?		Sub-Theme 4: Societal and Institutional Devaluation of the Profession
			Sub-Theme 5: Remuneration
Based on these educators' experiences, what can be done to retain primary school educators in the teaching profession in Cape Town?	5. What recommendations can you make to retain educators in the teaching profession in South Africa?	Theme 2: The Decision to Leave the Profession	
		Theme 3: Life After Teaching	
		Theme 4: Former Educator Recommendations	
		Sub-Theme 1: Enhanced Support Systems	
		Sub-Theme 2: Mental Health Support	
		Sub-Theme 3: Workload Management	
		Sub-theme 4: Professional Respect and Work Environment	
		Sub-Theme 5: Remuneration	

4.4.1. Theme 1: Educator Experiences Leading to Attrition

Theme 1 explored the lived experiences of primary school educators in Cape Town and how these experiences contributed to their decision to leave the teaching profession before retirement age. This theme directly addressed the primary research question: What are the reasons for primary school educators in Cape Town leaving the teaching profession before retirement age?

The findings reveal that educators' experiences were shaped by excessive workload demands, strained relationships with key stakeholders, an imbalance between work and personal life, a perceived decline in the status of the profession and inadequate remuneration. These factors interacted to create environments in which educators' professional and personal needs were not met, ultimately contributing to their decision to exit the profession.

The following section will present Sub-Theme 1.

4.4.4.1. Sub-theme 1: Excessive Workload and Multiple Responsibilities

Participants consistently described the teaching profession as demanding, fast-paced and overwhelming, characterised by excessive workloads and multiple responsibilities that extend far beyond classroom teaching. These responsibilities included administrative tasks, curriculum demands, co-curricular activities and managing overcrowded classrooms. Collectively these demands contributed significantly to stress, burnout and ultimately decisions to leave the teaching profession.

Educators are often expected to carry out many roles and responsibilities within and outside of teaching, including acting as caregivers, nurses, and counsellors, just to name a few of the hats that educators are expected to wear. This expectation of filling all these roles creates a narrative that educators must embody these multifaceted roles, leading to moral and emotional strain or even burnout. Participant 1 (P1) described it as a "toxic environment" where educators are expected to be everything for their learners, often neglecting their own needs and well-being.

I think a lot of the time; there is a bit of moral brainwashing that comes when you are an educator. You care about the kids and must do all these different things, and that makes you so brave. I do think it's very culty.

Participant 3 (P3) echoed this sentiment, describing the culture as manipulative and unhealthy:

It's very toxic. It's a very manipulative kind of mindset where educators are superheroes. It kind of feeds into this toxic thing where educators start to buy into this as well, when they're like, ok well, I'm a good teacher. I have to wear all these hats and if I do it properly, I'll be able to help at least one or two kids and that will make it worthwhile. And that's not healthy.

This relentless commitment and hero narrative often resulted in self-sacrifice. This sense of self-sacrifice for the learners or the job prevents educators from meeting their own needs, as set out by Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, which was discussed in Chapter Two. Specifically, the pressure to maintain a façade of always being in control prevents educators from fulfilling their basic needs for subsistence and security, as they neglect rest and self-care can significantly influence their decision to either remain in or leave the profession.

As noted in the literature review, Foord (2022) similarly found that being an educator is physically and mentally demanding, and the continued strain could have a negative effect on the educator's well-being. P12 vividly described this constant juggling of priorities:

Educators have these glass balls and plastic balls that you constantly need to keep in the air simultaneously needing to determine which are the glass balls that will break if they fall, and which are the plastic balls that will bounce back if they fall. It's just the pressure of just juggling everything.

The fast-paced nature of the job results in educators operating on high levels of adrenalin, leaving little time for breaks or personal time. P3 reflected this high intensity environment:

You just moving, moving, moving and it's problem-solving and you on your feet that whole time and making decisions and it's a very high level of a mental state that you have to be in.

Heffernan et al. (2022) reported that of their 2,444 participants, only 41 intended to remain in the profession. The other 2,403 named workload as the primary factor

influencing their decision to leave. The heavy workload was a common theme among participants. Many educators described being expected to maintain consistently high performance with minimal time for rest or personal life. P3 shared:

We literally didn't have a break in the day. The workday was from 7 am to 5 pm without any break. I wouldn't eat. I had no time to eat.

This constant pressure leaves little opportunity for meaningful engagement with learners. P2 explained:

Educators are far too overworked, far too overloaded to really put their heart and soul into the practice.

The participants' experiences reveal how relentless expectations and demanding workloads contribute to burnout and ultimately drive educators to leave the profession. This aligns with Siebritz (2021), who reported that SADTU had cautioned that educators are under tremendous stress due to the working conditions they face. Wock's (2014) Canadian study found that participants were expected to fill many roles, and this workload contributed to their exiting the teaching profession. Worth (2023) identified the same issue in England, while, in South Africa, Palm (2020) found that excessive workloads and pressure are causing educators to experience stress and burnout, which causes job dissatisfaction, leading to exiting the profession.

As P2 expressed:

It forbids me from putting the time and effort into my lessons that I usually would. The workload and the deadlines that I must see to are so much that I'm not able to connect with my learners. All that joy that comes from engaging with those little ones and really shaping the young minds and the young hearts is much overshadowed by the administrative duties that come with being a teacher.

P3 similarly highlighted the extent of daily administrative tasks:

It was a large portion of admin that we were doing every day. We would have to log observations for every child every day. It was awful. At the end of the day, we would have to show it to our Department Head to be able to

leave for the day. I was being expected to do miraculous levels of work every day and I would stay up late doing all this admin.

Alongside the administrative overload, the curriculum itself also presents significant challenges for educators. P4 highlights the rigidity of the curriculum:

The curriculum is set on your ideal child. It's not catering to your children that absolutely cannot cope. And the differentiation is expected to be made by you as the teacher. I've already got to teach this concept, now I still need to go and think of another way to make it for the higher, the middle, and the lower, sometimes you even get lower than low.

The constant cycle of assessment further compounds the problem. As P3 observed:

I think the way that we do assessments is very flawed. It's one of the things that just keeps putting time and content pressure on both educators and learners. I think we assess too often, and I think we assess too early. This is all I have time for and I don't have time to stop. If this group of kids are struggling with this, I don't have time to try another tact. I don't have time to try different things at all.

This finding is supported by Du Plessis and Letshwene (2020), who report that due to the large amount of time spent on assessments, there is little time for teaching and learning to take place. Along with excessive amounts of administrative tasks and curriculum expectations, educators also need to manage overcrowded classrooms. This overcrowding leaves little room for personalised attention. P11 explained:

They need your attention and one-on-one time, but you are sitting with too many kids in a class. It's frustrating for the child and the educator. They are being robbed from your attention, and this becomes the teacher's problem.

West and Meier (2020) similarly identified that overcrowding of classes is a fundamental challenge within classrooms. The challenges faced by educators, as described by the participants, directly highlight the unmet needs identified in Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. Administrative tasks, rigid curriculum demands, and frequent assessments significantly compromise educators' subsistence needs, such as adequate rest and self-care. As noted by the participants,

the sheer volume of administrative duties and the time required to adapt teaching materials leave little room for rest or recuperation, directly impacting their physical and mental well-being.

The need for security is similarly affected. Overcrowded classrooms, as mentioned by P11, intensify stress levels and create an environment where educators struggle to maintain discipline and manage learner behaviour. This constant pressure undermines educators' sense of safety and stability in their roles. Furthermore, the lack of respect and acknowledgement of educators' efforts, stemming from excessive workloads and systemic challenges, jeopardises their need for respect and association. Educators feel disconnected from their students and unable to foster meaningful relationships, as administrative and curriculum demands overshadow the core purpose of teaching (Engelbrecht-Aldworth, 2024).

Participants highlighted the additional pressures associated with co-curricular responsibilities, which further intensified their already demanding workloads. These activities extend beyond classroom teaching and often consume personal time, leaving little opportunity for rest and recovery. As P12 reflected:

And then it's the co-curriculum. And especially at a school where you are the rugby, cricket, and remedial teacher. I was reluctant to go into mainstream school because I didn't want to do all the extra-murals. Coaching sport after a full day of teaching. The pressure of everything that needs to happen every day becomes overwhelming.

This statement illustrates the cumulative effect of co-curricular duties, which include coaching, organising school events, attending weekend functions, and participating in extracurricular training sessions. Such expectations frequently extend into evenings, weekends, and even school holidays, blurring the boundaries between educators' professional and personal lives.

From the perspective of Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, as unpacked in Chapter Two, these expectations directly undermine educators' subsistence needs, as the constant time demands prevent adequate rest, recreation, and self-care. The strain of managing both academic and co-curricular responsibilities erode energy levels and contributes to chronic fatigue.

The need for security is also affected. The unpredictability of co-curricular schedules and the expectation to be constantly available create a sense of instability and continuous pressure. Over time, this leads to emotional exhaustion and diminished resilience. As Bowen et al. (2020) observe, sustained exposure to such demands can lead to burnout, negatively impacting educators' mental health and overall job satisfaction.

The findings demonstrate that excessive workload directly impacts educators' ability to meet their subsistence needs, as outlined in Fisher and Royster's Teachers Hierarchy of Needs. The lack of time for rest, recovery, and meaningful engagement with learners contributes to physical exhaustion, emotional strain, and ultimately burnout. This sustained pressure significantly influences educators' decisions to leave the profession.

The following section will present Sub-Theme 2.

4.4.4.2. Sub-Theme 2: Strained Relationships with Stakeholders

Given the extensive responsibilities placed on educators, one would expect strong support structures and collaborative management to facilitate their work. However, participants consistently reported strained relationships with key stakeholders including school management, parents, unions, and the broader education system. These strained relationships contribute to feelings of frustration, isolation and lack of support.

Frustration within the working environment also stemmed from systemic and institutional factors such as curriculum demands, parental expectations, learner behaviour, and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). Participant 2 (P2) highlighted the relentless pace and administrative expectations:

We are just expected to meet deadlines. If circulars come out, we need to do what the circular says. If policies come out, we need to abide by the policy.

P1 expressed frustration with the WCED:

Their decisions make no sense and are not conducive for what you are doing.

P4 emphasised the sometimes-overlapping relationships of circuit managers from the WCED and principals, highlighting the issue of biased relationships within school management:

Having circuit managers take into account the complaints or the comments that educators on the ground make about management. You can't be buddy-buddy with a principal because you're going to be biased in any situation that involves that principal.

Participant 6 (P6) described how educators' basic needs are often disregarded:

Educators' needs are not being met. The inhumanity that we have to deal with. The last school I was at, it's becoming such a corporate kind of thing, especially if the school had money. You are just a number. There needs to be a system in place where the teacher can have the basic right to eat and go to the bathroom or leave the building to go get lunch.

Several participants described their management as disrespectful, unprofessional, and unsupportive, exacerbating their stress and frustration. Participants also described ineffective and dismissive responses to their calls for help. P9 recalled:

They are very quick to say that you cannot shout like that. Or arrange a meeting to tell you that you must go on calming tablets. I'm not the problem, the problem is not going to go away if I take calming tablets. He told me I could not go into my class like that and needed to go on calming tablets.

Such experiences illustrate the lack of emotional and professional support educators receive from their leadership. This finding aligns with Baxen (2021), who reported that poor managerial support contributes to disciplinary challenges and undermines educators' authority in the classroom.

Trade unions, which should serve as another layer of protection and advocacy, were also described as ineffective. P1 shared her disappointment:

The unions aren't helpful either. The unions will literally tell you if we step in, they're going to bully you further because it's almost like it's a catalyst, right, there's just zero support.

This lack of support from unions echoes Jacobs and de Wet (2018), who reported that a principal's use of managerial powers over staff could include bullying, and this has profound implications for the victim's physical, psychological, and economic well-being and may even cause educators to leave the profession.

The participants' experiences can be directly connected to Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, which emphasises the importance of respect, recognition, and stability. The unprofessional conduct and lack of support from management erode educators' respect and sense of association, leaving them feeling disempowered and alienated in their work environment. As illustrated by P9's account, being told to take medication instead of receiving support signals disregard for educators' security needs, creating an unstable and inequitable working climate.

What the participants shared about poor management and lack of support is consistent with the findings of Sitoyi's (2020) study in the Western Cape, where all participants indicated insufficient support from senior management teams (SMTs). When leadership fails to provide guidance or acknowledge challenges, educators are left vulnerable and unsupported, which contributes to emotional exhaustion and attrition. Similarly, the absence of effective union support exacerbates this sense of isolation and mistrust. Collectively, these conditions hinder educators from advancing through the levels of Fisher and Royster's (2016) hierarchy and ultimately contribute to their decision to exit the profession.

Participants revealed significant challenges in dealing with parents, often describing them as a major source of stress and frustration. P7 shared:

The parents are even more disgusting. I always distanced myself from learners' parents. There will always be parents that go against you and parents that are for you.

P2 echoed this frustration, pointing to parents' lack of accountability and denial regarding their children's behavior:

Just dealing with parents. You meet with the parents, and you explain to them that lessons ABC are going to be beneficial to your child or I am having a problem with your child and the parents are just in total denial. It's all about

what you are doing as a teacher. You are victimising my child or you know, that sort of thing.

Educators typically engage with learners at school during the day, whereas parents or guardians are responsible for the learners' time outside of school. Yet, participants noted a significant lack of support and trust from parents. P7 explained:

There was no support from home. The kids weren't being assisted with homework. The kids could go home with any story and they would be believed. You could say your kid is doing this and they would say not my kid or what did you do to make them behave that way.

P11 shared an interesting perspective:

Most parents cannot afford to get their kids help and some parents are parenting out of guilt, being more lenient to make up for their absence because they work long hours. Parental involvement is just not there... It is a generalisation. There are parents who do their best but they are by far in the minority. I ended up feeling alone in educating the learners without any parental input. It's very sad when you see children falling behind and their parents are not supporting them.

As shared by the participants, their ability, as educators, to meet their hierarchy of needs, specifically the need for belonging, respect, and self-actualisation, was often hindered by difficult parents. The lack of respect and trust from parents fostered a hostile and alienating environment, leaving these educators feeling underappreciated and isolated from the broader school community. Verbal abuse and blame-shifting eroded their sense of professional respect, resulting in feelings of powerlessness and frustration. Hachmon and Marulevska (2023) have reported that educators who do not receive sufficient support to deal with the demands of and treatment from parents experience a diminished sense of commitment and stronger intention to leave the profession. Moreover, parents' unwillingness to cooperate limited educators' ability to meaningfully contribute to the progress of learners, thereby obstructing the educator's path to self-actualisation.

The following section will present Sub-Theme 3.

4.4.4.3. Sub-Theme 3: Work-Life Balance

The balance between work and home life responsibilities emerged as a critical factor impacting the well-being of the participants in this study. A number of the former educators described how the challenges of maintaining this balance led to severe physical and mental issues, as well as negative consequences for their personal lives.

Educators reported that the profession made it difficult to maintain boundaries between work and home life. The expectation to complete administrative tasks, prepare lessons, and manage responsibilities outside of school hours resulted in chronic exhaustion and limited time for family, social connections and self-care.

The immense stress of teaching profoundly affected the participants' health. P1 explained:

I would get sick, physically ill, like flu. I got a lot of somatic symptoms and then of course you must be all preppy and happy. And you can't. You can't be sick. It's like you're expected to have this super immunity. I felt so exhausted to the point where I didn't even know how I felt. It's like a soul tiredness.

P3 described experiencing severe panic attacks while at school:

I started having panic attacks at work, like there were physical symptoms. My nose would bleed. I would sometimes- I had a little-I don't wanna call it a seizure, but very much involuntary kind of movements. I think happened maybe two or three times within the nine months that I worked there.

P4 highlighted the struggles with her mental health and the difficult decisions she had to make:

I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety. I was just struggling to wake up in the morning. The excitement and the joy were often lost. Sometimes just really feeling like you aren't good enough, you're feeling like you're being constantly broken down, constantly being negatively looked at and it was a choice of whether I am going to continue doing this to my mental health possibly run the risk of doing something to myself that is going to impact others who love me."

These reports from the participants correlated with a study done by Hofmeyr et al. (2024) who found that teaching had a negative effect on 32% of their participants' mental health, and 24% of their participants' physical health. P7 further emphasised the prevalence of reliance on medication among educators:

Educators exchange Urbanols like it's ok. And it's not ok that a person who is working with kids and you are not within your full mental capacity. You can't function at 100%.

The participants' accounts illustrate how unmet security needs, as described by Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, affect both physical and mental health. Chronic stress, panic attacks, depression, and reliance on medication underscore the professional environments' failure to provide the security educators need to thrive (Foord, 2022; Koch, 2024).

A survey conducted by Hofmeyr et al. (2024) revealed that 60% of participants experienced work-related stress, and 68% of participants reported that teaching does not facilitate a work-life balance. The teaching profession profoundly affects educators' personal lives, often blurring the boundaries between work and home, and leading to significant personal sacrifices. Participants described how their work commitments impacted their relationships, social life, and overall well-being.

P1 reflected on the toll teaching took on her family life, expressing concern for her marriage:

In school holidays, if you don't have training, it's a thing of you lie there, you vegetate, and you don't spend quality time with your family members or with your loved ones. And then, is my husband getting parts of me? You know, is he getting a wife that is there for him at the end of the day?

P6 described how teaching affected her relationships and social connections:

I had a school that I took home, and it got messy with my kids and my marriage and my friends. I didn't have any friends outside of the school that I was teaching at. When you walk into a school, you automatically make new friends and those are your only friends. I had no time or energy. I wasn't

a good mom while I was a teacher. I wasn't a good wife. Teaching teaches you a lot about life and your abilities, but it takes.

P7 highlighted that this struggle to balance personal and professional responsibilities is widespread:

Educators tend to neglect their own families for the school. And if you don't, then you are classed as someone who is not a team player or has no work ethic.

P3 shared a similar sentiment, reflecting on how her work affected her behaviour and self-perception:

I didn't like who I was becoming to these kids. I was staying up all night doing this admin and doing all this prep and I was just a bitch to them. I was not in a space where I could be a good teacher because I was just bitch. I was a horrible person and that's not the teacher I wanted to be. So, if I can't be the teacher that I wanna be for the kids, which is why I wanna do this job. Then why bother?

Participants also expressed how misalignment between their personal values and those of their schools or the WCED created ethical and emotional strain. P1 explained:

I don't want to be part of a system that's incongruent with my own values, against my values. It comes back to values. I can't work in a place that doesn't put the children first. Like going against values in terms of not doing what's in the best interest of the kids. They value their image in the community as opposed to the educational needs of the children. But we want money. We just accept anybody. I mean, they are just more worried about their image.

P2 reflected on his sense of responsibility and inability to detach from the learners' outcomes:

And I'm not the kind of person who can just be like, OK, you know, I'm earning my salary, your marks are up to you. It keeps me up at night when my class is not performing or when we are approaching exams. I know for

a fact my kids aren't in a space to write those exams. It keeps me up at night. I'm not the kind of person who can be like, it's fine. I tried or it's beyond my power.

These experiences demonstrate how the demands of the teaching profession can significantly impact educators' personal lives, as well as their ability to meet the association and respect needs as set out by Fisher and Royster (2016) in the Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. Participants described experiencing compassion fatigue, isolation, and feelings of guilt for neglecting their families as well as lowered self-esteem (Murray, 2021). They reflected on the challenges they faced trying to balance work and home life. The misalignment between their personal values and the expectations of the education system caused feelings of identity loss, affecting their self-esteem and fulfilment of their needs. Overall, these findings demonstrate that the pressures of teaching not only hinder educators from meeting their own needs for well-being and safety but also highlight the urgent need for effective support systems. Addressing the causes of these mental and physical strains is crucial to ensuring both educators' personal health and well-being, and the quality of education they provide (Murray, 2021).

The following section will present Sub-Theme 4.

4.4.4.4. Sub-Theme 4: Societal and Institutional Devaluation of the Profession

Participants also discussed the broader societal issue of diminishing respect for the teaching profession. Many expressed frustration that teaching, once regarded as a noble and respected career, has become undervalued. P4 noted:

Being a teacher has become like an underrated qualification or underrated profession.

Similarly, P2 described the loss of authority and professional dignity:

It's like the rights and the power that has been completely stripped away from us as educators and just handed to the parents and the learners, which makes life very, very difficult, especially when you are trying to do the right thing. But that's not really being reciprocated.

These perspectives highlight how societal and institutional attitudes towards teaching have shifted, resulting in educators feeling disrespected and disempowered. Nunez (2022) reported that the perceived low status of the profession may be attributed to government policies and salaries. The devaluation of the profession contributes to emotional disengagement and undermines educators' sense of purpose.

Within Fisher and Royster's' (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, devaluation of the teaching profession reflects a failure to meet educators' respect needs, leading to unfulfilled psychological needs for recognition, appreciation, and professional esteem. When educators perceive that their contributions are not valued by society, management, or even parents, they experience a diminished sense of professional identity and belonging.

A sense of lack of respect for the teaching profession shared by the participants aligns with Mohammed (2024), who found that educators often feel undervalued and underappreciated when their dedication and sacrifices go unnoticed. The lack of recognition not only affects morale but also fosters a perception that teaching is a "thankless profession". Consequently, this erosion of respect and appreciation becomes a critical factor influencing educators' decisions to leave the teaching profession.

4.4.4.5. Sub-Theme 5: Remuneration

Participants highlighted the significant impact that inadequate remuneration had on their experiences of the teaching profession. The financial strain of teaching was evident for P2, who shared:

Financially, you realise, the salary is not really geared toward seeing to all these things. I actually had to move back home and rent out my property. I had to sacrifice that freedom, you know, to now have more or to be in a better space financially. It started taking a toll on me as far as my finances were concerned and realising that the teacher's salary really wasn't enough.

P4 expressed a similar sentiment:

But for what we were doing as educators versus even the money that we were getting out; it just was not doing it for me anymore. I can't feed my kid from another kid's smiles.

The financial pressures extended beyond their own living costs, as P6 explained how she often spent personal funds on learners in her class:

And you give everything. Even financially. If a child doesn't have something, we go buy it. We would take loads of sandwiches to school for the kids that didn't have lunch. How much stationery did I buy?

These experiences are consistent with Mampane's (2012) findings, which highlight that high attrition is often a result of the disproportion between educators' responsibilities and the lack of corresponding salary improvements.

The financial dissatisfaction expressed by participants in this study underscores a critical factor contributing to educator attrition, directly aligned with Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, particularly the basic need for financial security. The testimonies highlight the severe discrepancy between the demands of the profession and the inadequate compensation received, with participants like P2 and P4 emphasising the financial strain, particularly when salaries failed to cover essential living costs. As P2 revealed, the decision to move back home and rent out property shows how financial instability impacts educators' personal lives and overall well-being.

The findings of this study are also reflected in international and local research. Khadka (2021) reported that educators in Nepal did not earn the level of pay needed to sustain their lives, while in South Africa, Mlambo and Adetiba (2020) found insufficient salaries to be a major reason for educators leaving the teaching profession.

Furthermore, the emotional burden of investing personal funds, as described by P6, where educators often purchased resources for learners, reflects how unmet basic needs for financial stability can extend into the educators' social and emotional needs. The recurring sentiment expressed by participants—"Pay them" (P11)—is a clear call to prioritise financial compensation as a critical factor in supporting educators' continued engagement and well-being within the profession.

The financial strain experienced by participants highlights the failure to meet basic security needs, particularly financial stability. As a result, educators experienced increased stress and dissatisfaction, reinforcing their decision to seek alternative career paths.

The following section will present Theme 2.

4.4.5. Theme 2: The Decision to Leave the Profession

Leaving the profession was not a decision made lightly. For most participants, it was the result of stress, burnout, and unmet personal and professional needs. Participants' narratives reflected a turning point where the culminative challenges discussed in Theme 1 became unsustainable, ultimately prompting them to prioritise their well-being, personal lives, and sense of fulfillment.

P2 described their decision as a gradual realisation:

It was a culmination of a lot of little events. It's just been a sequence of events that has gotten me to the point where, like, you know what, I actually have to put myself first. I know it is wishful thinking, but I think if I just had one good day at school, where everything was just going smoothly. Learners were working as they should. No disciplinary issues, and no difficult parents but the bad days outweigh the good ones by a landslide. You know if I just had one day where everything was just ideal, come to work, kids are ready to go. We are working and everything is flowing. I think if I just had to have one of those days. I might have reconsidered my decision to tender my resignation.

This account highlights how ongoing negative experiences, rather than isolated incidents, contributed to the decision to leave. The absence of positive reinforcement and the dominance of challenging experiences reinforced participants' perceptions that remaining in the profession was no longer sustainable.

P6 reflected on a moment of clarity when someone pointed out the toll her work was taking on her family and herself:

When somebody from outside showed me what I am doing to my own kids and what I am doing to myself. I was blindsided the whole time with these

are the boxes you have to tick and these are the hours that you have to work for this amount of money which is ridiculous if you work it out. I think I grew up and started to believe in myself that I didn't study for four years and did a post-grad just for this to be my life.

This quote illustrates the role of external reflection in prompting participants to reassess their circumstances. It also highlights how deeply normalized the demands of the profession had become, to the extent that participants only recognized the negative impact once it was pointed out by others.

These findings suggest that the decision to leave is closely linked to the prolonged inability to meet the needs outlined by Fisher and Royster's (2016) Hierarchy of Needs. Participants' narratives reflect unmet subsistence and security needs, particularly in relation to rest, health and financial stability, as well as unmet higher-level needs such as respect, belonging and self-actualization. Over time, this imbalance contributed to emotional exhaustion, diminished job-satisfaction and a reassessment of personal priorities.

The decision to leave the teaching profession can therefore be understood as both a reactive and proactive process. While it is a response to prolonged stress and dissatisfaction, it also represents an intentional move towards well-being, rest and self-preservation. Participants' accounts demonstrate that leaving the profession was ultimately an act of reclaiming control over their lives and seeking environments that better aligned with their personal values and needs.

4.4.6. Theme 3: Life After Teaching

Participants' reflections on life after leaving the teaching profession revealed a complex process of recovery, adjustment, and ultimately, renewed well-being. While the decision to leave was difficult, many participants described a noticeable improvement in their quality of life once they had exited the profession. Their accounts highlight both the lingering effects of their experiences in teaching and the positive outcomes of transitioning into alternative roles.

P1 reflected on the weight of the demands of teaching only realising their impact after leaving teaching:

Only when I decided to stop teaching, that is when I truly realised how heavy the weight and responsibility that I was carrying was gone. One doesn't realise while you are doing it because you are running on adrenalin.

For P1, the psychological impact of teaching lingered even after she had left:

I had PTSD-like symptoms because of those experiences. I had struggles with it after I left. I've got my own counselor therapist that I see when I need to. So, I feel supported now. It took me a while to just feel like myself again after I left. I feel OK talking about it. It does sometimes make me lowkey anxious, but I think now it's like I know I don't have to go back. I know that I'm not gonna be forced to go back to that.

After leaving the profession, P1 remains involved in short-term substituting, stating,

I'm still involved like one on one. I still sometimes sub for schools if there's a need for it, but it's short-term things... I'm not going to do it for free. I'm not fresh out of university. I've got almost a decade's worth of experience. I'm not going to be basically like underpaid.

Although some participants, like P1, continued doing short-term, substitute teaching, others found satisfaction in entirely new roles. P3, who works remotely, shared:

It makes your life better and puts you in a space where you can give more to your job. I know that I am trusted as an adult to get my job done and because of that I work really hard to get my job done.

This account highlights the importance of trust, autonomy, and respect in fostering job-satisfaction. Unlike their experiences in teaching, participants described working environments where they felt valued and empowered, enabling them to perform more effectively.

These findings align with a study conducted by Brandenburg et al., (2024) where the participants also felt unable to continue to teach in a classroom but also found ways to stay engaged in education using their highly transferable skills in their new employment.

Overall, participants' decisions to leave the profession reflected how unmet needs, particularly the need for security, respect, and self-actualisation, shaped their choice. The heavy workloads, emotional exhaustion, and lack of recognition undermined their mental health and job satisfaction. For P6, leaving became an act of reclaiming agency and aligning her life with her values. The journeys of these participants illustrate Fisher and Royster's (2016) framework in action. When foundational needs go unmet, even the most passionate educators are unable to reach fulfilment in the profession. This reinforces the importance of addressing the systemic challenges identified in Theme 1 to improve retention and support educator well-being.

The following section will present Theme 4.

4.4.7. Theme 4: Recommendations

Theme 4 focused on the recommendations made by the former educators who participated in this study. This theme addressed the research sub-question: "Based on these primary school educators' experiences, what can be done to retain primary school educators in the teaching profession in Cape Town?", as stated in Chapter One. The Theme 4 insights and recommendations draw from extensive experience within the classroom and the broader education system of Cape Town. Theme 4 directly addressed the third research question and objectives of this study by offering practical solutions based on firsthand experience. The recommendations made by the former educators are critical considerations for decreasing educator attrition and improving educator retention.

The participants' suggestions included enhancing support systems to help educators manage multiple responsibilities, providing meaningful mental health resources, employing independent HR departments to ensure fairness, reducing workloads, addressing toxic work environments, and improving remuneration.

The following section will present Sub-Theme 1.

4.4.5.1. Sub-Theme 1: Enhanced Support Structures

A recurring suggestion among the recommendations made by the participants is the need for more robust support systems within schools. Participants emphasised the importance of genuine listening and understanding by management. P1 stated:

Just listening and not listening to just give me an answer. Listen to understand, especially from management to understand and to just see us as humans. Give us that support. So literally just having a support system.

P7 shared a similar sentiment:

More support from the department and parents. Give educators more autonomy and rights.

The findings of other studies support the participants' suggestions. Michael et al. (2023) recommended that trade unions collaborate with provincial districts to support educators by arranging workshops and educating them about their rights and reporting structures. Baxen (2021) also recommended that school management take decisive action against discipline issues to support educators' physical and emotional safety.

P4 highlighted the need for improved communication:

*Creating a better platform for communication and open communication.
Going and speaking to educators.*

This sentiment is supported by Lawrence (2019), who has recommended that the Department of Basic Education consult educators when developing professional development programs to assist educators, as this will help to identify problem areas that could ultimately lead to attrition if not addressed. Employing school leaders as instructional coaches instead of only management has also been recommended as this will greatly influence educators perceived levels of support (Balow, 2021).

In accordance with findings from Theme 1, where participants emphasised the importance of being heard and respected and protected by management, the former educators recommended active communication with both school management and the WCED. They highlighted the need for fair and humane treatment, reflecting the respect and association levels in Fisher and Royster's' (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. Palm (2020) similarly emphasised the importance of implementing support systems, creating open lines of communication, and fostering a culture of respect.

The following section will present Sub-Theme 2.

4.4.5.2. Sub-Theme 2: Mental Health Support

The provision of mental health resources for educators emerged as a critical recommendation. Participants highlighted the importance of having dedicated counsellors available for both educators and learners. P1 emphasised the need to take educators' mental health seriously rather than treating it as a formality:

Have free counseling available or have a school counselor there that you employ that works with the kids and with the educators. Don't just use the mental health resources as ticking a box.

P6 further underscored the necessity of mental health support, recommending safe spaces and structured opportunities for educators to decompress

Look after their mental health. Give them bathroom and lunch breaks. All educators have bladder problems. If every teacher could have a standing appointment with the counselor or psychologist just for check-ins, just someone to vent with. Educators need a safe space or a grounding station for educators where they can go and have a moment.

As recommended by the participants, the provision of mental health resources is directly connected to the need for security and respect as set out by Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. Research by Dobson (2022) confirms that educators require improved mental health support and collaboration with colleagues, fostering a sense of community. The participants in Dobson's study recommended dedicated counsellors recommended having dedicated counsellors and safe spaces for educators to decompress and reflect, and mental resources to maintain their mental health. P1's point about mental health not being another checkbox is profound, as it highlights the need for educators to be valued and not merely managed. This point is supported by Madinger and Kim (2021), who recommend professional development programs geared towards equipping educators with coping resources and strategies to alleviate stress and burnout.

The former educators interviewed in this study stressed the need for unbiased human resource support. It was recommended that each school have an independent human resource department that reports directly to the Department of Education. P1 suggested:

I think if there was HR in schools it would have been so much better. The HR department, that is independent from management, it's like an ombudsman but for that school. It's not that if you talk to HR, it just contributes to the toxicity of the environment. It must be an independent space, and they answer directly to the Department of Education and not to a principal. If there is any toxicity, they can screen for that and implement the screening tools. Then the Education Department knows what is happening in the schools. They must have someone holding everyone accountable, making sure the school is a healthy system.

This recommendation for an independent human resource department aligns with Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, specifically the subsistence, security, and respect needs. Having an independent HR will provide educators with a feeling of safety, knowing they will not be victimised or met with further toxicity when reporting concerns or misconduct or even just seeking support. This will increase overall job satisfaction and contribute to educator retention.

The following section will present Sub-Theme 3.

4.4.5.3. Sub-Theme 3: Workload Management

As discussed in Theme 1, the overwhelming workload faced by educators is a critical issue needing urgent attention. The participants provided several recommendations for retaining educators. Many of these suggestions emphasised the need for better distribution of responsibilities, reduction of administrative tasks, and increased support from management. P2 suggested:

Lessen the administrative burden and let me focus on my job. Let me be a teacher. Let me deliver the curriculum to the best of my ability.

P3 recommended hiring additional staff to relieve educators of non-teaching duties, enabling them to focus on classroom instruction:

There need to be systems in place to look after your educators. If we were a little bit freer, it would help a lot of the pressure, the admin pressure, the heavy pressure we see on educators because assessment doesn't have to be sitting at home until 1:00 AM with a red pen. I think we need to take some

of the hats off the educators, some of them can be filled by other jobs. You can have an admin person. You can have someone whose job it is to be a carer for the kids during the day. The shepherding of kids between classes, the forcing kids to eat, the break duties. I don't think we can conflict those skills, well, we can, and we do, but I think it might be beneficial to not conflict those skills. But it would require paying more people.

P6 echoed this sentiment, advocating for specialisation:

Educators should be specialised and not used as child-care. To have funding for child carers to take that pressure of child-care and admin that is not needed. Having educators as specialised entities.

P7, P8, and P9 recommended smaller classes with fewer students.

Participants (P6, P7, P8, and P9) also recommended:

If a teacher could just live their passion. Educators don't get into teaching for the salary, so if they could just have the respect they deserve and the time. When they walk out of the school, work should be left at work."

The recommendations to alleviate the overwhelming workload faced by educators directly speak to Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, particularly in the areas of work-life balance, job satisfaction, and self-actualisation. The suggestions to reduce administrative tasks, hire more staff, and allow for specialisation highlight a need for a healthier work environment, where educators can focus on their primary role, which is teaching. According to Tompkins (2023), it is the administrator's (management) role to reduce workloads to alleviate pressures and provide a more sustainable working environment. By recommending administrative assistants, specialised roles, and a reduction in non-teaching duties, the former educators seek to reduce stress and burnout, enabling educators to regain their passion and effectiveness in the classroom (Fisher & Royster, 2016). Additionally, respecting educators' time and revising assessment expectations fosters emotional and psychological well-being, which is critical for retention and professional fulfilment.

The following section will present Sub-Theme 4.

4.4.5.4. Sub-Theme 4: Professional Respect and Work Environment

As discussed in Theme 1, the working environment of educators can be toxic and have a negative impact on them. P1 emphasised the need to end workplace bullying:

That bystander thing, it's almost like I'm watching the bullying and the picking on this person continuing. I'm shutting my mouth because it doesn't affect me or I don't wanna be next, so that needs to change. This whole toxic situation needs to change. Listen to what your staff needs and don't use their mental health, their physical health... as weapons against them.

This sentiment aligns with Jacobs and de Wet (2018), who recommended anti-bullying policies, restorative practice, and a code of professional ethics to prevent workplace bullying in schools.

P4 highlighted the need for unbiased management:

Having you know circuit managers... take into account the complaints or the comments that educators on the ground, make about management and putting principals in positions who can take accountability for their actions, for their words, for everything that they do, having principals in place who actually know what they are doing.

Acknowledgement and appreciation were also emphasised:

The acknowledgment of being a teacher. When you acknowledge people, and you give them that recognition and you let them feel like what they are doing is really making a change. They are even more eager to do it.

Swanepoel and Saurombe (2022) support this, reporting that educators experience higher job satisfaction and commitment when they are appreciated and acknowledged for their loyalty and hard work.

Finally, P12 stressed the importance of tailored professional development:

There were many times that I felt overwhelmed. I would have appreciated external training. If they could have looked at the needs in my classroom and could have given me external training on how to support the children.

More workshops could have been presented so that I could just grow my knowledge.

Johns and Sosibo (2019) reinforce this perspective, suggesting that professional development should be customised to the needs of the school rather than generalised. Addressing workplace toxicity, providing acknowledgement, and offering tailored development are essential for improving educators' job satisfaction, security, and overall retention.

The following section will present Sub-Theme 5.

4.4.5.5. Sub-Theme 5: Remuneration

The former educators interviewed in this study emphasised the urgent need for improved remuneration within the teaching profession. P8 captured this sentiment, stating:

Better pay. Increase people's salaries. Pay them what they are worth. We can't pay them what they deserve so let's at least pay them what they are worth.

As stated by UNESCO (2016), there is a need to improve the salaries of educators. They argue that an appealing teaching environment, combined with competitive salaries and good working conditions, would motivate current educators to remain in the profession and attract new entrants.

This recommendation aligns with the security level in Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. Many participants expressed that their earnings did not reflect their workload or the range of responsibilities they carried. Adequate salary adjustments are therefore necessary to help educators meet their financial obligations, maintain their well-being, and feel secure in their profession. This sense of financial stability contributes to feelings of respect, self-worth, and job satisfaction, which in turn strengthens their commitment to teaching (Shepherd, 2022).

Table 4.5 below provides a summary of the themes and the study findings.

Table 4.5: Summary of themes and study findings

Theme	Sub-Theme	Findings
Theme 1	Sub-theme 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workload - Administrative Responsibilities - Co-Curricular responsibilities - Curriculum Pressures - Overcrowding of classrooms
	Sub-theme 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management and lack of support - Unions - Parents - WCED Frustrations
	Sub-theme 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work-life balance - Effects on well-being - Effects on personal life
	Sub-theme 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of support - Loss of authority - Societal attitudes
	Sub-theme 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remuneration
Theme 2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culmination of events - Moments of realisation
Theme 3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities and pathways after teaching
Theme 4	Sub-theme 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced support structures - Union support - Better communication systems
	Sub-theme 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mental health resources - Safe environments - Independent HR departments
	Sub-theme 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workload management - Specialisation of duties
	Sub-theme 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anti-workplace bullying initiatives - Acknowledgement and appreciation - Tailored professional development
	Sub-theme 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved remuneration

4.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study aimed to determine the reasons for primary school educators leaving the profession before retirement age. It aimed to understand the experiences of primary school educators and derive recommendations for retaining educators in the teaching profession. The findings of this research highlight the challenges that educators are facing such as a toxic working environment, excessive workload, large administrative burdens, co-curricular responsibilities, poor management and lack of support, difficulties with parents, their experiences of entering the profession, and life after teaching. These challenges cause their needs to not be met and affect their job satisfaction, leading to resignation before retirement age. A critical challenge faced by the former educators who participated in this study was remuneration and the need to be financially compensated at a level aligned with their responsibilities and workload burdens.

The recommendations put forward by the former educators include enhanced support systems to assist with multiple responsibilities and high levels of workload and creating a better platform for transparent communication between WCED, SMTs, and educators. The former educators also recommended an increase in mental health resources available to educators. These can take the form of mental health workshops, counselling services, and safe spaces on the school premises for educators to decompress. Independent HR departments should be established in schools to create safe environments and decrease fear of victimisation or retaliation. The large workload of educators needs to be reevaluated with consideration given to hiring additional staff to support specialisation of roles, which will enable educators to focus on their teaching responsibilities. Toxic working environments need to be identified and addressed with anti-bullying policies that are strictly monitored. Educators need to be acknowledged and appreciated for the work that they do. Professional development should help with strategies for managing heavy workloads and should be flexible and contextualised. Finally, a call for better remuneration for educators was expressed. Educator's financial compensation should be reviewed, and changes should be made to align their salaries with their workloads and responsibilities. The following section concludes Chapter Four.

4.6. CONCLUSION

Chapter Four provided an in-depth analysis of the themes that emerged from the experiences of former primary school educators in Cape Town, South Africa. Thematic analysis was utilised and resulted in four primary themes, namely educator experiences leading to attrition, the decision to leave the profession, life after teaching and recommendations for the retention of educators.

Theme 1 highlighted the factors contributing to educator attrition, including excessive workload, limited support low pay, declining professional respect, and challenges with learner behaviour and parental involvement, all of which affected educators' well-being. Theme 2 explore how these pressures influenced participants' decisions to leave the profession. Theme 3 examined life after teaching, showing how former educators regained autonomy, balance and fulfilment. Theme presented participants' recommendations for retention, including stronger support structures, mental health resources, fair HR practices, workload management, recognition and improved remuneration. Together these themes provide a clear understanding of the causes of attrition and potential strategies to retain educators in Cape Town, South Africa.

The next chapter, Chapter Five, provides a summary of the findings, research conclusions, and recommendations for the retention of educators in Cape Town, South Africa.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter Five concludes this dissertation by providing a summary of the study, including the key scholarly finding and key empirical findings and their connection to the existing literature and theoretical framework that guided this research study. The chapter then presents the study's conclusions, practical recommendations, and suggestions for future research. Lastly, the study's limitations are discussed, followed by concluding remarks.

This study aimed to answer the main research question and the two related sub-questions in an attempt to understand why primary school educators in Cape Town, South Africa, left the teaching profession before retirement age, how they experienced being primary school educators, and their recommendations for retaining educators in the profession.

5.2. SUMMARY OF LITERATURE

This section presents a summary of the literature review in Chapter Two. The literature reviewed in this study offered a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to educator attrition and retention, framed within Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. This theoretical framework emphasised that educators must have their basic, psychological and professional needs met to sustain motivation and commitment. When these needs remain unmet, educators experience disillusionment, emotional fatigue, and a diminished sense of purpose in their work.

At the subsistence and security levels of the Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, research has consistently identified inadequate remuneration, overwhelming workloads, and unsafe working conditions as major contributors to educator attrition. Mlambo and Adetiba (2020) and UNESCO (2016) have highlighted how low salaries and limited financial progression negatively affect educators' quality of life and morale. Similarly, Khadka (2021) found that educators in developing contexts often struggle to meet basic living costs, leading to frustration and a decline in professional dedication. Heavy administrative demands and large classes, as noted by Mampane (2012), further

exacerbate stress and burnout, preventing educators from focusing on the core of their job, which is teaching.

Beyond financial and workload concerns, the need for association was shown to play a central role in retention. Research conducted by Palm (2020) and Lawrence (2019) emphasised that positive collegial relationships, open communication, and supportive management foster a sense of belonging and community. In contrast, a lack of empathy from leadership, poor collaboration, and limited opportunities for shared decision-making contribute to feelings of isolation and emotional exhaustion. These relational barriers often create toxic environments that discourage professional growth and accelerate attrition.

At the higher levels of respect and self-actualisation, the literature underscored the value of recognition, career advancement, and professional development. Swanepoel and Saurombe (2022) demonstrated that educators who feel appreciated and acknowledged are more likely to remain committed to their schools. Similarly, Johns and Sosibo (2019) argued that professional development must be responsive to educators' specific classroom needs rather than generalised, one-fits-all training. Shepherd (2022) further emphasised that respect and recognition are integral to educators' sense of professional identity, enhancing self-esteem and long-term commitment to the teaching profession.

In summary, the literature established that educator attrition arises from an interplay of economic, emotional, and institutional factors. Addressing these issues required a multifaceted approach that includes fair compensation, effective workload management, meaningful support systems, and a culture of respect. The literature reviewed provided a vital foundation for interpreting the findings of this study, which explored how unmet needs across the levels of the Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs influenced former educators in Cape Town to exit the teaching profession. The following section provides a summary of the empirical study.

The following section presents a synthesis of the research findings.

5.3. SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This synthesis of research findings aims to highlight similarities and differences between the literature addressing the topic of educator attrition and the findings of this

study that investigated the reasons for primary school educators in Cape Town, South Africa, to leave the teaching profession before retirement age. This section begins with a discussion of the similarities and correlations between this study and the existing literature surrounding this topic, followed by a discussion of the differences. Additionally, it aims to emphasise how this study contributes to the existing body of research.

As documented in the literature, educators perceive their workloads to be increasing as administration tasks are multiplying; however, no previous tasks are removed (Worth, 2023). Excessive and increasing workload is seen as a primary factor affecting educators' physical and mental health (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Foord, 2022). Workload was found to be a primary contributing factor causing educators to leave the profession (Heffernan et al., 2022). These reported findings and the findings of this study are closely correlated. This study found that primary school educators in Cape Town are overloaded with administrative, extra-curricular, and co-curricular responsibilities, as well as meetings. The former educators stated that this excessive workload caused burnout and declined mental and physical health and contributed to their decisions to leave the profession before retirement age.

The literature shows that school environments have been reported as hostile where educators are exposed to workplace bullying and victimisation by school management (Jacobs & de Wet, 2018). It highlights that South African educators are three times more likely to experience workplace bullying than educators in other countries (Baxen, 2021), and that they are seldom awarded sufficient support with handling difficult parents, learners, and excessive workloads (Michael et al., 2023). Poor leadership is a strong driver for educator attrition. Similarly, the participants in this study reported that school management was unempathetic, unsupportive, and toxic. One participant reported being told by her principal to take calming medication when she asked for support with a challenging learner. Another participant reported being bullied by her principal in the form of gossiping about her, gaslighting her, and micromanagement. These experiences contributed to the former educators' decisions to leave the profession before retirement age.

The literature shows that the financial security of educators is a critical factor driving educator attrition (Hofmeyr et al., 2024). The increasing demands placed on educators

are not being met with a corresponding improvement of their salaries, and this is causing, and sometimes forcing, them to leave the profession to seek better financial stability elsewhere (Kruger et al., 2024; Saks et al., 2021). This study found that the educators in Cape Town are faced with the same challenge of poor remuneration addressed in the literature. The participants stated that the level of work they do is not being compensated with a fair salary. Additionally, educators need to spend their own money on learners, fundraisers, and their classrooms. Poor remuneration is also perceived as a lack of respect and a feeling of being undervalued, causing primary school educators to leave the profession before retirement age.

The perceived value of educators by their peers, learners, parents, management, and society is rapidly decreasing, resulting in a lack of respect and recognition (Tompkins, 2023). Educators' perspectives, unique contexts, and experiences are not considered when making decisions that will affect them (Hachmon & Marulevska, 2023; Swanepoel & Saurombe, 2022). This study similarly highlighted the decreasing respect and recognition of educators. The former educators who participated in this study called for improved acknowledgement of their efforts; clearer communication; and respect for their needs, time, and capacity.

While local literature reports that educators in Cape Town, South Africa, are exposed to criminal violence at schools (Kgosimore, 2018; Makhasane, 2022; Michael, 2020; Phaliso, 2025), this study did not reveal the same experiences by the participants.

This study makes a significant contribution to the existing research on educator attrition. Not only does it clearly highlight the causes of primary school educator attrition in Cape Town, South Africa, but it also demonstrates how multiple unmet needs interact, leading to attrition through the lens of Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs, as discussed in Chapter Two. For example, when an educator faces a heavy workload and administrative burdens that drain their time and energy, combined with poor leadership that fails to provide support, they feel disregarded and increasingly frustrated. These challenges, compounded with inadequate pay that prevents stability, result in the perfect storm. This highlights the value of a holistic approach to combating educator attrition and retaining motivated and fulfilled educators. The following section provides the research conclusions addressing each research question.

5.4. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research study was to discover why primary school educators in Cape Town, South Africa, are leaving the teaching profession before retirement age. The experiences and perspectives of 12 former primary school educators were investigated. This study also aimed to explore recommendations made by these former educators on factors that could improve educator retention.

The research conclusions for this study are presented as answers to the initial research questions, based on the evidence generated throughout the study.

5.4.1. Main Research Question: What are the reasons for primary school educators in Cape Town leaving the teaching profession before retirement age?

This study uncovered that primary school educators in Cape Town are leaving the profession due to a combination of health, professional, and broader systemic issues. Key factors causing educators to leave the teaching profession include physical and emotional exhaustion; excessive workload; a severe lack of support from school management, the WCED, and parents; poor work-life balance; inadequate remuneration; and a sense of being disrespected and undervalued. Many participants also experienced a misalignment between their values and the school's culture and actions, which were aimed at upholding a certain reputation.

Their decisions to leave were not made lightly, as participants described feeling emotionally torn, and many felt guilty for leaving the classroom. The participants reported that their passion for teaching did not disappear; they did not leave because they no longer cared about the learners or education, but because the working conditions had become unbearable. The following section unpacks the recommendations stemming from this study to retain educators in the teaching profession.

5.4.2. Sub-Question 1: How have primary school educators who have left the teaching profession experienced being educators in Cape Town?

The former educators who participated in this study experienced their teaching roles as emotionally draining, physically exhausting, and often unsupported. They described

entering the profession motivated and excited; however, their daily realities included excessive administrative burdens, overcrowded classrooms, lack of support from management, and overwhelming expectations to meet outcomes without sufficient resources or time to complete their responsibilities.

The participants reported feeling undervalued by the system and by society at large. They described the school environment as increasingly toxic and isolating. They explained that despite entering the profession with enthusiasm, their roles demanded continuous personal sacrifice, often at the expense of their family life and emotional well-being.

5.4.3. Sub-Question 2: Based on these primary school educators' experiences, what can be done to retain primary school educators in the teaching profession in Cape Town?

Several insightful recommendations were offered by the participants for retaining educators in the teaching profession in Cape Town, South Africa. These recommendations include a reduced administrative workload, enabling educators to focus on meaningful, quality teaching in the classroom. They recommended improving school management through more transparent, empathetic, and supportive practices. It was recommended that systems of recognition be established and maintained to acknowledge the work and efforts of educators. The participants recommended improving remuneration packages to balance the workload and responsibility of educators with what they are paid.

Participants also emphasised the need for more in-depth and practical pre-service training, as well as ongoing professional development. Professional development should be context-relevant and meaningful, rather than being used as a mere checkbox endeavour.

The following section unpacks the recommendations stemming from this study to retain educators in the teaching profession.

5.5. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATOR RETENTION

This study sought to understand the causes of primary school educators leaving the profession before retirement age by investigating their experiences and the meanings

they assigned to them. It also aimed to discover best practices for retaining primary school educators in the profession. The recommendations presented below were derived from both the insights of former educators who participated in the study and the my interpretation of these findings.

These recommendations emphasise the need for systemic, multi-level interventions, recognising that educator attrition is influenced by factors operating at governance, district, school, and community levels. Addressing these challenges therefore requires a coordinated and comprehensive approach.

5.5.1. Enhanced Support Systems

To foster a supportive environment, schools and school management teams should implement robust support systems that prioritise genuine listening and understanding, and increased educator autonomy. At the school level, this may include regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and open communication platforms such as staff meetings and anonymous reporting systems, allowing educators to raise concerns, seek support, and contribute suggestions.

At the district level, stronger more transparent relationships could be facilitated between the WCED, schools and trade unions. Trade unions can play a vital role in providing knowledge and facilitating workshops that educate educators about their rights and available support structures.

At both district and school levels, school management teams should receive formal training in leadership and people management to ensure fair treatment, transparency, and the development of a respectful organisational culture.

5.5.2. Mental Health Support

The mental health of educators must be prioritised across all levels of the education system. At the governance level, national frameworks should explicitly incorporate educator mental health and wellbeing into policy.

At the district and school levels, support should include access to counselling services, mental health workshops, and designated safe spaces within schools where educators can decompress. Initiatives such as roadshows, wellness programs, and ongoing support services should be implemented to address mental health in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

School management teams play a critical role in supporting educator mental wellbeing and should be trained in staff management and leadership to effectively respond to mental health needs.

5.5.3. Independent Human Resource Support

The establishment of independent human resource structures was identified as a key recommendation. At the governance and district levels, consideration should be given to implementing HR systems that operate independently from school management and report directly to the WCED.

At school level, this would provide educators with a safe and unbiased platform to report concerns without fear of retaliation. Regular screening processes should also be implemented to address toxic workplace behaviours, ensuring accountability among school leadership and contributing to healthier working environments.

5.5.4. Workload reduction and Professional Support

The workload of educators requires urgent attention. At governance level, policies should be implemented to reduce administrative burdens, streamline reporting processes, and eliminate unnecessary or duplicated tasks. This would enable educators to focus on teaching and learner support.

At a school level, responsibilities should be re-evaluated and redistributed. The introduction of specialised roles, such as administrative assistants and support staff, can assist in managing non-teaching duties. Additionally, reducing class sizes and revising assessment requirements would allow for more effective teaching and learning.

Professional development should be addressed at both governance and district levels, ensuring that it is meaningful, flexible and tailored to the specific contexts in which educators work. Investigating educators' needs and designing context-specific development programs will enhance their preparedness and job satisfaction.

5.5.5. Addressing Toxic Work Environments

Creating safe and respectful working environments is essential. At the school level, anti-bullying policies must be implemented, regularly reviewed and consistently

enforced. School management teams should demonstrate compassion and discretion in responding to educators' physical and mental health needs.

At the district level, accountability systems should be strengthened to ensure that complaints related to bullying, favoritism, nepotism, and mismanagement are addressed seriously, with protection provided to those reporting such issues.

Programs that recognize and support educators' contributions should be developed to foster a culture of appreciation and respect across schools.

5.5.6. Improved Remuneration and Incentives

At the governance level, improving financial compensation for educators is essential for retention. Salaries should be regularly reviewed to ensure they are fair, competitive, and reflective of educators' workload and responsibilities. In addition, retention strategies such as bonuses and incentives should be implemented to encourage educators to remain in the profession.

5.5.7. Leadership Development and Accountability

At the district level, WCED offices should provide mentorship and leadership training for school management teams to ensure that they are led with fairness, empathy, and professionalism. An accountability system should be established at both district and school levels, ensuring that leadership practices are monitored and that educators are protected from victimisation. Data from exit interviews should also be collected and analysed to inform policy development and monitor attrition trends.

5.5.8. Educator Involvement in Policy Development

At the governance and district levels, educators' voices should be actively included in policy development and implementation processes. Educators possess valuable insights into the classroom realities and should be consulted when decisions are made regarding curriculum, workload, and professional development.

5.5.9. Creating Supportive School Cultures

At the school level, management teams must actively cultivate a culture of support, recognition, and open communication. Educators should feel valued, respected, and supported through opportunities for collaboration, emotional and professional support,

and recognition beyond learner performance outcomes. Schools must also ensure that discipline policies are consistently and fairly implemented and that educators are supported when dealing with challenging situations.

5.5.10. Ensuring Safety and Well-being in Schools

At the school and district levels, efforts should be made to create physically and emotionally safe environments. Schools should collaborate with WCED and relevant safety structures to strengthen security measures. Educators should have access to safe spaces within schools and be protected from discrimination, victimisation and harm.

5.5.11. Community Engagement and Support

At the community level, parents, caregivers and the broader public should be actively engaged in supporting schools. Public awareness campaigns and community workshops can promote respect for educators and increase understanding of the challenges they face. Schools should function as community hubs, encouraging parent involvement in school activities. Community member may assist with administrative tasks or school programs, fostering a shared sense of responsibility for learner development and success.

These recommendations, grounded in the lived experiences of former educators, aim to create a more supportive, equitable, and fulfilling work environment that can significantly reduce attrition rates and enhance educator attrition in Cape Town's primary schools. Implementing these strategies will not only benefit educators but also contribute to a more stable and effective educational system for learners.

The following section will discuss the study limitations.

5.6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is essential to acknowledge that this study has certain limitations that should be considered. The first limitation of this study is the small sample size ($n = 12$), which does not accurately represent the diverse range of experiences of educators in Cape Town, South Africa, in general. Additionally, the study relied on human experiences and perspectives, which could be skewed by emotions or unclear memories. Most participants were selected via Facebook educator groups and snowball sampling,

which may have introduced selection bias, attracting those who are more engaged in online educator communities. Lastly, the sample was not balanced in terms of gender, as the majority of participants were female, which may have limited the diversity of the perspectives included. The following section presents recommendations for government, district, school, and community levels.

5.7. AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research study revealed several potential directions for future research. Building on these findings, a quantitative study across multiple provinces could enhance the relevance and generalisability of the results to the broader South African population. It would also be beneficial to conduct longitudinal research that follows early career educators over time to better understand when and why they start to consider leaving the teaching profession. Owing to the underrepresentation of male voices in this study, future research could explore their experiences to gain a deeper understanding of gender-specific challenges. Comparative studies would be beneficial to compare the educators who are currently in the profession with former educators. This could reveal differences in how these educators cope with challenges, access support, and show resilience. Further investigation into schools with high retention rates would be useful to determine which strategies have been tried and tested to encourage educator retention.

The following section presents a summary of the chapters included in this study.

5.8. SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One served as an orientation to this study, which aimed to discover the reasons for primary school educators in Cape Town, South Africa, exiting the teaching profession before retirement age. This was accomplished by exploring the experiences of former primary school educators and determining their recommendations for retaining educators in the profession. The chapter started with an introduction to the topic and the relevance of educator attrition. The research questions, followed by the aims and objectives, were stated. The background of the study was explored, followed by an overview of the theoretical framework of Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs. An overview was presented of the literature review exploring local and international research. The chosen research

design and methodology were stated. Lastly, an introduction to the ethical considerations and measures for trustworthiness that were adhered to in the study, was provided.

Chapter Two presented the theoretical framework utilised as the lens through which to observe and investigate the phenomena of educator attrition. Adapted from Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, Fisher and Royster's (2016) Teachers' Hierarchy of Needs served as a conceptual framework for examining how educators experience their needs and how this influences their job satisfaction and decisions to remain in the profession. The chapter then presented the literature review of research conducted locally and internationally on educator attrition through the lens of the theoretical framework, highlighting the contexts of teaching, the causes for educator attrition, and recommendations and best practices for the retention of educators in the profession. The chapter concluded with a summary.

Chapter Three commenced with an introduction, followed by the rationale for conducting the study, which addressed the necessity of this research based on the value that this study will contribute to the existing body of research. This is a qualitative study that made use of an exploratory design. The research paradigm employed in this study, namely the interpretivist paradigm, enabled the subjective experiences of the participants to be studied in a way that produced rich data.

The research type and processes were discussed, including the use of purposive sampling and snowball sampling for participant recruitment. This was followed by a description of the process of data collection via semi-structured interviews held either in person or via Microsoft Teams. The method of data analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2020) thematic analysis was discussed, as well as the measures for trustworthiness used in this study. The chapter concluded with an overview of the ethical considerations adhered to throughout the research process and a summary of the chapter.

Chapter Four started with an introduction, followed by a presentation of the research findings in systematic manner, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings were organised into four key themes. Theme 1 examined factors contributing to educator attrition, highlighting the challenges within the working environment, inadequate remuneration, difficulties maintaining work-life balance, and

the societal and institutional devaluation of the teaching profession. Theme 2 explored the decision to leave the profession, revealing how stress, burnout and unmet personal professional needs promoted participants to resign.

Theme 3 focused on life after teaching, illustrating how former educators regained a sense of autonomy, balance and fulfilment in their personal and professional lives. Theme 4 presented the recommendations offered by the participants to improve educator retention, including enhanced support structure, mental health resources, independent human resource management, workload management, professional respect and improved remuneration. The chapter concluded with a summary.

Chapter Five began with an introduction, followed by a summary of the literature about educator attrition and retention that was reviewed in Chapter Two. The chapter then went on to provide a summary of the five chapters and the empirical study that took place. The synthesis of research findings was presented to highlight the similarities and differences between the reviewed literature and the findings of this study. Chapter Five then presented the research conclusions for the main research question and the two sub-questions. Following this, the recommendations that were derived from this study were presented at different levels, including the governance, district, school, and community levels. Avenues for further research were explored such as a quantitative study involving multiple provinces and longitudinal research to follow educators' careers from inception as well as an investigation into schools that have successful retention strategies. The chapter and study ended with concluding remarks made by me as the researcher.

The following section will offer the concluding remarks.

5.9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study sought to answer the main research question namely: What are the reasons for primary school educators in Cape Town leaving the teaching profession? The findings revealed that participants' decisions to leave were largely influenced by their lived experiences of excessive workload, multiple roles and responsibilities, and a lack of meaningful support from school management, the Western Cape Education Department, and other stakeholders. Participants described working in high pressure environments characterised by administrative overload, strained relationships with parents and management, and a persistent expectation to prioritise learners at the

expense of their own wellbeing. These conditions contributed to emotional exhaustion, declining mental health, and an inability to maintain a sustainable work-life balance. For many, the decision to leave the profession was not sudden, but rather a result of gradual accumulation of stress and unmet needs, where exiting the profession became necessary to restore their well-being and sense of self.

This research study has taught me a great deal about educator attrition, but also about myself. This experience opened my eyes to the conditions under which our educators work and the reasons for their perseverance, as well as the reasons why they may have to give up on a dream and seek sustainability elsewhere, which, in my opinion, is a loss to our learners and our country as a whole. This study has strengthened my resolve to continue researching educator well-being, attrition, and retention, and to continue being a voice for our educators.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2023/08/10

Ref: 2023/08/10/48242098/55/AM
Name: Ms CS Hayward
Student No.: 48242098

Dear Ms CS Hayward

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2023/08/10 to 2026/08/10

Researcher(s): Name: Ms CS Hayward
E-mail address: 48242098@life.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0780207671

Researcher(s) Name: Ms CS Hayward
E-mail address: 48242098@life.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0609865888

Title of research:

Effectiveness of the use of a mobile application in the management of mental health in a primary school in the Western Cape.
School of Education, University of the Western Cape

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2023/08/10 to 2026/08/10.

The medium risk application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

- 1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the UNISA Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



UNISA
From: ...
Subject: ...
Date: ...

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the conduct of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, should be immediately reported in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
 4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methodology proposed in the application set out in the approved application.
 5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
 6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional policies and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. **Particularly, the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 66 of 2013; Child Protection Act, no 26 of 2004; Child Justice Act, no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.**
7. **Secondary research data may be used for secondary research purposes in publications similar to those of the original research data requires additional ethics clearance.**
8. **No field work activities may continue after the expiry date 2026/08/10. Submission of a completed research ethics programme report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.**

Note:

The reference number **2023/08/10/48242098/55/AM** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with participants, as well as with the Committee.

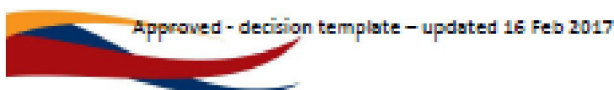
Kind regards,



Prof AT Motlhabane
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 motlhat@unisa.ac.za



Prof Mpine Makoe
EXECUTIVE DEAN
 qakisme@unisa.ac.za



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APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM AND REPLY SLIP

Date: tba

Title: Educator Attrition in Primary Schools in Cape Town, South Africa: Former Primary School Educator Perceptions

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Cindy Hayward I am doing research under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Lees, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies, towards a M.Ed. at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study titled "Educator Attrition in Primary Schools in Cape Town, South Africa".

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could provide insight into the experiences of primary school educators in Cape Town, Western Cape regarding teacher attrition. This study gives former primary school educators in Cape Town a "voice" which will be heard. It will lead to an understanding of educators' needs and ultimately having their needs met at a more adequate level. This, in turn, could lead to increased retention of educators, reduced educator attrition, and a more informed approach to prevent educator attrition.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

There will be twelve participants interviewed for this study.

You are able to participate because you meet the following criteria as required for my research study.

You

- are a former primary school educator.
- hold an accredited, recognised teaching qualification.
- exited the teaching profession since 2015.

I obtained your contact details from Facebook where you messaged me replying to my post (see below) indicating that you were interested in taking part in this study.

Facebook Post:

Good day all. I am a master's student currently undertaking research investigating teacher attrition in Cape Town, Western Cape. I am looking for former primary school educators who exited the profession before retirement age who are willing to participate in an open-ended, semi-structured interview regarding their experiences in the profession. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and there is no financial or other compensation. Please inbox me if you are interested in participating in this interesting and exciting research.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves semi-structured, open-ended interviews. In the interview, you will be asked open-ended questions about your experiences as a primary school teacher in Cape Town, Western Cape. The interview can take place in person or electronically via Microsoft Teams or Zoom. The expected duration of the interview will be between one and one and a half hours.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a written consent form.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participating in this study will be beneficial to you. I will share my final thesis with you electronically. I plan to publish articles in the future, and I will share these with you as well. Participating in this study will provide you with a glimpse into understanding the phenomenon of educator attrition and what can be done to remedy this situation. In the process of taking part in this study, you will also have an opportunity to speak about your experiences, whether they be positive or negative.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

The interview will involve you sharing personal experiences and by reflecting on these experiences, some minor discomfort or anxiety may be caused. If you feel any discomfort during the interview, we can pause for a break, or you can withdraw from the study at any time. If necessary, I will refer you to Lifeline (0861322322), South African Depression and Anxiety Group (0800121314) as well as Mental Health Helpline (0800 36 36 36) for counseling and support.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the experiences that you share. Your responses will be allocated a pseudonym, ensuring anonymity. This will be done for my dissertation, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. In all scenarios, individual participants will not be identifiable.

All data collected will be stored on a password-protected USB stick. Only me and my supervisor will have access to this password and the data. Your identified responses may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is conducted properly, including my supervisor, a transcriber, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be stored on password-protected documents on a USB stick. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. The electronic data will later be destroyed by permanently deleting it from the USB stick.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will receive no payment or incentives for participating in this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Education *ERC*, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from me if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

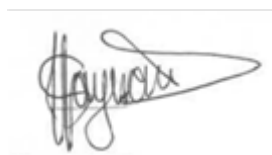
I will send an electronic copy of my final research thesis to you via email.

If you would like any more information regarding the final research findings, please contact Cindy Hayward on 0780207671 or email 48242098@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Cindy Hayward on 0780207671 or email 48242098@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr. Deborah Lees, my supervisor, on 0609865888 or email leesdc@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.
Thank you.



Hayward

CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of a semi-structured open-ended interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

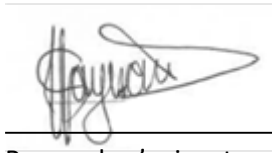
Participant Name & Surname (please print) _____

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print)

Cindy Sonia Hayward

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hayward", enclosed within a thin black rectangular border. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Researcher's signature

Date: tba

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH STUDY INTEREST FORM

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

APPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Form to be filled in by the researcher on behalf of the participant before the interview commences:

Information required	Participant information
Date of interview	
Name of participant (Optional)	
Gender	
Age	
Highest qualification	
Number of years of educator experience	
Grade and subjects taught by the educator	
Name of school(s) taught at	
Allocated pseudonym	

SECTION B: INFORMATION TO BE SHARED WITH PARTICIPANTS

- a) The purpose of this study is to investigate educator attrition in primary schools in Cape Town, South Africa.
- b) This particular interview, as well as the others collected for this study, will be the data collection method for the study in question. The interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed for data analysis. You will be given a transcript of your data for approval before it is included in the write up of the research.
- c) Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.
- d) The signing of a consent form is necessary before commencement of the interview. You may withdraw from the interview at any given time. The interview is confidential, and a pseudonym will be used instead of your real name. You will be offered a transcript copy once it has been typed to validate the content. Additionally, you will be provided with an electronic copy of my thesis once the study is approved and final.
- e) The interview will be 1 – 1 ½ hours in duration.
- f) Have the participant read and sign the consent form.

SECTION C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Tell me about your experiences of being a primary school educator?

2. Tell me how you felt about these experiences?
3. Could you tell me the story of what motivated you to leave the teaching profession?
4. Please explain what could have motivated you to stay in the teaching profession?
5. Could you please explain your current employment status and if you feel that you made the right decision to leave an educator position at a primary school?
6. What recommendations can you make to retain educators in the teaching profession in South Africa?

SECTION D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Questions.	Clarifying Probes – explain the answer in more detail.	Elaborating Probes – explore the content in more depth.	Reflective questions.
Tell me about your experiences of being a primary school educator.	<p>Can you focus on a specific experience?</p> <p><i>Which experiences were meaningful and why?</i></p> <p>Can you think of any less pleasant/more pleasant experiences?</p> <p><i>Tell me more about ...</i></p>	<p>“Tell me more.”</p> <p><i>“Could you please explain your response further.”</i></p> <p>“I need more detail.”</p> <p>“Why?”</p> <p>“How?”- how did you feel about that?</p> <p><i>“Further examples...”</i></p>	<p>Play back to the interviewee what he/she has said: So you felt that...?</p> <p><i>“Uh huh”</i></p>
Tell me how you felt about these experiences?	<p>Could you explain your feelings about your new experiences during your first few weeks at MSA?</p> <p><i>Could you relate your feelings about experiences?</i></p> <p>How do you feel about some of the experiences that mattered and how you felt about the?</p>	<p>“Tell me more”</p> <p><i>“Could you explain your response further.”</i></p> <p>“I need more detail.”</p> <p><i>“Could you explain why?”</i></p> <p>“How?”- how did you feel about that?</p> <p><i>“Further examples to explain...”</i></p>	<p>Play back to the interviewee what he/she has said: So you felt that...?</p> <p><i>“Uh huh”</i></p>
Could you tell me the story of what motivated you to leave the teaching profession?	<p>Think back to teaching days...</p> <p><i>What stands out that led you to taking the decision</i></p>	<p>“Tell me more”</p> <p><i>“Could you explain your response further.”</i></p> <p>“I need more detail.”</p>	<p>Play back to the interviewee what he/she has said: So you felt that...?</p> <p><i>“Uh huh”</i></p>

	<p><i>to leave being a primary school educator?</i></p> <p><i>Do you have any examples that you could share?</i></p>	<p><i>"Further examples to explain..."</i></p> <p><i>"How?"- how did you feel about that?</i></p> <p><i>What happened after that?</i></p>	
<p>Please explain what could have motivated you to stay in the teaching profession.</p>	<p>Focus on yourself and relate a few examples to substantiate your response.</p> <p><i>Can you provide any examples...</i></p> <p>How does remembering this make you feel?</p>	<p><i>"Tell me more"</i></p> <p><i>"Could you explain your response further."</i></p> <p><i>"I need more detail."</i></p> <p><i>"Further examples to explain..."</i></p> <p><i>"How?"- how did you feel about that?</i></p>	<p>Play back to the interviewee what he/she has said: So, you felt that...?</p> <p><i>"Uh huh"</i></p>
<p>Could you please explain your current employment status and if you feel that you made the right decision to leave an educator position at a primary school.</p>	<p>Any experiences that you would like to share?</p> <p><i>Are things better or worse now for you? Please explain.</i></p> <p><i>Is there a personal story that you would like to share?</i></p>	<p><i>"Tell me more"</i></p> <p><i>"Could you explain your response further."</i></p> <p><i>"I need more detail."</i></p> <p><i>"Further examples to explain..."</i></p> <p><i>"How?"- how did you feel about that?</i></p>	<p>Play back to the interviewee what he/she has said: So you felt that...?</p> <p><i>"Uh huh"</i></p>
<p>What recommendations can you make to retain educators in the teaching profession in South Africa?</p>	<p>Are there changes that could be made to the benefit of all education stakeholders?</p> <p><i>What would be your wishes that could lead to retaining educators in the teaching profession</i></p>	<p><i>"Tell me more"</i></p> <p><i>"Could you explain your response further."</i></p> <p><i>"I need more detail."</i></p> <p><i>"Further examples to explain..."</i></p> <p><i>"How do you think that can be done?"</i></p>	<p>Play back to the interviewee what he/she has said: So you felt that...?</p> <p><i>"Uh huh"</i></p> <p>"</p>

APPENDIX D: POSTER POSTED ON FACEBOOK SEEKING FORMER EDUCATORS



APPENDIX E: EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT FOR PARTICIPANT 3: MICROSOFT TEAMS

TITLE OF THESIS	Educator Attrition in Primary Schools in Cape Town, South Africa: Former Primary School Educator Perceptions
DATE OF AUDIO	21 OCTOBER 2023
LENGTH OF AUDIO	0:56:8
TRANSCRIPTION LEGEND	RESEARCHER R PARTICIPANT 3 P3

INTERVIEW QUESTION 1: Tell me more about your experience as a primary school teacher?

P3

I don't know how relevant it is to share my entire background here. So, in my first year of teaching, I actually taught overseas. Not quite relevant to the study, but the problem was. I don't want to say the issue, but the issue with working overseas was that I was working in China, and I was very well paid. I was well respected as a professional and my entire job was to teach. I didn't have to do any of the admin or set up any of the assessments. The content was given to me and I could create my own resources based on that content, but that wasn't a requirement. That's something I did. And so my entire job was just to teach. And it was really enjoyable. And that's what I always liked about education, about being a teacher. It was the act of teaching. So then after about a year of teaching overseas, I came back and I got a job at a semi-private school.

It was a weird little school. The demographics were largely mixed because it was a private school. There were some really wealthy kids, but you know, because of the area they were, it was very much a mix, but largely multicultural and diverse. I still loved teaching. I liked my subject area. I liked the content, and I liked teaching kids, so I liked planning activities and doing those activities. I love those moments in the classroom and those really fed me and I really enjoyed that. Everything else was a nightmare.

We were doing curriculum planning. They had devised their own curriculum, but then we would have to do the planning. We would have to do all of the year planning from the beginning. We would have to go through CAPS requirements for what kids needed to know in that grade level and that year. And then we would have to go through the various pedagogical approaches they wanted to say that they could do and we would have to marry the two.

And so there was a large portion of admin we were doing. So you know, there are usual things that you're you're meant to do, but they had very strict requirements. So, like every day we would have to log observations for every single kid, and then the kids were meant to- so the school had a feeding scheme. So all of the kids were fed at the school. So we would have to make it happen. So there was a cooking staff. They cooked the food, but everything else was us.

So we had to supervise the kids eating and make sure all the kids ate their food. So the thing was, the reason I'm explaining this is because we literally didn't have a break in the day. There was no break duty and there wasn't even a staff room. We were on duty the entire day and when I say the entire day.

They wanted to do, I don't know if you've heard about flip class. So for classes, this new research where it's like if you kind of flip the teaching practice. So instead of a teacher starting to introduce a concept and then giving the kids activities to practice and then assessing. What happens is the teacher gives the kids like introduction, reading, and work activities to do on their own before and then you just start your teaching. But at that point, the kids all have kind of like base-level background and then you can be like, so everyone's done this activity. You've been introduced to this concept and activity. Well, what do you think?

So it's almost like a hook, but it's like an individual hook that you can use, but the issue was that it's been proven to do really good things in other countries. They had this idea to change. Flip class is great. So what we're going to do is we're going to introduce a flip class session every afternoon after school is finished. So from 3 to 5, these kids do this activity, so you have to prepare this activity and then you now have to supervise them doing it from 3 to 5.

So, my teaching day was from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM without any break and then we remained to do all this admin and stuff as well. So, this was not great. Honestly, I stayed there for not even a full year. I think it was nine months. It was awful. The school was privatized and run like a business kind of vibe. So the terrible experience there. But again, I like I enjoyed the active teaching. I've always felt what I enjoy most about the teaching is that I'm passionate about the content.

I really like English is the content and the subject that I teach, and I enjoy finding ways to communicate that with kids and also people at a higher level, which is why I ended up moving away. But yeah, so that I really enjoyed and that I still have really great experiences of or memories of or whatever. It wasn't a typical school experience, but I do think in my own research with teachers and just anecdotally talking to teachers, this is probably quite a familiar experience for many teachers. The kind of, yeah, the bullshit surrounding everything.

I remember I used to- at that time I was still living with my parents because I had just gotten home from China. I'd gotten this job and I was living with my parents and I used to get home and I used to stay up late doing all this admin work, and my dad said to me once and I got so mad and my dad said well, why aren't you getting this work done at work? And I was like, just can you not because this is not my job. My entire day I am meant to be with these kids. That's my job. So we weren't paid extra. We were paid a flat rate and I think in terms of entry-level jobs in South Africa, I think I was paid about R12 000 per month which is bottom level.

And we were also expected to do a lot of Saturday work as well. So what I had done was at the end of that year, so partly why I accepted the job at that school was because I got back from China in February and February is a rough time to be looking for a job as a teacher. So I took the job at the school because they had a high turnover.

My intention when I got back anyway was to use the money that I'd saved in China to do my masters. But I just worked that year and then applied for my masters the next year. So then I went and did my masters. And during that time when I was doing my masters.

Then I took on another position. I don't wanna call it a part-time job. It was every day, and it was two to three hours every day. But what my job was, there was this kid, who was diagnosed with learning disabilities. I am not a professional in learning disabilities. My personal feelings were she came from a very, very, very wealthy family and there were issues there that had to do with more than just stand-alone learning disabilities.

But anyway, so my job was after school every day I would spend time with her. And she just wasn't coping. She wasn't good at planning. She wasn't good at like, so the issue was, you know, if her teacher had said OK, this is what you have to do for homework. These are the pages, blah blah blah blah. She wouldn't remember any of that. She wouldn't remember anything that happened in class. She wouldn't write anything down, even homework. The diary thing didn't work.

So it was my job to kind of sit with her, to go through everything that was done in the day kind of figure out for myself kind of if there was something that had been done in the day and figure for myself if she hadn't quite followed and just kind of catch her up to speed on that and help her with homework and then also just help her to umm, to organize her day and her time and stuff like that.

Umm so this this wasn't necessarily teaching in a primary school, but it was very much teaching primary school content and stuff like that. And then I'd started that job, and then the COVID pandemic happened. So we switched to online and I carried on working with her for a while, but that was not the format for her. That really was not the format for her. So I worked with her for the time that I was doing my masters. After I got my masters. I submitted it in February and then I passed and I got my degree.

So I started looking for jobs again, like an idiot in February. It just happens to be where the cycle of job hunting because you started your contract and then you end it and then it's just what happens and then that's just what your life is like. So at this point, I hadn't given up on teaching. My intention wasn't to stop teaching at that point, but I had it in the back of my head and kind of opened my mind to maybe adult education or tertiary education or other spheres in education that weren't necessarily primary school teaching.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 2: Tell me how you felt about these experiences.

P3

So, you know, I think a lot of teachers who get into the profession are perfectionists. We're a certain kind of type A type of person. We like things to be a certain way. It's the teacher vibe, but I think a lot of that can in certain people you know there's a certain level of low-level anxiety in those types of people just in general.

And that's the thing. Situations like that. I think in those certain situations that can trigger those, those kinds of low-level anxieties to become larger and larger and larger and then turn into something that actually needs to be treated. And that's what happened to me. I did start having panic attacks.

I started having panic attacks at work and not like the kinds of panic attacks where you are just kind of like you go to a bathroom by yourself and you just kind of breathing. Like there were physical symptoms. My nose would bleed. I would sometimes, I had a little little I don't wanna call it a seizure, but very much involuntary kind of movements. So that was probably the worst of the subset of emotions and that I think happened maybe two or three times within the nine months that I worked there.

In general, it's so weird it's almost like I don't wanna say it's almost "culty" or whatever, but I've worked in similar spaces since and it's almost like there's very high levels of adrenaline for a lot of the time because you don't have the time to sit down, you know, it's just you're moving. You get there at 7:00 AM and you just moving, moving, moving and it's problem-solving and it's you on your feet that whole time and making decisions and it's a very high level of a mental state that you have to be in. And I think often at that time in those moments, I don't know. I can't speak for other people, but

sometimes I felt that to be quite a rush when things were going right and I was doing the right thing. I was like, this is really cool. I'm like, you know, and doing all these things and I'm being really productive. It's often after that where that kind of sits in on you and you get home and you just- I didn't have a life outside of the school, like I couldn't go out, could go out with friends. I was just so tired all the time. I was drained and there was very little left in me that was social energy, like I just didn't have the space for that.

And a lot of it was just frustration in general, kind of the things that you don't talk about in a job. So like lower levels of, like frustration that our internal and you you don't really know if they're valid and you don't really know if they're professional, you don't really know that you can share them. You don't know if you're being over the sensitive or so.

For example, there was a time where we weren't coping. None of the teachers were coping because of the high levels of admin because the amount of time that we were teaching, there was no such thing as a free period. There wasn't such a thing as a break. It was just all the time working and so we weren't getting the admin that they wanted us to get done done. So when I say admin, obviously there are different levels of admin. We were getting our books marked.

We were getting the things that you need to keep up to date, but the things that they were saying were key points, but that we didn't see as key points. So things like, you know, doing the things like writing the report for every single kid, every single day, that's not something we were getting to. And they had a very complex online system that wasn't very user friendly.

And every day they wanted those uploaded and every day they wanted, you know, to track that and to see that. And so nobody was getting it done. This was a horrible space. We didn't have the time. So then they brought in someone, they brought in an HOD, a new person, a new teacher, and her entire job was to micromanage us to the extent where she gave us little A4 notebooks.

And every day she would write a list of things we would have to do. And at the end of the day, we would have to show it to her to be able to leave. Now I'm an adult woman. I fucking hated that. I've never felt so insulted in my life. So there were frustrations with with this kind of thing where it was just like I'm being expected to do miraculous levels of work every day. I'm getting no recognition for the work that I am managing to get done and on top of that, you know, I'm being treated like a little bit of a child.

They've recognized the problem. They've recognized the problem that not a single teacher is able to do this level of work, and instead of rectifying that problem, they've decided to put that on this group of 10 people. If 10 people, if you have 10 people and not one of them can do the job, you know there's something in in. Yeah, but they didn't see the problem as being the same as we thought it was a problem, right? So and then it's just it's frustrations at that level where it's like. Just that act like you could tell if I brought that up. They're not gonna listen to me because they've shown me with this action. How much do they value my services? How much do they value my opinion? How much do they value my professionalism as an adult woman? A teacher that they hired and they're going to do a job.

So I think that's probably one of the things that I struggle with the most is this level of frustration, but also powerlessness and that kind of thing. When that festers, I don't think you can come back from something like that.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 3: Could you explain what motivated you to leave the profession?

P3

I yeah, I just wanna reiterate that what I love about teaching is the act of teaching. And what I love about teaching is having a passion for a subject area and being able to share that with kids. I do not have a single complaint about the children that I taught. Not one. I will be honest I do hate certain kids. I'm not a maternal sort. Not naturally a maternal sort. And there are days where I'm just like I don't want to see that kid's face today.

Yeah, but but beyond those which I think are quite normal in any job, I mean I think in any job, even when you deal with adults, there's an adult who's like, I can't see this person's face today, you know. I think I'm a good teacher, which means that in the classroom when I am teaching, I can have control over a group of students. I can let them explore and discuss and be and not lose that kind of thread.

And whatever you know, sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's hard, but it's something that I know how to do. And I think if I were to stay in the provision or if I were to ever go back to the profession, what I would want is to know that that was my main job and to be valued to do that, you know so. To be recognized as enough of a person who's you know, I have a master's degree in this. Now I'm doing my PhD. I know a lot about pedagogy and pedagogy is something that is a skill.

It's not something that you just know how to do. And in order to go back, I would just like my day to be more about that than about anything else. I think that's the most simple way that I can explain it. If I think about what I want to do on a day-to-day basis, that is still up there, and if I could find a job where that is what I did and that was what is valued and that is what I could turn my attention to, and not have to worry about all of the all of the other nonsense You know, it's just I think it's support. I think it's support from your place of work. I had a learning design job. My previous learning design job before I got the job that I have now, I was creating and English resources for an online high school it was I think great 6th grade 7 English and it was for African countries and one of the things that I hated the most in in schools was obviously the resource label, especially if you're teaching literature, you can't buy a million books for a million kids and whatever.

But basically one of the tenets of this learning design job. When what they had said to me was we want umm, we want these kids to explore lots of different literature, but we also want, you know, relevant literature to their context, to be woven in as well. So they want to balance this both and in order for you to do that, you need to expand the kind of literature that you're familiar with. So you go do your research to find some books you wanna read and then tell us and we will pay for you to get the online copies of these books so that you can read up on them and include them in your lessons like that kind of thing.

And it's also been they gave me the time to do that as well. So they were just the money to get the books. And also you can log this as X amount of time in your daily work. So because that is a part of your job. And so I think if a lot more places kind of recognize that you know, teachers are expected to have all these different hats and I think a lot of the time there's a there's a bit of moral brainwashing that comes when you're a teacher, where it's like, oh, you care about the kids so much and you have to do all these different things. And that makes you so brave. And a lot of the times, I do think that's very culty. It's so toxic.

It's like it's like ohh, you don't wanna work late. Don't you care about the kids? It's like I care about the kids, but I also, you know, that shouldn't be an either-or It shouldn't be as a teacher, my choices are being a good teacher or having a balanced life. That's not fair. I think a lot of other professions, like nurses and stuff like that, have a similar issue where there's, it's moral and ethical blackmail because you're you're saying because your job is so important, it should be the only thing that's important. And I think that that's unfair.

And again, I do think it kind of feeds into sometimes this toxic thing where teachers, teachers start to buy into this as well when they're like, OK, well, I'm a good teacher. I have to wear all these hats and if I do it properly, I'll be able to help at least one or two kids and that will make it worthwhile. And that's not a bad thing, but at the same time, I don't think that's how it should be. It's not healthy.

I'm gonna go maybe on a tangent here, but I don't know if you watch the TV show, Abbott Elementary. Yeah, I think I think they go into in later episodes and every now and then they go into an episode where you can tell they really spoke to some teachers and this episode where the young teacher has just the shit day because everything's going wrong and she's decided she's the one who's gonna fix everything. So the toilet doesn't work, so she's gonna be the one to organize the toilet to work and the lights go off.

And she's going to be the one who lights to work. And she just has this horrible day where she's running around. She's wearing all these hats. She's trying to get everything done and at the end of the day she goes outside and she sees two or three of the older teachers just sitting outside watching the kids and she says she says to them, how could you just be hanging out with the kids like this? Like, don't you care? Like, don't you care that the toilets don't work? Or don't you care that the lights don't work? And if you care about the kids, wouldn't you wanna fix all these problems? And all the teachers said to her we care about the kids. We care about the kids enough to know that we cannot burn ourselves out doing everything because that would be a disservice to the kids. We wouldn't be the people we wanted to be for those kids.

One of the reasons why I didn't want to teach anymore was because I didn't like who I was becoming to these kids because I was staying up all night doing this admin and doing all this prep and I was just a bitch to them. I was not in a space where I could be a good teacher because I was just bitch. I was a horrible person and that's not the teacher I wanted to be. So if I can't be the teacher that I wanna be for the kids, which is why I wanna do this job. Then why bother?

INTERVIEW QUESTION 4: What could have been done to motivate you to stay in the teaching profession?

P3

So obviously, teaching is never going to be as free as that because there is a factor of child care involved. But a lot of the time I do think I made the right decision for my life because I don't know that I would have been able to have the kind of, umm, freedom work-life balance that I have now if I was still in teaching. I know I wouldn't be able to. I love teaching and I do still love teaching and I do still love educating. And if there was ever a way for me to be able to do that. I'm not asking for a fully remote teaching job. That's not possible, but I'm asking for a little bit of grace.

This is where you know, you research enough, and then you go into a rabbit hole and you just like, OK, so for this one thing to change, everything would have to change it would just be terrible. And why do

we even bother and blah blah blah? But I envision a world where it's not like we have the school group of teachers of this one school, and if you are sick, there's no other recourse for you. You have to stay there, because what's gonna happen to the kids? Like, no you need to employ enough people. You have to have a system. You need to, you know, there need to be systems in place to look after your teachers.

Honestly, if someone came to me tomorrow and was like here Candice, we're gonna give you all the money. We're gonna give you the top government job. You can make all the changes you want, just go make it. I don't even know where I would start. I know this is about what is, umm, for teachers specifically this is radical.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 5: Could you please explain your current employment status and if you feel that you made the right decision to leave an educator position at a primary school?

P3

I was applying to primary school teaching jobs but I was applying to a lot of other things as well, and that's when the job at *College A* came up and I was like this kind of sounds like a good middle ground because it's still education and its tertiary education, but you're working with schools, you're working in schools because I was doing the teaching experience and so I took that job.

And then, yeah, I stayed for a while. Where I kept an open mind and as my mind was open, just other things happened. And I slowly moved further and further away from actual teaching. And I do sometimes think of myself as a failed teacher, but I wouldn't say I wouldn't go back. I would need to find a very very good spot to go back, and this is the one thing that I never really felt like I found like a community or family.

Obviously, I have taught teaching experience at quite a lot of places and obviously you never gonna find a job when everything's right. But yeah, I never really really found a spot where I was like this is something that I can see myself doing for a long time and not getting burned out and not having it have a terrible effect on my mental health in this and that and the other thing.

It goes back and forth, there are things that I value in my job now that if I could get as a teacher, I would go back to teaching. But it's unlikely. So the thing I work fully remote and fully from home. That obviously is not ever going to be possible for teachers, This I would be willing to kind of forego, but there are other things that just make my life easier. I work flexi hours. You know if my job is done at the end of the day, they don't care when I do it. So if I wanna go take my dog for a walk at 10:00 AM just for half an hour, I can if I wanna God forbid if I get a little bit sick and wanna go to the doctor in the morning on a Wednesday, I can do that. And it's just little things like that where it just makes your life better and puts you in a space where you can give more to your job, if that makes sense. So like I know that I am trusted as an adult to get my job done and because of that I work really hard to get my job done. If I do go to the doctor, I'll make sure my task list is done by the end of the day.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 6: What recommendations can you make to retain educators in the teaching profession in South Africa?

P3

I've also been studying. I'm doing a PhD at the moment. I have been radicalized. Umm, I think the way that we do assessments is very flawed and in many ways it's one of the things that just keeps putting time pressure. Content pressure on both teachers and learners,

I think we assess too often and I think we assess too early. And because we assess too often, we're like, OK, so these assessments coming up as a teacher know this, this, this, this, this and this is gonna be covered. So this, this, this, this is this is all I have time for and I don't have time to stop. If this group of kids are struggling with this, I don't have time to try another tact. I don't have time to try different things at all. I just I have the time to sit in front. I have 40 minutes to get through this concept that's gonna be covered on this test and then I have to move on. We're gonna teach it. We're gonna do a little activity, and then that's gonna be it.

Whereas I think if we focused a lot less on content for assessment, a little bit more on, I don't wanna say skills that's a difficult. It depends on the subject area. Largely umm. But I think if we if we were a little bit more free. Uh, again, it's radical. So it's not something that I know would work and that I would know how to do that. I think one way is to adjust assessments.

Would give the teachers more space and to be better teachers it would give the kids more space to learn more effectively. And I think in general that would help a lot of the pressure, the admin pressure, the heavy pressure we see on teachers because assessment doesn't have to be sitting at home until 1:00 AM with a red pen.

That's one form of assessment, but there are other forms of assessment that are often far more beneficial to students, but there's no time for them. There's no time for me to sit in class and actually watch what the kids are doing and catch them in a moment and do something with that moment.

So that's one thing. The other thing is I think we need to take some of the hats off the teachers. You know teachers wear all these different hats, some of them can be filled by other jobs.

You know you can have an admin person. You can have someone whose job it is to be a carer for the kids during the day. This makes me sound terrible, like I said, I'm not a maternal person. The shepherding kids between classes, the forcing kids to eat, the break duties, all of that I think is obviously it's there is a form of schooling is both education and childcare at the same time. But I don't think we can conflict those skills. I don't think well, we can and we do, but I don't think it might be beneficial to not conflict those skills.

And obviously that's something that would be difficult, but well, I don't think difficult, it would require paying more people. So yeah, I think that's one thing, it's the thing that again maybe I'm a little bit idealistic and maybe I'm a little bit radical, but I think and maybe this makes not might make me sound cold as well, but I think I enjoy education. I'm good at education. I'm good at teaching. I'm good at making lessons and planning those lessons and engaging children in lessons. I was not good at the other stuff. I wasn't good at lineup time. I don't have the patience.

I don't, especially if I meant to now teach in 5 minutes and I have X amount of things that I need to set up and I need to be in a certain mind space for that. You know, it doesn't help that I spent the entire break time breaking up a fight and then I get to my classroom, and I'm frustrated and I'm built up and I'm a little bit scared. And you know all those kinds of things. I don't think extra murals are too much, I think a lot of teachers enjoy the extra murals. I enjoyed it, but because at many times there's an element of choice there. And that's also, you know, there's an element of choice. And well, I enjoy

this. This is something I would like to share with the kids who are interested and getting an opportunity.

So there are times when if you give teachers a choice, you will probably find that they will give of their time and they will give of their skills in areas where they are strong. You can force me to do things, but if you're forcing me to be on my feet 2,000,000 different things for 12 hours in a day, then I'm going to be not as good at any of those things as I would be if. You know, and yeah, it's just a I had something else to say, but I lost it.

I think teachers again, I think it goes back. I don't think teachers are expected to have human needs. A lot of the time, and again this comes back to this. What I think it's a very toxic it's a very manipulative kind of mindset where it's teachers are superheroes and teachers, you know, wear all these hats and that's cute. And that's great and all. But teachers are not superheroes.

Umm, teachers are people and I when I was a teacher I wanna say I was very young. I wouldn't eat. I at that job I would not eat. There was not time for me to eat. Yeah, it's almost criminal in any other workspace. It would be criminal to say you have X amount of time to you know you can only use the bathroom here or there.

The thing is, the reason that they get away with it is often it's not made explicit, but you put anyone in a classroom with 30 plus kids and that person has spent a lot of time and effort getting those kids to a point where they are working where they are, learning where they are engaging. And then this person has a choice. Do I stay and ensure that carries on or do I just leave for 5 minutes to take care of my own human needs quickly and then come back and risk having to start that process all over again the burden of choice on that person is they will probably choose to stay and this is also where it gets a lot of teachers. A lot of teachers. Ohh well, you know they chose education and they're good teachers so they wouldn't make this choice, but it's like you've put this choice on them by not giving them other options.

It's so interesting because I like, like I said earlier, I never really made a concerted decision to never be a teacher again. I just opened my scope a little bit and then opening my scope. I just moved further and further away because there were a lot of things that I could do. I would get paid more for them and I would get more lifestyle perks from them as well. And so, I moved further and further away, and I've reached a point where it's like, OK, well, maybe I won't go back.

APPENDIX F: EDITING CERTIFICATE

01 December 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Confirmation of editing of MEd dissertation

Title of dissertation:

Educator attrition in primary schools in Cape Town, South Africa: Former primary school educator perceptions

Author:

Cindy Sonia Hayward

Academic Institution:

University of South Africa

This letter confirms that the dissertation detailed above has been edited for spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, phrasing, language, readability, and consistency.

The intended meaning of the content has not been altered by the editing process. The dissertation was edited using the MS Word Track Changes tool enabling the author to reflect on and accept or reject the suggested changes.

Yours faithfully,

pef.

Glynnis Carter

Professional academic editor

Freelance specialist editor: CACTUS Communications

Freelance researcher, writer, and editor: Aquila Life Sciences

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082 364 3589

APPENDIX G: SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Title: Educator Attrition in Primary Schools in Cape Town, South Africa: Former Primary School Educator Perceptions

Please answer the following questions comprehensively:

1. Name and Surname (Optional):
2. Gender:
3. Ethnicity:
4. Age:
5. Please provide the date that you entered the teaching profession.
6. Please provide the date that you exited from the teaching profession.
7. Please name the school/s that you have taught at:
8. Which subject/s did you teach?
9. What was your post level at the time that you exited the profession?
10. What is your highest qualification?
11. Are you able to provide proof of qualification?

Thank you for your time and effort.

The researcher will contact you via email to inform you whether you have been selected for the study or not.