

**Mindset Matters: Understanding University Teachers'
Well-being in a Post-Pandemic Era in Finland**

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ABSTRACT

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Everyday life came to a halt when the COVID-19 pandemic began. The world stopped functioning whilst schools and universities were expected to continue regardless of the circumstances. These rapid changes led to adverse effects on teachers' and students' well-being that continued after the pandemic. Although students' well-being has received considerable recognition in literature, teachers' well-being remains under investigated and under-researched. To fill this gap in literature, this study aimed to explore how university teachers' experiences affected their well-being after the pandemic by answering the following research questions, (1) What are university teachers' experiences of how their well-being in the workplace has been affected during the post-pandemic phase? (2) What issues do university teachers identify as limiting their well-being during the post-pandemic phase? and (3) What strategies or coping mechanisms have university teachers utilised to manage their well-being in the post-pandemic workplace?

To find answers to these research questions, ten university teachers across various departments at a Finnish university were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. This was a qualitative study which utilised thematic analysis taken through an inductive lens to understand university teachers' perceptions with regard to their well-being after the pandemic. Findings showed that university teachers' well-being in the workplace was influenced by several factors. University teachers' well-being was mainly impacted in negative ways even after the pandemic due to the factors discussed in this study. However, university teachers' experiences of how their well-being was influenced were highly dependent on their understanding of themselves, their conceptualizations of well-being and their previous experiences.

Keywords: COVID-19, post-pandemic, teachers' well-being, university teachers, Finland

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my beloved Grandma, whose unconditional support served as a guiding light throughout this journey.

Asma Tariq

Between Qatar and Finland, May 2024

CONTENT

ABSTRACT	2
CONTENT	5
1 INTRODUCTION	7
2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	9
2.1 Well-being in general	9
2.2 Coping mechanisms as a tool to support teachers' well-being	11
2.3 Definition of a crisis	13
2.4 Well-being of teachers during a time of crisis	14
3 COVID-19 AND THE EFFECTS ON WELL-BEING	18
3.1 Students and teachers' well-being	18
3.2 Addressing the challenges to teacher shortages and well-being	19
3.3 Long-term effects of low levels of well-being among teachers	20
3.4 Teacher attrition factors globally	23
3.5 Post-pandemic challenges among university teachers' well-being.....	24
4 RESEARCH TASK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	26
4.2 Research Context.....	27
4.3 Research Participants	28
4.4 Data Collection	30
4.5 Data Analysis.....	31
4.6 Ethical Solutions.....	36
5 RESULTS	38
5.1 Increased expectations after the pandemic	38
5.1.1 Interaction provided a sense of belongingness and a sense of community.....	40

5.1.2	Juggling with the changing working environments after the pandemic	43
5.2	Issues and matters supporting and challenging university teachers' well-being after the pandemic.....	45
5.2.1	Supporting issues: atmosphere and awareness of job responsibilities	46
5.2.2	Challenges among well-being resources.....	49
5.2.3	Potential changes and improvements to support university teachers' well-being after the pandemic	53
5.2.4	Students' well-being and teachers' well-being are inter-connected	54
5.3	Managing well-being after the pandemic	56
5.3.1	Understanding themselves as a coping mechanism.....	57
5.3.2	Importance of taking breaks after the pandemic	58
5.3.3	Physical and cognitive exercises to de-stress.....	59
5.3.4	Connecting with people and social support after the pandemic... ..	61
6	DISCUSSION	64
6.1	Examination of the results	64
6.2	Evaluation of the study	71
6.3	Future research.....	73
7	CONCLUSION	74
	REFERENCES.....	76

1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education systems globally with no time for systematic planning. Teaching quickly transitioned from campus-based instruction to emergency remote instruction resulting in negative effects on the well-being of teachers and students alike (Müller et al., 2021). In many parts of the world, teachers' expectations and responsibilities skyrocketed as a result of the pandemic. This further resulted in challenging working environments which directly impacted teachers' social, emotional, and physical well-being which in turn contributed to teacher shortages, burnout, and attrition rates.

Although the teaching profession is highly respected and known to be a noble profession, the expectations for it are considered unrealistic (Hargreaves, 2009). Teachers' responsibilities and expectations are multiple and complex, and they are constantly evolving. With this, it should be known that teachers' well-being is at great risk when working conditions and expectations become unrealistic. Teachers are an essential part of society and are known as some of the key individuals who contribute greatly to a child's development and learning. Empirical evidence suggests that teachers are known to be the most significant factors contributing to student success, satisfaction, and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). It should be noted that teachers' well-being has been neglected over the past few decades. For example, prior to the pandemic, 44% of teachers were already expected to leave the profession due to the extensive workloads and monitoring in England (The Guardian, 2022). In addition, school leaders and leadership directly influence how well teachers feel supported in their profession. Research has pinpointed the significant role of emotion within the teaching profession. Teachers, like any other profession, need to feel appreciated, supported, and respected. By emphasizing the importance of teachers' voices and ensuring that they are heard, school leaders and school leadership can have a direct impact on this. A teacher's career as a professional is significantly impacted by their emotional health (Hargreaves, 2000). The ability to feel emotions is a

necessary part of being human, and emotions may also be considered as being important to both teaching and learning as they can directly impact teacher performance. Therefore, changing factors such as school culture, organisational structures, and leadership roles during and after the pandemic have greatly contributed to teachers' overall well-being through burnout. Subsequently, this has resulted in a rapid increase in teacher shortages and teacher attrition rates overtime. Limited research has focused on the aspect of supporting teachers and school leaders' well-being after the pandemic although it caused a vast impact. Hence, it is paramount to conduct further research on the well-being of teachers and school leaders during the post-pandemic period. In my thesis, I will focus on university teachers due to the scarcity of research on this population of teachers (see Appendix A).

The primary goal of this thesis was to explore how university teachers have been managing their well-being after the pandemic and how the effects of the pandemic have contributed to their well-being in positive or negative ways. The pandemic has lasted approximately four years in most parts of the world however the impacts have been detrimental and sudden changes have become permanent changes such as adopting distance teaching models and conducting meetings online. The lack of research within this area, especially from the perspective of university teachers has been another driving force to conduct this research. Consequently, this research examined the perceptions of university teachers through semi-structured interviews. My thesis aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What are university teachers' experiences of how their well-being in the workplace has been affected during the post-pandemic phase?
2. What issues do university teachers identify as limiting their well-being during the post-pandemic phase?
3. What strategies or coping mechanisms have university teachers utilised to manage their well-being in the post-pandemic workplace?

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Well-being in general

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being” (World Health Organization, 2005). The World Health Organization defines mental health as:

The state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

According to these general definitions and the WHO, well-being consists of several aspects such as physical and emotional well-being, social well-being, daily existence, and financial status (Halbreich, 2022). A standard of good health can be considered when the body's components and functioning systems are in a state of balance and harmony (Selye, 1996). As Diener et al. (1999) state, the mind and the body are considered equal as their interaction can influence the other. For example, age, gender, and the environment can be understood as optimal health as these aspects can be influenced in positive and negative ways by internal and external stimuli (Halbreich, 2022). Daily functions or daily-existence can be separated into two sub-categories, sleeping and awakening. The quality and quantity of sleep is a crucial component of mental health and well-being (Clifton & Harter, 2021). Participation in activities during the day such as satisfaction at work and home, daily routines, and changes in environment varying from culture to culture can significantly impact other components of well-being. Optimal well-being is considered a reachable goal that can be achieved through coping mechanisms and adaptation. As WHO (2005) states, balance in mental and physical health is necessary for a good state of well-being.

Three decades of longitudinal research regarding well-being by George Gallup revealed five universal elements of well-being. Dr. Gallup studied the

worries, fears and confidence during some of the major crises in the U.S over the past eight decades and these included the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, World War II, the 2008 global financial crash, racial injustice in 2013, and finally the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019. The five main elements of well-being identified by Dr. Gallup were career well-being, social well-being, financial well-being, physical well-being and finally, community well-being (Clifton & Harter, 2021). Career well-being can be considered as enjoying what you do every day or liking your job. Social well-being indicates having meaningful friendships and a healthy social circle. Financial well-being relates to managing your money well. Physical well-being means having the energy to get things done and finally community well-being refers to feeling happy with your living environment (Clifton & Harter, 2021). According to Dr. Gallup, career well-being is the most significant element considered as the foundation for the other four elements.

According to academic literature, well-being can be interpreted as positive emotions where there is a feeling of life satisfaction with minimal negative emotions which can be categorised as a subjective definition of well-being (Diener et al., 2003). On the other hand, from a social and cognitive perspective, well-being can also be defined as standards that influence the feelings of individuals based on adaptation (Brickman, 1971). The conceptual framework by Viac and Fraser (2020), consists of physical and mental well-being, cognitive well-being, subjective well-being, and social well-being. Arguably, well-being can be considered a multidimensional phenomenon as widespread research over the past 20 years has displayed a challenge to reach a precise consensus on the definition of teacher well-being (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Consequently, for the purpose of this thesis, the term well-being will be used in accordance with the definition provided by Dodge et al. (2012) who defined it as the balance between a person's social, emotional, and physical resources and difficulties.

The amount of research on the concept of well-being has increased during the previous decade. However, there is no consensus on how it should be defined (Diener et al., 1999; Kahneman et al., 1999; Keyes et al., 2002; Stratham & Chase, 2010; Seligman, 2011). Nonetheless, Ryff and Keyes (1995) noted that "the absence

of theory-based definitions of well-being is perplexing fairly early in the research. The hedonic tradition and the eudaimonic tradition are the two primary philosophical perspectives on well-being that have arisen over time. The hedonic tradition underlined concepts like contentment, good impact, minimal negative effect, and pleasure with life (Bradburn, 1969; Diener, 1984; Kahneman et al., 1999; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) whereas the eudaimonic tradition stressed the importance of individual development and positive psychological functions (Rogers, 1961; Ryff, 1989a; 1989b; Waterman, 1993). Bradburn (1969) identified psychological well-being as happiness and connected this idea with the eudaimonic tradition coined by Aristotle. Furthermore, he underlined the significance of psychological well-being as one of the most critical aspects of well-being, ranking it above social and physical well-being.

2.2 Coping mechanisms as a tool to support teachers' well-being

According to Petrakova et al. (2021), coping mechanisms refer to distinctive behavioural strategies utilized to navigate psychological stress triggered by stressful situations. Research has indicated that supporting teachers socially and professionally reduces the chances of burnout and enhances their well-being (Brooks et al., 2022). For example, leadership support and collegial support have been shown to be useful and positive coping mechanisms for teachers in the workplace. According to Fiorilli et al. (2019), other coping mechanisms such as approachable colleagues, respectful working environments, and collegiality are crucial in improving teachers' overall well-being. Hence, implementation of these coping strategies in the workplace can help reduce teachers' stress. Previous studies have pointed out the different environmental stressors teachers face and how these factors can greatly affect their stress levels. Additionally, these studies have explored how teachers cope with stress as a means of alleviating its impact within the Finnish context (Aulén et al., 2021). Building on the model of stress and coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Matheny et al.'s

(1986) research has widely examined the impact of environmental stressors in teaching.

A plethora of empirical evidence indicates that increased levels of stress and burnout among both students and teachers can lead to compromised well-being. Previous research highlights the critical role of social support in well-being. For example, positive forms of social support from friends, family, colleagues, and supervisors can serve as a coping mechanism for university teachers' social well-being. Based on the model of stress and coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), "psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being" and consists of two types that are "cognitive appraisals" and "coping". According to this model, an individual's capacity to cope and adjust to problems or challenges is dependent upon the individual's interaction with their environment (Hascher & Waber, 2021). In the context of university teachers, this means understanding how people react to changes in their environment, appraise and cope with work-related stressors such as increased workload or lack of social interaction and how it impacts their psychosocial and emotional well-being.

Arguably, Chang (2009) emphasizes the importance of considering reappraisal in relation to stress and coping mechanisms in comparison to the definition coined by Lazarus and Folkman. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), reappraisal refers to the process of reinterpreting an emotional situation to change its meaning and emotional effect however Chang (2009) suggests reappraisal can be understood as part of the process of emotional regulation through coping strategies. Learning coping mechanisms or skills is an important aspect when dealing with changes, particularly when changes occur rapidly. Coping can be described as "not a stand-alone phenomenon: it is embedded in a complex, dynamic stress process that involves the person, the environment, and the relationship between them" (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004, p. 758). People react and interpret the same situations differently. In other words, the nature of stressful experiences influences individuals' judgments and access to personal

and social resources (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Park & Folkman, 1997). Coping mechanisms or strategies can contribute to teachers' overall well-being in positive ways by helping them navigate and overcome stressful situations.

2.3 Definition of a crisis

Walby (2022) defines crisis as “an event that has the potential to cause a large detrimental change to the social system and in which there is a lack of proportionality between cause and consequence”. Based on this definition of a crisis, it largely applies to the COVID-19 crisis. It can be viewed as an event with long-lasting and permanent effects that unfolded in a complicated manner and affected the social system hence helping us understand the COVID-19 developments. The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in late December 2019, led to the implementation of strict health emergency protocols, including lockdowns and social distancing restrictions all around the world (Holmes et al., 2020). By 11th March, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). The Emergency Power Act was placed in Finland from 16th March to 15th June 2020. During this time frame, public places closed, restaurants operated solely for take-out services, and people transitioned to remote work and study arrangements (Finnish Government, 2020). Daycares and primary schools were reopened in May 2020 however higher education institutions remained closed (Finnish Government, 2020). The surge of the 'mental health pandemic' (Dragioti et al., 2022; Pierce et al., 2020) accompanied by increased physical inactivity and a sedentary lifestyle during the COVID-19 period, created a harmful combination of pandemics, profoundly affecting social, emotional, and physical aspects of well-being.

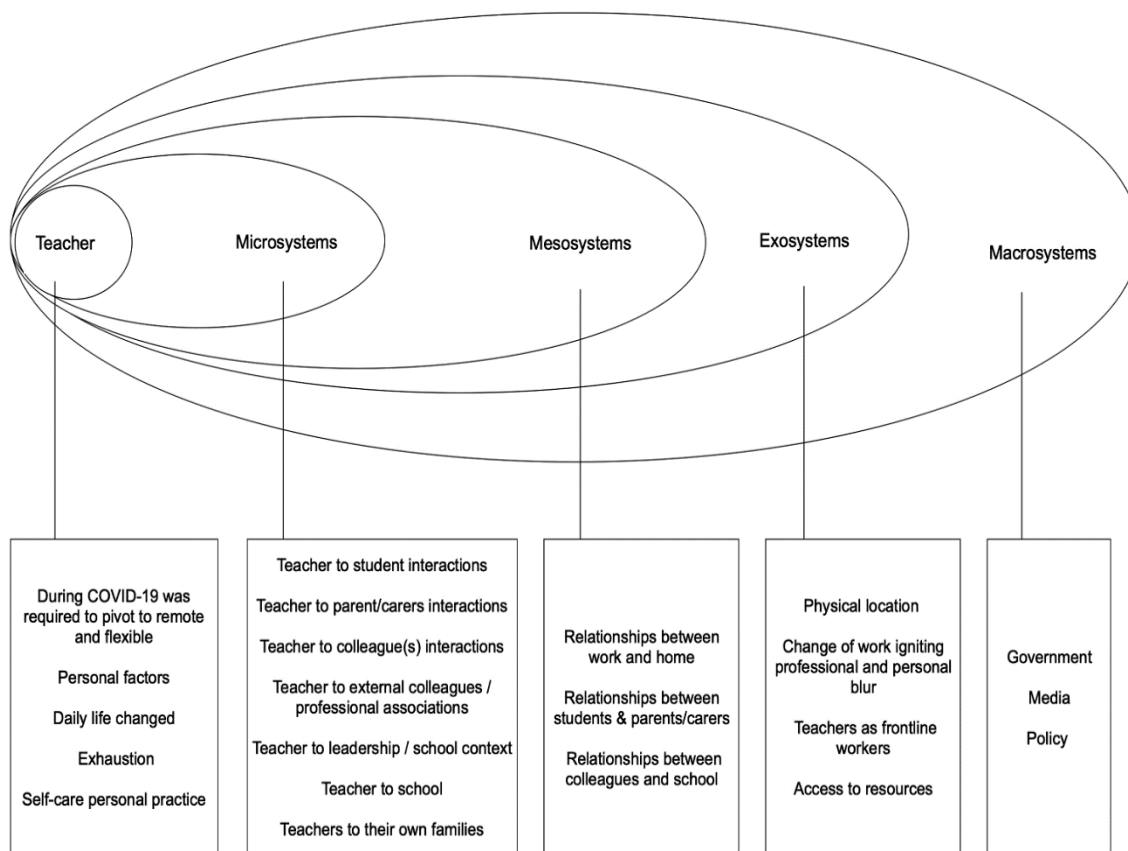
2.4 Well-being of teachers during a time of crisis

A review of the literature indicates that definitions of well-being unique to teachers are limited. According to Huppert and So (2013), the definition of well-being among teachers specifically consists of “a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively (p. 837).” However, McCallum et al. (2017) note teachers’ well-being based on the following,

Wellbeing is diverse and fluid respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change. It is something we all aim for, underpinned by positive notions, yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected (p. 17).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological framework proposes that active interaction between a person and their environment through the five ecological systems influences their development. The microsystem is the first system and in the context of teachers, this refers to the individual teacher and their connection with their close environment. The mesosystem is teachers’ relationship with the wider environment such as their family, friends, neighbours, and school networks for example colleagues and supervisors. The exosystem refers to the interaction among local educational policies, organisational management, and societal, economic, and political systems within their environmental and cultural contexts. The macrosystem refers to the values, social beliefs, and legislative factors. The chronosystem refers to the timing of events, actions, and decisions. This system is known to be out of the teachers’ control and plays the most crucial role in influencing teachers’ well-being.

Figure 1: Ecological systems influence on teacher work and well-being during COVID-19 (McDonough & Lemon, 2022).



Note. The original model was produced by Bronfenbrenner (1979) summarising the influence of ecological systems on an individual's development. From "Stretched very thin: the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' work lives and well-being," by McDonough, S., and Lemon, N. (2022). *Teachers and Teaching*, 1-13. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.jyu.fi/10.1080/13540602.2022.2103530>

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework has been widely applied to study teachers' well-being and work as it provides a holistic understanding to explore the social, economic, political, and cultural factors and interactions that can contribute to teachers' well-being (see Figure 1 by McDonough & Lemon, 2022). According to research by McCallum (2020) social interaction, working environments, work-life balance, planning time, students' well-being, professional learning, professional identity, collaboration with colleagues, and trust in leadership and management

are examples of what contributes positively to teachers' social, emotional, and physical well-being.

Empirical research findings by Katsarou et al. (2023) suggested that teachers across all levels experienced a significant decline in their well-being due to the unprecedented challenges brought by the COVID-19 crisis. Factors such as reduced social interaction, temporary closure of schools and educational institutions, and persistent restrictions, all contributed to decreased levels of well-being among the general working population (Gray et al., 2020). In the context of teachers, negative consequences on their well-being included concerns over work-life balance, financial strain, emotional instability, stress, professional challenges, and difficulties in adapting to remote teaching (Hascher et al., 2021). Negative self-perceptions and feelings of devaluation further impacted their well-being as the pandemic aggravated their challenges. Looking specifically at university teachers, only three studies from Poland, Northern Ireland, and Australia showed consistent findings regarding the negative consequences. Bartkowiak et al.'s (2022) research found that teaching online and distance-based were the primary factors contributing to decreased psychological well-being among Polish university teachers. Shen and Slater's (2021) study also revealed low emotional well-being among university teachers during the COVID-19 outbreak, with work-related stress being a key predictor in Northern Ireland. Creely et al.'s (2022) research highlighted the challenges of transitioning to remote learning, affecting teacher-student interactions and instructional quality among five university teachers in Australia. Additionally, Lee et al.'s (2022) study emphasized the importance of supporting teacher well-being, and advocating for interventions to enhance mental health during crises among pre-service teachers in Hong Kong.

Although the pandemic mainly had negative consequences on teachers' well-being, it led to a positive impact on digital-based learning for education globally. The transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated educational transformation (Firmansyah et al., 2021). Due to the social distancing measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic,

universities underwent a significant shift towards online learning on a large scale. This rapid transition forced teachers to figure out ways to create new learning materials that were suitable for online teaching (Dwivedi et al., 2020). This accelerated the process of digital transformation in education hence allowing educational systems to rethink their teaching methodologies, essential competencies, and assessment methods (Jensen, 2019). However, it is important to consider that promoting digital transformation in higher education institutions requires fostering a culture in which students, management, university teachers, and administrators work together to support the implementation of these changes (Carolan et al., 2020).

According to the Eurydice (2021) report on “Teachers in Europe Careers, Development and Well-being”, working environments play a significant role in teachers’ well-being. Teachers deserve supportive working environments that recognize their contribution to society and the economy as stated in the European Education Policy Network report (Risku et al., 2022). Teachers’ working environments should facilitate their duties, especially during the pandemic when they were constrained which influenced their well-being. Emphasising the necessity of prioritising the well-being of teachers across all educational levels and implementing targeted interventions to mitigate challenges, particularly in the face of unprecedented crises like the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial (García-Morales et al., 2021). According to Risku et al., 2022, a positive sense of well-being in the workplace and healthy coping mechanisms correlate with a high quality of teaching which is essential for learning.

3 COVID-19 AND THE EFFECTS ON WELL-BEING

3.1 Students and teachers' well-being

The effects of COVID-19 on student well-being have been studied, however, teachers' well-being has not been given the same attention. Prior to the pandemic, the profession of teaching was recognized as the career with the greatest levels of job-related stress hence identifying teacher stress as a serious concern (Johnson et al., 2005; Markow et al., 2013). Yet, there is still a gap in research on how to best support teachers both during and after the pandemic. With further challenges brought about by the pandemic, this only aggravated teachers' well-being which later contributed to teacher burnout and teacher shortages globally. Additionally, teachers' well-being directly impacts their students and their learning and well-being. Teachers have already observed their students struggling emotionally, socially, and academically due to the abrupt changes in instruction caused by the pandemic (Ferdig et al., 2020). One of the many contributors to teachers' well-being has also been the additional distress of not being able to offer their students relevant support because of the disruptions caused by the pandemic (Kush et al., 2022). Moreover, policy decisions made during the pandemic regarding the continuation of learning and teaching safely and effectively can be regarded as another gap in research. Understanding the scope of possible negative effects policies had on teachers' overall well-being needs to be addressed further. Lastly, all the changes experienced during the pandemic have had long-term impacts on teachers' well-being as well as retention rates (Shirley et al., 2020). Research has shown that teachers' overall well-being is most likely to improve in positive environments like supportive working conditions, the capacity for collaboration with colleagues, and being

able to students' needs, it is crucial to give this issue prime importance now more than ever.

3.2 Addressing the challenges to teacher shortages and well-being

With the ongoing growing rates of teacher attrition, it is no surprise that teacher shortages have been on the rise. According to Rosenberg and Anderson (2021) the long-term impacts of the pandemic on teachers' well-being, leaders are becoming increasingly concerned about potential teacher shortages. Although the global pandemic has contributed greatly to teacher shortages, it is beginning to affect the teaching force in various systems. According to Carlo et al. (2013), countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, and Turkey will be faced with a lack of qualified teachers due to reasons such as an ageing teaching force and lack of qualified teachers. Additionally, a lack of teachers can have worrying effects on students' performances as well as organisational stability (Henry & Redding, 2020). One reason for teacher shortages other than the well-being could be due to the focus being on how to make up for the shortage rather than looking into the root cause of what is resulting in frequent shortages. Focusing on improving teachers working environments and unrealistic expectations of workloads and instead focusing on making teachers feel heard can help improve the teacher shortage crises (Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Arguably, recognising the need to reform teaching and learning within schools can result in major improvements. From a leadership perspective, an established school leadership plays a significant role in a successful school (Leithwood et al., 2020). Furthermore, research has shown how leaders can influence teachers' careers in terms of feeling that they are supported, especially with experienced teachers. From a theoretical point of view, we must understand there is no such thing as the 'perfect' leader. Multiple leaders can have multiple leadership styles and competencies. The way school leaders

approach a situation can result in unexpected consequences where teachers do not feel supported (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Like every other career, teachers too need to feel valued, supported, and respected within their organisations and especially by their professional school leaders. With this, teachers often feel their voices are heard and they matter (Hargreaves, 2021). Examining this issue from the perspective of emotional well-being, research from Hargreaves, (2000) has shown the substantial role of emotions on teachers' professional careers. Emotions are an integral part of being human and similarly can be considered a key process when it comes to teaching and learning. Researchers such as Oplatka and Arar (2017), have conveyed changing factors such as the school culture, role of leaders and seniority can directly influence teachers' emotions. Similarly, it can be argued that the negative impacts of COVID-19 on school culture were a great contributor to teacher shortages and their emotional well-being.

3.3 Long-term effects of low levels of well-being among teachers

Burnout can be defined as a 'psychological syndrome' of continued work-related stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Burnout can also be viewed and understood from the scopes of fatigue, feeling unaccomplished, and feeling detached from the job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Understanding teacher burnout can help in understanding teacher well-being and identifying the underlying conditions. According to Hakanen et al. (2006), teacher burnout has proven to have substantial damaging impacts on teachers' mental health as well as on their well-being. Additionally, teacher burnout not only has negative impacts on the individual teacher but also on the student, and on organisational and societal levels as teachers are a key catalyst in society.

Teaching has already been identified as one of the most stressful occupations in previous studies. Research by Johnson et al. (2005) has highlighted teaching at

the top of the list of 26 occupations in the United Kingdom. According to the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), teachers in Finland have reported stress and burnout 14% more regularly than other occupations (OECD, 2020). In comparison to other professions, the levels of burnout among teachers have been the highest frequently among white-collar jobs and human services (Hakanen et al., 2006). Furthermore, increased workload and teachers' role ambiguity were variables identified by Brunsting et al. (2014) from 23 reviewed studies from 1979 to 2013. Research mentioned above shows teacher burnout can lead to teachers suffering from mental health issues and emotional exhaustion. Amplified levels of stress and teachers who have experienced burnout make it evident that they are related to psychological and health issues.

The negative correlation between teachers' burnout and well-being is supported by empirical evidence. Research carried out by Lavanchy et al. (2004) revealed burnout being linked to life satisfaction negatively. In order to understand and help improve teachers' well-being, we need a deeper level of understanding among school leaders and at the organisational structure so that we can help find ways to reduce teachers experiencing burnout by prioritising positive outcomes on the health and well-being of pedagogical staff. Maslach's (1976) and Freudenberger's (1974) revolutionary work has paved the way for teachers' burnout and well-being to become a widespread topic globally. Burnout has been investigated in approximately 4,500 studies according to the Social Science Citation Index and has established the links between work-related stress and lower levels of well-being (Milfont et al., 2008).

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Teaching has been identified as one of the most stressful occupations in previous studies. Research by Johnson et al., (2005) has highlighted teaching among the top of the list of 26 occupations in the United Kingdom for this. Similarly, teachers in Finland have reported stress and burnout 12% more regularly than other occupations (Kauppinen et al., 2010). In comparison to other professions, the levels of burnout among teachers have been the highest frequently among white collar jobs and human services (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Furthermore, increased workload and teachers' role ambiguity were variables identified by Brunsting et al. (2014) from 23 reviewed studies from 1979 to 2013.

Research mentioned above shows teacher burnout can lead to teachers suffering from mental health issues and emotional exhaustion. Amplified levels of stress and teachers who have experienced burnout make it evident that they are related to psychological and health issues. The negative correlation between teachers' burnout and well-being is supported by empirical evidence. Research carried out by Lavanchy et al., (2004) revealed burnout being linked to life satisfaction negatively. In order to understand and help improve teachers' well-being, we need a deeper level of understanding among school leaders and at the organisational structure so that we can help find ways to reduce teachers experiencing burnout by prioritising positive outcomes on the health and well-being of pedagogical staff. Maslach's (1976) and Freudenberger's (1974) revolutionary work has paved way for teachers' burnout and well-being to become a widespread topic globally. Burnout has been investigated in approximately 4,500 studies according to the Social Science Citation Index and has established the links between work related stress and lower levels of well-being (Milfont et al., 2008).

3.4 Teacher attrition factors globally

Due to the stress of the pandemic, nearly half of American public school teachers who have left teaching since March 2020 had COVID-19 as their primary cause, according to survey data (Diliberti et al., 2021). Stress, low salaries, and difficult working conditions were also mentioned as reasons for leaving (Thomas et al., 2021). These recent increases in teacher attrition worldwide have landed a seat on the table of policymakers globally (Van den Borre et al., 2021). According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2012), teacher attrition rates especially in secondary education are expected to rise rapidly. There are several factors which have contributed to these growing rates. Firstly, teacher attrition rates have shown to be higher among newly qualified teachers which is also known as Early-Career Teacher (ECT) attrition.

Secondly, disruptive student behaviour and salary were the second highest reason among new teachers to leave the profession (Wynn et al., 2007). Widespread research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016), has also suggested teacher characteristics as one of the contributors to teacher attrition rates. Furthermore, factors such as school leadership styles, school culture, organisational structures, salary, working conditions, school identification and schools' mentoring programs (Ellis et al., 2017). From an organisational perspective, leaders and policymakers can focus on personnel decisions to help bridge the gap between teacher attrition and teacher shortages. Making culturally responsive decisions and determining what works best for teachers can minimise teacher attrition rates. From a theoretical perspective, organisational management can heavily influence school accountability and performance which is directly correlated with teacher satisfaction (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Moreover, organisational management significantly contributes to teacher attrition as organisational cultures and climates are affected (Hughes, 2012). Just as in any other profession, it is important to show there is support available especially for teachers entering

the profession (Van den Borre et al., 2021). The facets of the teaching profession can be considered overwhelming as teaching is a multifaceted profession.

3.5 Post-pandemic challenges among university teachers' well-being

Although teachers' well-being is crucial at all stages, in my thesis, I will focus on university teachers' well-being as this is an area of limited research. Research within work well-being is becoming highly relevant, and university teachers' well-being after the pandemic is an area that is incredibly under-investigated that requires the need for further research. Previous research has favourably prioritised well-being through the perspectives of the corporate world thus leaving the field of education and especially university teachers' well-being understudied (Li, 2018). The significant role university teachers play in education through imparting knowledge to their students can directly be influenced by factors such as job burnout, access to resources, organisational culture, departmental leadership, and role conflict which additionally influences well-being at a significant level (Capone & Petrillo, 2016). Moreover, satisfaction of teachers' needs has been considered a direct promoter of their well-being by enabling their competency and autonomy (Reis et al., 2000). University teachers are considered higher intellectuals and aspiring individuals who are frequently involved in research projects, conferences, and educating students as autonomous beings (Li, 2018). University teachers' well-being becomes a collective and vital theme in terms of human resource management. Similarly, the pandemic challenged university teachers' well-being by posing new challenges towards the nature of teaching as a profession. Lack of resources, increased emotional and physical stress due to the constant changes and increased levels of workload resulted in outcomes such as job burnout, changes in job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and agency as aforementioned. However, it is crucial to note that although the pandemic exasperated teachers' overall well-

being, it also brought attention to the lack of understanding with regard to teachers' well-being.

Throughout the global COVID-19 pandemic, teachers struggled to keep up with the continuous changes brought upon them. Changes in the general nature of teaching unfolded its own challenges when teachers were expected to teach remotely or in hybrid forms. Additionally, sustaining student engagement, establishing emotional connections with students, particularly the most vulnerable ones, and maintaining relationships are a few examples of challenges brought by remote teaching (Li, 2018). The constant changes in the working environment increased the risks of job dissatisfaction. Furthermore, previous studies exploring the relationship between changing work environments and job satisfaction conveyed those changes among university teachers' working environments increased job stress and job dissatisfaction (Shin & Jung, 2014). Following the pandemic, online and hybrid teaching soon became part of the teaching methods required by educational intuitions. Another study examining university teachers' preferences among online and face-to-face teaching revealed that university teachers strongly preferred face-to-face teaching which resulted in significantly positive ways towards their well-being after the pandemic (Saha et al., 2022). Aside from the fundamental differences between online and face-to-face teaching, there are numerous constraints among online teaching and learning environments. For example, establishing new study materials, additional logistics, active learning, opportunities for interaction and support are a few ways that limit teaching approaches (Meskhi et al., 2019). As the pandemic prolonged, these changes soon became a part of the everyday teaching requirements despite the large amounts of research regarding how changes in the teaching environment affect teachers and students.

4 RESEARCH TASK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A qualitative approach was chosen for this research to understand the experiences of university teachers' well-being during the post-pandemic period. This approach made it possible to study the nature of the relationship between the post-pandemic and its effect on university teachers' well-being whilst taking into account their in-depth experiences regarding teaching efforts (Fossy et al., 2002). Furthermore, a qualitative approach allowed me to explore questions that focused on comprehending the significance and experiential aspects of university teachers and their interactions within social contexts.

This study explored the research problem of understanding university teachers' experiences with their well-being specifically during the post-pandemic period. The COVID-19 crisis challenged issues teachers faced in their profession and their coping mechanisms. Since research on university teachers' well-being during the post-pandemic phase is highly limited, the aim of my research was to understand how the changes brought about by a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to university teachers' well-being in the workplace after the pandemic. The main research questions of this study were:

1. What are university teachers' experiences of how their well-being in the workplace has been affected during the post-pandemic phase?
2. What issues do university teachers identify as limiting their well-being during the post-pandemic phase?
3. What strategies or coping mechanisms have university teachers utilised to manage their well-being in the post-pandemic workplace?

4.2 Research Context

The research took place at an undisclosed Finnish university to safeguard participant anonymity. The university consisted of academics in research, teaching, and professional roles at the time of this study. The university had a student body exceeding 8,000 across bachelor's, master's, and PhD programs and over 500 staff members employed during the time of this study.

I conducted this research based on an idealist outlook that examines the concept of being through reflecting on the structure of realities (Crotty, 1998). It is essential to consider that ontology can be interpreted through various definitions. According to Richards (2003), idealist ontology can be understood in terms of the assumptions regarding the nature of reality which coincides with Ormston et al. 's (2014) classification of ontology as what we know about the world. In other words, the world from an ontological view is understood through meaning-making and interpretations as individuals. Arguably, there have been multiple statements regarding the interpretation of our social world as being subjective against social world being physical that is governed by universal laws (Al-Saadi, 2014). Nevertheless, contemporary qualitative researchers believe that having agency provides humans with choices and what they do with those choices hence denying that universal or unspoken laws in the social world exist (Ormston et al., 2014). Ontology delves into the beliefs we hold concerning reality and the social world (Al-Saadi, 2014).

According to the idealist interpretation above and this research, I was looking for multiple truths regarding the experiences that university teachers had to go through during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these experiences influenced their overall well-being during the post-pandemic time. By conducting semi-structured interviews, participants took part in meaning-making through discussing their personal experiences and sharing valuable insights. In addition, the semi-structured approach allowed the interviewee to make better use of dialogues through leeway for significant angles towards the topics at hand. As for the interviewer, this structure provided visibility in terms

of knowledge-producing potential and guided the conversation based on the research (Brinkmann, 2014). My conceptualizations of epistemology and ontology affected the implementation of my research in several ways. Firstly, based on the literature review of my thesis, I was able to understand that the majority of the teachers' well-being was influenced in negative ways due to workload, multitasking, limited social interactions, and time management associated with the pandemic. With this understanding, I have been able to explore whether the post-pandemic period reflects similar aspects and if so, what are the reasons for it. In order to find the multiple truths, I conducted semi-structured interviews as it was the most appropriate method to find out how university teachers who were a part of the pandemic and are still teaching have been carrying on with those expectations and outcomes that were reflected during the pandemic.

4.3 Research Participants

Ten university teachers were interviewed, of whom five were male and five females. Participants were given pseudonyms based on a numeric scale of 1-10 (P1= Participant 1). Five participants were known to the researcher and the remaining five had no connections. Table 1 shows the general information about the participants in this study. Participants in this study held the job title "university teacher/lecturer" and were from various departments at the university. Participants held roles such as coordinators, pedagogical leaders, language and communication teachers, adult and early childhood education teachers and teachers at the teacher training institute.

Table 1 *Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants*

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	5	50
Female	5	50
Age		
30-40	3	30
41-50	5	50
51-60	2	20
Years of teaching experience		
1-10	3	30
11-20	6	60
21-30	1	10

Note: *n*=number of participants (*n*=10)

To understand how university teachers' well-being after the pandemic was affected, ten university teachers across different departments at a Finnish university were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews. Snowball sampling was utilized to identify participants who had taken part in forms of teaching whether online or in person during the COVID-19 (2019-2021) pandemic. Participants' gender, age and years of teaching experience were collected for data analysis purposes and were considered during the analysis process. This research employed snowball sampling that began by identifying participants who matched the study criteria for instance those who had been teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and had been in the teaching profession for a minimum of one year, and experienced distance teaching of some form. Snowball sampling was the best-suited mode of sampling for this approach since it was used to access difficult or hidden groups of participants. In addition, this type of sampling focuses on a set of criteria based on the researcher's study (Tracy, 2012). Selected participants were invited to contribute to the research via email which contained the relevance and purpose of the research, notification of

research and the consent to participate. Participants were provided with the choice to have the interviews at their convenience, in-person or online. Eight interviews took place in-person and two were conducted via Zoom.

4.4 Data Collection

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews using a pedagogical approach where the selected participants were asked to share their experiences with teaching during the post-pandemic period. In addition, how it affected their well-being hence gaining the participants' perspective regarding this specific topic through open-ended questions prepared by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews are known to gather plentiful information without being explicit as these types of interviews take on an interactional exchange of dialogue (Edwards & Holland, 2013). By conducting semi-structured interviews, participants took part in meaning-making through discussing their personal experiences. In addition, this structured approach allowed the interviewee to make better use of dialogues through leeway for significant angles towards the topic at hand. As for the interviewer, this structure provides visibility in terms of knowledge-producing potential and guiding the conversation based on the research (Brinkmann, 2014).

Participants were contacted via email for semi-structured interviews which took place in person and online via Zoom. In-person interviews were audio recorded and online interviews were video recorded. Both oral and written consent were acquired from the participants.

Prior to the data analysis process, participants were given pseudonyms at random based on a numeric scale of 1-10. A pilot interview was conducted prior to data collection to ensure the quality of the research questions and to identify any weaknesses in the interview guide. Pilot interviews are an essential part of the research process as they can assist researchers in addressing potential pitfalls

and help increase the quality of the research results (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Interview questions were developed based on guidance and suggestions from Tracy (2012). The interview questions contained four segments: general questions, university teachers' experiences, issues limiting and supporting well-being, and finally coping mechanisms utilised during or after the pandemic (see Appendix B). Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. In total ten interviews were conducted that produced approximately 480 minutes of data. The data collection process began on 20th October 2023 and was concluded by 12th December 2023.

4.5 Data Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke, (2006), thematic analysis consists of six phases that are a part of a recursive process which aims to identify, analyse, and report qualitative data. Thematic analysis seeks to describe patterns or recurring themes which are based on the theoretical framework that assists the researcher in generating a credible and valuable theory of the phenomena being investigated (McLeod, 2001). Data Analysis was conducted by a single researcher. Responses were analysed using thematic analysis taking on an inductive approach.

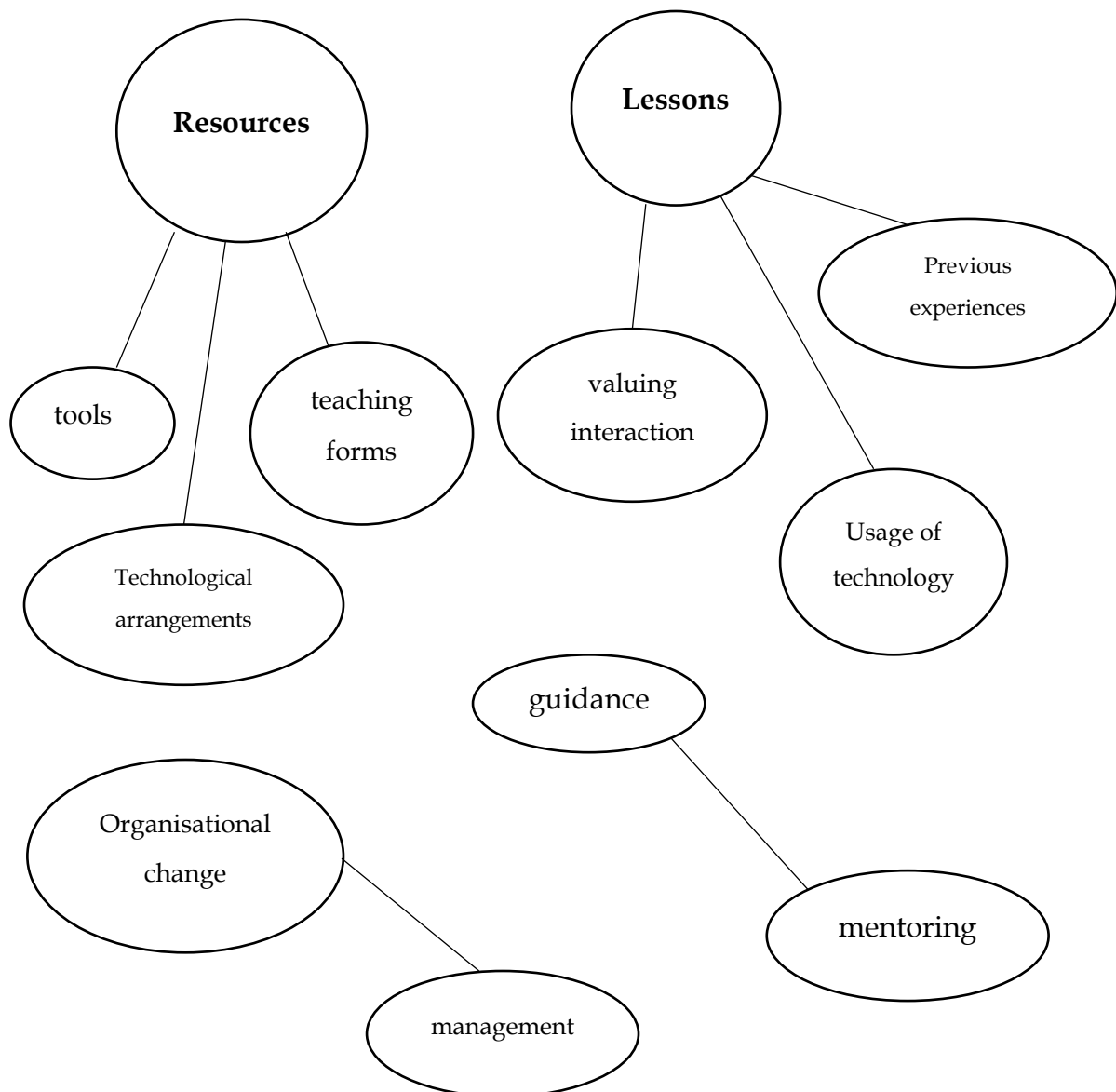
Familiarising with the data. First, the interviews were transcribed word-for-word from the audio recordings using Whisper large v2 model to create plain-text draft transcripts. Draft transcripts were manually checked and modified by the researcher and then imported into MAXQDA24 for a final proofread to ensure accuracy. Thematic analysis was conducted based on the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher went through each transcript individually with the research questions at hand to familiarise herself with the depth and breadth of data. Throughout this process, familiarity with the data was established further and can be recognized as an interpretive approach (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

Generating initial codes. During this step, I also began to identify semantic codes and themes. The initial phase of coding involved reading each transcript carefully to form a brief description or word of what was being said in the text. This step of coding involved codes such as “working space” “togetherness” “multitasking”, “balancing tasks”, “tasks” “stressful”, “exercise” and “resources”. This step was repeated for each transcript and gradually code patterns began to emerge from the data. Altogether I formed 760 initial codes which were later combined to form themes. This process in the analysis can also be understood as coding since the data is reorganized and grouped into common themes and groups (Tuckett, 2005). However, it is necessary to take note that coding data and themes are different. Coding can be either, data-driven where themes are dependent upon the type of data or theory-driven. In theory-driven coding, the researcher approaches the data from an inquisitive perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I approached my data with inductive reasoning and looked beyond my own beliefs, values, and judgements regarding teachers’ well-being. I made sure that the data was coded in a way which best represented the meaning communicated by my participants and free from any preconceived theories and conceptual framework. (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Combining codes to themes. Once all my codes had been created, I went through a second round of coding which involved refining and combining the codes that were overlapping or expressed similar responses and expressions. For example, codes such as “teaching” “tools” and “technological arrangements” were combined with “resources” to form refined codes. Figure 2 shows an example of how I refined my sub-codes to codes prior to forming themes.

Figure 2

Example of combining sub-codes to codes for issues identified as limiting or supporting well-being among university teachers



Reviewing themes. After the sub-codes and codes were combined and confirmed, I began to form themes based on the codes that represented similarities or differences. I investigated the themes that could be separated or linked to ensure they reflected an accurate picture of the data. This process was

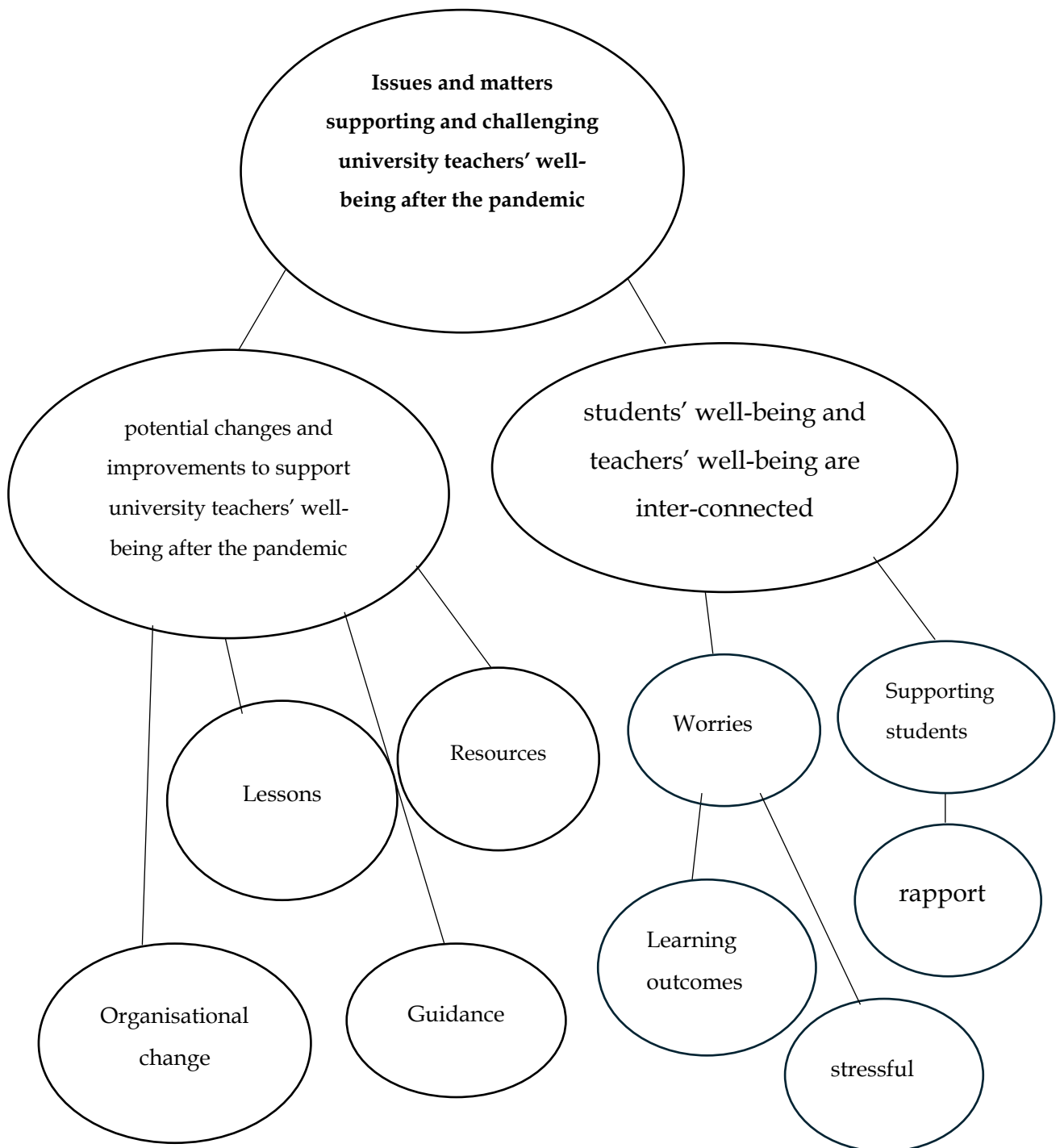
repeated with the entire data set to ensure the validity of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, I combined the codes “resources” “guidance” “Organisational change” and “lessons” to form the theme “potential changes that limited well-being after the pandemic” as I observed that the data extracts represented the possible changes teachers suggested that would support their well-being after the pandemic. This theme was later redefined as “potential changes and improvements to support university teachers’ well-being after the pandemic”.

Defining and naming themes. During this phase, I reviewed the themes again to ensure each theme answered the appropriate research question and represented an accurate picture of the data extracts. For example, themes such as “potential changes and improvements to support university teachers’ well-being after the pandemic” and “students’ well-being and teachers’ well-being are interconnected” fit under the broader theme of “issues and matters supporting and challenging university teachers’ well-being after the pandemic” (Figure 3). This process was repeated with the entire data set where all the codes were linked to form themes.

Write up. After all the themes were formed and named, I thoroughly analysed each theme to consider how it was linked with the broader story of my data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I collated all my data with the relevant themes and research questions to provide a cohesive structure that was used in Chapter 5 on research results. With this, I reported my results and contextualised them with the relevant literature in Chapter 6 on the discussion.

Figure 3

Thematic Map for Issues and matters supporting and challenging university teachers' well-being after the pandemic



4.6 Ethical Solutions

According to Byrne (2016), ethical and safety planning are crucial in terms of executing research. For example, issues such as confidentiality and identification of potential harm should be taken into account when conducting research. For my research, I carefully reviewed the potential harm that could have been caused prior to data collection. I removed any questions from the interview guide which may have been harmful or uncomfortable to my participants' health and well-being.

I had to think about the most ethical way to find participants with no involvement of third parties. The first two participants were selected based on the recommendation from my supervisors. Although this method of sampling is common in qualitative research, it has several limitations. This method limited my research approach because it was solely based on my resources and networks. As the majority of the teachers in my networks were within the field of education, this limited the ability to access teachers from other departments such as those belonging to Health Sciences, Mathematics, and Information Technology.

Another ethical consideration would be to ensure that I had no connections with the participants to avoid risks of potential research bias. According to Byrne (2016), researcher bias is an ethical issue in research that may happen intentionally or unintentionally. The majority of the participants in my research were teachers that I had known through my courses, and this may have increased the risk of potential researcher bias.

A larger data set could have been utilised to gain a wider view of university teachers' well-being after the pandemic. Due to the time constraints, I had to limit the number of participants which may have affected the potential conclusion and may not represent the views of all university teachers at this university.

I also took into consideration the consent and privacy of my participants. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form to ensure that they were participating with their own free will. In order to protect the privacy of my

participants, I ensured that the audio recorded interviews were stored safely in a way in which they could only be identified by the researcher. I replaced the names of all my participants' pseudonyms based on a numeric scale of 1-10 to protect participants' anonymity and to avoid potential researcher bias. I made sure to look past my own beliefs, values, and ideas and reflected on the conclusions I made during the entire analysis process to ensure I was faithful during my data analysis and reporting process.

The audio recordings were kept in a password protected folder stored in my personal network on my computer to avoid breaching of data. As stated in the notification and privacy of research data, all obtained data is planned to be destroyed by August 2024. Prior to conducting the interviews, participants received the notification of research, privacy notice and consent forms via email. Participants' informed consent was obtained and confirmed on the day of the interviews via the privacy notice and consent forms. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any moment during the interviews. Oral consent and permission to record were acquired explicitly at the beginning of the audio recordings.

5 RESULTS

In this section, I discuss the results from the data analysis and explain the perceptions of university teachers regarding their well-being after the pandemic. The results are presented in the order of my research questions and tables are provided to help illustrate the themes found in each category.

5.1 Increased expectations after the pandemic

The first research question was aimed at understanding what university teachers' experiences were during and after the pandemic and how these experiences affected their well-being at work after the pandemic. The responses from the university teachers covered numerous aspects. Table 1 shows an example of the themes that emerged from increased expectations after the pandemic. Many university teachers reported the feeling of higher expectations coming from colleagues and students alike. Correspondingly, university teachers expressed receiving increased pressure from the administration of the university also affected their well-being in a negative light. These views were echoed by other university teachers as well who highlighted that these expectations also stemmed from the management and control mechanisms that started to affect their daily work and the ways in which they viewed their purpose at work.

Table 1

Thematisation of increased expectations after the pandemic

Theme	Verbal description
Interaction provided a sense of belongingness and sense of community	Interacting and getting back with colleagues and students positively affected well-being
Juggling with the changing working environments after the pandemic	Changes in working spaces increased workload, expectations and stress yet gave flexibility in working life

Several university teachers also stated that they were expected to be available constantly and take part in meetings regardless of their circumstances due to the changes in the working environments, such as remote work. A few university teachers indicated the hybrid approach as an opportunity for new ways of working. One university teacher stressed how the misuse of 'flexibility' caused a lot of distress to their well-being after the pandemic.

There was a lot of pressure from like administration from the university in particular... there's a pressure coming from the students also... it's my well-being after the pandemic so I definitely think that pressure to be more of what the word that people used to use and still do to this day is flexibility and for me like excuse my language but that is a bullshit kind of way of making something sound positive like pedagogically that's actually like when we want you to teach remotely or in a hybrid way. (P3)

Subsequently, another university teacher commented that it made no difference to their well-being after the pandemic and their experiences were business as usual. This was due to the university teacher's previous experience with the approaches which became more common after the pandemic such as remote and hybrid teaching.

I would honestly say that the pandemic and things after it didn't impact me much. And just to clarify that a little bit, when the pandemic hit, all my teaching, for example, was already before the pandemic planned as distance learning or hybrid learning things. So, when the pandemic hit, it didn't impact my day-to-day work. (P9)

However, the same teacher shed light on the importance of handling matters in a more structured and resourceful way as an organisation if something like this were to occur again in the future.

I think that for overall well-being, university and organizations should, for example, think a little bit more how this sort of a yearly cycle of epidemic instances occur. So we

should have more support and backup systems, for example, the second period of the academic year. (P9)

Overall, the majority of university teachers agreed that these increased expectations such as the university, working community, and students combined had adverse influences on their well-being at work after the pandemic.

5.1.1 Interaction provided a sense of belongingness and a sense of community

The overwhelming majority of university teachers reported that interaction amongst colleagues and students after the pandemic contributed in progressive ways towards their well-being. Nine out of ten university teachers commented that returning to the university campus and being able to communicate and interact with people in real-time and face-to-face brought about a feeling of belongingness resulting in positive experiences towards their well-being.

The biggest thing was just getting on campus then and like meeting my colleagues face-to-face and meeting my students face-to-face that was definitely the biggest thing that positively affected my well-being after the pandemic. (P2)

Furthermore, the same teacher emphasized that this interaction also provided a sense of community within their professional life which was also conveyed by many university teachers throughout the results. It was evident that most of the university teachers valued interaction to a greater extent when they finally returned to the university campus after the pandemic. This interaction further provided university teachers the opportunity to connect with their colleagues over their lunch breaks whereas before the pandemic interaction was not viewed in the same light. Interaction with their colleagues and students in person also provided the feeling of being part of a community. This fostered a feeling of belongingness within their respective departments. Several teachers also

highlighted the need for more support for interaction, especially for new staff who joined when the pandemic had just started.

They [referring to new staff] weren't coming into campus, they were staying at home and not meeting anybody and, I realized how much like social interaction in like say we're sitting in an office building...[provides example]... but when you're at home by yourself you miss all that...I was thinking about myself in hindsight, If I was a young teacher or a new teacher and I was coming into the staff new they're going to miss out on so much information because they can't turn around in their office chair and say hey what like what should I do with the student or a million other things so that lack of social contact was a huge thing for me also a very big thing for me. (P3)

New staff who joined during the pandemic when teaching and learning were predominately distance-based did not have the opportunity to get to know and interact with their colleagues and students in the usual ways. Moreover, another teacher voiced worries regarding the lack of social interaction among their new team members. Consequently, several university teachers commented that the lack of social interaction was demotivating and affected their well-being. For example, P3 reported:

So that was a big thing for me that loss of social contact that kind of motivation all of that I, I feel did like affect my well-being in ways that I maybe was more aware of in hindsight than I was at the time. (P3)

In addition, P4 commented about learning to appreciate daily interactions to a greater extent after the pandemic. Furthermore, several other teachers indicated that face-to-face interaction also helped them connect better with their students. Some teachers pointed out that this type of interaction also let them know if their students were engaging and participating in learning during the classes.

The significance of interaction was a recurring theme among the majority of the university teachers. Several teachers highlighted that during the pandemic it was challenging to follow up on whether teaching and learning were happening due

to the students' cameras being constantly off hence giving the impression that they were talking to themselves. Being able to teach face-to-face after the pandemic was "so much more clear" as P2 stated. P6 commented: "Just those black screens you can see and kind of you have a feeling that you are just talking alone and then thinking about that am I lunatic kind of? Is anyone listening?".

When asked about their experiences with teaching and learning after the pandemic and how it impacted their well-being, six university teachers reported that accidental interaction also provided a sense of belonging within their working environments. The value of building the working community and changes in working environments after the pandemic contributed positively towards their well-being. For example, P1 reported: "That kind of interaction with people that just happens accidentally so that you kind of need to see people that you work with and feel the working environment like feel that you're part of a working environment".

Many teachers commented that being able to see their colleagues again and being able to chat over their lunch breaks also positively contributed to their well-being as it provided a feeling of togetherness that was taken away during the pandemic.

I've learned these even more and kind of appreciating even more the chances when we are together face to face, of course that's kind of part of my expertise to know what interaction means and what benefits does it have, but still, I've kind of even more realised how important it is to see one another and to have this casual conversation, for example on lunch or because the lunch times and the, those snacks between all the meals, they weren't that good when we were pandemic, when we had the pandemic. (P4)

Furthermore, almost all ten university teachers stated that interactions with their colleagues and students after the pandemic had positive influences on their well-being, for example as P6 reported: "Definitely it was a positive influence".

5.1.2 Juggling with the changing working environments after the pandemic

Many teachers also expressed that the possibility to continue working remotely after the pandemic gave them the possibility to schedule their workdays flexibly. University teachers echoed that the changes in the working environment were stressful at some point due to the increased demands and challenges in terms of developing their teacher identity. Furthermore, remote learning and teaching were also portrayed as a good feeling “both physically and mentally” as P4 indicated. Whilst P5 echoed the challenging aspect in differentiating working environments was the limited interaction amongst colleagues based on their experience. One teacher also commented on being able to differentiate which activities for work were better suited for remote work and others at the office. The same teacher also pointed out the importance of working environments based on people’s preferences.

It became more common in general to work remotely and then having some meetings remotely and so on so it was more common that there was the option to maybe join some meetings online and so on so it gave flexibility to working life (P1)

P3 expressed the challenges faced by the changing modes of teaching. Similarly, another teacher voiced how constantly changing environments also affected interaction among students and colleagues.

I quite strongly didn't like kind of hybrid learning...I would have found quite stressful at that point post-pandemic would have been like the demand from students say for remote learning was very high. (P3)

It's very like complicated to differentiate and having I think going back to the spaces... after that [referring to post-pandemic] we have been building up the face-to-face connections again. (P10)

Eight of ten university teachers mentioned how the changes in the working environment affected their workload. Nonetheless, all ten university teachers voiced experiencing increased workload to some extent after the pandemic. The increased workload ranged from the logistics of working environments such as the technological arrangements of classes to finding time for lunch breaks and learning to differentiate between working hours and their free time. Furthermore, teachers also reported that insufficient working space in some buildings was challenging at most times. P10 reported the challenges in differentiating between their hours of working and hours off work. P9 expressed practicing boundaries and learning when to say no and “having the strength or being brave enough to say no for interest, even for the interesting things to sort of balance the workload”.

Well it also has something to do with the environments that I was talking about for instance this space ...when we're working at home it's, it's difficult to kind of stop working earlier but what I have done nowadays or and I have continued to do that nowadays also is that I mean I'm staring at the computer the whole day. (P5)

P7 and P5 shared their struggles in finding the balance between work and the changing working environments. Similarly, P5 also conveyed that constantly changing working environments were demanding as work and home merged into one at some point during and after the pandemic. Equally, P3 commented on becoming active towards prioritising working hours and non-working hours “I did put effort into like I will never work on a weekend. I started getting really fundamental like once four o'clock came, I'm out of here”

P1 and P2 expressed the severity of increased workload and its negative influence towards their well-being as well as the need for a better work-life balance. As P1 stated: “I would like to have a better work-life balance I would like to not work as many hours as I do. Um I think that would be better for like my physical and mental well-being”.

Overall, all ten university teachers expressed the need for a better work-life balance in one form or another. The data suggests that university teachers' experiences with their well-being during the post-pandemic phase varied due to several factors such as motivation with teaching and learning, motivation with regards to interaction, their sense of belonging in their workplaces, forming better connections with their students and colleagues, feeling like they are part of a community and changes within the working environment and work-life balance.

5.2 Issues and matters supporting and challenging university teachers' well-being after the pandemic

The second question was aimed at understanding the issues that university teachers identified as being constraining or limiting towards their well-being after the pandemic. To find answers to these questions, university teachers were asked to identify issues that limited or constrained their well-being and to pinpoint the most supporting or challenging issues towards their well-being in the workplace after the pandemic. Responses to these questions were overlapping and thus combined to form supporting and challenging issues where challenging issues included those issues that teachers had identified as limiting their well-being. Table 2 shows an example of the themes that emerged from: Issues and matters supporting and challenging university teachers' well-being after the pandemic. The four themes are discussed below.

Table 2

Thematisation of Issues and matters supporting and challenging university teachers' well-being after the pandemic

Theme	Verbal description
Supporting issues: atmosphere and awareness of job responsibilities	Following working hours, role ambiguity, financial issues, and collegial support
Challenges among well-being resources	Pedagogical challenges, technological challenges, new modes of teaching (hybrid)
Potential changes and improvements to support	Improvements relating to teaching, organisational culture, resources, technological equipment, and decisions at the organisational level.
Students' well-being and teachers' well-being are inter-connected	Finding ways to support their students through safe environments, engaging lessons, and empowering them.

5.2.1 Supporting issues: atmosphere and awareness of job responsibilities

In terms of issues that supported university teachers' well-being in the workplace, the most common theme was atmosphere, which was expressed by seven university teachers. However, atmosphere was noted in both positive and negative ways. Many teachers emphasized the atmosphere in the workplace in terms of interaction and the atmosphere around the topic of collegial well-being as supporting issues towards their well-being. For example, P1 reported: "So I think that people realized the value of the office in terms of it being a place where you interacted with other people even if you weren't trying to interact with them".

Similarly, P2 commented on the awareness about oneself as a teacher in the classroom after the pandemic in a positive light. Whilst P3 commented on

becoming more aware of the comments and discussions among their colleagues and the impacts they may have on other people.

So on the well-being side like even if that wasn't directed at me um it makes me feel really conscious about what I say um in front of my colleagues which was never something I worried about before I'm usually pretty quick to give my opinion about stuff but you know you don't want to hurt people's feelings (P3)

Three other teachers indicated how the teamwork atmosphere within their organization contributed as a positive issue towards their well-being at work as it was “a really big thing” that “the co-workers are the most supporting” as P8 expressed.

P5, P2 and P3 expressed the importance of building rapport with their students as supporting and positive issues towards their well-being at work. Both emphasized the need to build collaborative relationships and see them as “kind of like colleagues like they're adults” as P3 stated. P2 conveyed the significance of interaction and providing the students with a sense of belongingness in classes as another way to build rapport with students.

They [students] can talk to me maybe with something and also after the class and that kind of like brings to me such or some sort of like sense of, sense of belonging in a way and I think that students feel that, feel that too and that brings like more positive energy which then positively affects the well-being for both for me and my students hopefully as well so that definitely (P2)

Moreover, awareness regarding well-being in the workplace was the next most supportive and positive issue mentioned by five university teachers. Several teachers commented that they felt more conscious of their own well-being and their colleagues' well-being. P1 reported that increased awareness within the organisational level to ease access to occupational health care after the pandemic was also a supportive and positive issue.

After the pandemic they [referring to the organisation] made some of the occupational health care services...[trails off]... became easier in some ways to just umm to like talk to like a nurse or a psychologist or a counsellor and or like to just access things with health care (P1)

Whilst P9 discussed awareness in terms of “taking care of my working hours”. P6 reported having the awareness to view the different teaching methods as opportunities to develop their teaching repertoire: “It was positive for my teaching that I had to develop something different”.

P4 and P3 both emphasised their awareness to understand their working hours and think carefully about “where to put my energy, and when it's more convenient to ask others”. Similarly, P9 also commented on the awareness to increase collaboration practices during meetings and among colleagues: “I could say that some increase, some increase in some meeting and collaboration practices has helped”.

The next most common supporting issue among university teachers was personality and how that contributed to their outlook towards issues faced after the pandemic at their workplace. For example, when asked about what specific issues limited their well-being at work, P4 commented feeling rather positive about the situation as opportunities were greater than before the pandemic in their view: “I actually quite feel the opposite. I think that we have more opportunities now...I think that's something to do with my personality and my temperament, I sometimes need the changes to feel alive”.

Additionally, P6 expressed that their positive attitude influences their well-being towards work which then impacts the ability to view challenges as opportunities: “I've been quite overloaded with work lately still I try to think positively so maybe that is the thing that also influences to my well-being so I'm quite positive thinker”.

Furthermore, both P8 and P5 also reported their positive thinking as supportive issues that aided their challenges with well-being at work after the pandemic. The other most common supportive issues covered aspects related to teamwork, a sense of community, decision-making, empathy, exercise, family support, hybrid participation, mentoring, quiet working spaces, trust, and work distribution. One teacher expressed how their age, family support and status aided their well-being.

My well-being wasn't really badly affected because of my age and my status and my, that the kids are grown already...I wasn't feeling alone and so everything was quite easy for me, so I think it could be really, really different when if I were 20 years younger (P4)

5.2.2 Challenges among well-being resources

Atmosphere was expressed as challenging and negative in terms of the ambiguity among teaching methods, decision making and increased workload. Responses to questions regarding what issues teachers identify as constraining or limiting and the most challenging or the most supporting, covered increasing workload, limited working environments, breaks, hybrid teaching, meeting equipment, time, and atmosphere.

As earlier pointed out atmosphere was seen as both a challenging and a supportive issue by several teachers. In terms of how it was challenging, one teacher expressed how self-appointed experts in IT had adverse impacts on pedagogical methods henceforth leading to frustration and resulting in limiting their well-being. As P3 reported: " I find that frustrating I don't, I don't like people claiming to have expertise that they maybe from my perspective they do not have and then telling me how I should teach or deliver my teaching".

Furthermore, the same teacher expressed that they felt even more stressed than before due to the atmosphere around budget cuts from their employer and its impacts on pedagogy. As P3 reported: “The other thing would be the worry about, the worry I have about the how it affects the pedagogy and, and the temptation by our employer to cut costs”.

Another challenging aspect of atmosphere was the ambiguity regarding arranging lessons online or on campus. For instance, P4 reported the uncertainty about whether to have classes fully online, in-person or with a hybrid approach.

So then when we kind of had to struggle with the questions, so would we still, would it still be better online? And how do we convince the students that there are certain benefits to be on campus? (P4)

Equally, P2 expressed that the increased workload “sometimes it gets, gets pretty, pretty rough” and was seen as a negative issue towards their well-being. Increased workload was highlighted by many teachers and one teacher raised the issue of how constantly changing demands led to additional work. For example, recording their lectures online and being required to review and upload them to the relevant channels. Many teachers stressed that the technical aspects of the different modes of teaching were stressful and shouldn’t be a part of their responsibility as teachers. These teaching demands resulted in them having to multitask which then negatively contributed towards their overall well-being.

Additionally, P6 and P1 commented on accountability in terms of time spent on teaching strategies. P6 stated that their previous teaching during the pandemic was not accounted for in their contact teaching and resulted in ineffective ways to use their planning time therefore leading to negative impacts on their well-being.

I think that it's somehow wasted because it's not counted anymore so it doesn't make sense for me to continue such kind of course designing because it's not counted on my contact teaching... I've been also rather critical I don't understand why, why such kind of change was, was done although at first hand we were encouraged. (P6)

Lastly, P1 reported an awareness of having control over things that affect their well-being as teachers even when it isn't obvious.

I think some things are within my control for changing my well-being but only maybe to a certain extent but I don't think things are completely like beyond my control I think people always have some sort of control even in situations where they don't have much let's say... (P10)

Then, the next most challenging and negative issue based on the responses was the aspect of hybrid teaching. Many teachers expressed their struggle towards hybrid teaching especially due to pressure from the administrative side and the increased expectations as a teacher to provide both options to the students even though it increased the workload for the teacher and had negative impacts on their well-being.

I might have to reassess what I do for the rest of my career because I don't think I'm gonna sit on an office speaking into a camera every day you know so so those would be a few issues. (P3)

Furthermore, another teacher also criticized the hybrid approach as "They [hybrid meetings] are not working so well" and "it's more natural to have, have this hybrid form meetings than it was before in more broader scale in the university, but again, this is difficult" as P9 reported.

Similarly, P1 expressed that even though prior to the pandemic, there were occasional online cases, it was never hybrid and it made it difficult to make the "right decision" thus placing teachers in an awkward circumstance. P7

emphasized their struggle with the hybrid approach due to the planning time required and the technical issues that come along with this form of teaching.

Um because before the pandemic it wasn't or it would sometimes be online but it wouldn't be hybrid so it would be online only or in person only but not hybrid... it was quite stressful to navigate these situations all the time and then to try and figure out what decision to make and to try and make the right decision. (P1)

I think kind of the challenging part has been the hybrid teaching that I've been carrying out a lot, so getting used to that already but that is always a bit of issue that it takes a bit more time and you have to always plan that what to do with the group and can you do the same things yeah normally you cannot do the same things as hybrid and, and then the connections aren't always good and so on so that is something that that's kind of a bit of extra thing to teaching and can be a bit stressful sometimes. (P7)

Another reason as to why they found hybrid stressful was due to the multitasking that this approach required from teachers which subsequently amplified their previously increased workloads. Teachers stated hybrid teaching made it challenging to teach students online and students in class due to their divided roles.

I like how I like to teach and then if I'm teaching in other style does it influence to my well-being or does it just influence to my personality as a teacher... that's actually quite a difficult question. (P6)

Another teacher also commented on how this approach made them question themselves as a teacher and their personality rather than their well-being.

5.2.3 Potential changes and improvements to support university teachers' well-being after the pandemic

When asked if there was something they could change or improve with regard to their well-being in the workplace, several teachers highlighted issues linked with reducing the workload stemming from the hybrid approach, technological arrangements and equipment, the need for more resources, mentoring and guidance efforts, higher salaries, better working spaces and balancing the workload between the teaching periods. For example, three teachers highlighted that work distribution during the autumn and spring semesters at the university was something they would improve or change if they could. Several teachers also stressed the importance of having working spaces that provided a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere where they could unwind during their short breaks. Teachers' working spaces were a combination of small shared offices between two-four teachers or large shared offices between 10-30 teachers.

I think the like this when it's uh end of semester for example then there's usually like all the courses are ending and there's so much like, like all the assessment and giving feedback and so all sorts of things like that and like getting, getting a course wrapped up that causes lots of work and also there seems to be different deadlines for like different, different teams and so on. (P2)

If I could somehow structure and balance when I teach and when I don't better that would, that would probably be better for my well-being as my workload is very heavy during the autumn term but not as heavy during the spring term at the moment. (P6)

Moreover, P1 emphasised the work-life balance in terms of being able to take breaks for their mental and physical well-being. P3 also mentioned taking their working hours seriously and clocking out of work when it was time "I finish work and I go home".

P9 expressed finding better ways among working practices and improving the organization of the technical aspects. A few teachers echoed concerns regarding

fair pay and their working responsibilities. Two other teachers mentioned that they would like to have better support for new staff members and part-time staff members at the organisation.

What I could do is that we do have these part-time teachers and others of us are kind of, I don't know the word in English but totally employed here so we get monthly paid and others just get paid for hours and though I do understand it's an easier way to come as a teacher for some people, it's also there is a small difference and though in more way we don't want them to feel any way separate and we are all together here but I don't enjoy being kind of, I don't know, advantaged here or privileged, privileged is the word here because I would like everyone to be equal so that's a small thing here, I wish everyone could have the same opportunities. (P4)

Additionally, P10 emphasized the need to support new staff members and spend less time talking about finances and focusing on the true purpose of the organization which is research. P10 also stressed how the change in organisational structure has affected the employees and the perceiving university matters through the perspective of strict finances.

I would put much more effort for the people who could feel kind of safe, not safe from the pandemic, but safe as a staff member...I've been working at the university for many years now. We have switched so strongly on top-down industry and very strong, like, management control and I can see how it affects everyone who's working and I would like to spend a little bit less time to talk about the money or the lack of the money and resources at the moment during the last 12 months. It seems that we forget that we are doing worse than we are academics. We should spend more time talking about it. I mean, money and resources are very important, but I can see how it affects our staff. Everything, we look everything through the lenses of finance. (P10)

5.2.4 Students' well-being and teachers' well-being are inter-connected

Eight of the ten university teachers mentioned students' well-being and the connection it has with teachers' well-being. Teachers highlighted important

factors such as creating a safe learning environment, providing more opportunities for interaction, making decisions that would benefit their student's well-being and empathizing with their students.

I'm, I'm like starting to see it more especially now with language learning that if I can get the environment to be like somewhat like happy or fun or just some like a safe space for everyone I think that is what affects or what makes the learning, learning more and or what affects because if the, if the space is really positive or supportive or just I don't know fun to be, if the people are fun to be around and so on it makes the learning so much easier (P2)

If my well-being is brought in a good condition, it has influence to my students, whether I want it or not, whether I am conscious or not about that. On the other side also, if our students and their well-being is not so good, it will affect me. (P10)

Students' well-being was analysed as neither positive nor negative but an issue of incredible importance that links directly to teachers' well-being. Many teachers expressed that they made an effort to support their students either by providing a safe learning environment, planning interactive lessons or simply just being there for them and listening to them.

The students well-being absolutely affects my well-being as a teacher as well because if they're overburdened and they're coming into class like it's not exactly going to make my day much better or make my job much easier and like I'm a normal empathetic human being if I see a bunch of people sitting suffering in front of me I also will feel that too so those, those would be the main things. (P3)

Furthermore, teachers understood the inter-connectedness between their well-being and that of their students. One teacher raised the importance of empowering students by reinforcing their voices and opinions during classes, especially after the pandemic. The same teacher emphasised that communicating to their students how they can affect things and their thoughts and feelings are just as important as the teachers. Nevertheless, the teaching profession is a social

and emotional profession that deals with the everyday lives of both, the teachers, and the students. Another teacher emphasised how teaching being a social profession meant that going beyond their working hours to support students was not a viable excuse to not support them. Inclusively, students' well-being was expressed as worry that many teachers found to be essential in terms of contributing to their overall well-being.

I don't think that that's really possible because we don't just work by ourselves we work with other people and we work for students and I think that I don't think it's okay to say to students I'm sorry I can't do x y z because my working hours are finished um sometimes that is the case but I feel like you've kind of made a commitment as a teacher to do things and it's like yes okay this is not fair in the sense that you're working more hours than you have but I don't think it's a reasonable excuse to say to students (P1)

5.3 Managing well-being after the pandemic

The third and final research question was intended to discover what strategies or coping mechanisms teachers utilized after the pandemic. Responses to Did the pandemic time teach you any coping mechanisms or strategies and what coping mechanisms or strategies did you use after the pandemic to take care of your own well-being revealed that teachers identified previous experiences, exercise, autonomy, teacher identity and understanding oneself as coping mechanisms and strategies they used to cope with their well-being after the pandemic. Table 3 shows an example of the main themes for managing well-being after the pandemic.

Table 3*Thematisation of Managing well-being after the pandemic*

Theme	Verbal description
Understanding themselves	Finding their own working patterns, practicing setting boundaries and personalities
Value of taking breaks	Forgetfulness of breaks, productivity at work, physical working spaces, working hours
Physical and cognitive exercise to de-stress	Exercising to manage changes, mindset changes through exercises
Connecting with people and social support	Appreciation of connecting with people, re-evaluating pandemic decisions

5.3.1 Understanding themselves as a coping mechanism

All ten teachers mentioned that after the pandemic, they understood themselves better in terms of their working patterns, learning to work in different environments, developing their teacher identity, connecting with people, flexibility to arrange their own schedules and prioritizing physical exercises or other forms of movements such as meditation and understanding their personalities. Many university teachers highlighted that understanding themselves better was a type of coping mechanism they used. P6 expressed that their positive attitude towards life aided the constantly changing circumstances that followed the pandemic. Similarly, P4 expressed their ability to focus on the positive aspects that served as a coping mechanism during stressful situations. P9 and P1 echoed the importance of understanding themselves and learning to prioritise their working tasks. P9 stated: "I needed to learn again to say no, for example, maybe more also during the pandemic, but after the pandemic".

In Addition, P1 emphasised that understanding their own patterns of working assisted greatly in finding a balance between their work and life: "I understood

like my own kind of patterns of work much better and I was able to within reason adapt them so that it was kind of like the ideal situation for me”.

5.3.2 Importance of taking breaks after the pandemic

Several teachers emphasised that diligently taking breaks during their working hours after the pandemic was a form of coping mechanism and strategy for them. Teachers indicated that the importance of taking micro breaks during their working hours and the effectiveness of stepping away from their desks helped in creating a balance between work and life. One teacher reported how taking breaks and the pandemic helped them understand that constantly working was not as positive as it appeared to be.

I think having breaks is important and became more clear in the sense that because it was easy to just be eight hours with a computer and having several meetings but then that you really need to take the breaks. (P7)

Somehow the pandemic helped, helped me to notice that it's not good to be a work alcoholic how do you say so, so that it's good to also have different things in your life as well so sort of creating some sort of balance. (P5)

Lastly, P3 reported how stressful situations made them realise the value of time and taking breaks regularly.

I absolutely learned a harsh valuable lesson that I was not immune to that at all like you know and uh I don't know if that's just like that period of time there was a lot of stress a lot of pressure stuff like that like and you realize just how human you are like everybody else. (P3)

University teachers emphasized the value of breaks. Most of the university teachers' responses included forgetfulness of taking breaks at their designated times during working hours due to the increased workload. Teachers echoed that

forgetting to take their breaks had negative effects on their well-being as it contributed negatively towards their workload. Four other teachers also mentioned forgetting to take breaks and identified it as something that they became more aware of after the pandemic. A few other teachers stated that small working spaces also affected their ability to take breaks. Some teachers worked in shared office settings that had extremely limited spaces for teachers to spend their breaks. Teachers suggested that having open and relaxing spaces such as staff lounges where they could spend their breaks during working hours would benefit positively towards their well-being. The majority of the teachers reported that after the pandemic, they started to take their breaks more consistently. For example, P3 reported: “I actually started taking my breaks properly again once, once the pandemic ended, um like I used to kind of just work through lunch time and stuff like I'd sit and eat and work would continue working”.

I would like to have a better work-life balance I would like to not work as many hours as I do I would like to have better lunch breaks because often I don't I have lunch but I sometimes don't even have lunch for more than 10 minutes depending on the day and so I think it would be better to have like the proper half hour lunch break um I think that would be better for like my physical and mental well-being to always be like okay it's half an hour and I'm having that lunch and I can't just make an excuse because of whatever. (P1)

5.3.3 Physical and cognitive exercises to de-stress

Several teachers highlighted how physical exercise and some form of movement served as their coping mechanism and strategy to aid their well-being after the pandemic. Teachers emphasised that taking part in physical and cognitive exercises such as practising meditation and spending more time doing activities they enjoyed contributed in positive ways.

I would like have now for example that like the exercise stuff and so on I didn't I like I knew maybe should be doing something and so on but I didn't really do that it back then I just got into it later on like after the pandemic. (P2)

Yeah, I had to increase like going out during the days because before the pandemic, at least I walked from my home to the campus by a couple of kilometres and then I walked and cycle back during the pandemic. I didn't do that. So I had to break my days and go out and walk around the block just to have some exercise and things, but that was the coping mechanism. (P10)

Similarly, P10 stressed the need to go for a walk as a form of movement to help them create balance in their days, especially during the pandemic to manage their well-being. One teacher also commented that the two hours per week allocation for exercise provided by the university was something that they would have liked to do to manage their well-being however could not as it increased their workload. Another teacher reported that the changes during the pandemic such as working remotely challenged their physical well-being and it was difficult for them to break the habits of the pandemic. Some teachers also stated finding the time to incorporate cognitive exercises such as mindfulness was much more practical for them as it worked better with their schedules. However, stopping all forms of physical exercise for some teachers was also seen as a coping mechanism during the pandemic. However, the same teacher described that it was tough to change their mindset back to the pre-covid time and continue their daily routines such as finding a balance between their work, meeting colleagues, and staying healthy mentally and physically.

Physical well-being hasn't been so successful to be honest if I think about well-being from kind of healthy way of living, kind of the pandemic ended up in my case that I, I almost stopped all, all physical exercises and I haven't been able to kind of change the mindset back to, to get myself on the business and doing some physical exercises so maybe that hasn't been the best part of kind of physical well-being (P6)

Exercising whether physically or mentally, were forms of coping mechanisms that helped many university teachers to cope with the changes that were a result of the pandemic. However, for some just trying to find the balance and time to exercise among other commitments and just trying to get out of a rut were some other ways they managed their well-being in the workplace.

5.3.4 Connecting with people and social support after the pandemic

Lastly, all ten teachers emphasized that they viewed interaction with people in a different light than before the pandemic. Teachers expressed the importance of being able to interact and appreciate seeing their colleagues and students. Several teachers also indicated that their views regarding teaching had changed, and they saw teaching through a different lens than prior to the pandemic. Moreover, teachers indicated that they made more effort to plan their teaching that utilised interaction among students to serve as a form of social support and interaction. Some teachers highlighted the importance of family support as a form of coping mechanism that positively contributed to their well-being. For example, P2 reported: “The general appreciation of just appreciating people more and appreciating the chance to go to somewhere with someone and spending some quality time there and just being happy being here”.

P8 commented: “As I mentioned, my family is really important to me...And that is the really big thing for me that I have such an understanding family and supporting family”.

Finally, another teacher also reported that their previous experience with remote work and changes in teaching and learning that were caused by the pandemic did not interrupt their daily routine in any way. This was seen as another form of coping mechanism that contributed positively to their well-being.

Responses to what the university as an employer could have done differently with regard to university teachers' well-being in the workplace, teachers identified improving technological arrangements and tools, teaching, resources, spacious working environments, organizational change, logistics and guidance and mentoring. Resources related to teaching and teaching arrangements were the most common responses. For example, P9 expressed that decision-making and guidelines could have been clearer especially when those decisions had an impact at a larger scale. Another teacher voiced the need to make clearer decisions at the management and head of department levels and raised how autonomy in making decisions regarding learning and teaching and its influences in the long term. Furthermore, the same teacher expressed concerns regarding autonomy in teaching arrangements and the impacts it may have on everybody's well-being, both mentally and physically.

I mean people who are in power like management level heads of departments and so on they should have taken a clearer position on things like the class has to be hybrid or the class is only in person or for this program let's say I don't know for all students in special education it must be on campus because there wasn't a clear message and it varied and I think that was because people were saying well you have autonomy you can make a decision but then if everybody makes different decisions and then like I said if students are going from course to course and it becomes like a mess so I think someone or groups of people maybe could have made clear decisions or given clearer kind of statements about that instead of saying well you have the power to figure it out yourself. (P1)

In Addition, P3 shed light on the significance of decisions regarding teaching and learning and that they should be re-evaluated based on what is actually needed rather than what is wanted by the majority of the students.

The university as an employer it needs to recognize that stuff like what is best for the student is not always what the student demands the voices who demand the kind of like always having a flexible option for teaching and learning they might be the loudest voice

it doesn't mean they're the majority so they need to find out what the majority need is and, and, and act upon that. (P3)

6 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to understand university teachers' experiences with their well-being by exploring how the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to their social, emotional, and physical resources and difficulties during the post-pandemic phase. This goal was achieved by interviewing ten university teachers across different departments who had been teaching during and after the pandemic. Based on the results and earlier research, university teachers' post-pandemic experiences were in many ways different to the time before the pandemic as they experienced newer challenges with pedagogical changes, lack of social support, a sense of belongingness, spacious working environments and work-life balance. The majority of the university teachers highlighted teaching experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their views on teaching as a profession, social interaction, health and well-being, and ways to deal with stressful situations.

6.1 Examination of the results

The first and second research questions aimed to understand how university teachers perceived their experiences with their well-being and issues that limited their well-being after the pandemic. Results indicated that university teachers' experiences and issues were diverse and dependent upon factors such as increased expectations from the university and students, interactions among their colleagues and students, sense of belonging, changing working environments and work-life balance matters.

Resources and difficulties that influenced university teachers' well-being after the pandemic ranged from technological arrangements, the necessary tools needed for hybrid and remote lessons, constantly changing guidelines, external and internal pressures, and stressful situations. The results from the current study indicated that university teachers struggled with their well-being in the workplace even after the pandemic due to these factors. Although these

factors were previously highlighted as issues influencing teachers' well-being in negative ways, after the pandemic these issues were exacerbated to such an extent that teachers' states of well-being became much more difficult to manage regardless of coming out of a crisis. Moreover, the findings from this study explain how continuously low levels of well-being can contribute to teacher burnout if they remain undiscussed thus threatening their occupational well-being (Beusaert et al., 2023). The post-pandemic further challenged teachers' resources in terms of digital expertise. Prior to the pandemic, teachers' digital competency was not seen as a priority due to the preferences of traditional methods of teaching face-to-face. According to Hargreaves (2021), improving teachers' digital competencies are newer and lasting challenges faced by teachers globally after the pandemic. Investing in digitally based learning tools and methods as well as managing the potential risks that arise from this mode of teaching are some examples of how to support teachers' well-being in terms of resources and difficulties. The COVID-19 pandemic also affected teachers at the internal and external levels which resulted in exposed issues such as at administrative levels, the use of technology and teaching arrangements (Cristol & Gimbert, 2021). Based on the results from this study, university teachers' issues such as atmosphere in terms of ambiguity among teaching methods, decision making, increased workload, lack of interaction, harmony among colleagues, self-awareness as teachers, meeting equipment and working space contributed negatively towards their well-being after the pandemic. According to research, increased workload directly predicates stress and general unease (Ford & Jin, 2015). Increased workloads have also been recognized as a main factor that contributes to stress in university teachers in previous studies (Shen & Slater, 2021). Internal pressures such as increased expectations from the management directly influence accountability and performance which are connected to teachers' job satisfaction (Hughes, 2012). Although the pandemic ended, the expectations and workload that stemmed from the pandemic remained and in fact deteriorated. These results could explain how constantly increased workload hampers teachers' roles and creates role ambiguity resulting in permanent

changes in the profession (Brunsting et al., 2014). Furthermore, these pressures and constantly changing factors forced teachers to continue in survival mode regardless of the present circumstances. Consequently, this increases their risks of burnout which has damaging effects on teachers' mental health and overall well-being.

Social well-being was challenged in distinctive ways than prior to the pandemic as most forms of face-to-face interaction were either restricted or simply did not exist during and sometime after the pandemic. Many university teachers reported that interactions during online lessons and meetings felt artificial and challenging. According to Li (2018) sustaining student engagement and establishing emotional connections with students and maintaining good relationships with colleagues were previous challenges that university teachers faced. After the pandemic, the essence of interaction changed dramatically due to the limited natural interactions during the pandemic. The prolonged two years spent interacting online during the pandemic time affected teachers' sense of belongingness when they returned to campus as many teachers reported in the results. Further findings indicate that the majority of the university teachers viewed interaction and socialisation with their colleagues, students, and families from a different perspective than before the pandemic. Based on a case study on university teachers by Dinu et al. (2021), supportive working environments and collegial support helped teachers transition to online teaching which continued after the pandemic. Henceforth, building a strong sense of teamwork and collegial support positively contributed to their social and mental aspects of well-being (Ranjbaran, 2023). The post-pandemic experiences with social well-being were different in comparison with the time before and during the pandemic as they brought forth novel challenges among teachers at personal and social levels. Despite the growing threats to well-being in the teaching profession, research remains limited especially during the post-pandemic period and within the Finnish context.

Throughout all three research questions, interaction and sense of belongingness were the most mentioned experiences, issues, and coping mechanisms. Interactions among colleagues and students were the epitome of providing a feeling of community hence enhancing their well-being when returning to campus among many of the university teachers. Based on the definition of well-being stated earlier in this study, social well-being among university teachers was noted most frequently in comparison to their emotional and physical well-being. Similarly, these findings are in line with previous research which suggests the positive impacts of these interactions such as higher levels of engagement and learning, increased academic motivation and educational aspiration are all linked to improved well-being (Trolan et al., 2022). The emotional impact of self-isolation brought by the pandemic caused a negative effect on well-being nonetheless, early qualitative research suggests that appreciation and gratitude were fostered by the pandemic which were evident in the results of this study after the pandemic. These rapid changes towards the modes of teaching caused by the pandemic challenged the well-being of both students and teachers alike where they increased their risks of self-isolation (Knight et al., 2021). Correspondingly research by Van Der Feltz-Cornelis et al. (2020) uncovered the impact of social-isolation towards psychological distress among students and teachers and self-reported stress, anxiety loneliness and depressive symptoms (Husky et al., 2020) henceforth suggesting the impact of environments as a significant contributor towards well-being.

Remarkably, only two participants mentioned the age difference as a barrier towards managing their well-being. The idea of being able to connect with similar cultural references among colleagues within similar age ranges helped play a role in how to manage their well-being. Additionally, they help in connecting more and understanding the challenges you may be facing in the workplace whereas the challenges faced by someone older would be different and play a role in how they manage their well-being. A possible explanation for this might be that people from different generations in the workplace have different experiences, perspectives, and ways of working (Polat et al., 2019).

These can be either presented as opportunities or challenges as the attitudes between work and well-being can differ from person to person.

Emotional well-being is another aspect of well-being that was noted in the findings. The second research question aimed to understand and identify issues which teachers found supportive or challenging towards their well-being after the pandemic. My findings indicated that university teachers' issues were positive and supportive and negative and challenging. Students' well-being was identified as an issue that influenced teachers' emotional well-being in the sense that teachers felt that they lacked the necessary resources to support their students. Teachers in my study indicated that they constantly worried about their students and tried to support them in the best ways possible either through creating positive and safe learning environments for them or simply being there to listen to their students and provide support. These findings are in line with previous research which indicates the correlation between university teachers' well-being and students' emotional well-being (Kiltz et al., 2020). Though fewer studies have investigated how student-teacher well-being is connected within the university context, it indicates that the university context is a promising area of future research. Remarkably, Hagenauer and Volet (2014), discovered the importance of student-teacher interaction on teachers' emotional well-being. Their systematic review highlighted how student-teacher rapport had positive effects on university teachers and students' emotional aspects of well-being. With this, it can be established that student-teacher well-being deserves further attention in academia. However, Kush et al. (2022) emphasized, that one of the main stressors of teachers' well-being was not being able to offer support to their students due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Based on the results from my study, it is evident that university teachers' emotional well-being is influenced by their students' states of well-being as one participant from my study stated, "students well-being absolutely affects my well-being as a teacher". Furthermore, the importance of understanding the linkage between student and teacher well-being is crucial in terms of gaining a holistic view of their well-being in academia. Simultaneously, the lack of support and integrating self-awareness

concepts are some issues that are in line with the current literature (Darling-Hammond & Hylar, 2020). In the context of emotional well-being, understanding themselves, self-awareness and developing teacher identity were some of the most mentioned coping mechanisms among university teachers after the pandemic. Collaboration, teaching methods, decision making and self-awareness in navigating as professionals are all issues that are crucial in terms of post-covid educational environments (Cristol & Gimbert, 2021). A longitudinal study during the pandemic on teachers by Kim et al. (2022) illustrated that factors such as workload, multiple roles and worries about others' well-being had negative effects on their mental health and well-being hence reflecting the findings from my study. Based on the model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), university teachers' coping mechanisms such as previous experiences, understanding themselves, and attitudes towards life were highly dependent on their interaction with their environmental factors during the post-pandemic period. According to recent research by Elomaa (2023), maintaining work-life balance, changes in environments, developing oneself professionally and taking care of oneself physically and emotionally have been reported as effective coping strategies to prevent stress. Research by García-Arroyo and Segovia, (2019) indicates that other changes such as staff adjustments and reorganization, introduction of new technologies, and new policies can further result in emotional exhaustion among teachers. According to previous literature, emotional exhaustion is identified as the heart of burnout (Seidler et al., 2014). Lack of interaction and not being able to connect with colleagues and students as well as the online teaching challenges from this study are in line with previous research which reveals these issues as some of the most challenging factors for teachers (Baker et al., 2021). Consequently, the unexpected and constantly changing guidelines by the university also expedited university teachers' stress levels thus affecting their overall well-being in negative ways. Balancing workloads that were linked to the technological arrangements needed for remote or hybrid teaching also further affected their well-being. Prior to the pandemic, pedagogical methods consisted of digital learning of some form however

teachers were provided with appropriate resources to implement such lessons. According to a report by the Finnish National Agency for Education (2021), different pedagogical methods are necessary for online teaching and learning for teachers. Additionally, the results from this study are in line with the report by the Finnish National Agency for Education, which indicates the difficulty of developing the use of technology in pedagogy and instruction individually (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2021, p. 116). Results also indicated that most teachers utilized more than one coping mechanism and strategy. These findings are in line with the previous research that highlights that burnout and stress are negatively linked to positive coping mechanisms which aim to limit or solve stressful situations (García-Arroyo & Segovia, 2019). Henceforth, coping mechanisms among university teachers in this study may be effective for burnout prevention, especially during the post-pandemic period.

The last research question aimed to understand what coping mechanisms or strategies university teachers utilized after the pandemic. Results indicated that the majority of university teachers used coping mechanisms and strategies that involved their social, emotional, and physical well-being. The most frequent coping mechanism was 'understanding oneself' as many teachers expressed that the post-pandemic helped them understand their patterns, aid teacher identity and what environments they work best in. In Addition, physical exercise, walking, connecting with people and support, and the importance of taking breaks were other types of coping mechanisms utilized by university teachers. Prior studies have also noted the impacts of physical exercise and connecting with people and seeking support to be the most common coping strategies among teachers during the pandemic (Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021). It was evident that the consequences of the pandemic were contributing to university teachers' overall stress as coping mechanisms are distinctive behavioural strategies that are utilized to navigate psychological stress triggered by stressful situations such as the pandemic (Petraikova et al., 2021). Furthermore, my findings are in line with Mäkelä et al. 's (2022) research which found the rapid

changes university teachers had to go through during the pandemic negatively affected university teachers' well-being and agency.

Physical well-being in the context of limited working spaces and adequate teaching arrangements related to hybrid and remote teaching were also identified as contributing negatively towards teachers' physical well-being. Sufficient working space for teachers to spend their breaks as well as the teaching arrangements specifically the hybrid and remote approaches were emphasised by many university teachers in my study and contributed to their overall stress levels due to the technical related issues and demands from both the management and students. Coping mechanisms that are developed during times of rapid and sudden changes such as the pandemic, are linked to technostress which can be understood as "an inability to cope with the use of new technologies in a healthy manner, or as stress experienced while using information technology" (Mäkelä et al., 2022). The pandemic caused a mindset shift as norms were challenged and largely altered the teaching profession in permanent ways which should encourage policymakers to consider policies that prioritise and increase support for teachers and their sense of autonomy during such times (Kim et al., 2022). The findings in my study can explain the individuality of coping mechanisms needed to thrive during the post-pandemic period. Previous research highlights that burnout and stress are negatively linked to positive coping mechanisms which aim to limit or solve stressful situations (García-Arroyo & Segovia, 2019). Henceforth, coping mechanisms among university teachers in my study may be effective for burnout prevention in the long run. Changes in working conditions and increased workload are one of the major sources of occupational stress (Laurence et al., 2016).

6.2 Evaluation of the study

There are several limitations in the current study which should be considered as caveats. Since this study was predominantly reliant on semi-structured

interviews, researcher's bias influenced the topics of conversation. Moreover, this could have possibly hindered the views of the participants thus not representative of their actual views. Data analysis was conducted by a single researcher which reduced the likelihood to conduct inter-rater reliability and as a result, may have caused potential codes and themes to be overlooked (Tracy, 2012). Furthermore, this study employed a limited number of participants and may not fully represent the view of all university teachers at this university. To ensure the transferability of my study, I provided a clear description of the participants and my research process in this thesis. The dependability of my research was illustrated using examples of my data analysis process and how it was applied in this thesis. I also took into consideration the confirmability of my results by providing thorough interpretations of how I interpreted my data and how it reflected the meaning of the actual data. Triangulation was planned and attempted through member checks but due to time constraints, I was not able to complete this process. Hence interpretations are based solely on the interview transcripts from the participants. To ensure the credibility of my data analysis, I tried to familiarise myself with the data prior to conducting analysis during the transcription process. However, after further reflection, data could have been interpreted differently based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework and applied accordingly. Throughout the entire process of my research, I consistently reflected on the choices and decisions I made as a researcher and looked beyond my own ideas, judgements, and beliefs to ensure reflexivity. One of main strengths of this study was the in-depth data analysis process and thorough decisions made regarding the entire research process. Meticulous attention to research details and valuable insights from my participants provided new research-based knowledge regarding university teachers' well-being in the post-pandemic phase.

I also considered the ethical issues to ensure the ethical quality of my research which is discussed in detail under section 4.6.

6.3 Future research

To gain a holistic view of university teachers' well-being after the pandemic, additional studies will be needed that focus on university teachers' well-being after the pandemic and investigate the potential links or outcomes. Feasibly future research should aim to focus on how teachers' competency can be developed to include competencies of well-being as a way to support their occupational well-being. Previous research has mainly focused on teachers' well-being and the important factors relating to it. Future research could also perhaps investigate the current interventions aimed at improving university teachers' well-being to understand how teachers' well-being is supported and what resources are being utilized. As this research mainly focused on university teachers, future research should also examine teachers' well-being among schoolteachers to identify any possible relationships between university teachers' well-being. As this is an area of growing research, perhaps more complex and intricate methods of data collection may be required with a larger data set.

7 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore university teachers' experiences with their well-being after the pandemic and understand how the rapid changes they went through influenced their overall well-being. Based on the results from this study, university teachers' experiences were diverse in the context that some of the challenges they faced were new and intensified in comparison with the previous difficulties within the teaching profession. Results revealed that although university teachers found it challenging to adjust to the new changes, their mindset, and understanding of themselves played a significant role in how they handled adjusting to post-covid changes.

As we navigate beyond the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings from this study serve as a poignant reminder to prioritise teachers' well-being with the same dedication that we have shown to our students' well-being. Educational organizations can greatly enhance university teachers' well-being by developing strategies that foster social interaction, support leisure activities, and provide spacious working environments. For example, organizing events that promote their well-being in positive ways and encourage healthy work-life balance. Additionally, providing innovative physical, psychological, and emotional working environments where teachers feel safe and supported. According to Dodge et al.'s (2012) definition of well-being, university teachers' social, emotional, and physical well-being and resources were affected even after the pandemic through the ways discussed in the results and discussion chapters. All aspects of well-being affected their overall well-being in negative and positive ways. Furthermore, university teachers indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic already felt like "a long time ago". This could perhaps explain the warped perceptions of time and how time felt slow during the pandemic. As the pandemic concluded, it also dramatically impacted our perception of time and how we perceive our futures hence explaining the "pandemic skip". A global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic can be conceptualised as a collective trauma that profoundly impacted our mental health and overall well-being. Teachers'

well-being plays a vital role in shaping both our present and future thus making it more important than ever to prioritise it.

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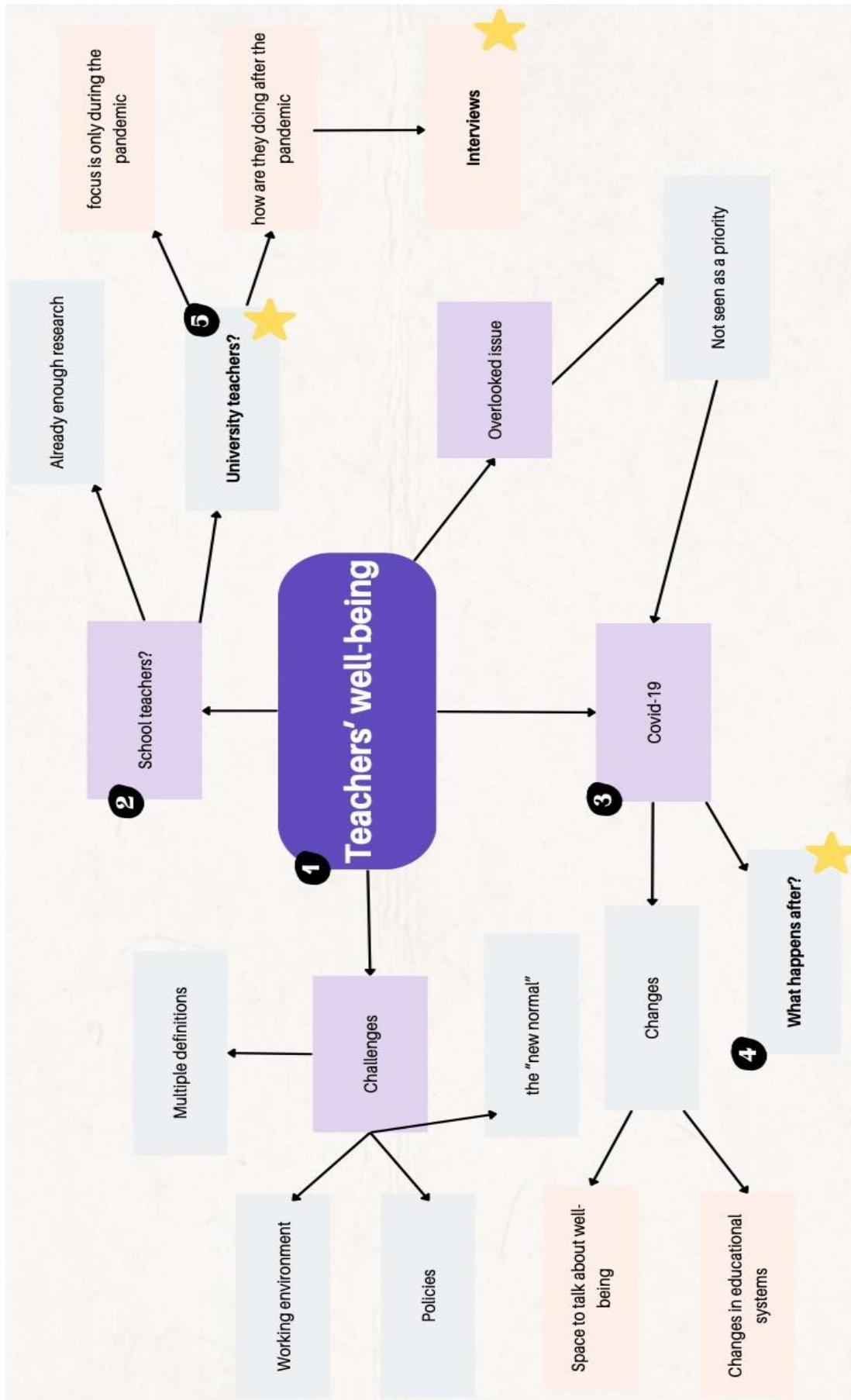
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APPENDIX A

Mind map explaining justification for focusing on university teachers



APPENDIX B

Interview guide for participants

During the pandemic: 2019-2020

After the pandemic: 2021 onwards

General

1. How would you describe well-being?
2. What are some important aspects of well-being for example, for university teachers?

Experiences (2)

1. From your experiences *after the pandemic*, what were some of issues that - impacted your well-being in the workplace?
2. From what you have shared, did you feel that these experiences were in any way different than the ones you faced *during the pandemic*? (How were they different?)

Issues (4 questions)

1. What did you do to manage your well-being *after the pandemic* in your workplace?
2. If you could identify specific issues whether they were positive or negative, which constrained/limited your well-being *after the pandemic*, what would they be? (How were these factors different to the ones *during the pandemic*?)
3. If you could pinpoint the most challenging or supporting issues towards your well-being in the workplace *after the pandemic*, what would they be?
4. Is there something you would like to change or improve in relation to your well-being in the workplace?

Coping mechanisms (5)

1. Did pandemic time “teach” you any coping mechanisms and how to take care of your own well-being?
2. What sort of strategies or coping mechanisms did you use to manage your well-being in the workplace *after the pandemic*?
3. How did these strategies or coping mechanisms you mentioned impact your well-being *after the pandemic*? (*did they help or did you learn something about yourself?*)
4. From your experiences teaching *after the pandemic*, what do you wish the university as an employer could have done differently with regards to university teachers’ well-being?
5. Any further thoughts or comments with regards to your well-being after the *post-pandemic*?