2023

Perceived Teacher Self-Care Influence on Beliefs About Teacher Persistence During COVID-19

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MEd, Boston College, 2010

BA, Hampton University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Higher Education and Adult Learning

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Abstract

Teaching has never been an easy profession, but the swift transition from in-person to digital instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic made it significantly more difficult. Between a global pandemic and a nation's racial reckoning, teachers were forced to juggle work, family, and student responsibilities. While there were suggested tips on how to practice self-care, the findings on self-care have been conflicting, and there is a scarcity of research on the role that teacher self-care played in persistence for classroom teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic. The conceptual framework of this study was formed by combining Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory and Quarantelli and Dynes's social crisis and disaster theory. The study's research questions focused on how teachers who taught Grades 6–12 during the pandemic described their practices of self-care at that time, and how their perceptions of self-care influenced their beliefs about persistence during COVID-19. Ten teachers from Grades 6-12 participated in semistructured interviews for this study. Additionally, thematic coding was used to interpret transcripts. The findings suggest that teachers who taught Grades 6–12 during the pandemic expressed the need for physical, mental, and emotional well-being as vital self-care practices for sustaining longevity and remaining in the classroom. This study has implications for social change because it provides methods to support teacher development and perseverance in the practice of self-care and future research that will support those practices in times of crisis.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to every teacher who still chooses to remain in the profession despite the roles, responsibilities, overall requirements-to-compensation ratio, and insurmountable lack of respect. You answered the call and continue to do so each day that you show up to do the work. The work which receives advice and observations from those who would not last one day in the classroom. The work admired because of its *built-in* "vacations" and miscellaneous days off yet criticized for any number of reasons at any given time. The work of taking the time to plan lessons that never get covered due to the impromptu yet consistent disruptions that could arise at any given moment. And the list goes on. The work. Yeah, *that* work. For the many thankless days and countless nights of sacrifice, I thank you for your service and commitment to the profession. In the words of Lowell Milken, "Good teachers are to education what education is to all other professions—the indispensable element, the sunlight and oxygen, the foundation on which everything else is built." You can neither be manufactured nor mass-produced. Without you, this simply will not work.

Acknowledgments

God, You are the One. Thank You for seeing me through and being with me every step of the way. Thank You for Your provision, safety, and covering. Thank You for granting me the wisdom, wherewithal, fortitude, and courage to complete that which I began. To my committee chair, Dr. Jennifer Courduff, affectionately known as "Dr. C.," thank you for pursuing me. Thank you for the push, the pull, the tugs (gentle and not so much), for having the emotional intelligence and discernment to know when, and when enough was enough. You have *mothered* me throughout this process, literally walking with me every step of the way until it was time for me to walk on my own. Mom, thank you for being you and for being in tune with your First Born. For knowing what I wasn't saying when I was saying everything. Your strong, yet gentle encouragement to finish "my little project" was significantly instrumental along the way. To my village of family, friends, colleagues, doctoral committee, supporters, and naysayers (yeah, you're a part of the village, too), thank you for playing your part and serving your purpose. To my sister Tiffany, you came in clutch with timely support, feedback, and encouragement. To hear that you are proud of me means more than you can possibly know. And Dad, while I miss you dearly and wish you were still here on earth to be a part of this moment, I know you are and have been smiling down … gently pushing … and shaking … and moving things around. Hope you're proud.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Teaching has never been an easy profession, but in the year 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was especially challenging (Anderson, 2020). Teachers had to abruptly learn to balance the swift transition from in-person to remote learning, learn and rely on technology as the new teaching and learning norm, and in some cases, manage their own children in addition to their students. With many teachers juggling in-person and remote learning, it was critical that they practiced self-care to stay healthy and to help avoid burnout (Anderson, 2020). Suggested self-care practices for teachers working during the pandemic included teachers recognizing that self-care is vital, not a luxury, and modeling it appropriately. While researchers have identified the importance of self-care and provided tips for educators, there has been a scarcity of qualitative studies specifically addressing reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020; Knight, 2020). This study has implications for social change because it provides methods to support teacher development and perseverance in the practice of self-care and future research that will support those practices in times of crisis. The major sections in this chapter address the study's background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, nature, definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance, concluding with a summary.

Background

The present body of research on the connection between teacher self-care and teacher persistence can be seen as contradictory. While some literature related to the scope of the study showed a relationship between teacher burnout and teacher persistence, little was understood about reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Allen et al., 2020; Crosby et al., 2020; Singer, 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2021). Therefore, the gap in practice for this study was that it was unknown if or how teachers reported self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). This study is important because it could inform the way in-service teachers handle their own self-care.

Problem Statement

The problem explored in this basic qualitative study is that little is understood about reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Crosby et al., 2020). For the purposes of this study, *self-care* is defined as steps taken to improve one's physical, mental, and/or emotional well-being through proactive activity supported by self-awareness and self-regulation, and *teacher persistence* refers to teachers' determination to persevere and continue in the profession despite facing numerous hardships (Lemon, 2021; Varela & Fedynich, 2021). As a result of the

COVID-19 pandemic, education systems were impacted at all levels from global to local settings (Doghonadze et al., 2020). For instance, schools in the country of Georgia had the resources to make the transition from traditional classroom instruction to online instruction but lacked the time to provide necessary teacher training or evaluate course content. Teachers in Georgia and surrounding countries argued that a lack of resources and training forced them to work longer and more irregular hours (Doghonadze et al., 2020). As such, virtual learning made it more difficult for teachers to practice self-care because they were asked to prepare for and implement multiple modalities of instructional delivery based on ever-changing federal, state, and local mandates during COVID-19 (Crosby et al., 2020). Additionally, some schools provided yoga for teachers as a form of self-care as well as drop-in counseling sessions with the district's counselor; however, it is unknown whether these teachers utilized the services or had the time to do so given the district's constantly evolving and new regulations (Koner et al., 2022).

Crosby et al. (2020), Harris (2020), Hanover Research (2020), and Knight (2020) all suggested self-care practices for teachers working during the pandemic. These self-care practices included teachers acknowledging that self-care is important and not a hobby and properly modeling it, focusing on what can be controlled, acknowledging feelings, having as much compassion for themselves as they would have for others, taking time every day to relax, and making self-care practices into habits. With the implementation of COVID-19, teachers were tasked with adapting teaching and learning to virtual delivery models and establishing classroom management systems for the virtual classroom; however, it was unknown whether

teachers engaged in self-care during this trying period (Doghonadze et al., 2020). Hargreaves and Fullan's (2020) "collaborative professionalism" emphasized the significance of teachers collaborating with their colleagues to discuss school-related issues and asserted that as a result, teacher persistence and a positive school culture were likely to emerge.

According to Doghonadze et al. (2020), teachers struggled with self-care during the pandemic because they had less human and social interaction, and thus their lesson plans and curricula were less culturally sensitive and differentiated. Additional stressors and challenges that impacted the lives of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic included job security, the implementation of eLearning instruction, and a lack of time to prepare for the delivery of virtual instruction (Doghonadze et al., 2020; Raisinghani, 2020). The gap in practice was that it was unknown to researchers if or how teachers reported self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). According to Ciprano et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic exposed pressure points in the educational system while also posing new challenges and stressors for teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the greatest disruption to

education on a global scale in recorded history (Crompton et al., 2023). Understanding how teachers reported self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19 was important because self-care may have influenced how in-service teachers managed their own self-care and whether or not they remained in the profession (Anderson, 2020; Cardoza, 2021; Crosby et al., 2020). The primary objective of qualitative research is to provide a comprehensive account of human events and experiences (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). To address the dearth of qualitative research on the relationship between teacher self-care practices and teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic, I developed research questions that aligned with the problem and purpose of the study and would most effectively lead to a basic qualitative design.

Research Question

To explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020), this study centered on the following research questions and subquestions:

RQ1. What self-care practices do teachers describe while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2. How do teachers perceive that self-care (physical, mental, and emotional well-being) influences beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

SRQ1. How do teacher perceptions of physical well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

SRQ2. How do teacher perceptions of mental well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

SRQ3. How do teacher perceptions of emotional well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the unique combination of Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT) and Quarantelli and Dynes's (1977) social crisis and disaster theory (SCDT). Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT framework addresses both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the context of personality, self-regulation, and the cognitive and social development of people. It also addresses innate psychological demands for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (CAR; Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT considers how social and cultural elements influence a person's overall well-being and level of performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The combination of these theories provided a framework for exploring reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). Connections among key elements of the combined SDT and SCDT framework include the examination of themes such as the psychological well-being of teachers during a disaster, global and urban resilience, disaster risk reduction, and disaster recovery (Chen & Ji, 2021; Dube, 2020; Prayag et al., 2021). Additionally,

it was important to understand what teachers perceived as motivation for continuing to persist in their professions during the pandemic (Chen & Ji, 2021). Though SCDT is a newer theory, it was used in global and domestic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. As derived from the literature, the explanations of Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT and Quarantelli and Dynes's SCDT aided in gaining a better understanding of teachers' practices of self-care and motivations for persisting during the COVID-19 pandemic. The combined SDT and SCDT framework related to the study's approach and key research questions because it provided a fundamental lens for the development of the study's research instrument. Semistructured interview questions were developed to answer and better understand the study's problem regarding reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Crosby et al., 2020).

Nature of the Study

Because the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020), a basic qualitative design was the best fit for the study, in that it provided an appropriate methodology for exploring participants' perceptions regarding their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Patton, 2015). The conceptual framework related to the study approach and key research questions, as I sought to understand teachers' perceptions of what self-care practices motivated them to persist in the classroom and profession during COVID-19 (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Quarantelli & Dynes,

1977). Additionally, the conceptual framework served as the basis for the instrument development of the study, which involved semistructured interviews (Patton, 2015). Authors in the field have called for qualitative work to better understand the relationship between the role of teacher self-care and teacher persistence while teaching during the pandemic (Crosby et al., 2020; Knight, 2020; Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Robinson et al., 2023; Tran et al., 2020; Varela & Fedynich, 2021).

Through one-on-one semistructured interviews and member checking, this study collected data from teachers at a school in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts who taught Grades 6–12 during the COVID-19 pandemic (Patton, 2015). After conducting the interviews and transcribing the audio recordings, I coded to locate keywords, themes, and phrases to categorize the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Following the coding cycles, the codes were classified and arranged into themes to look for commonalities and reoccurring themes.

Definitions

The terms defined in this section are used throughout the remainder of this study.

Distance learning: For this study, I have defined distance learning as an educational setting in which a teacher and student are not in the same physical location (Doghonadze et al., 2020).

Self-care: In this study, self-care is defined as steps taken to improve one's health, well-being, or wellness; it involves proactive activity supported by self-awareness and self-regulation (Lemon, 2021).

Teacher perceptions: For this study, I have defined teacher perceptions as instances in which teachers characterize and evaluate the current state of affairs (Brandmiller et al., 2020).

Teacher persistence: For this study, teacher persistence refers to teachers' determination to persevere and continue in the profession despite facing numerous hardships (Varela & Fedynich, 2021).

Teaching and learning: For the purposes of this study, teaching is defined as working with students to help them understand and use information, ideas, and processes. Learning is defined as acquiring new information or skills through study, experience, or being taught (Reshi, 2023).

Assumptions

According to Patton (2015), qualitative researchers should be transparent regarding their assumptions to ensure the reliability of a study. This study relied on the assumption that the teachers who chose to participate in this study would provide candid and truthful responses to the interview questions. In order to establish a comfortable rapport and conduct interviews that yield rich qualitative data, researchers need to trust and depend on the honesty of the participants' responses. Additionally, the findings of this study address reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al, 2020). These findings help to cover a knowledge gap regarding teacher self-care during the pandemic to identify areas where it is possible to strengthen teachers' self-awareness and ability to practice self-care.

Scope and Delimitations

Little is understood about reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Crosby et al., 2020). This specific focus was chosen due to the scarcity of existing research. The first delimitation of the study was that semistructured one-on-one interviews were the only method of data collection. A second delimitation was the study's basic qualitative methodology and descriptive approach as opposed to a more general approach such as a case study. These could also be considered as limitations as the methodology could have been more time-consuming and lacking in depth (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Another delimitation of this basic qualitative interview study was that it only involved participants from one study site. As a means of facilitating access, 10 teachers from the research site in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts who met the criteria and volunteered to participate in the study were interviewed. Both the research site and sample size were suitable for a qualitative study (Patton, 2015). In order to assure that they had the necessary experience to provide rich qualitative interview data, participants were teachers who taught students in Grades 6 through 12 during the COVID-19 pandemic (Patton, 2015).

A fourth delimitation was that only teachers who taught Grades 6-12 were participants in the study, rather than widening the search group to teachers in prekindergarten to Grade 12 who had all experienced the same phenomenon. Students, administrators, and other staff members from the research site in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts did not participate. Conceptual frameworks that were related to but not

included in the study were trauma theory (Caruth, 1995), learning and cognitive development theory (Bruner, 1964), and happenstance learning theory (HLT) (Krumboltz, 2009). HLT posits tolerating uncertainty by learning to navigate life's planned and unplanned events (Kiekel et al., 2022; Krumboltz, 2009). Participants in this study included 10 middle school special education and general education teachers who taught during the pandemic. The results of this study have the potential of transferability across multiple roles in education that are not just limited to teachers, as self-care can be practiced by all education practitioners.

Limitations

Biases are considered limitations because they are not within a researcher's control and are considered unavoidable (Patton, 2015). As the primary researcher of this study, I was conscious of my own biases and took steps to alleviate any that might have arisen. For example, I am a teacher who taught students in Grades 6 through 12 in a different location and region during the pandemic, which is a bias that could have influenced study outcomes and how the outcomes were addressed. Therefore, as a form of member checking, I took reflective notes after each interview and shared them with my committee as well as with peers for review (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) cited reflective journaling, member verification, and peer review of findings as practices to control researcher bias. Throughout the research process, I used reflective practices to ensure the validity of the study (Patton, 2015). The executive director (ED) of the local site provided me with a list of teachers who taught Grades 6–12 during the COVID-19

pandemic. That list was used to conduct nonprobability purposeful sampling. See Chapter 3 for an explanation of the methods used to build credibility in this study.

A measure I used to address the limitations of the study was to acknowledge that the study had limitations, specifically regarding its methodological approach (Patton, 2015). Acknowledging the study's limitations provided an opportunity to make recommendations and suggestions for future research and to connect the study to the possibility of addressing open-ended concerns and bridging a gap in practice with its findings (Patton, 2015).

Significance

The results of this study could lead to positive social change by providing ways to support teacher development and persistence in the practice of self-care (Roman, 2020). Also, teachers' practice of self-care and its subsequent value to persistence through hardships could inform teacher preparation programs or professional development offerings. The pandemic impacted every area of human life, including the fundamentals of teaching and learning (Brennan, 2020). It may be possible to learn more about addressing teachers' self-care and persistence needs in school settings under circumstances such as COVID-19 or other disasters by frequently checking in with teachers through conversations, interviews, and surveys of their experiences and perspectives on self-care and wellness in the workplace. A potential contribution of the study that could advance knowledge in the discipline is that the practice of self-care and wellness could be included in workplace requirements of teachers in school settings in an effort to eradicate teacher burnout and turnover (Sokal et al., 2020).

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the study's background, problem, purpose, and research questions and subquestions, as well as the conceptual framework and the study's basic qualitative design and methodology. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the study's assumptions, scope, and limitations. In Chapter 2, I further discuss and develop the study's conceptual framework with a combination of Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT and Quarantelli and Dynes's (1977) SCDT. Following that, I present a review of recent research relevant to the primary components of this study, as well as further explain the gap that supported the purpose and research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem explored in this basic qualitative study is that little is understood about reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Crosby et al., 2020). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). For the purposes of this study, self-care was defined as steps taken to improve one's physical, mental, and/or emotional well-being; this was seen as proactive activity supported by self-awareness and self-regulation, (Lemon, 2021). Teacher persistence was defined as teachers' determination to persevere while facing numerous hardships (Varela & Fedynich, 2021). Suggested self-care practices for teachers working during the pandemic included teachers recognizing that self-care is essential, not a luxury, and modeling it appropriately (Crosby et al., 2020). Other teacher self-care practices included focusing on what can be controlled, acknowledging one's feelings, having as much compassion for oneself as one would have for others, taking time daily to decompress, and making self-care practices a habit (Hanover Research, 2020; Harris, 2020; Knight, 2020).

With the onset of COVID-19, teachers were tasked with adapting traditional teaching and learning to fully virtual delivery models and establishing classroom management systems for the virtual classroom (Doghonadze et al., 2020), but it was unknown whether teachers practiced self-care during this time. The gap in practice was

that researchers did not know if or how teachers practiced self-care during COVID-19, nor how these practices influenced teacher persistence (Anderson, 2020). Varela and Fedynich (2021) found that teachers who worked together and depended on each other were more likely to persist within the field. In their work on collaborative professionalism, Azorín and Fullan (2022) highlighted the importance of teachers collaborating with their peers to discuss school matters and purported that teacher persistence and positive school culture were likely to occur as a result.

Challenges to teacher self-care included lower quality human/social interactions and less culturally sensitive approaches to classroom material and curricula (Doghonadze et al., 2020). An additional three stressors impacting the lives of teachers during COVID- 19 were job security, the application of eLearning instruction, and little time to prepare for virtual instructional delivery (Doghonadze et al., 2020; Raisinghani, 2020). For example, schools in the country of Georgia were technologically equipped to switch from face-to-face to distance learning but did not have time to train teachers or assess relevant curriculum (Doghonadze et al., 2020). Teachers in the country of Georgia and its neighboring countries claimed that the lack of resources and training caused them to work nonstop around the clock to find a solution to the issue (Doghonadze et al., 2020). As such, virtual learning made it more difficult for teachers to practice self-care because they were asked to prepare for and implement multiple modalities of instructional delivery based on ever-changing federal, state, and local mandates during COVID-19 (Crosby et al., 2020). The gap in practice was that it was unknown if or how teachers practiced self-care or how self-

care practices influenced teacher persistence (Anderson, 2020). Understanding the way in-service teachers handle their own self-care is important for educators who want to remain in the classroom despite hardships they may be facing.

The purpose of this basic qualitative descriptive study was to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby, 2020). For the purposes of this study, self-care was defined as the deliberate activity to take care of one's mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Lemon, 2021). Teacher persistence was defined as teachers' determination to persevere while facing numerous hardships (Varela & Fedynich, 2021). To gain an understanding of participants' perceptions of self-care and how self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the pandemic, audio recorded interviews were conducted with teachers who taught virtually during COVID-19 (Crosby et al., 2020). The study's findings helped address a gap in practice regarding teacher perceptions of self-care and their decisions to remain in the classroom during the pandemic. Table 1 illustrates the alignment and overview of the study's components. In particular, the conceptual framework, research questions, data requirements, data sources, and data analysis of the study are summarized in a single table.

Table 1

Research Process Map

Conceptual framework	Research questions & subquestions	Data needs	Data sources	Data analysis
Self-determination theory (SDT) considers how social and cultural factors affect a person's overall well-being and performance quality (Deci & Ryan) Social crisis and disaster theory (SCDT) addresses what happens when the fundamental structure of a society experiences a drastic disruption or decline (Quarantelli & Dynes)	RQ1: What self-care practices do teachers describe while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic? RQ2: How do teacher perceptions of self-care (physical, mental, and emotional well-being) influence beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19? SRQ1: How do teacher perceptions of physical well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19? SRQ2: How do teacher perceptions of mental well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19? SRQ3: How do teacher perceptions of emotional well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?	Participant descriptions and perceptions of self-care practice(s) (if any) while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, and knowledge of how those practices and perceptions are linked to teacher persistence	Semistructured interviews	Demonstration of knowledge: Descriptions of the role of self-care practice(s) while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and the possible role of self-care practice(s) in relation to teacher persistence

The major sections previewed in this chapter address the literature search strategy, conceptual framework, literature review related to key variables and concepts, concluding with a summary and discussion about how my research filled a gap in practice related to how in-service teachers handled their own self-care when faced with hardships.

Literature Search Strategy

The iterative search process for this literature review was conducted using the following databases and search engines, with various combinations of key search terms: Google Scholar, Walden University Library Database, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Thoreau, American Psychological Association (APA) PsycArticles, Journal Storage (JSTOR), SAGE Journals and Publications, EBSCO Host, Education Source, Primary Search, and Teacher Reference Center. Key search terms and combinations of search terms used were *COVID-19*, *COVID-19 effects on education*, *COVID-19 effects on teacher persistence*, *COVID-19 effects on teachers*, *educator readiness*, *educators*, *instructors*, *pandemic*, *self-care*, *self-determination theory*, *social disaster*, *social disaster theory*, *social problem of COVID-19*, *teacher persistence*, *teacher persistence during COVID-19*, *teacher preparedness*, *teachers, teacher stress*, *well-being*, *work motivation*, and *workplace stress*. The following Boolean phrases were used: *teachers OR educators OR school staff OR instructors*, *self-care OR well-being*, and *COVID-19 OR Coronavirus OR pandemic OR social disaster*.

The extensive research and review of literature for the study came from peer-reviewed articles published in 2019 through 2023. Any literature referenced before 2019

consisted of seminal works essential to framing the conceptual theories, thus establishing the foundation of the study. Data from education and psychology websites and databases were helpful in providing general information about returning to school after the pandemic. However, after review of the literature, there was a gap in practice and the literature was sparse combining the variables of this study: the relationship between reported teacher self-care and how teachers perceived the role of its subsequent influence on beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). Next, I annotated the articles and looked for themes, specifically related to how teacher perceptions of self-care influenced beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19 (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). The review of articles resulted in saturation of the literature.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was the foundation of this study. The unique combination of Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT and Quarantelli and Dynes's (1977) SCDT provided foundational support for the research and data collection methods of this study. Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT framework addresses intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in cognitive and social human development, personality, and self-regulation and considers innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (CAR; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Furthermore, SDT addresses how social and cultural factors affect one's overall well-being and performance quality (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This theory serves as a foundation for exploring reported teacher self-care practices

and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19 (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020).

The concept of SCDT is a relatively new. Recognizing the scarcity of data on the social-historical emergence and development of disaster-related behavior, Quarantelli (1987) conducted research and developed SCDT. Quarantelli and Dynes (1977) classified "disaster" into four major categories: the physical component (of the disaster), the physical consequences of the component, the evaluation of the physical component's impact, and the social changes and disruption(s) caused by the physical component. The COVID-19 pandemic affected every aspect of human life as well as altered the way in which education is delivered. Quarantelli's SCDT, in conjunction with Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT, provided a relevant foundation for conducting a study on how teachers managed self-care and self-determination to remain in their professions during a pandemic. Table 2 contains a list of abbreviations and definitions of frequently used terms throughout Chapter 2.

Table 2

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
SDT	Self-determination theory
SCDT	Social crisis and disaster theory
CAR	Competence, autonomy, and relatedness
CET	Cognitive evaluation theory
OIT	Organismic integration theory
COT	Causality orientations theory
BPNT	Basic psychological needs theory
GCT	Goals content theory

Self-Determination Theory

According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) SDT, understanding human motivation requires recognizing the basic psychological criteria for CAR. SDT is defined as human motivation driven by the need to grow and be fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan emphasized CAR as psychological needs, referring to them as conditions for psychological growth and well-being. In developing SDT, Deci and Ryan (1985) pointed out that people are motivated by a need to grow and find fulfillment. Modern theories of motivation presume that people actively engage in behaviors because they believe those behaviors will result in desired goals or outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Niemiec and Ryan (2009) explored the CAR concept in the classroom and applied SDT to educational practice, while Cherry (2021) asserted that human motivation is achieved when the psychological needs of CAR have been met. SDT involves two assumptions: (a) human behavior is driven by the psychological need for growth, and (b) autonomous motivation and behavior are crucial (Cherry, 2021). While external motivations such as money and reputation typically drive human behavior, SDT focuses on internal motivations such as a desire to learn or attain independence (Cherry, 2021).

Minitheories of SDT

Ryan (2009) used five minitheories to make up SDT's formal framework: cognitive evaluation theory (CET), organismic integration theory (OIT), causality orientations theory (COT), basic psychological needs theory (BPNT), and goals contents theory (GCT). CET was introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985) as a subtheory of SDT with the purpose of identifying reasons for the variability of intrinsic

motivation. Intrinsic motivation is defined as the natural tendency for people to want to grow and to do something for the sake of doing it (GQR, 2020; Ryan, 2009). CET addresses how social situations and interactions with other people either help or hurt intrinsic motivation. It also emphasizes the importance of autonomy and competence to intrinsic motivation (Ryan, 2009). OIT addresses how different external motives become internalized and focuses on the internalization continuum, which goes from external regulation to introjection, identification, and integration (Ryan, 2009). Ryan's COT illustrates individual variances in how people focus on various environmental factors to control behavior. BPNT expands on the concept of basic needs by making a direct link between them and overall wellness (Ryan, 2009). It also indicates that each need has its own effect on wellness (Ryan, 2009). GCT, the fifth minitheory, posits that even if they are successfully attained, consumerism and other extrinsic goals do not tend to increase need fulfillment, and thus do not promote happiness (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Niemiec et al., 2009; Ryan, 2009).

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Ryan and Deci (2000) posited that intrinsic motivation, the natural tendency to seek out new things and challenges, stretching the ability to explore and learn, may be the one thing that shows the good side of human nature. Intrinsic motivation is vital at any level of learning and can sometimes result in delayed reward (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). According to SDT research, people who are intrinsically motivated learn more effectively because they thrive in environments that meet their needs for CAR (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Klein (2019) referred to Ryan and Deci's (2017) stance on CAR, and

the importance of its influence on freedom of choice and quality of behavior. SDT indicates that people stay motivated when their basic psychological needs for autonomy and competence are met (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Even though people are endowed with intrinsic motivational tendencies, Ryan and Deci (2000) found that the preservation and strengthening of this innate propensity requires supportive situations, as it is susceptible to disruption by numerous unsupportive conditions.

Though intrinsic motivation is an essential form of drive, it is not the sole form of self-determined motivation (Deci & Ryan 1985). Ryan and La Guardia (in press) postulated that much of what people do is not organically motivated. The key challenge regarding nonintrinsically driven behaviors is how individuals acquire the motivation to engage in them and how this motivation influences long-term persistence and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT indicates that different motivations show how much the value and rules of the requested behavior have been internalized and integrated. Accordingly, Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT addressed the methods by which extrinsically motivated actions can become self-determined, and how the social environment influences those processes.

However, Ryan and Deci (2000) referred to extrinsic motivation as engaging in an activity to achieve a distinct goal, while intrinsic motivation involves engaging in an activity for the intrinsic rewards of the activity itself. Teaching practices are multifaceted and include a variety of elements. According to SDT, external pressures are one of the main reasons why some teachers utilize controlling rather than autonomy-supportive tactics in the classroom (Ryan & Brown, 2005).

SDT in Current Literature

Many factors have contributed to teachers' decisions as to whether to remain in the classroom during and post COVID-19. Using the SDT framework, Kim et al. (2021) conducted a study that explored challenges to teachers' basic needs for CAR. The goal of the study sought to comprehend teacher experiences post COVID-19 pandemic. Themes identified in the study were: uncertainty, practical concerns, worry for pupils, importance of relationships, teacher identity, and reflections (Kim et al., 2021). The conclusion of Kim et al.'s (2021) study connected the significance of teachers' experiences to their psychological needs of CAR.

On the other hand, Liu et al. (2019) used the SDT framework to conduct a study which looked at how teachers' motivation affects the usage of motivational tactics in the classroom. The following measures were used in the study: perceived job pressure, autonomous causality orientation, teachers' perceptions of student self-determination, psychological need satisfaction, teachers' self-determination, and teachers' use of three motivational strategies (Liu et al., 2019). Liu et al. (2019) posited that most research in SDT literature has disregarded teachers' needs for self-determination and satisfaction. Both studies bring up the importance of consulting with teachers to find out their needs. This consideration could positively influence teacher motivation and teacher persistence to remaining in the classroom during and post COVID-19.

History of Social Crisis and Disaster Theory

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most significant and unprecedented events of its generation. Quarantelli and Dynes (1977) are credited as founders of the relatively new SCDT concept and categorized it as a group anxiety. Quarantelli (1987) described a sociological analysis of factors affecting the study of disasters within the United States. The history and development of social and behavior research on disaster studies emerged because there was very little research and documentation (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977; Quarantelli, 1987). Dynes (1974) referred to disaster in four ways: the actual crisis disaster, the actual (physical) consequences of the disaster, how the impact of the crisis disaster is evaluated, and the social disruption and changes because of the crisis disaster. Britton (1988) posited that the sociologist perspective linked everyday occurrences of any civilization and those witnessed during the occurrence of a natural disaster. A disastrous event offers a sociologist two different chances: the first is to study and learn more about social reality, and the second is to put theories to use in the study (Britton, 1988).

Due to the lack of documented information, Quarantelli and Dynes (1987) conducted a study which sought to highlight and analyze the social conditions regarding the origins of disaster research. The natural and technological disasters that occurred in the United States, as well as those that were backed by military groups during times of conflict, were the primary subject of this research (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1987). Additionally, Quarantelli and Dynes (1987) highlighted the following "wartime" implications: social control and reactions of the population to fundamental

challenges of a disaster. Quarantelli and Dynes (1987) used the following five questions to establish field instruments in their study (p. 290):

1. Which elements in a disaster are most frightening or disrupting to people and how can the threats be met?
2. What techniques are effective in reducing or controlling fear?
3. What types of people are susceptible to panic and what types can be counted on for leadership in an emergency?
4. What aggressions and resentments are likely to emerge among victims of a disaster and how can these be prevented from disrupting work of disaster control?
5. What types of organized effort work effectively and which do not?

Similar tactics and approaches were used to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic (Finucane et al., 2020).

SCDT in Current Literature

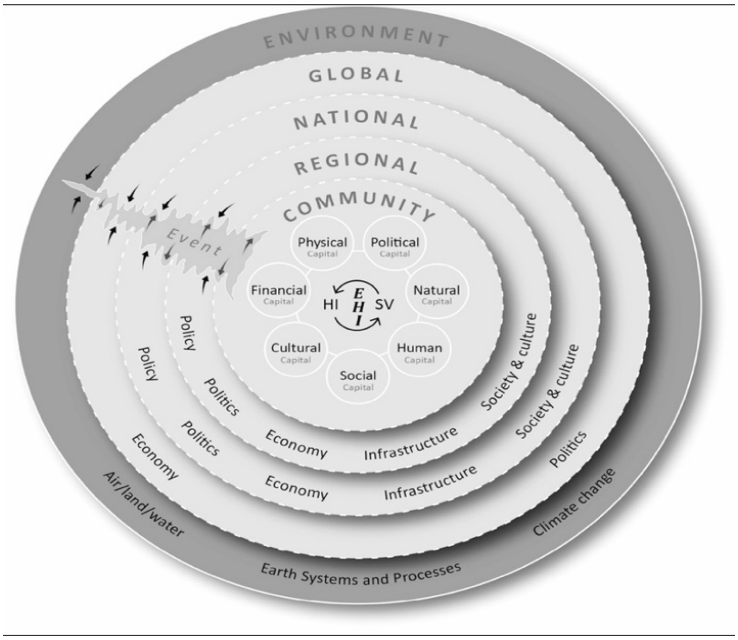
Despite SCDT being a relatively new concept with little historical documentation, current literature supports the theory and has used its model in response to the COVID-19 pandemic both domestically and abroad. Global and domestic responses which used the SCDT theory include themes such as: psychological well-being of teachers during a disaster, global and urban resilience, disaster risk reduction, and disaster recovery (Chen & Ji, 2021; Dube, 2020; Prayag et al., 2021).

Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery

Dube (2020) defined build-back better as the process of how a society strategically reconstructs, rehabilitates, and recovers, in response to a disaster. Dube emphasized the significance of the build-back better concept in relation to disaster risk reduction. Finucane et al. (2020) examined the effect that post-disaster strategies had on both the reduction of risks and the restoration of communities. On the other hand, Chen and Ji (2021) conducted a study to explore and fill in research gaps surrounding public demand urgency (in response to a disaster) and posits the criticality of equitable infrastructures. As such, the catastrophic nature of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the disparities within communities in relation to distribution of resources, leaving much of the public to demand equity and support (Finucane et al., 2020). Thomas et al. (2020) introduced the Cascading Hazards to disAsters that are Socially constructed eMerging out of Social Vulnerability (CHASMS) model. Figure 1 depicts the effects of a disaster at various levels, from local to environmental, as well as structural forces that can lead to social inequities at each level.

Figure 1

CHASMS Conceptual Model of Cascading Disasters, Social Vulnerability (SV), Health Inequity (HI), and Environmental Injustice (EHI)



Note. From "The CHASMS Conceptual Model of Cascading Disasters and Social Vulnerability: The COVID-19 Case Example," by D.S.K. Thomas, S. Jang, and J. Scandlyn, 2020, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, *51*, Article 101828 (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2020.101828). Copyright 2020 by Elsevier Publishers. Reprinted with permission.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Teacher Self-Care

Teaching is frequently ranked among the most stressful of occupations (McIntyre et al., 2020). The world was experiencing multiple disasters simultaneously: a worldwide pandemic, a national awakening, and confrontation regarding racism, governmental divisiveness, and, for educators, the question of what to do about the existing status of education and the future of the profession (Knight, 2020). Even though it does not come naturally, the practice of self-care is imperative for teachers and should become a common practice in order to prevent burnout (Knight, 2020; Anderson, 2020). Although Harris (2020) emphasized key self-care practices for teachers such as taking time to notice one's own thoughts and feelings, there is still a disparity when it comes to knowing how teachers practiced self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When schools were closed due to COVID-19, it was necessary for teachers to establish new routines while adjusting to teaching from home for them to maintain a sense of stability (McCarthy, 2020). Working from home for extended amounts of time was difficult because work time and personal time often overlapped. It became so easy to fall into the habit of being on-call 24-hours per day, seven days per week as when responding to requests from learners anywhere, at any time (McCarthy, 2020).

Trust and Whalen (2021) examined a wholistic point of view from teachers. It was reported that the immediate shift from traditional to virtual instruction placed education into a state of emergency. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers

had to learn new ways to teach, such as creating online content, mastering new instructional delivery technologies, understanding online methodology and pedagogy, getting parents involved, dealing with student mental health issues, and exploring multiple synchronous and asynchronous learning strategies (Hartsthorne et al., 2020). This change was made quickly because of the need to adapt to sudden changes in delivery, such as delivering services in ways other than being face-to-face, and because of the potential danger and unpredictability posed by a virus that was widely spread but not well understood (Veletsianos & Houlden, 2020).

Teacher Burnout

There are many components which contribute to the causes and effects of teacher burnout, including lack of resources, student behavior problems, and the pressures of standardized testing. Lack of resources can include but are not limited to, lack of leadership support, classroom supplies, and instructional training. Student behavior problems have a wide and unpredictable range and are frequently the result of ineffective classroom management. In addition to the newly added responsibilities that COVID-19 introduced to the educational profession, teachers were still required to teach their students with the goal of them successfully passing standardized tests. Growth and proficiency rates could still be determining factors as to whether teachers kept their jobs (Hanover Research, 2020).

Kiekel et al. (2022) referred to the happenstance learning theory when discussing how humans learned (and continue to learn) to navigate through the events of their lives, whether those occurrences were planned or unexpected. Teachers gained

the abilities necessary to seamlessly shift from the traditional classroom setting to the online learning environment (Kiekel, 2022). COVID-19 introduced a new level of stress to a profession with its own demands, requiring teachers to multi-task at exponential rates. Being tied with nursing as having the highest stress rates of any career, good teachers are leaving the classroom because teaching conditions in a pandemic were not sustainable (Hanover Research, 2020; Singer, 2020).

Many teachers reported they had become impromptu social workers, referring students to food banks and other assistance agencies, grief counselors for students who lost family members to the COVID-19 pandemic, and helping students cope with anxiety, sadness, and loneliness, and that they had never been as exhausted as they were while teaching during the pandemic (Singer, 2020). Teachers were reaching their breaking points attempting to manage and balance life with newfound responsibilities, and reportedly consuming more food and alcohol, while exercising and sleeping less (Cardoza, 2021).

Furthermore, experts and teachers' organizations expressed concern about an educational burnout issue that could trigger a retirement wave (Singer, 2020). According to a recent National Education Association survey, nearly 30% of teachers said COVID-19 increased the likelihood of quitting their jobs or retiring early. Meanwhile, 55% of veteran teachers with more than 30 years of experience and 20% of teachers with less than 10 years of experience said they were now considering leaving their jobs (Singer, 2020). In many cases, leaving the teaching profession, be it mid-year

or the end of a school year, was equivalent to self-care and helped preserve mental and overall health (Singer, 2020).

Veteran and new teachers chose to quit rather than return to the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic out of concern for individual and collective safety. Many preferred that virtual instruction last longer and believed that the decision to return to the traditional educational setting of the classroom was premature (Allen et al., 2020). While Simmons et al. (2019) questioned the role that schools played in fostering and promoting teacher self-care practices, Sokal (2020b) reported that no studies had been conducted to examine teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Suganya and Sankareshwari (2020), online teachers in higher secondary education had a higher rate of job satisfaction. On the other hand, Nagasawa and Tarrant (2020) claimed that early childcare educators were under significantly greater amounts of stress, and as a result, they were not as satisfied working in their respective professions. Though face-to-face instruction was phased out of all aspects of traditional education, older pupils were still able to participate in and receive virtual training (Nagasawa & Tarrant, 2020). Thus, the social and emotional well-being of early childcare and education providers became a major topic of concern since they frequently suffered high levels of stress and burnout (Jennings et al., 2020).

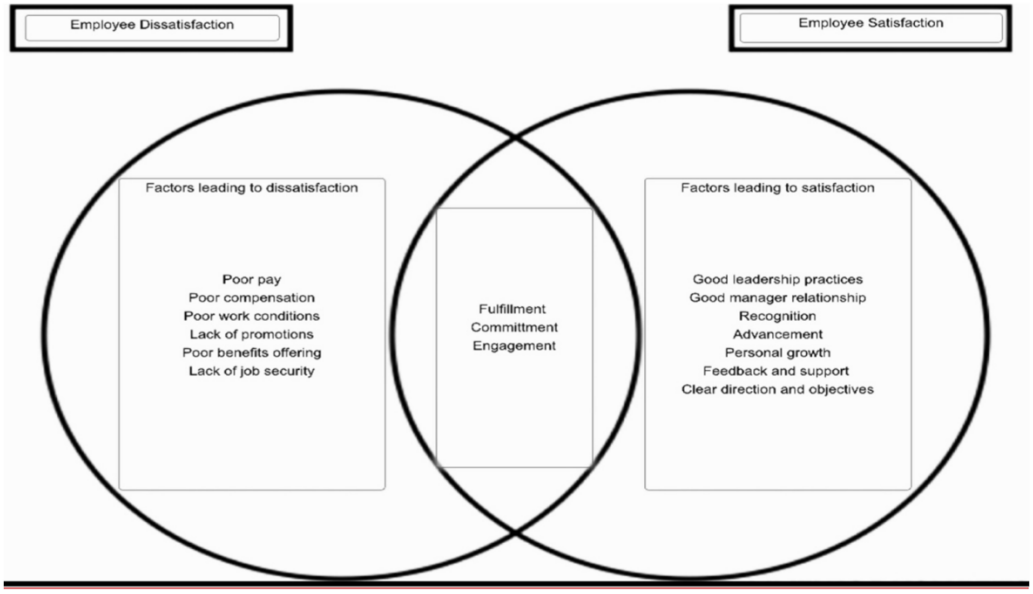
Teacher Persistence

During the COVID-19 pandemic, strong and compassionate leadership was cited as an essential factor in keeping teachers in the classroom (Tran et al., 2020).

Leadership helps drive and cultivate workplace culture and can break or build trauma-sensitive spaces for teams to heal, recover, and produce (Brown, 2021). Rather than perfection, the goal is teacher persistence, or in other words, keeping teachers in the classroom (Courduff et al., in press). Problems associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have consumed the lives of teachers which is why workplace environments are influential to their decisions to stay or leave the classroom (Hare, 2021). Figure 2 illustrates Raisinghani's (2020) perspective on the factors that contribute to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which may ultimately impact a teacher's decision to remain employed or not.

Figure 2

Job Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction



COVID-19

The 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic posed significant challenges to the U.S. school system and to educators (Herman et al., 2021). Nearly 1.6 billion students in over 200 nations were affected by the COVID-19 epidemic. Over 94% of students worldwide have been affected by school closures. This has altered our entire life. Social isolation and movement restrictions have disrupted education and impacted overall well-being (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

At the start of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic happened suddenly and had big effects on many people's jobs (Allen et al., 2020). Teachers had to swiftly design and create online materials to teach their students virtually. 2020's lockdown period, from mid-March until the end of May, was also a time of significant anxiety for schools as well as teachers. Some teachers continued to teach the children of critical workers while others wondered when they would be able to return to the classroom and if doing so was safe. This was happening at a time when family members were falling ill, when teachers' own children were staying home from school, and when many outlets for stress reduction were off-limits (Allen et al., 2020).

A variety of studies have examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and well-being (Fancourt et al., 2020; Pierce et al., 2020). However, little thought has been given to the precise ways in which this unusual time has impacted teachers in particular (Allen et al., 2020). There was an increase in the percentage of teachers who reported experiencing extremely high levels of anxiety associated to their

professions in the week preceding up to the March 2020 lockdown, as well as in the week after the news that classes would resume in June (Allen et al., 2020).

The percentage of educators reporting extremely high levels of job-related stress increased significantly in the two weeks leading up to the lockdown and again in the week following the June announcement of classes' resumption. Concern about their jobs was indicated more frequently by female educators than by their male counterparts (Allen et al., 2020). Some aspects of teacher well-being (i.e., feeling useful, feeling optimistic) deteriorated during the lockdown, while others (i.e., having energy to spare, thinking clearly) improved (Allen et al., 2020).

COVID-19 Impacts on Domestic Education

Hemphill and Marianno (2021) conducted a study which examined how urban school systems adjusted collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) to accommodate COVID-19 learning. In spring 2020, school districts swiftly implemented distance learning strategies in response to COVID-19. At times these initiatives violated CBAs between teachers' unions and district administration (Hemphill & Marianno, 2021). Hemphill and Marianno (2021) examined 101 urban school districts' COVID-19 contract revisions and found twenty-five urban school districts negotiated short-term CBA solutions with teachers' unions to enable distance learning. Among the 25 districts was one of the largest urban school districts in the Midwest. These CBA revisions addressed remuneration, workload, non-teaching duties, evaluation, leave, and technology. Hemphill and Marianno (2021) found that discussions of spring

contracts informed preparation for schooling in the fall, which impacted teacher morale and workplace relationships beyond the 2020–21 school year.

Teachers and school counselors were initial responders to student well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic (Beard et al., 2021). Teachers nationwide had to incorporate social and emotional learning standards while adjusting to online instruction (Beard et al., 2021). While focusing on the social and emotional needs of children is important, Beard et al. (2021) pondered the level of assistance required for teachers working in urban schools and disproportionately impacted communities of color. Beard et al. (2021) posited that the well-being of teachers is a key factor in the well-being of their students. They also looked at how teachers came up with new ideas and created online communities via social media to help each other with SEL and anti-racist teaching.

COVID-19 Impacts on International Education

Universities all over the world quickly paused face-to-face classes, stopped practicum field experiences, ordered interim campus closures, and required faculty to redesign traditional courses to a virtual format because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all with not much time to get ready (Bailey et al., 2022). In a qualitative study, Bailey et al. (2022) examined the individual and group experiences of five academic staff members at a university in the United Arab Emirates. The crisis of COVID-19 induced feelings of widespread anxiety and unease (Bailey et al., 2022). During the pandemic, deep thought on teaching and learning required a novel yet informed approach (Bailey et al., 2022). Bailey et al. (2022) examined participant attitudes, habits, and thinking

zones during COVID-19 to determine how to give students universal learning experiences in a variety of media and locations. Many teachers went from teaching face-to-face in a classroom to teaching online on numerous platforms.

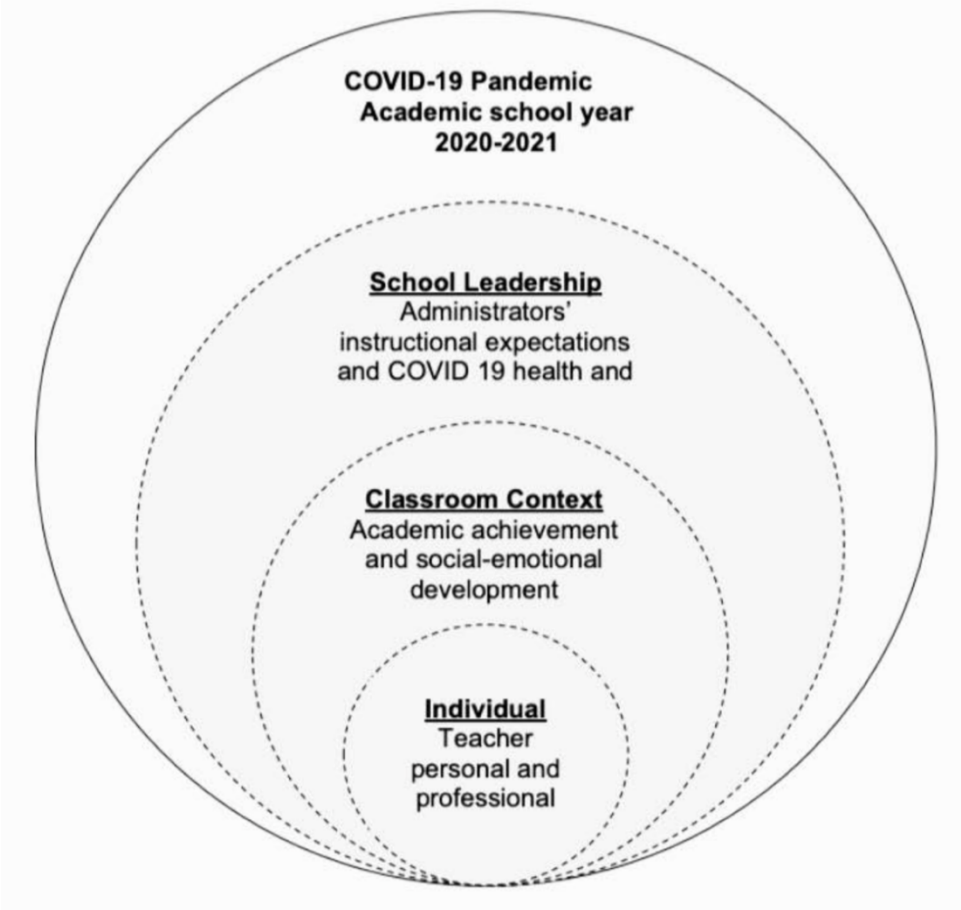
The simultaneous shutdown of schools in 191 nations throughout the globe in reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak is unprecedented (Erfurth & Ridge, 2020). It has forced school systems and governments to find solutions ensuring that education keeps going and that the most vulnerable children do not become even more worse off. Erfurth and Ridge (2020) revealed four key results after 700 individuals were surveyed and several experts were interviewed. First, although staff, students, and parents felt prepared, training was poor. Second, administrators, teachers, and parents were stressed out by distant learning. Third, working parents confronted more challenges. Fourth, learning-disabled and special-needs children were under supported (Erfurth & Ridge, 2020). For future outbreaks, Erfurth and Ridge (2020) reported that schools must be better prepared to support students and staff in order to limit the dangers to learning. The structure and content of school days might be made more flexible, ideally with on-demand content for students and project-based teaching and learning strategies (Erfurth & Ridge, 2020). Parents must partner with teachers by participating in their children's remote learning, and schools must prioritize disadvantaged groups. Working parents find this difficult. If hazards to quality education are not addressed, distant learning could increase economic and social inequity. To establish distance learning systems for all children, low-income and remote parents need support (Erfurth & Ridge, 2020).

The Stress of COVID-19

While the COVID-19 pandemic presented teachers with new problems, it also brought to light preexisting stressors and disparities within the system of education (Cipriano et al., 2020). Teaching was ranked among the most stressful professions in the United States in polls conducted before the pandemic, especially since teachers are paid significantly less than occupations with comparable educational prerequisites (Allegretto & Mishel, 2019; Steiner & Woo, 2021). Pre-pandemic, teachers were stressed because they had no control over curriculum and instruction, struggled with student behavior, and felt under supported (Steiner & Woo, 2021). At the onset of the pandemic, many teachers continued to experience the same stresses in addition to anxieties for their physical health, safety, and well-being (Will, 2021). Due to the fact that teachers felt stress on many different levels, Robinson et al. (2023) used an adapted socio-ecological framework (Figure 3) to show how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the individual, classroom, and school leadership ecologies.

Figure 3

Socio-Ecological Model



Note. From "Teachers, Stress, and the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Analysis," by L. E. Robinson, A. Valido, A. Drescher, A. B. Woolweaver, D. L. Espelage, S. LoMurray, A. C. J. Long, A. A. Wright, and M. M. Dailey, 2023, *School Mental Health, 15*(1), p. 80 (https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-022-09533-2). Copyright 2023 by Springer Science+Business Media. Reprinted with pending permission.

Although there is a large amount of stress associated with their jobs, teachers do not work alone. Instead, they are affected by stressors in their own lives, the lives of their students, and the larger context of society (Robinson et al., 2023). Because teachers experience stress on many different levels, the socio-ecological model is used to illustrate how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the individual, classroom, and school leadership environments (see Figure 3). People expect those historical events like the pandemic will influence all levels of the social ecology. These stages often coincide with each other, which makes the lines between them less clear. Teachers suffer stress depending on their circumstances, temperament, capacity to deal, and personal strengths and weaknesses (Robinson et al., 2023). For example, at the end of the 2021 academic year, Diliberti et al. (2021) discovered that younger teachers departed due to childcare challenges, while older teachers left largely due to health concerns.

During the pandemic, instructors may have experienced stress due to managing their interactions with children, families, and school administration. According to Pressley (2021), most of the 359 K–12 teachers who took part in a study on burnout during the pandemic indicated high levels of stress brought on by managing classroom activities, keeping in touch with parents, and inadequate administrative presence and support. Besides teaching and adhering to safety standards during the pandemic, teachers also had to deal with external stressors connected to their personal lives. These stressors may have been specific to the

individual, the context of the classroom, or the conditions surrounding school leadership (Robinson et al., 2023).

Summary and Conclusions

As evidenced in the literature, self-care is regarded as a crucial aspect of the teaching profession. However, the findings linking teacher self-care to beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19 have been inconsistent. Teachers are given advice on how to include self-care techniques into their lives and daily routines to improve their overall well-being. After an exhaustive review of the literature, it is known that the studies on teacher self-care have primarily centered on self-care teaching tips and general teaching experiences during the pandemic. Reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic is unknown (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). To better understand and fill the gap of how teachers practiced self-care in relation to their persistence during the pandemic, I utilized a basic qualitative approach to design the study. In the next chapter, I provide information on the study's research design, methodology, instrumentation, and reliability.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). Audio recorded interviews were conducted with teachers who taught virtually during COVID-19 to gain an understanding of their perceptions of self-care and how self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the pandemic. This study's findings addressed a gap in research on practice regarding teachers' perceptions of how self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the pandemic.

The study took place in a Grade 6–12 local setting in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and addressed the things which are known to be incorrect in current practice. I demonstrated how the situation in the local setting was representative of what was happening across the country. Though the study addressed a local problem, the local setting was not unique to the problem of self-care for teachers. The literature on practice indicated that this is problematic in other areas (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021). Research indicates that the practice of teacher self-care is a problem similar to the problem in the local setting (see, for example, Diliberti et al., 2021; McCarthy, 2020; Robinson et al., 2023 or more supporting research studies); therefore, the study could be conducted in the local setting because it is related to a larger problem in research on practice.

In this chapter, I, as the researcher, discuss the research questions and subquestions, essential concepts, and why a basic qualitative approach was appropriate for the study. Next, I closely examine my role as the researcher, including any connections, biases, and potential ethical issues. Finally, I discuss reliability and processes for protecting the anonymity of the study's participants.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research questions and subquestions were the focus of the study in order to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020):

RQ1. What self-care practices do teachers describe while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2. How do teachers perceive that self-care (physical, mental, and emotional well-being) influences beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

SRQ1. How do teacher perceptions of physical well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

SQR2. How do teacher perceptions of mental well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

SQR3. How do teacher perceptions of emotional well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

The central concepts for this study included Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT and Quarantelli and Dynes's (1977) SCDT. Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT addresses how individuals might grasp how teacher motivation and teacher persistence are related. Quarantelli and Dynes's theory of SCDT defined the fundamental conditions experienced by the teachers, which provided a lens to frame questions about experiences while teaching during a pandemic.

The research tradition of this study was basic qualitative study. Because the research questions were developed to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020), quantitative methodology was inappropriate, as it would have produced statistical data. Therefore, interviews were the most efficient means of obtaining data to answer this study's research questions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Alternative Qualitative Methods Considered and Reasons for Rejection

After evaluating several qualitative approaches that could have been applicable to this study, the basic qualitative design emerged as the strategy which most connected with the study's topic, problem, purpose, and questions as it addressed how individuals made sense of their lives (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Contrastingly, other qualitative methods, such as case study and ethnography, would have involved collecting and studying data in a group setting or lens (Mayer, 2015; Patton, 2002b). A researcher conducting a case study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals experience a phenomenon in a specific context (Mayer, 2015). Though this study was

conducted in a local school setting, the research questions were not specific to that context. The interview guide was designed so that the study would be transferrable to other settings. The purpose of narrative inquiry is to comprehend a person's culture through gaining knowledge of their lived experiences with a certain occurrence (Patton, 2002b). Though interview questions inquired about teachers' experiences while teaching during the pandemic, that was not the sole focus of this research. Phenomenology involves an effort to understand and describe the essence of something. This method is used to investigate people's everyday experiences while researchers suspend their preconceived notions about an issue (Patton, 2002b). Teachers answered questions and shared some of their lived experiences while teaching during the pandemic, yet the purpose of the study was not solely focused on comprehending and describing those experiences. The purpose of ethnography is to gain a thorough understanding of a group's shared culture, conventions, and social dynamics within members' own context (Patton, 2002b). However, the focus of this study was to learn about individual teachers' experiences while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, rather than about their experiences as a collective group. Researchers using grounded theory seek to develop a theory from data that have been systemically collected and examined using comparative analysis (Patton, 2002b). Though grounded theory is used in qualitative research, the purpose of this study was not focused on using results to create a theory.

Basic qualitative research was appropriate for the study because I provided the groundwork for future research and collected baseline data on the reasons why teachers practiced or did not practice self-care. Merriam (2009) said that basic qualitative

studies were the best way to learn about how people made sense of their experiences and built their worlds, as well as what meanings they gave to their experiences. Studies of qualitative research that do not adhere to a particular accepted methodology are considered generic. The question of how much rigor may be maintained without following a predetermined approach has generated a great deal of discussion in the qualitative literature (Kahlke, 2014). Part of the problem with this identified problem of educational significance under evaluation was that not much was known about how teachers perceived their self-care practices influenced their beliefs about persistence to keep working as teachers during the pandemic. Through conducting interviews with the participants, I was able to gain an understanding of their experiences and the meanings of those experiences. In relation to this study, this means that the participants evaluated their self-care practices or lack thereof during the pandemic. Additionally, the participants reflected on the relationship between their self-care practices relative to their motivation to remain in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, teachers were able to reflect and consider other methods that could be used to complement and support teaching practices (Merriam, 2009).

The purpose of qualitative studies is to comprehensively summarize the specific events of individuals (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Basic qualitative studies are not generally case dependent, and practical phenomena are not as bound to a specific setting. Inquiry questions of basic qualitative studies include practical consequences and useful applications of what can be learned about an issue or problem. The purpose of basic qualitative inquiry is to answer straightforward questions without framing the

inquiry within an explicit theoretical, philosophical, epistemological, or ontological tradition (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Basic qualitative data sources primarily include interviews. Though triangulation can occur among the interviews, it is minimal. Basic qualitative studies are practical and flexible, which helps practitioners address problems in the field.

Role of the Researcher

In this study, I was the sole researcher and interviewer. I contacted the appropriate administrators and participants. For the study, I collected, recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and appropriately stored the data. As the sole researcher for this study, my most important responsibilities were to establish a credible and reliable study and adhere to protocol for protecting participants while conducting interviews (Patton, 2015). As the researcher of this study, it was essential to examine the possibility of bias (Patton, 2015). Reflective journaling was one way to mitigate this bias (Patton, 2015). It was possible that some of the participants and I could have taught some of the same students. Therefore, it was crucial for me to refrain from sharing my views and experiences on dealing with those students, as well as my perspective on the role of self-care in teacher persistence. Because journaling would allow me to reflect on any issues of bias that may have arisen, I journaled my responses after each interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Methodology

Participant Selection

I interviewed 10 participants for this study who taught Grades 6–12 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Boddy (2016) suggested that having 10–12 participants in a study should suffice in order to achieve data saturation and is appropriate in most basic qualitative interview studies. Within the first few interviews, I noticed patterns in the participants' responses. By the fifth interview, participant responses to certain interview questions were almost identical. The study's participants ranged from 1st-year to veteran teachers because all the participants taught during the pandemic from March 2020 through the summer of 2021. According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling is appropriate for basic qualitative study. Purposeful sampling is defined as a selective sampling technique used by qualitative researchers to recruit participants who can provide in-depth information about the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). Therefore, I used a purposeful sampling strategy method when choosing potential participants. This strategy was used because it provided information-rich data from voluntary participants who fit the demographic and met the criteria related to the study (Patton, 2015). Also, I used purposeful sampling because I was looking for sixth- through 12th-grade teachers of this demographic in my local setting. Had I not been able to reach 10–12 participants, I planned to use snowball sampling as a methodological approach to ask participants whether they had any teacher friends who met the study's eligibility criteria (Patton, 2002a; Suri, 2011).

Instrumentation

Semistructured Interviews

I collected data using semistructured interviews. Using my research questions as a guide, I created interview questions based on emerging themes from the literature that could yield rich data (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interview questions began with larger themes inviting participants to speak freely while considering and reflecting on their experiences as educators during the pandemic (Meadows, 2003). After each topic was asked during the interview, follow-up questions were often asked based on participant responses. Throughout the interview, I asked probing questions and followed up with additional questions toward the end. Interview questions are highlighted in Table 3 as well as in Appendix A.

Table 3

Interview Questions

IQ #	Interview question
1	How are you feeling right now?
2	What is your definition of self-care?
3	How did you practice self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4	How long have you been in the teaching profession?
5	Why did you first enter the teaching profession?
6	Why did you decide to remain or not remain in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic?
7	In your opinion, how did physical well-being relate to/influence your longevity in the classroom/profession? Or would you say that physical well-being was related to or influenced your longevity in the classroom/profession during COVID-19? Why or why not?
8	In your opinion, how did mental health and well-being connect to or influence your longevity in the classroom/profession during COVID-19?
9	In your opinion, how did emotional well-being relate to/influence your decision to remain in the classroom during COVID-19?

Alignment between research questions (RQ), subresearch questions (SRQ), interview questions (IQ), and potential follow-up questions (FQ) is highlighted in Table 4.

Table 4

Research Aligned With Interview Questions

Research question	Interview question	Follow-up question
RQ1. What self-care practices do teachers describe while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?	IQ1. How are you feeling right now? IQ2. What is your definition of self-care? IQ3. How did you practice self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic?	FQ1. Do you foresee any reason why you may not be able to complete this interview recounting your experience(s) while teaching during the pandemic?
RQ2. How do teachers perceive that self-care (physical, mental, and emotional well-being) influences their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?	IQ4. How long have you been in the teaching profession? IQ5. Why did you first enter the teaching profession? IQ6. Why did you decide to remain or not remain in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic?	FQ2. Do you think there is a connection between how teachers practiced self-care during the pandemic versus how long they stayed in the classroom? Why or why not? FQ3. Who or what would you say was your motivation for entering the teaching profession?
SRQ1. How do teacher perceptions of physical well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?	IQ7. In your opinion, how did physical well-being relate to/influence your longevity in the classroom/profession?	
SRQ2. How do teacher perceptions of mental well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?	IQ8. In your opinion, how did mental health and well-being connect to or influence your longevity in the classroom/profession during COVID-19?	FQ4. Did your school (administration/leadership) provide opportunities for teachers to practice self-care? If so, how? FQ5. Why did or didn't you remain in the classroom during the pandemic?
SRQ3. How do teacher perceptions of emotional well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?	IQ9. In your opinion, how did emotional well-being relate to/influence your decision to remain in the classroom during COVID-19?	FQ6. Who or what kept you in the teaching profession during the pandemic?

Member Checking

As a method of member-checking the information provided, I emailed the study participants a copy of the complete original transcript of the first interview we had together. The email asked the participants if the transcription was accurate. If not, participants were given the opportunity to delete information that was not precise as well as add or change information that may have been misunderstood (Patton, 2015). I documented the number of times a participant changed the transcript text by adding or subtracting from it. Lastly, the participants were asked to email me back their revisions if applicable. This procedure ensured the accuracy of the interview data used in my analysis.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

This study's data were collected from teachers who taught Grades 6–12 in a local school district in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts during the pandemic. I contacted the ED explaining the purpose of my research, whom I sought to recruit as participants, and how I planned to collect data from the participants. Upon obtaining permission from the ED on official letterhead to conduct the study at the research site, I provided the letter of permission to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Next, I received IRB approval from Walden University which granted permission for me to collect data for the study. The IRB approval number connected to this study is: 06-06-23-0371153. After I received the approval of the IRB, the ED provided me with a list of teachers who taught Grades 6–12 during the pandemic to serve as a prospective participant pool.

Through email, I confirmed with the teachers whether they matched the requirements for participation in the study. The participants' letter of invitation can be found in Appendix B. If they responded to the email and met the requirements, then the teachers received electronic consent forms. Upon receiving informed consent paperwork, I interviewed 10 teachers. The interviews were audio recorded in a web-based password-protected meeting room such as Zoom. During the interviews, I took notes and saved the audio files. Next, the audio files were transcribed through Microsoft Word. I played back the recorded audio while reading the transcripts to verify the accuracy of those transcripts. Because this is my dissertation, I was the sole interviewer and data transcriber.

Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). In this basic qualitative study, data analysis included organizing the data into initial codes, codes into categories, and grouping those categories into themes (Patton, 2015). This study collected data in two stages: a semistructured primary interview and member checking (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Patton, 2015). The research questions served as the foundation for developing and aligning each interview question (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). After conducting interviews and transcribing the audio recordings, I coded to find keywords, themes, and phrases to categorize the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The first cycle of coding could have

ranged from a single word to a complete sentence, whereas the second cycle was based on more lengthy passages or reconstructions (Saldaña, 2018). Several iterations of coding were required for the analysis of thematic descriptions (Patton, 2015). Each interview was manually coded and annotated by me. Therefore, I recorded my comments by hand after each interview. Next, I looked for recurring themes to provide a detailed and data-rich descriptive data analysis (Patton, 2015; Williams & Moser, 2019). Following the coding cycles, the codes were sorted into categories and organized into themes. I then created a codebook using Williams and Moser's (2019) guidelines to organize the codes and categories. This made it possible to observe commonalities and recurring themes in the data.

Any discrepancies discovered during data collection and analysis were included with the results. If applicable, I attempted to contact the participant again to clarify and resolve the data discrepancy (Patton, 2015). If the participant confirmed that the data was correct, the negative case was placed next to each round of coded data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Despite the possibility that negative cases may have contradicted the primary conclusions while strengthening the study's credibility, data variation led to a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers should aspire to provide transparency in order to improve credibility and trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). The trustworthiness of a qualitative study supports its validity, transparency, and rigor (Chandra & Shang,

2017). This section of the chapter expands on the strategies used in this study to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

When creating the study, I considered reflective practices to establish credibility (Patton, 2015). As the researcher, I kept my own reflective notebooks to reflect on my biases, preconceptions, and what I was learning during the course of the study. Upon the conclusion of each interview, I reflected on the questions and responses. I worked closely with members of my research committee and cohort to identify and control any biases that may have been overlooked. Another important factor for ensuring credibility was interpreting interview data with a focus on the study's purpose and research questions (2015). The data collection process continued until saturation was reached.

Transferability

Transferability is most effectively determined by coding (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This research is grounded in the conceptual framework and the phenomenon being explored, which in this case was how teachers perceived the role of self-care practices influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). The interview questions are aligned with the research goals and served as descriptive data for the study of how teachers exercised self-care in relation to teacher persistence during the pandemic. I promoted transferability by creating research questions that can be used in other settings and

contexts beyond this study. However, the study failed to promote transferability in that it was limited to one study site with limited criteria of teaching Grades 6-12.

Due to the nature of the interview questions and the restriction of the study's participants being teachers of Grades 6 to 12, the study's findings and line of questioning can be transferred to a variety of contexts, settings, and populations. For example, K-12, university, public, private, independent, and charter school teachers who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic all experienced the same phenomenon (Robinson et al., 2023). Teachers across the nation faced numerous obstacles during the 2020–2021 school year as they attempted to educate pupils in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic (Robinson et al., 2023).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the degree to which research procedures are documented and reliable (Nowell et al., 2017). Techniques used to demonstrate dependability include: *Evidence,* which includes full transcripts, careful documentation of data gathering sessions, media (i.e., audiotapes, videotapes, documents, photographs; Nowell, et al., 2017). *An in-depth methodological description* that provides a comprehensible record of how data were collected and analyzed. Meticulous description increases soundness of study that can be useful for future studies (Anderson, 2010). *Audit trail*, which is documentation of the inquiry process (Koch, 1994). *Records of the data analysis process*, which includes codebooks, how coding schemes were developed, documentation of initial codes, and secondary codes and categories with multiple examples from the dataset (interview transcripts, observational records, focus group transcripts, for example).

Dependability is important to make sure that the research is of a high standard and can be repeated with similar outcomes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A researcher can establish validity by developing an objective interview guide (Patton, 2015). To guarantee that the study's conclusions can be verified, valid data are needed. In order to gather comprehensive descriptive data for this study, semistructured interviews with follow-up questions were used. The constant cycles of transcribing, coding, categorizing, and recoding the data contributed to the study's dependability (Patton, 2015). There was one round of semistructured interviews and another round of member checking in this study.

Confirmability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), to be considered reliable, credible, and trustworthy, a study must take an inquiry stance and use reflexivity to explore relationships, data, and context. This dissertation was suitable for qualitative research. After coding, I revisited the audio recordings to confirm that none of the participants' perspectives were omitted. Establishing objectivity in the researcher's transcription and analysis of the data was crucial for establishing confirmability. I carefully transcribed the interviews to ensure that the teachers' perceptions of the role of self-care practices in relation to teacher persistence during COVID-19 were clear. As another form of confirmability and member checking, I emailed the interview transcript to the participants for their review and evaluation. Participants were able to correct, omit, or change any portion of their initial interview, as well as preliminary codes and themes, in the email to ensure the accuracy of the data and my analysis.

Ethical Procedures

I contacted the ED of the local school district in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to inquire about conducting my research with the district's personnel. Following the oral defense of my proposal, I completed the IRB application, awaited its approval, and met with the ED to discuss the objectives of the research. The letter of permission to the ED indicated the title of the study, described what the study was about, whom I sought to recruit as participants, and how data would be collected. Upon receiving written approval from Walden University's IRB, I submitted the ED's official letter of permission to perform my study with local district staff members to the IRB and began the recruitment process. After reviewing the ED's data spreadsheet of potential study participants from the site, I issued email invitations. I sent invitations to those who volunteered to participate in the study a copy of the informed consent form I created using Walden's template. To safeguard the privacy and protect the confidentiality of each participant, a pseudonym was issued to them. The interviews were transcribed using these aliases. During the interviews, I recorded via audio and took notes. Following the interviews, I compared my notes to the audio transcriptions in order to eliminate any researcher bias (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All research materials will be kept in my home office and on a password-protected computer. External hard disks that contain field notes or audio recordings will be housed in a lockable filing cabinet. To protect the identities of my participants, I will delete all research-related papers at the end of the 5-year study period.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the study's research design and rationale, my role as a researcher, the methodology, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection and analysis, issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures. This basic qualitative study explored reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). It took place at a local site in the Northeast Region of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Purposeful sampling was used for participant selection. The study consisted of one formal round of interviews followed by an email for member checking. Throughout the data collecting and analysis phases, I adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the study's credibility and reflexivity.

In Chapter 4, I will report this study's findings. The codes, themes, and descriptions emerging from the interviews will also be included. The chapter will cover the setting, demographics, data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and outcomes.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). The research questions and research subquestions that were used in this study are listed below.

RQ1. What self-care practices do teachers describe while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2. How do teachers perceive that self-care (physical, mental, and emotional well-being) influences beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

SRQ1. How do teacher perceptions of physical well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

SRQ2. How do teacher perceptions of mental well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

SRQ3. How do teacher perceptions of emotional well-being influence their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

In this chapter I will report the results of this basic qualitative study. It includes the research setting, participant demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

This study was conducted in a password-protected virtual platform called Zoom. The semistructured interviews were conducted between work and home offices at mutually convenient times for both myself and participants. As such, the interviews were conducted during the last week of the school year. The participants of this study were teachers who taught in a Northeast school district in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in Grades 6–12 during the height of the pandemic.

Participant Demographics

I asked the participants to share the number of years of their teaching experience, why they first entered the teaching profession, and if/why they remained in the profession during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the interviews, some participants volunteered the current grades and subjects they taught. P1, P3, P5, P7, P9, and P10 reported that they had taught between 1 and 5 years. P2 and P6 taught between 6 and 10 years. P4 and P8 reported that they had been in the teaching profession for more than 20 years. P5 and P10 were the only participants of the study who intentionally entered the teaching profession to share their knowledge and passion. P5 stated, "I first entered teaching because I always enjoyed teaching people. I always enjoyed sharing knowledge. It could be showing someone how to work a computer … I just like sharing that knowledge and seeing someone be happy because they gain knowledge." P10 reported, "I just had such a love of reading and writing ... when I feel like you just have that much of it, you kind of just want to give it to others to try to plant those seeds of passion as well." P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, and P9 stated

that they entered the teaching profession unintentionally at the suggestion of others or by entering another profession and finding it was not for them. P1 said, “So I actually entered college as a business major and I took one business class and I said this is not for me.”

P2 stated the following:

> I had a history degree coming out of college and when I graduated, I had absolutely no clue what I wanted to do. Weirdly enough, I was working for a landlord that I knew … and it worked out because I was helping to take care of my grandfather at the time … we were talking one day … and another guy told me that I needed to do something more useful. So they recommended a graduate program … They gave me a sales pitch that you’re probably not going to be the best teacher … You’re not going to be the worst one. But you are going to do something that’s, you know, necessary and useful for the people in our community.

P3 reported the following:

> So growing up, I had always been told … you’re going to be a teacher. You’re going to be a doctor and nurse or something … to take care of people … but I didn’t really know what I wanted to do because you know, when you’re young you want to be like a space princess astronaut. I didn’t really know if that was my path; if I really wanted to go into teaching … I started off my career with engineering and I absolutely hated it … and I was like, you know what, let me try out this teaching thing.

P4 said the following: “My background is nursing. When I came to America, I’m a single mom and no one can really watch my kids. So when I was looking for a job, I was told why don’t you work in a school?” P6 reported, “That (entering the teaching profession) was due to, I think having a lot of teachers in my family. And just being around that environment … those people will always ask that question, *Are you a teacher yet*?” P7 reported,

> Before I was a teacher, I was designing online apps and educational tools for adults. So I wanted to understand … the learning process. So that’s why I went to grad school to understand how people learn and how I can incorporate that because I can design something that’s well designed but it may not be meeting the person where they are in terms of like learning … While I was there I met all these people who are teachers and they were like, *oh, you know, I just love my kids*. It’s kind of fake of me to be a designer designing these things if I haven’t actually interacted with … except my own daughter. I felt like I needed to be in a classroom to understand what learning looks like.

P8 stated,

> Well in reality I was studying … to be a doctor. I was doing pre-med, was taking all my courses and then my last year I volunteered at a school. There was this little girl I was helping. When the teacher was asking her something she (the little girl) was so excited. She raised her hand. *I know this, I know this!* And then when she (the little girl) answered, I felt such pride that she was able to do it … and I

realized that I like that feeling. I like helping others or students like get it. So … from that moment I thought … you know what, I want to do this. So I did.

P9 reported, "It was honestly kind of by accident. I didn't go to college for teaching, but I've always worked well with kids."

The demographic data for the 10 participants of this study are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Research Participant Demographics

Participant (P) pseudonym #	Years of teaching experience	Grade(s) taught	Subject(s)	Remained in the classroom during/after COVID-19?	Reason for becoming a teacher
P1	3	6–8	Special education (SPED)	Yes	Unintentional
P2	6 or 7	8	History	Yes	Unintentional
P3	3	8	Science	Yes	Unintentional
P4	22	8	Math	Yes	Unintentional
P5	2	7	History	Yes	Sharing knowledge and passion
P6	6	7	Science	Yes	Unintentional
P7	5	7	Math	Yes	Unintentional
P8	21	6–8	SPED English learners (ELs)	Yes	Unintentional
P9	3	6	English language arts (ELA)	Yes	Unintentional
P10	3	7	ELA	Yes	Sharing knowledge and passion

Data Collection

Ten middle school teachers provided data for this study via semistructured virtual interviews. The criteria used when selecting participants for this study were that they must have been teaching Grades 6–12 during the pandemic. The school district's email addresses were used to contact participants. Though some participants received and responded immediately to the email invitation to participate in the study, others were reminded to check their emails and reported that they did not receive the invitation. It was later discovered that the invitation emails were in their spam folders. Each of the 10 middle school teachers who received the invitation email responded with interest in participating in the study. Additionally, there were other middle school teachers in the district who had heard of the study and were willing to be participants if there was a need. After interest was expressed, I emailed the participants with an in-depth explanation of the study, along with links to the consent form. All 10 of the middle school teachers met the requirements of the study, responded with interest, and provided their consent to participate. As each form of consent was received, I began scheduling the teachers' interviews.

The interviews were completed between June 6, 2023, and June 13, 2023. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary, and that if at any point they became uncomfortable with or did not want to answer a question, their participation in the interview could be terminated at any time per their request. Additionally, I confirmed that participants were informed and gave

their consent to being audio-recorded only. I reminded them that though the meeting was taking place in a virtual meeting space, no video recordings would be used.

The interviews were semistructured and adhered to the interview and research questions as outlined in Table 4 of Chapter 3. Though each question had a follow-up question, the follow-up questions from Table 4 were unnecessary because the participant(s) provided all relevant information from the initial question. In some cases, the conversation naturally flowed from the initial question into a follow-up question. The interview questions aligned with the study's research questions and were created to learn more about reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of each interview, I asked the participants if there was anything else they would like to share, or if they had any questions for me.

The transcripts and audio recordings were utilized to analyze the data from the study. The audio recordings of the interviews are located on my personal password-protected computer and will be moved to an external hard drive, which will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home office for 5 years as per Walden University policy. I, as the researcher, will be the only one accessing password-protected electronic files, external hard drives, or any hard copies pertaining to this study. There were no unusual circumstances or obstacles during the data collection process.

Data Analysis

This was a basic qualitative study in which I collected data using semistructured interviews, transcribed those interviews, and analyzed them through coding. Since I

chose to conduct coding by hand, I carefully reviewed the transcripts and observed the patterns. Next, I organized the data into initial codes, placed codes into categories, and grouped those categories into themes (Patton, 2015).

I then compared the transcripts of the audio recordings to identify any discrepancies. After transcribing the interviews, I coded the data to identify significant terms and phrases. Coding interviewers allocate codes to words or phrases that stand out in their search for patterns or categories (Saldaña, 2018). I then categorized related codes, patterns, and topics. After reviewing and reorganizing all the themes, I created a table to represent the categories, patterns, and themes that emerged from the interviews in accordance with the research questions and frameworks. Table 6 displays the initial codes' frequency of use from the initial coding phase.

Table 6

Initial Code Count

Phrase count			
Able (10)	Feel (45)	Need (16)	Space (6)
Allow (8)	Feeling (30)	Needed (7)	Special education (7)
Anxiety (11)	Fell in love (2)	Outside (7)	Stress (13)
Anxious (5)	Felt (12)	Overwhelming (2)	Struggled (16)
Balance (4)	Focus (5)	Pandemic (68)	Student (7)
Boundaries (3)	Happy (3)	Physically (48)	Student teaching (5)
Break (12)	Hard (14)	Practice (21)	Students (35)
Burnout (12)	Health (41)	Prepare (4)	Support (8)
Care (18)	Home (17)	Profession (70)	Teach (9)
Class (95)	House (3)	Run (2)	Teaching (75)
Classroom management (2)	Important (14)	School (39)	Think (74)
	Love (16)	Screen (6)	Time (63)
College (16)	Mental (38)	Self-care (70)	Walk (6)
COVID (55)	Mentally (12)	Separation (2)	Well-being (48)
Day (19)	Mindset (2)	Sick (5)	Work (22)
Early (5)	More (42)	Situation (6)	Year (46)
Emotional (28)	Morning (5)	Skills (6)	Zoom (6)
Emotions (19)	Myself (21)	Sleep (2)	

To aid in the coding process, I developed a codebook as described by DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011). First, I created an Excel spreadsheet to document the major codes, phrases, and notes from each participant. As I carefully read through each participant's transcript and took notes of key words and phrases, I began to see patterns in responses to the interview questions. I then created individual documents for each participant and took copious notes. As I began observing patterns of codes and phrases, I highlighted and documented them into each participant's individual document. Next, I arrived at 70 codes (illustrated in Table 6) that best represented the patterns and significance of the study based on frequency of use and alignment to research and interview questions. The codes were synthesized after the first coding cycle by mixing them to form patterns and categories, which splits raw data into more manageable topics (Saldaña, 2018). Then, I solidified patterns in alignment with research questions and assigned a code to each of the patterns. There were 36 codes in the first pattern and 34 codes in the second pattern, as illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7

Patterns From Initial Code Count

Patterns	Initial codes		
Self-care practices during COVID-19	Able	Focus	Run
	Allow	Happy	Schedule
	Balance	Hard	Screen
	Boundaries	Health	Self-care
	Break	Home	Sleep
	COVID	House	Teach
	Day	Important	Teaching
	Early	Mental	Walk
	Feel	Morning	Work
	Feeling	Outside	Zoom
	Fell in love	Pandemic	
	Felt	Practice	
Perceptions of physical, mental, and emotional influence on beliefs about persistence	Anxiety	Myself	Stress
	Anxious	Need	Struggled
	Burnout	Needed	Student
	Care	Overwhelming	Student teaching
	Class	Physically	Students
	Classroom management	Profession	Support
	College	School	Think
	Emotional	Separation	Time
	Emotions	Sick	Well-being
	Love	Situation	Year
	Mentally	Skills	
	Mindset	Space	
	More	Special education	

There were no discrepancies between the transcriptions and the audio recordings, which I verified by carefully going over both. Any contradictions or inconsistencies discovered during the data collection process would have been noted and incorporated into the conclusions. Additionally, I would have contacted the participant(s) to inquire about the documented disparity (Patton, 2015).

Results

This section explored reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19 (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). I have organized the results by research question and subsequent themes. To support each theme, I included quotations from the 10 participants that were transcribed from the interview questions. Using a basic qualitative design, participants were asked to answer semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A) to collect data pertinent to the research questions. Table 8 displays the themes that emerged from the research questions.

Table 8

Connection Among Research Questions and Themes

Research question	Theme
RQ1. What self-care practices do teachers describe while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?	During the pandemic, teachers exercised self-care in a variety of ways, such as exercise (movement), creating schedules (time), and taking intentional breaks (wellness).
RQ2. How do teacher perceptions of self-care (physical, mental, and emotional well-being) influence beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?	Teachers viewed physical, mental, and emotional well-being as vital self-care practices for sustaining longevity and remaining in the classroom.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was: What self-care practices do teachers describe while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic? The following themes emerged from Research

Question 1: *movement, time, and wellness* (see Table 8. Participants were asked to describe their definition of self-care, and how they practiced self-care while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants shared a variety of ways in which they practiced self-care during the pandemic.

The theme for RQ1 was: During the pandemic, teachers exercised self-care in a variety of ways, such as exercise (movement), creating schedules (time), and taking intentional breaks (wellness)

Movement

According to the responses provided by the participants during the interviews, physical exercise was a common self-care practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. P2, P6, P7, and P10 stated that physical exercise and movement was important to their overall practice of self-care and well-being while teaching during the pandemic. P2 stated, "…I would always just go outside….because for me, that's self-care. I got a treadmill. So I had a little gym." P6 reported, "…really early in the day…and then get up and I would do a jog in the morning or walk…" P7 said, "I bought a rowing machine so I would row. I use to row a long time ago at the gym. The rhythm of it is kind of calming. So that is what I would do." P10 stated the following,

> During the pandemic, I definitely made sure that I was taking like my daily walks or a daily run. That was really important because I'm definitely someone that gets stir crazy if I'm inside for too long. So I had a regular route that I would run or walk at least once a day.

Time

The responses given by the participants in the interviews indicated that time was a key factor in their practices of self-care while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. P1, P2, P3, P6, P8, and P10 mentioned taking the time to do things of importance that would reduce stress, such as taking breaks, as an example of self-care. P1 reported the following, “Coming off of college graduation that (the pandemic) was exactly what I needed…just a break…a moment to stand still and just take in what was going on.” P2 said the following, “I actually set a schedule for myself, and that kind of kept me…make sure my mind is not on everything that’s going on…So that was self-care for me.” P3 stated,

> I don’t think I really had a self-care regimen because we were at home. I could kind of just step away from my computer and do what I needed to do. It wasn’t really instilled in me to make sure I was taking time to do self-care. I just knew when to take breaks for myself.

P6 reported,

> It was a hard time because it was different, but it was actually my best time … these new life skills or ways of life I go right into survival mode immediately just to prepare beforehand … organizing the task for the day…making sure everything is already set up and ready … being prepared was also a part of self-care. Then of course, staying healthy and taking my time.

P8 said, “When you’re feeling overwhelmed or stressed…take a step back. People need different things, but an hour, day, or half a day, go do something you love…go for a walk, go to a movie.” P10 stated the following,

> For me, self-care definitely means taking time away from things that commonly stress me out. And even if there are things that I do love at the same time … just making sure that I’m giving myself that break to do things that I want to do rather than what I need to do.

Wellness

The interviews revealed that the study’s participants practiced multiple forms of wellness as a measure of self-care. Most of the study’s participants, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, and P9, mentioned specified measures of self-care that they practiced while teaching during COVID. P1 reported the following,

> This might be a controversial thing, but I absolutely loved the pandemic. I loved working from home and the ability to sleep in longer … and you know … watch Netflix … go for a walk. I think it (COVID) gave me the tools to understand what self-care really is.

P2 said the following, “I’d say doing things that lower your stress, something where you don’t have to think as much. Like for me, self-care sometimes is literally just sitting and doing nothing.” P3 stated, “… making sure I had snacks near me, making sure I had my water bottle just to keep myself good throughout the day while teaching during COVID.” P4 reported,

> I was actually happy during the pandemic in a way because my daughters were home ... we were all together, the three of us. And I'm sorry if I sound insensitive, but it was because my daughter left after college and came back during the pandemic. And so, practice of self-care was just being with them.

P5 said, "I'm someone who is always anxious about something, any type f thing can affect me mentally or physically…What I did to reduce that stress is turn off so the news…and search for something that would relieve my stress." P6 stated the following, "…taking care of the health; taking care of the body; making sure you get that time for the mind to relax and recoup." P7 reported the following, "…allowing myself space to recharge. Whatever that may look like." P9 said the following,

> … doing things that make better your mental and physical well-being … having mental reminders that no one knew how to handle the situation (COVID) that was going on, so there was no correct way to go about something.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: How do teacher perceptions of self-care (physical, mental, and emotional well-being) influence beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19? Despite the stress and anxiety levels of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, 100% of the participants of this study reported that they remained in the education profession and returned to the classroom (see Table 6).

The theme from RQ2 was: Teachers viewed physical, mental, and emotional well-being as vital self-care practices for sustaining longevity and remaining in the classroom.

Physical Health and Well-Being

The interviews revealed that teacher perceptions of how self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19 were influenced by the participants' perspectives on physical health. P2 stated the following, “It (physical health) mattered a lot. Me exercising and going outside allowed me to take a break…If I didn’t have those breaks…if I was just inside all day not exercising, I know I would’ve had it worse.” P3 reported the following,

> As a teacher you get burned out really quickly. Being physically well is going to help you with the longevity of not only your career, but even going year to year. If your immune system is shot, if you mentally aren’t doing well, I think that ties into more of the physical and being able to show up in your classroom.

P5 said the following, “If you are not physically well, it’s hard for you to stay consistent and you need to be consistent to avoid burnout. So, it could influence your longevity because if you’re burned out, you just can’t do it anymore.” P7 stated,

> For me it is really important to feel physically well in the sense that I can challenge myself and make myself stronger. One of my self-care things is yoga. I use to run and go to the gym and even hiking. Feeling physically strong helps me feel like I can get through the challenges in the classroom. It is really important for me to be able to get through a day, especially since I’m not 25 anymore.

Mental Health and Well-Being

The responses given by the participants in the interviews indicated that mental health played a role in teacher perceptions of how self-care influenced their beliefs about

teacher persistence during COVID-19. Despite the fact that 100% of the 10 participants decided to remain in the classroom during and after COVID (see Table 6), P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, and P10 reported their viewpoint on mental health while teaching during the pandemic. P1 stated the following,

> My first year I didn't have the best mentor, so that really weighed on my mental health, which that ended up weighing on my physical health. I'm a firm believer that your mental health will also weigh on your physical health. With the influence of social media, I feel like a lot of things go unsaid … mental health needs to be addressed on the professional level.

P2 reported the following, "My mindset was to make the best of it (the pandemic). And so taking those breaks … just helps the way I'm thinking." P3 said the following,

> Oh it's (mental health) everything for a lot of teachers, especially during COVID. It was very hard to separate home and work. Doing Sudoku puzzles and talking to someone and making sure that you know you're opening up about what was happening at home and in your life really helped to keep everything healthy emotionally and mentally.

P5 stated,

> Mental health connects with well-being because being well doesn't always have to be physically. It's mentally, too. If both those things are negatively affected, you're not really going to last in the place that you are. You need to be mentally well in order to be in the place that you are.

P6 reported, “I was able to disconnect myself from the learning aspects of teaching. Aligning the mind and body…it was a priority.” P10 said:

> I think I really did love the way that COVID had us talking more about our mental health. That was kind of almost a positive thing that I found was the new understanding of my own mental health and understanding of others’ allows me to have more empathy towards the other teachers that I work with. Mental health definitely helps me stay in the classroom longer because I can create those boundaries for myself.

Emotional Health and Well-Being

According to the responses provided by the participants during the interviews, emotional health played a role in teacher perceptions of how self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19. Though 100% of the participants decided to remain in the classroom during and after COVID (see Table 6), P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10 referenced their emotions while teaching during the pandemic. P1 stated, “…my first week of working fresh out of college, I cried every day. I didn’t have the best welcoming.” P2 reported, “Physical, mental, and emotional…all those helped me to just be okay with what was happening….me being happy when I click login makes a difference…” P3 said,

> It was very interesting because I was going through a lot of ups and downs during that period and just trying to figure out my way … as a first-year teacher … was trying to figure out my classroom management style did I want to have? What kind of teacher did I want to be? Was I going to be super strict or king of relaxed

> or somewhere in between? Throughout COVID, it was very hard to find that identity since it was over Zoom. So emotionally, I was hitting highs and lows.

P5 stated the following, “If your emotions aren’t controlled in a certain form, like if you can’t…turn on and turn off your emotions, it’s very hard for you to be in the classroom and be able to teach.” P6 reported the following, “There were a lot of emotions. Being able to have my support in place actually helped me go through the emotions to get through it.” P7 said the following, “For me, I think it was if I don’t do this, who’s going to do it? And like in this sense, which I think is emotional…I just felt…that obligation…like our kids deserve something better.” P8 stated, “Emotionally, I get attached to the students. I want to see them do well…So I wanted to remain in the classroom.” P9 reported,

> I think COVID was an extremely emotional time and I felt like it was necessary to stay in the classroom to be there for my students. It influenced my decision because I kind of put myself on the back burner and put my students to the forefront … I guess my emotional well-being took a backseat and my students’ well-being took a front seat because I knew they probably needed it more.

P10 said,

> I think the emotion that I have in teaching is one of the reasons why I’ve been able to stay. I truly just love education. There are so many parts of our education system that are broken, which is why teachers are underpaid and overworked … and even when I get stressed out about that, that passion and love that I have are the things that keep me going the most in this profession.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As addressed in Chapter 3, trustworthiness in a study is demonstrated when a qualitative researcher aspires to provide transparency to improve a study's credibility and trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). I upheld issues of trustworthiness in several ways. In this section I will describe how I ensured credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

First, I ensured credibility by using reflective practice (Patton, 2015). After each semi-structured interview, I immediately took a moment to reflect on the interview questions and responses by writing down my thoughts and reactions. As an added layer of credibility, I emailed each reflection to my dissertation committee chair and methodologist to identify and address any biases I may have overlooked, as well as uploaded each reflection into Walden University's classroom portal. Next, I was sure to interpret the interview data by focusing on the study's purpose and research questions. During this process, I kept a copy of Table 4's research and interview questions (see Chapter 3, page 50) near each transcript to confirm alignment. The interviews continued until I reached a data saturation point. As soon as I continued to hear the same responses to the same interview questions, I was confident that the data had reached saturation.

Transferability

Transferability is most effectively determined by coding (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Grounded in the conceptual framework and research of this study, I sought to explore how teachers perceived the role self-care practices influenced their

beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). The study's results and line of questioning can be transferred to a range of situations, settings, and demographics, due to the nature of the interview questions and the constraint that the study's participants be teachers of Grades 6 to 12. For example, multiple teachers in a variety of settings, K–12, higher education, public, private, independent, and charter schools, all taught during COVID-19 and experienced and were affected by the same phenomenon.

Dependability

The constant cycles of transcribing, coding, categorizing, and recoding the data contributed to the study's reliability and validity (Patton, 2015). To ensure validity and dependability, I developed an unbiased interview guide (2015). Throughout the research phase, my committee offered helpful feedback. I meticulously documented each step of the data collection and analysis procedure so that the study may be repeated in the future by keeping reflective journals and notes. The study's participants were contacted to confirm their representation in each transcript as a form of member checking.

Confirmability

In order to be considered reliable, credible, and trustworthy, a study must take an inquiry stance and use reflexivity to explore relationships, data, and context (Ravitch & Carl 2016). After coding, I went back over the audio recordings to ensure that none of the participants' points of view were omitted. Confirmability must be established, and this requires objectivity in the researcher's transcription and interpretation of the data. I carefully transcribed the interviews to ensure the clarity of the teachers' perceptions of the

role of self-care practices in relation to teacher persistence during COVID-19. As another form of confirmability and member checking, I emailed the participants the transcript of their interview for their review. If applicable, the participants were able to correct, omit, or change any portion of their initial interview, as well as preliminary codes and themes, to ensure the accuracy of the data and my analysis.

Summary

Based on data analysis, I organized a key finding for each research question. The key findings were categorized into emerging themes of each research question. RQ1 asked middle school teachers to describe their practices of self-care while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, with emerging themes of movement, time, and wellness. The key finding of RQ1 was that during the pandemic, participants exercised self-care in a variety of ways, such as through exercise, creating schedules, and taking intentional breaks. RQ 2 asked middle school teachers how their perceptions of self-care (physical, mental, and emotional well-being) influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19. The themes which emerged from RQ2 were emotional health, mental health, and physical health. The key finding of RQ2 found that teachers viewed physical, mental, and emotional well-being as vital self-care practices for sustaining longevity and remaining in the classroom. In Chapter 5, I will review the findings and explain how they connect to the literature and conceptual framework. Additionally, I will address the study's limitations, recommendations, implications for social change, and conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative descriptive study was to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). This study employed a qualitative methodology because it provided the best framework for learning and comprehending more about the perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of its participants (Patton, 2015). This study was conducted to better understand how teachers perceived the role of self-care practices influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence amid the transition to distance learning during COVID-19 (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020).

In this chapter, I interpret the findings and discuss how this study confirms, disconfirms, and extends knowledge of the relationship between teacher self-care practices and beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19. Additionally, I discuss the study's limitations and make suggestions for future research. Data analysis produced the key findings based on the study's research questions, which were categorized into emerging themes. The key findings of the research indicated that teachers described self-care practices of exercise, organization of time by creating schedules, and being intentional about taking breaks. Additionally, it was found that teachers considered physical, mental, and emotional well-being as vital practices of self-care in order to sustain longevity and remain in the classroom.

Interpretation of the Findings

Exploring the role of reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care practices influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic was viewed through the unique combination of Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT and Quarantelli and Dynes's (1977) SCDT. In this section, I explain how some of the findings from the current study confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge of reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic from the literature (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). I analyzed and interpreted the study's data results by research questions, key findings, and themes per each research question.

Research Question 1

What self-care practices to teachers describe while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In a review of the literature on teacher self-care, teaching was ranked among the most stressful of occupations, notwithstanding the worldwide pandemic, national awakening and reckoning, governmental divisiveness, and for educators, what to do about the existing status and future of the profession (Knight, 2020; McIntyre et al., 2020). According to Brown (2021), leadership shapes workplace culture; as a result, depending only on self-care practices to encourage and promote teacher persistence may have its limits. Additionally, Pressley (2021) noted that a lack of administrative assistance contributed to teachers' stress and burnout levels, which impacted their ability

to persevere while teaching throughout the pandemic. The current findings of this study confirm the current literature in that the participants of this study described the need for practicing self-care while teaching during the pandemic in order to remain physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy.

Key Findings of RQ1

The key finding of RQ1 is that during the pandemic, participants exercised self-care in a variety of ways, such as through exercise, creating schedules, and taking intentional breaks.

Movement, Time, and Wellness

Reflecting on the study's findings and the research by Trust and Whalen (2021), it was crucial for teachers to adapt to the demands and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic by developing new routines and self-care practices during times of significant transition. Participants in the study reported developing new routines that included exercise, task organization for the day, and practicing well-being, which covered a variety of options such as actively taking breaks and setting boundaries. According to the findings of the study, participants shared that they practiced self-care by physical exercise or movement, taking the time to create schedules, and doing things to destress such as taking intentional breaks or discovering new hobbies. The study confirms the previous research findings of Trust and Whalen (2021), who examined a holistic perspective from teachers who had to find and create new routines to sustain their careers because of COVID's immediate transition from traditional to virtual instruction. The immediate shift from traditional to virtual instruction was a major shift in education in which teachers were strongly

encouraged, and in some cases “voluntold,” to explore and adapt multiple learning strategies as a measure of self-care (Hartsthorne et al., 2020). Preparation and organization were key components in this endeavor and reported by the study's participants as self-care strategies. These new routines could assist teachers in navigating the challenges and uncertainties brought on by such a significant transition by contributing to and establishing their mental and emotional well-being. According to the study’s findings, mental and emotional well-being were directly related to the participants' approach as teachers, classroom presence, and overall persistence and longevity in the field.

Research Question 2

How do teachers perceive that self-care (physical, mental, and emotional well-being) influences beliefs about teacher persistence during COVID-19?

In a review of the literature on teacher persistence during COVID-19, Courduff et al. (in press) indicated that the goal is persistence, rather than perfection, in the effort to keep teachers in the classroom. On the other hand, Brown (2021) indicated that leadership drives workplace culture and can break or build trauma-sensitive places for teams to heal and recover. Therefore, the current findings from this study extend the knowledge of this current literature because participants did not mention leadership or goals. What is known about the literature is that teachers' lives have been dominated by problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is why workplace conditions influenced their decisions to stay or leave the classroom (Hare, 2021).

Key Findings of RQ2

The key finding for RQ2 is that teachers viewed physical, mental, and emotional well-being as vital self-care practices for sustaining longevity and remaining in the classroom.

Physical Health and Well-Being

Reflecting on the study's findings, participants believed that their physical health was inextricably linked to their ability and capacity to consistently show up in their work as educators, because their physical health directly impacted how or if they would be able to report to work. Anxiety for their physical well-being impacted teachers by lowering their energy levels, which contributed to reducing their overall resilience and quality of job performance (Will, 2021). Another finding of the study was that participants believed that mental and emotional health had an impact on their overall physical health. The study confirms previous research as teachers' stress caused anxiety to their mental and emotional state regarding their physical health and well-being (Will, 2021). Participants of this study were of the belief that if they were not physically well, they would be unable to show up to work on a consistent basis, which would ultimately affect the longevity of them being in the profession of education.

Mental Health and Well-Being

It was evident from the findings of the study that teachers believed that their mindsets and overall mental health greatly impacted how they showed up in a classroom and the capacity in which they could be available for their students (Singer, 2020). Also, they acknowledged and appreciated how COVID increased the awareness of mental

health across the world as well as gaining a better understanding of their own mental health. According to Singer (2020), 55% of veteran teachers with more than 30 years of experience considered leaving the profession to protect their mental health. The absence of a mention of leadership or goals in the participants' responses might affect the understanding of teacher persistence during the pandemic in that the workplace culture under which the teachers were working, or the specific factors that led to their decision to stay in or leave the profession may be unknown. Other factors that might be at play in determining teachers' decision to persist in their roles include their overall emotional, mental, and physical health. In short, were teachers physically able to perform their duties? Also included may be a significant change in their personal lives or family dynamics, loss of interest in the profession, or inability to afford the required compensation. Simmons et al. (2019) questioned the role that schools played in fostering environments that promoted teacher self-care practices. The findings of the study confirm the current literature in that many studies have examined COVID-19's effects on mental health and well-being (Fancourt et al., 2020; Pierce et al., 2020).

Emotional Health and Well-Being

According to the findings of the study, participants indicated that emotional health played a significant role in their decisions to remain in the classroom or not. Though 100% of the participants decided to remain in the classroom during and after COVID (see Chapter 4, Table 5, p. 63), participants referenced that their emotions drove their teaching performance. Drawing on the previous research mentioned, which suggests that emotional state is linked to job performance and job satisfaction, it can be inferred that

increased stress levels contributed to an increase in teacher retention and turnover rates (Singer, 2020). The natural effects of COVID-19 caused an increase in teachers' workloads and expectations, and many of them struggled to find the balance of managing their personal lives and newfound responsibilities (Cardoza, 2021). This led to burnout and higher turnover rates. On the other hand, understanding and addressing teachers' emotional well-being might contribute to creating a more stable and resilient teaching workforce (Brown, 2021). Despite the negative impacts of COVID-19, it brought out the best in some teachers in that they felt mentally and emotionally supported by leadership and gained the skills to more successfully navigate the pandemic (Kiekel et al., 2022). The study confirms the previous research in that one's emotional state affects their job performance and level of job satisfaction, which are contributing factors to remaining at or leaving a job (Raisinghani, 2020).

Interpretation of the Findings in Relation to the Conceptual Framework

Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT and Quarantelli and Dynes's (1977) SCDT were the frameworks that guided this study. The framework served as the vehicle for developing the study questions, interview guide, and data analysis. The study's findings are related to the framework, as SDT and SCDT established the unique experiences of teachers who taught Grades 6–12 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants in this study mentioned self-care practices and their physical, mental, and emotional states as factors that influenced their self-determination and motivation to remain in the classroom or leave the profession. The teachers who taught Grades 6–12 during the pandemic disclosed that teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic

significantly impacted their physical, mental, and emotional health and made them question if or how much longer they would remain in the profession. While the majority of the participants reported having a challenging time adjusting to the swift shift from traditional to virtual instruction, two of the 10 participants said that they loved it (the pandemic)—that it was their best time. While some of the participants were eager to physically return to in-person instruction, others reported being anxious out of fear of being in front of people and getting sick. Allen et al. (2020) further confirmed these experiences when stating that some aspects of teacher well-being deteriorated during the lockdown, while others improved.

Limitations of the Study

Ten teachers who taught Grades 6–12 during the COVID-19 pandemic participated in this basic qualitative study. The first limitation of this basic qualitative interview study is that it involved participants from one study site. A second limitation was the study's qualitative methodology and descriptive approach, as opposed to a more general approach such as a case study. These could also be considered as limitations as the methodology could be more time-consuming and lacking in depth (Lambert & Lambert, 2012).

The use of one semistructured interview per participant was another limitation. The design failed to allow for additional follow-up questions or clarifications with participants after interviews. The use of one semistructured interview per participant was another limitation. The design failed to allow for additional follow-up questions or clarifications with participants following interviews, thus failing to verify the

interpretation of each interview response. Lastly, using a single source to collect data prevented the triangulation of data, consequently presenting yet another limitation of this study.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research are based on study results and limitations of the study as well as the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The first recommendation is related to the finding of how teachers practiced self-care during the pandemic. Because the study only had 10 participants who taught Grades 6–12, it is recommended that research be extended to teachers who taught in any capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic (Brennan, 2020). Further research is needed to have a deeper understanding of how teachers, on a larger scale, practiced self-care during the pandemic.

A second recommendation is related to the limitations of this study. This study was done at one site in the Northeast region of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Therefore, I recommend that this study be replicated in multiple regions and educational settings to anyone who served in any educational capacity to determine if the results are similar.

A third recommendation is to have specific support systems in place for teachers that promote self-care. For example, there could be dedicated time in a schedule for peer support networks, mentoring programs amongst veteran and new teachers sharing best practices on effective classroom management strategies, and administrative support as intentional checkpoints and measures of promoting self-care.

Implications

This study will contribute to positive social change in several ways. First, at the individual level, by understanding teachers' experiences and perspectives on self-care, school administrators can implement targeted support programs, create opportunities for self-reflection and well-being, and foster a culture of self-care within the school community. There is also potential for change at the organizational level. Teachers' practice of self-care and its subsequent value to persistence through hardships could inform teacher preparation programs or professional development offerings. The results of this study could lead to positive social change by providing ways to support teacher development and persistence in the practice of self-care (Roman, 2020). Potential contributions of the study that could advance knowledge in the discipline are that the practice of self-care and wellness could be included in workplace requirements of teachers in school settings in effort to eradicate teacher burnout and turnover (Sokal et al., 2020a).

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore reported teacher self-care practices and how teachers perceived the role of self-care influenced their beliefs about teacher persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Anderson, 2020; Crosby et al., 2020). The data for this study came from 10 teachers who taught Grades 6–12 in the Northeast region of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data showed that because of COVID's demand and immediate shift from traditional to virtual learning, the teachers developed new routines and practices of self-

care, including, but not limited to, exercise, daily schedules, and the practice of well-being (Trust & Whalen, 2021)—in other words, doing things to destress like actively taking breaks and setting intentional boundaries. Additionally, teachers viewed their physical, mental, and emotional well-being as vital components for sustaining longevity and remaining in the classroom. The data compellingly show that teachers experienced a wide range of emotions during the pandemic, which were not new, but rather due to the pandemic. While the passion of some teachers was enough to keep them motivated in the classroom, others questioned whether they possessed the mental and emotional fortitude to sustain a career in education. The data also indicated questions such as "What about my financial well-being?" and "Yes, I'm passionate about teaching, but can my passion sustain me in the long run? Can I *afford* to be passionate?" For a profession that demands so much of its employees and is the literal foundation of every other profession, one would think that compensation and well-being would be written into and accounted for in the annual contract of every teacher. Alas, here we are, and thus, the purpose of this study.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview #	Interview question
1	How are you feeling right now?
2	What is your definition of self-care?
3	How did you practice self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4	How long have you been in the teaching profession?
5	Did you decide to remain in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic?
6	Did you decide to remain in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic?
7	In your opinion, how did physical well-being relate to/influence your longevity in the classroom/profession? Or would you say that physical well-being was related to or influenced your longevity in the classroom/profession during COVID-19? Why or why not?
8	In your opinion, how did mental health and well-being connect to or influence your longevity in the classroom/profession during COVID-19?
9	In your opinion, how did emotional well- being relate/influence your decision to remain in the classroom during COVID-19?

Appendix B: Participant Invitation Email

Greetings,

Hopefully this message finds you safe and healthy. Currently, I am conducting research as part of my doctoral study at Walden University. For this qualitative study, I am seeking participants for interviews. The purpose of my study is to explore how teachers practiced self-care while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the role of those practices in teacher persistence. As a teacher who taught students in grades 6-12 during the pandemic, you are a good candidate to share your perceptions and experiences surrounding self-care practices while teaching during COVID-19.

If you are interested, we can complete the interview via Zoom conferencing, which should last between 30-60 minutes. I am the sole researcher for this study. Your responses will be kept confidential. Though there is no compensation for participating, sharing your knowledge and experiences will contribute to better understanding how teachers practiced self-care while teaching during COVID-19, and what role those practices played in teacher persistence.

Would you be willing to participate? If so, please respond to this message at your earliest convenience and I will provide you with electronic informed consent paperwork. Additionally, I will reach out to you to schedule an interview. However, if there are standing times that work best for you, please include that in your response as well!

Take good care and thank you for considering!

Sincerely,

Tamarah

Appendix C: Letter of Permission

Dear Executive Director,

My name is Tamarah Davis and I am student in the Ed.D. in Education program at Walden University. I am conducting a study entitled, "Perceived Teacher Self-care Influence on Beliefs About Teacher Persistence During COVID-19". I will be interviewing teachers who taught students in grades 6-12 during the COVID-19 pandemic to explore their perceptions of the role that teacher self-care played in teacher persistence during COVID-19. With your permission, I would like to conduct my study with teachers from your campus. Though I am an educator who taught grades 6-12 at another site during the pandemic, the study is completely independent of my educational perceptions.

For my study, all I ask is that you provide a spreadsheet of the names of teachers who taught students in grades 6-12 during the pandemic. From this spreadsheet, I will conduct purposeful sampling and invite potential participants via email. For those interested in participating, I will obtain the proper informed consent via email before conducting all the interviews using the Zoom platform. As such, I will not need access to campus facilities for any part of my study. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and will not be compensated. Teachers may choose to exit the study at any point.
I will be under the close supervision of my professors and Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the duration of the study. I am attaching my proposal if you would like to ready more about my study. Like the participants, you are under no obligation to help me with my study, and you may choose to approve or deny my request with or without explanation.

If you agree to let me conduct my study with teachers from your school, please reply to this email. I will provide you with a letter of cooperation that I can use for documentation with Walden's IRB.

Thanks in advance for your consideration,

Tamarah Davis

Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation

Date:

Dear Tamarah Davis,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled, "Perceived Teacher Self-Care Influence on Beliefs About Teacher Persistence During COVID-19" at our Northeast Regional local site. As part of this study, I authorize you to email invitations to teachers who taught students in grades 6-12 during the pandemic, obtain informed consent, schedule interviews and follow-up emails for member checking, via Zoom. Individuals who decide to participate will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: providing a spreadsheet of the names and email contact information of teachers who taught students in grades 6-12 during the pandemic and that we reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the researcher will not be naming our organization in the doctoral study that will be published in ProQuest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the researcher's supervising faculty or staff without permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Sincerely,

Executive Director Authorization
Official Signature