

Teacher challenges in Faroese Compulsory Schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Support from School Leaders.



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Avbjóðingar hjá lærarum í fólkaskúlanum undir korona-farsóttini og stuðulin frá skúlaleiðarum

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Abstract

This mixed method pilot study aimed to elicit the impact of COVID-19 on Faroese compulsory school teachers as professionals and people in 2020-21. The objectives were to understand teacher and teaching challenges during the pandemic, positive and negative experiences, teacher evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the crisis leadership of their school leaders, identify concerns with 'learning loss' and explore any evidence of organisational learning for schools. The findings reveal that teacher challenges included lack of digital competence, coping with the change in the teaching-learning environment, the difficulty in adapting to Information Communication Technology (ICT), reduced teacher self-efficacy and emotional stress. It revealed the tremendous concern teachers have for their students' learning outcomes and well-being. Teacher evaluation of their leaders is fairly positive. It is not very clear if organisational learning has resulted from the COVID-19 crisis and been anchored to provide a basis for tackling future crises. This may be significant in providing school staff resilience to cope with any future change in the external environment and the resultant consequences for leadership, teachers and students.

Úrtak

Hendan verkætlan hevur til endamáls at kanna, hvørja fakliga og menniskjaliga ávirkan COVID-19 farsóttin í 2020-2021 hevði á fólkaskúlalærarar í Føroyum. Høvuðsmálið við verkætlanini var at nema sær kunnleika og fáa innlit í, hvørjar avbjóðingar fólkaskúlalærarar høvdu undir koronafarsóttini, bæði jaligar og neiligar upplivingar, at fáa innlit í, hvussu fólkaskúlalærarar eftirmetta

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teirra egnu skúlaleiðslu og teirra førleikar at handfara kreppustøðuna og samstundis at stuðla undirvísarunum, og at áseta trupulleikan við “learning loss” og kanna møguleikan fyri organisatiónslæring. Kanningin vísti, at nakrar av høvuðsavbjóðingunum hjá læraranum vóru manglandi tøkniligir førleikar, broytingar í undirvísingarháttinum, trupulleikar við at umstillast seg og trupult við at nýta samskiptistøkni (KST). Eisini vísti kanningin, at fólkaskúlalærararnir høvdu lækkandi motivatión og eyðkenni av strongd. Harumframt eina stóra stúran um trivnaðin hjá næmingunum og teirra heildarúrslit av skúlagongdini. Eftirmetingin vísti í stóran mun, at fólkaskúlalærararnir høvdu eitt jaligt sjónamið um skúlaleiðsluna. Tað er ikki týðuligt, um koronafarsóttin hevur elvt til organsatiónslæring og givið førleikar at handfara framtíðar kreppustøður. Hetta kann hava avgerandi týdning í mun til at geva fólkaskúlanum evni at tillaga seg og handfara framtíðar broytingar í samfelagnum.

Keywords: COVID-19, teacher and teaching challenges, school leadership, learning loss, compulsory schools, organisational learning.

Leitorð: EFL, lærarakognitión, frálæru við talu, kjarnu-periferisannføring, kunneiki um námsfrøðiligt innihald.

Introduction

COVID-19 has had an incontrovertible impact on education. It brought with it a wave of challenges that affected every aspect of the school environment – the leaders, teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders. It became a ‘supernova’ (Azorín 2020) creating ‘undeniable chaos’ (Hargreaves and Fullan 2020) and shaking the very fabric of education’ (Harris and Jones, 2020, p 243). Unique to this crisis must be its pervasive effect on the educational system giving rise to debates on and the importance of teacher resilience.

Teaching in the Faroe Islands during COVID -19 was relegated to a remote, online-based activity limiting most learners to asynchronous teacher support or synchronous on-screen support. This was dependent on whether the students were able to meet on campus as was sometimes possible or were at home being taught online. The sea change it brought about to the approaches to teaching for individual teachers may have created a sense of incongruence between what teachers believe, think, do and feel (Borg, 2019) as routine, and the abrupt need to change, modify and adapt one’s actions to the changing environment. The Faroese schools were online for between two to four weeks on average, after which students returned to schools with reduced number of lessons and subjects. The students are aged between 5 and 16 in the compulsory schools.

In this unique situation of ‘forced’ digital learning resultant of the COVID-19 school lockdown, the need for insights to inform education policy, praxis and learning for the future underpins the focus of this pilot study. It is incumbent upon research to ‘contribute to the current debate about schooling by providing

relevant information from its knowledge base and generating new knowledge where needed and when possible' (Huber and Helm, 2020, p. 238). It is with this focus that this article hopes to contribute to educational research on COVID-19 impact on the teachers.

Rationale

There is a valid need to elicit teachers' views of the kind of support they sought and received from their school leaders during the crisis as teachers and teaching underpin the very fabric of school systems. To explore their experiences during the pandemic can afford valuable insight into the kind of support and guidance that could empower them in times of crisis. A short, quick pilot study was conducted to elicit the impact of COVID-19 on Faroese compulsory school teachers as professionals and people. The objectives were to glean teacher challenges during the pandemic, positive and negative experiences, establish how teachers evaluated the efficiency and effectiveness of the crisis leadership of their school leaders, explore any evidence of 'learning loss' and evidence of organisational learning from the crisis.

The study could also be viewed as a barometer survey in its focus on assessing the impact of a social phenomenon in a particular context, its relevance for action in its aim to provide relevant information for action to specific target groups (Department of Education - Undirvísingarstýrið, school leadership and teachers) and do it quickly to enable data-informed prompt action which includes multi-perspectivity in its inclusion of school leader and teacher perspectives (Huber and Helm, 2020). This pilot study is a precursor to another COVID-19 study and is by no means an in-depth or representative study of teachers during the pandemic. It is in keeping with the Eldridge et al. (2016) definition of pilot studies as precursors to a future project. Bugge et al. (2013) agreed that pilot trials are "a miniature version of the main trial, which aim to test aspects of study design and processes for the implementation of a larger main trial in the future" (p. 2).

Plans are underway to conduct a comprehensive study in the near future on the impact of COVID-19 on students through the eyes of the students, teachers and leaders in the Faroese compulsory school system. That study will have dual perspectives – impact on learning and impact on student well-being, and this study should provide some input for it. It will not be easy to assess the full impact unless more years have passed, but nevertheless some impact assessment for student learning may reveal if and to what extent 'learning loss' has taken place in Faroese compulsory schools in this pandemic period.

However, what is obvious is that home learning has posed challenges and exposed the lack of equity in the system with not all children having access to technology and thereby unable to spend more time on home learning (Andrew et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond and Kini, 2020). It has also underlined the

importance of the leader's role. "School leaders will need to be discerning therefore, about the digital products they choose and to be careful about striking a balance between technology and pedagogy in their school" (Hargreaves 2020 in Harris and Jones, 2020, p. 245). Ultimately, pedagogy is the key to effective learning, and while technology has a part to play, it is the human dimension of effective teaching that makes the difference (Harris and Jones, 2020). A positive is though that the pandemic has seen teachers becoming more conversant with digital pedagogies (Moss et al., 2021). It is important to examine student performance in terms of 'learning loss', student well-being together with teaching as a positive influence on student learning in the Faroese educational COVID-19 environment.

Theoretical and research underpinnings

In the context of this pilot study, the significance of principal transformational leadership, teacher self-efficacy and research on COVID-19 impact on teachers and teaching might offer a basis for various foci on the issue and create a viable basis for data analysis encompassing as they do key, relevant voices 'in the know' to fulfil the aim of the study.

Principal transformational leadership

Transformational leadership as defined by Bass & Riggio (2006) highlights the role of leaders as "those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity. Transformational leaders help followers grow and develop ... by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization" (p. 3).

There is clear research evidence that validates the contribution of principal transformational leadership to establishing positive school environments, and thereby, improved teacher performance (Hallinger, 2003; Day, Gu, and Sammons, 2016; Marks and Printy, 2003; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005). Crucially, transformational principal leadership motivates and inspires teachers resulting in sustainable outcomes (Day et al., 2016). This engenders teacher participation and enthusiasm in committing to attaining organisational goals, and significantly, contributes to the empowering of teacher leadership (Allen, Grigsby and Peters, 2015; Demir, 2008).

Studies further reveal that leadership support sought by teachers is being given clear expectations, appropriate encouragement and acknowledging and rewarding good performance (Grissom, 2011). Leaders who act as facilitators, collaborators and interpret their roles as team leaders or leaders of leaders (i.e., teachers as leaders) are seen to attract and retain teachers in schools (Brown and Wynn, 2009). Such leadership fosters employee engagement and buy in of organisational goals (Stone et al., 2004). Through highlighting goals and

objectives, transformational leaders are able to attract or build up follower commitment.

Effective leaders have to constantly work with and expand their personal qualities and transfer these into leadership praxis (Leithwood et al., 2020). Their success in fulfilling their remit is highly context-dependent (Hallinger, 2018; Eacott, 2019; Hoogsteen, 2020). Yu et al., (2002) draw attention to the key advantages of transformational leadership as promoting development of employees, ensuring personal commitment to organisational goals and building positive relationship between the leaders and the led. Crucially, this relationship may be tested in times of crisis, but nevertheless, mitigate the impact of crises (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Leithwood et al., (2006) see leadership as pivotal and a catalyst for positive impact in times of crisis.

Teacher self-efficacy as potential buffer in crises

A definition of self-efficacy is teachers' belief in their skills in designing their lessons, planning them and implementing their teaching to attain learning outcomes (Bandura, 1997). It is teachers' "judgments about their abilities to promote student learning" (Hoy and Spero, 2005, p. 343). In designing a teaching approach, teacher strategy rests on an analysis of options that are available to the teachers depending on their knowledge of the teaching-learning environment, their knowledge of students and knowledge of content and pedagogical knowledge of a subject (Vijayarathan, 2017).

Teacher self-efficacy is contextual (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2006), and the school setting has a crucial influence on teacher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran and Johnson, 2011). Teacher self-efficacy within the context of 'self-determination theory' of Ryan and Deci (2000) reveals that it awards teachers with a competence through intrinsic motivation (Wyatt, 2015); it engenders autonomy and shapes teacher attitudes to work and provides a sense of fulfilment that comes from establishing a relationship with students and their teaching environments (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Therefore, when this environment changed drastically in the pandemic, it is bound to have impacted teacher performance and motivation. COVID-19 created near chaos in its onset in the teaching environment, and to claim this drastic change may have been detrimental to teacher self-efficacy cannot be an exaggeration.

Teacher self-efficacy can be influenced by student motivation, engagement, and achievement (Lashinsky, 2012; Morris et al., 2017; Pajares, 1992). The behaviour of students, their engagement with learning and the school environment acquired other characteristics than the norm in the pandemic period, and teachers were deeply concerned and communicated this to their leaders (Vijayarathan, 2021). Self-efficacy impacts both the effort teachers make and their resilience. In so doing, self-efficacy can both influence the course of action a person takes in a given context and the resilience needed to achieve the task (Schunk et al., 2000). Teacher self-efficacy influences teacher cognition

(Putman, 2012) and has clear implications for teacher action in context and the teaching-learning environment (Van Uden et al., 2014). “Teachers' agency is understood as the willingness to engage in iterational, practical-evaluative, projective, and transformative action despite the existence of practical, personal, and institutional constraints” (Damsa et al., 2021, p. 1). Without this agency, it may be difficult for teachers to adapt to changing their teaching approach. This is because teaching in a crisis situation demands a judicious combination of individual responsibility, working closely with management to manage and avail of digital and other relevant resources (Langford and Damsa, 2020). As COVID-19 dramatically changed the contextual milieu of teaching, it is pertinent to consider teacher self-efficacy as a factor that may have been affected in this period.

COVID-19 impact on teachers

The COVID-19 crisis must have markedly impacted teachers and teaching. Hargreaves (2021) claims that research has not focused sufficiently on teachers' experiences during this difficult time, ‘While a lot of the post pandemic debate has focused on adding learning time, increasing technology use, and retaining or reintroducing testing as ways to compensate for learning loss, far less attention has been paid to the short-term and long-term impact of the pandemic on teachers and teaching’ (p. 1836).

The ‘professional capital of teaching’ (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) is considered pivotal for quality. The first aspect – the single most influential factor on student achievement being the teacher is well-documented in educational literature (Hattie 2009). This pandemic highlighted the importance of teachers as influence of teacher on learning determined by quality of teaching became even more pertinent (Damsa et al., 2021). The value of teachers' earned expertise (not easily replaceable) and pivotal role in education has been highlighted by the pandemic.

Hargreaves' (2021) delineates the primary characteristics of teaching and teacher quality i.e., “teacher expertise”, teaching as “emotional practice” – the reciprocal relationship between teacher and student well-being and the ways in which external changes either enrich or deplete teacher's “professional capital”, especially their “social capital” (p. 1835). So, in the context of COVID -19, pronounced worry and anxiety about student well-being coupled with a possible dearth of digital pedagogical competence would ostensibly influence teacher self-efficacy and resultant teacher actions.

COVID-19 impact on teaching

The demands placed on adapting teaching to an online environment with little or no preparation has posed multiple challenges for teaching. Research indicates that the dominating discourse from the teaching perspective reveals streamlining teaching to focus on “core subjects”, discontinuation of other subjects, a reduction in academic standards and teaching subjects outside the teachers’ portfolios (Gunnþórsdóttir et al., 2021). It underlined that student satisfaction arises from combined learner and teacher ability to interact, collaborate & build relationships, which was compromised in pandemic teaching.

Furthermore, teaching during this period revealed some lack of pertinent pedagogical approaches for online teaching. Research suggests that teachers’ digital competence can become ‘dated’ given the fast pace in which technology evolves. This lack of up-to-date competence and a failure to acknowledge or even identify the implications this may have for teacher pedagogical competence (Gudmundsdóttir and Hatlevik, 2018) could affect the quality of teacher agency and teacher self-efficacy. Another aspect is the lack of equity and social justice in the school system in terms of information gap and availability of technological resources for students. This had implications for student participation in the online milieu, with teachers and teaching becoming affected by the disparity among students.

The next section touches upon the more obvious concern for authorities, school leaders and parents, which has been the possible impact on student learning outcomes as the logical objective of education.

COVID-19 impact on possible ‘learning loss’

As student learning is the key focus of education, any impact of ‘learning loss’ could reach far beyond the time frame of the pandemic. Learning loss is conceptualised as ‘any specific or general loss of knowledge and skills or reversals in academic progress, most commonly due to extended gaps or discontinuities in a student’s education’ (Learning loss, 2017). COVID -19 has definitively resulted in interrupted education, and the hurriedly constructed online teaching is likely to be less than optimal and fit-for-purpose as Faroese school leaders identified (Vijayarathan, 2021) leading to perhaps some extent of learning loss, and efforts to mitigate its impact become essential. The extent to which ‘learning loss’ occurs is determined by access to remote learning, its quality, support from home and student engagement (Dorn et al., 2020). Learning left to the home front in a regular school system is not conducive to equity as evidenced in studies on homework and extended summer vacations (Rothstein, 2020). The limited opportunity for student participation in online learning influences learning negatively – possible ‘learning loss’/ ‘interrupted learning’. Given the added exacerbation of student stress and the consequent

lack of engagement in their studies adds yet another dimension to the complexity that the pandemic brought in its wake. Kuhfeld et al. (2020) posit that the most likely impact of interrupted or disrupted learning during COVID-19 is to increase the range of student achievement requiring teachers to specifically focus on this is their praxis.

Obviously, 'learning loss' does not occur for all students, as self-directed learning, which comprises learner ability to manage study time, ability to self-assess, minimise distractions, evaluate their need for help and their motivation can be managed by some students – but in the interests of equity, all learners' needs should be met using targeted solutions to the issue (Hattie, 2021). Students do not just imbibe the facets of self-directed learning – they have to be taught these skills – there was no time to teach the students in media res, and if self-directed learning did not already really have a place in the pre-COVID-19 school, then it is a deficit that is likely to have impacted learning. COVID-19 has highlighted the value of teacher expertise, which cannot be substituted easily with the makeshift support of parents and families (ibid). The uniqueness of the teacher-student relationship, the ubiquitous nature of communication, emotional and social ties within a school setting, the face-to-face communication and collaboration between student and student, student-teacher and teacher-teacher interaction all play their pivotal parts in the complex journey of learning and were compromised in the pandemic.

COVID- 19 in the context of Faroese schools

The Faroese schools were online for an average of two to four weeks, after which they returned to schools with reduced number of lessons and subjects comparable to the approach identified by (Gunnþórsdóttir et al., 2021). The pandemic created a new reality for teachers and teaching. Firstly, it increased digital learning in a remote environment, which presented challenges for teachers in terms of sustaining student-teacher relationships. The emotional connections which underpin this relationship and maintaining student engagement, particularly of vulnerable and academically challenged students (Hagerman and Kellam, 2020) was yet another facet. Online teaching has nevertheless been a silver lining for children to whom school has been unsafe or fraught with challenges, and they may have benefitted serendipitously and enjoy improved learning and emotional well-being (Whitley, 2020).

Secondly, during the time when both face-to-face teaching and online teaching were being conducted simultaneously, teachers were challenged on both fronts. One required possible acquisition of new digital-oriented approaches and the other enforced certain changes to the classroom environment. Apart from demanding that teachers learn to teach remotely, functioning at times in a virtual environment required that their digital proficiency be up to par. Teachers had to learn to use digital platforms and accommodate new pedagogical approaches to facilitate online group work,

assessment, etc., while concurrently coaching students in using digital tools and helping them become independent and self-directed learners. Remote online learning provides reduced and less than optimal teacher support for vulnerable learners, who may lack proficiency and confidence in their abilities leading to less learning (Dynarski, 2018) and this may be applicable to the Faroese context.

Thirdly, physical distancing required that teachers police use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitisation practices, while getting on with the business of teaching and ensuring that students felt safe and secure in this hastily created learning environment (Campbell et al. 2020). Finally, given that teaching is dependent on professional learning networks, a team approach – both collective and social – is a pivotal support for the teachers, and the COVID-19 set up removed this fundamental discourse from Faroese school corridors. Though online teacher meetings provided a formal forum, it may have impeded open teacher sharing of problems, challenges and requests for help.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this pilot study is a mixed methods approach based on a questionnaire with both qualitative and quantitative elements. At the survey stage, the qual-quant factor is exemplified in the questions, while the analysis combines both aspects to arrive at a picture of the phenomena in context.

The ethos of qualitative research in its subjective interpretation and contextual focus – where teacher action in situ shaped by experience is recreated in a sense in the teachers' responding to the questionnaire – is what is pertinent. Thus, research makes inroads into eliciting a self-reflection by the teachers' as teaching professionals and makes its presence felt in the research environment (Kohlbacher, 2006). The stance is also idiographic (Starman, 2013) because teacher reflections are focused and gathered from a moment in time and every teacher's experience counts, despite their individuality, as they are co-participants in a collective experience of functioning during the pandemic. The research participants afford insight into the demands and changes that characterised their managing of the crisis impacting their teaching.

Researcher identity and authorial stance are the fulcrum in research undertakings (Kamler and Thomson, 2006; Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Therefore, when researchers are reflexive in their analysis of participant accounts (Elliott, 2005), it helps illuminate the role of the researcher as narrator. The voices of the participants are given importance in the analysis through quotations and through organising their responses in a manner that benefits the reader and fulfils the aims of this pilot project.

As one who has a long history in education and is fully aware of teachers and teaching being the fulcrum of education, it is meaningful to gauge teacher action and reaction in an environment in flux. How teachers define their roles and their

relationship to teaching and students in this scenario has the potential to create a crisis management approach in schools to cope with and manage upheavals that occur in their external environment in the future. My perspective though is not 'emic' as I am not part of the compulsory education system, but that of an 'etic' observer committed to learning from the experience, which can hopefully benefit my pre-service teacher students.

Data Collection

In keeping with the 'etic' perspective and purpose of the pilot study, the instruments used for data collection were a mixed research questionnaire sent online via Survey Monkey to all the teachers through their teacher union webpage and Facebook/Messenger post COVID -19 school closure. The random, convenience sampling of teachers is nevertheless purposive in the sense that it goes to the experts, here the teachers, to elicit their experience of teaching during the pandemic.

The questionnaire used a combination of closed-ended and open-ended question for quantitative data and qualitative data respectively (Creswell, 2003). This mixed questionnaire enables a kind of triangulation with the open questions allowing for better accuracy in understanding respondents (Nunan, 1999). There were 14 questions in all section constituting two parts. The quantitative first section composed of 4-point Likert-type 6 questions (five of these were common to both teachers and school leaders) regarding leaders' support during the crisis and 8 open questions in the qualitative section (four of these were common to school leaders) in keeping with the aims of this pilot study.

There are distinct advantages in using questionnaires as part of online surveys. They offer a means for the researcher to access people with shared professions, attitudes, beliefs, and values concerning an issue (Wright 2017). They are time-saving, and the researcher receives instant feedback (Taylor, 2000). SurveyMonkey facilitates saving and exporting data in multiple formats, minimising human error (Varela et al., 2017). The use of online surveys is cost effective and convenient (Llieva et al., 2002) and ensures anonymity, which is crucial in a micro society like the Faroe Islands, where there is an added responsibility for a researcher to tread very carefully and respect the culture, where the concern to remain anonymous is pronounced (Vijayarathan, 2017). The anonymised responses as de facto set up in this survey instrument protects the identity of the respondents.

The disadvantages could be that some responses may be incomplete and unclear and have low rate of return. The option to leave questions unanswered were given, and this meant that some teachers did not respond to a couple of questions. As this was a pilot study with a focus on eliciting themes through appropriate survey questions and responses were needed to identify themes of relevance for the larger study in the pipeline, the number of respondents for a

pilot study I felt could be around 100 of around 850 teachers, and I received 103 responses in SurveyMonkey. Any quotations used in the article are translated as I am competent in Faroese and English, and the content did not challenge my capabilities.

Ethical Concerns in the Study

There were no major ethical concerns in this pilot project as responses were automatically anonymised through SurveyMonkey. The introductory text to the survey described the purpose of the survey, assured participants of their anonymity and free choice to participate. The ethical issues rested on me as the researcher fulfilling the need to represent findings honestly and respectfully. The coding by the project assistant as basis for analysis ensured the authenticity of the input from the study. The study is financed by funding leftover from a project grant, which I received for the earlier school leadership study, but has no bearing on the survey purpose or dissemination.

Data Analysis

The data was collated by a research assistant coding in NVivo using the codebook. The responses from the qualitative section of the questionnaire were coded in NVivo deductively based on the 16 thematic codes elicited from the literature review by the researcher to ensure alignment with the pilot study objectives. Using pre-existing codes, data was appropriately labelled before analytical interpretation and applied to the qualitative questions. During the process of coding, the research assistant added 5 more codes inductively. The research assistant coded in NVivo, and as the researcher, I printed out the coding to check that coding nodes complied with the coding themes. The researcher analysed the 21 thematic nodal data to arrive at the findings.

In the light of validity and reliability of qualitative research as highlighted by Noble and Smith (2015), efforts were made to maintain credibility in representing the focus of the study from the social reality of teacher perspectives on the COVID-19 impact on their teaching. The efforts focused on unambiguously and correctly presenting findings in keeping with the true value required in qualitative research. Communication and discussion with the research assistant in this context made it possible to be on track. In terms of consistency, I make my decisions as the researcher transparent in terms of sample numbers, method of data collection, coding and role of the research assistant.

It is hoped that confirmability has been achieved through truth value and consistency. In terms of applicability, the study could be conducted with members of the teaching profession regarding support from their leaders at secondary and tertiary levels. Researcher identity and authorial stance are the fulcrum in qualitative research undertakings (Kamler and Thomson, 2006, p. 68; Denzin and Lincoln 2011, pp. 14-15). Therefore, when researchers are reflexive

in their analysis of participant accounts (Elliott, 2005, p. 152), it helps illuminate the role of the researcher as narrator and interpreter.

Findings in Context and Discussion

The thematic analysis focused on key challenges that prevailed in Faroese compulsory schools during COVID-19 with specific reference to teachers' viewpoints of their experiences and their evaluation of the efficacy of their leaders in supporting them through this crisis. These are categorised thematically as delineated in this section. The table below sums up the findings from the quantitative section of the pilot study.

Table 1.
An overview of teacher perspectives

Issues during COVID - 19	Teachers (definitely agree + agree) n=103
1. School leaders planned specific activity together with teachers to gain objectives	80%
2. Teachers were actively supported through listening to their concerns	76%
3. Clear communication was received from the leaders creating trust and motivation	79%
4. Teachers received current, relevant & significant information from leaders	86%
5. COVID – 19 requires a different leadership approach to empower teachers & encourage them to do their best	94%
6. The leader supported me in carrying out teaching	82%

It appears that a fairly positive picture of Faroese leadership emerges from this non-representative sample given that approximately four-fifths of teachers give the impression that their leaders did some things appropriately. While this cannot provide any basis for generalisations on the quality of leadership in Faroese schools, it nevertheless provides some indication of leadership efficacy and teacher satisfaction as elucidated in the study. It is important to note that the pilot study only focused on eliciting teacher experience of the pandemic impact, and no attempt was made to ascertain individual leader performance in a manner befitting this positive feedback. The findings from the responses to the qualitative questions in the study are analysed thematically in the next section.

Teacher perspectives on their school leaders

The qualitative data underpins the quantitative one revealing that teachers saw their leaders as showing inclusive, strategic, active, hands-on and

motivational principal leadership. Teachers described how they were included in decision-making during online Teams meetings, where possible solutions were explored and adapted as necessary. Changes were made incrementally during the process to optimise teacher buy-in, action and confidence. They were given courses in Microsoft Teams, sometimes by the leader him/herself. A teacher speaks of how they 'shared knowledge and the leader listened actively during online meetings'.

Comments underpin the active, hands-on leadership with collective and individual help. The most commonly repeated comments comprise: 'Clear guidelines from the leader'; 'Lot of clear information and regular communication both written and spoken'; 'Acquired the necessary technology, made sure the teachers were taught how to use it and kept the parents informed of the developments'; 'gave one-to-one support'; 'could always count on leader support'; 'always ready to answer questions'; 'open, active, supportive' and 'encouraging, up building and clear with expectations'. One teacher describes the leader being 'compassionate and helpful' when the teacher felt 'helpless and out of depth'. Another says, 'my leader was patient, understanding, and when I was concerned, respected my fears and helped me through them, so I could teach knowing I was not alone.'

These positive leader actions could be categorised within the approaches to principal leadership as 'intellectual stimulation' which offers encouragement for teachers to explore new methods and approaches in their teaching and learn from their experiences (Bass and Riggio, 2006). The school leaders also exhibited 'individualised consideration' through sorting out issues for individual teachers, keeping active communication, being open to ideas from their teachers and offering encouragement and support (ibid). The other two approaches are 'inspirational motivation', where leaders are able to share their vision and motivate teachers and 'idealized influence', where leaders are role models who inspire trust and create respect, making it easy for teachers to follow their lead. Based on teacher responses, it would be fair to conclude that some Faroese school leaders have also adopted these approaches in their principal leadership style.

The data exposed some negative aspects of Faroese principal leadership. A few teachers declared that they 'got no help'; 'no communication between me and the leader'; 'don't think he/she did much'; 'the leader was passive'; 'was just the middleman who conveyed the decisions of the Department of Education' and 'I have worked by myself without anyone enquiring or giving me support'. Clearly, the negative feedback identifies some poor and indifferent principal leadership, which may have affected the motivation of some teachers and their self-efficacy, presumably already under some stress, given the near instant significant change in the teaching environment.

In general, leaders appear to have been supportive and have offered possible solutions to challenges teachers faced. In keeping with principal

transformational leadership, teachers have indicated that expectations were set, encouragement and support was given. The leaders appear to have been able to lead the teachers proactively during the crisis. Overall, based on teachers' feedback, there is a sense that leaders have been hands on and led from the front in tune with the kind of principal leadership desirable in a crisis.

The thematic analysis identified other issues as delineated below, and these encompass teachers' lived experiences during a stressful period and indicates the impact these factors had on teachers' professional actions.

Teacher Perspectives on their Challenges during COVID -19

Teacher Knowledge Gaps in ICT influenced COVID -19 Teaching

Digital competence and competence in digital pedagogy are fundamental to education in the 21 century (Stauffer, 2020) and key to ensuring digital literacy in students, one of the desired 21 century skills for learners. The lack of Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills among teachers must influence the educational ethos of their schools, cause emotional stress and negatively impact teacher self-efficacy, which in turn undermines teacher motivation and impairs performance (Bandura, 1997; Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Teacher responses focus on five aspects of their digital competence: i. teacher lack of digital competences; ii. need for courses and training in ICT as part of continuing professional development, which they see as the joint responsibility of the Faculty of Education and leadership; iii. facilitating student use of ICT; iv. using digital teaching as part of the regular teaching schedule with access to digital tools, and v. having pedagogical IT staff to equip teachers to master digital pedagogy.

Teacher flexibility in COVID-19 environment

The flexibility demanded in the sudden upheaval to teaching saw teachers creating their own solutions and innovation at the grassroots level. They planned lessons differently and taught using a modular concept so they could be sure that lesson sessions were a unit in themselves making it easier for students to complete parts of the syllabus and move on. Teachers used a combination of Teams and social media websites, particularly Facebook, to establish communication with students, each other and parents. They speak of 'just leaping into' online teaching. Nearly 70% speak of leaders' facilitation of online teaching.

Teacher adaptability to ICT

With regard to teachers adapting to the fluctuating learning-teaching environment, there is evidence of the resistance to change resulting in some teachers completely – 'switching off' as one teacher called it. This group of

teachers is not by any means a majority, but the findings provide a good overview of why teachers do not engage with online pedagogy. About a fifth of the teachers seem to have struggled with coping with online teaching demands because of their insecurity with Teams, lack of trust in the ethos of online education, resentment that they had to change their habitual teaching approaches, lack of motivation and fatigue brought about by stress. This negative stance to online teaching was evident, despite the support and help from the leadership, IT specialists and colleagues, and sometimes, even family. As pedagogical content knowledge underpins teacher self-efficacy, the likelihood is that lack of felicity with ICT may have impacted teacher self-efficacy.

Teachers who were open to change, familiar with Teams, willing to experiment saw opportunities – both for teaching and other teacher duties (attending online meetings, discussions, etc.) and took the chance to experiment. They committed to the online environment and tried to modify their approach and saw a clear future role for ICT in education with the proviso that teachers and students were trained properly, and the school invested in the necessary tools and training. As one teacher succinctly put it, ‘IT is important to teaching, but when IT fails, everything falls with it.’ Others saw ICT from a utilitarian perspective, and said it needed to be included in teacher repertoire as an additional competence.

Teacher Emotions in Teaching

Teacher efficiency and effectiveness distinctly affect student performance as teaching does not occur in a neutral environment – ‘it is an emotional practice, not just a cognitive and intellectual one’ (Hargreaves, 2021, p. 1845). For teachers, rewards of teaching include an emotional component as emotions underpin the teacher-student communication. In this context, the function of student feedback as indication of student comprehension and learning often contributes to job satisfaction (Lortie, 1975).

According to teachers, a sense of an emotionless vacuum was created in online remote teaching, which robbed teachers of their sounding board, i.e., synchronous feedback both verbal and non-verbal from students. They were difficult to sense in the online setting for various reasons from student non-participation, student ‘invisibility’ (not being able to see and read student faces/expressions as cameras were switched off) and intrusive parental presence in the digital classroom. Teachers could not gauge the effect of their teaching, and this created a sense of inadequacy and angst. This experience with seemingly reduced teacher self-efficacy influencing teacher emotion is a dominant discourse in this study. Teachers refer to a need for ‘crisis help’, ‘more focus on teacher as person instead of focusing on Microsoft Teams’, ‘understanding’, ‘compassion’, ‘empathy’, for the leader to say, ‘don’t spread yourself thin’ and ‘give me freedom to design my own teaching’.

What several teachers explicated is captured rather clearly in this teacher's words, 'ICT can never replicate the fundamental ethos of face-to-face communication and social intercourse – face-to-face interaction in learning is key'. Teachers were convinced that this crucial ingredient could not be replicated in the online environment and was reason enough to prefer face-to-face contact and togetherness with students.

Teacher concerns about student well-being, student engagement and possible 'learning loss'

As already established, student well-being and student engagement have a significant role in learning. A powerful quotation from one teacher encompasses what nearly three-fourths of teachers expounded. 'Most of my fear has been to do with student well-being. How is each individual student doing? How are they affected socially? Are they going to withdraw into themselves, get depression, and what about those who have troubled conditions in their homes? Are they suffering?'

Another teacher captures the thoughts of over 65% of colleagues, 'Will students be lonely, will weak students manage online? How good is it to stare at a screen all day? Are they able to look after themselves?'. One teacher declares, 'I called several of them at home... it really worries me a great deal... (Corona) teaching is not suitable for average and weak students – they produce little. So, to get them back on track afterwards is going to be a challenge', indicating a possible concern with 'learning loss'. A common, pronounced thread is well-expressed in this teacher comment: 'The creative and social aspect of learning and student-student interaction has all but become invisible – this social distancing with lack of contact with peers is simply not good at all'.

Furthermore, some shocking issues were brought to light in teacher voices: 'Some students don't want to hear or see teachers and classmates'; 'We know that alcohol and violence are present in some homes – I'm worried about students for whom this is reality'. 'Several parents of my students have noticed psychological problems in their children. In fact, one student said that he/she could not see the meaning in life anymore, and with cooperation from parents, the health nurse and the school leader, we fortunately handled this and ensured proper care was given to this student'.

While several teachers spoke of possible 'learning loss', in tune with the fear for and focus on student well-being, teacher disgruntlement with student disengagement was always anchored in the discourse of concern for their students. 'My students have still not caught up with the lessons lost in Corona teaching. It was impossible for me to replicate the social learning environment while they were home and online. It is not good for them to repeatedly adjust to the online environment and not have contact with classmates and friends in other classes. 'They have forgotten what they have been taught. I find myself having to repeatedly remind them that we have gone through this material

before'. 'It's as if everything taught before Corona has somehow disappeared. It is frustrating as students seem to have forgotten a lot or are not motivated to engage in lessons online'. This 'burden of care' as one teacher put it created a great deal of anxiety among teachers, emphasising the emotional ties involved in an educational set up and teacher role as nurturer, which is often overlooked in educational discourse (Vijayarathan, 2021).

Examination preparedness, completing syllabi, lack of student concentration and engagement leading to possible 'learning loss', student isolation with its consequences and student poor completion of homework were other valid concerns. One teacher states categorically, 'as a successful teacher with positive student learning outcomes for over 40 years in the profession, I would not praise this online learning as it is particularly ill-suited to average and weak students, students with various challenges and boys in general in its impersonal teacher-student approach'.

Looking at the situation from an organisational point of view, it is reassuring that Faroese teachers appear geared to prioritise student needs and exhibit such clear awareness of socio-psychological challenges to student well-being. This awareness may be advantageous when teachers take stock of any possible 'learning loss' and consciously design compensation strategies, which will presumably be based on an evaluation of COVID-19 impact on learning-teaching.

Building of teacher self-efficacy

As student well-being and performance influence teacher self-efficacy, teachers may have felt that they were not performing to their full capacity or that they were not prepared professionally to overcome challenges as can be seen in the analysis. As teacher self-efficacy significantly impacts teacher efficiency and effectiveness and student motivation, it was thought-provoking to see how teacher stance, teacher attitude and teacher beliefs dictated action. Teachers who were overwhelmed by the situation appear to have reacted in various ways. A few sought refuge in a mask of indifference and just let go, while others were proactive in seeking to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfil their remit. A pertinent factor is the finding that where teachers fully accepted help for pedagogical adjustments, motivation and stress were replaced by a sense of learning, excitement and interpreted as scope for professional self-development.

A core issue here is teacher self-efficacy when it comes to digital competencies. As table 2 in the next section demonstrates, lack of digital competence appears to have impacted teachers and their professional sense of confidence and agency. The quotations suggest that teachers were overwhelmed by online teaching requirements, felt exposed, unable to cope and some simply gave up. The possible adverse effect on their teacher self-efficacy cannot be ignored. Table 3 comprises the positives of teacher digital competence

Lack of student ICT skills and engagement with online learning

Two diverse yet related aspects become clear in this study. Teachers claim that the IT skills of students are over estimated and student engagement in an online environment is complex. Lack of ICT skills means that students who cannot use Teams were left out despite school leaders and teachers trying to help them cope and teach them the basics. Teachers were surprised by student lack of felicity in IT. Unskilled students did not engage and for those with special needs, the challenges were exacerbated leading to teacher concern as delineated earlier. The added stress of teaching students the ins and outs of Teams and other programmes concurrently with subject-teaching is evidenced in this study. A valid concern raised by teachers was the amount of student time spent in front of the screen and their worry if this was at all good for young children and teenagers to be online the whole day.

The pros and cons of COVID-19 for teaching and learning

There are clear tendencies in this theme in the data, which cross over to areas already discussed but require deeper focus as one objective in the study was to pinpoint what exactly the positives and negatives of schooling in COVID-19 settings were according to teacher evaluation of this period.

The following tables offers an overview of the pros and cons of online teaching encapsulated through quotations to enable the voice of the participants in the study to have a telling presence, where the researcher becomes narrator and conveys the “indissoluble interrelationship between interpreter and interpretation” (Thomas & James, 2006, p. 782). I include representative quotations that indicate perspectives found with 70% or more frequency in the data. It is hoped that they help create a holistic picture to enhance credibility and impact of findings.

Negative aspects of online teaching

The negative aspects highlight the role of technology and lack of digital felicity in teacher skills.

Table 2.
The negatives of online teaching

Lack of IT skills which may impact teacher self-efficacy:

- I don’t like teaching online because I lack skills and experience in ICT.
- Getting to know the technology took up too much time and effort – too frustrating.
- Nothing positive with teaching online when technology does not function properly.
- Teams was negative – nothing positive about it when compared to regular teaching.

Teacher contact with students:

- Online teaching doesn't give me eye contact with students – teaching is better when this is possible.
- Good to experiment with IT, but so much better to teach face-to-face.
- All good about technology, but it cannot stand on its own – relations matter.
- I struggled to establish contact with my students.
- I couldn't get all my students engaged in lessons.
- I missed my students. Remote teaching is awful.

Challenges of teaching online:

- Convinced me that IT is just a tool and not an end in itself, whatever IT fans say.
- Difficult to use new teaching approaches and skills online.
- Teaching online was not a happy experience for teachers, students or parents.
- Teaching online is very demanding.
- They (students) had the camera switched off – were probably in bed sleeping instead of listening!
- I'm sure that some of them were surfing the net instead of following online lessons.
- Teaching became monotonous.
- I did not enjoy the feeling that I was present in a forum where I did not know who else was present – who knows who was privy to my teaching at the other end!

Concern for students:

- Students did not benefit from home learning – it depends of course on who is helping.
- My students have still not caught up with what they missed.
- After three-four weeks of online teaching, students were tired and inactive.
- Not sure whether it is right that small children should have so study time on screen.
- I felt I wasn't much help for my students as I couldn't gauge whether all students were following and to think that I put so much of an effort to learning technology only to end up frustrated and worried about student learning.
- As for students who are weak and have problems on the home front, their well-being concerns me deeply – so worried about them and their ability to learn.

Positive aspects of online teaching

When it comes to the positive aspect, the voice of the practitioners expressed in the quotations below affords interesting viewpoints.

Table 3.
The positives of online teaching

ICT and associated issues

- Positive that we were forced to try new things – both in ICT and teaching.
- I think online teaching is here to stay. We just need to get better at it.
- I have learnt a lot of new things about ICT. It is useful for students to practise exercises and revise what has been taught in class.
- I'm more confident in using ICT now.
- Will be using Teams more as it is convenient to upload assignments, especially homework.
- I enjoyed the convenience of teaching from home. We could meet our students every day from the comfort of our homes!
- Nothing negative with online teaching. I hope it is here to stay and can be used as an alternative so teachers could work from home some days of the week.
- Staff meetings could be held online from now on!
 - I could focus on my teaching as I didn't have to worry about bullying, anti-social behaviour of students or any conflict.
- Positive that we have experienced a new way of being together and are using more IT tools for teaching.
- Good teaching with IT requires a great deal of preparation. With ideas and preparation, we can make learning with IT effective.
- I see the significance of IT for our schools to reach goals in the future.
- If IT is to be fully integrated into the educational system, time, money and energy must be reserved for this work for many years in the future and invested in training teachers and students.

Teacher self-efficacy as enabler

- I like that I have had to innovate and go outside my comfort zone.
- Teachers have shown that we're quick to learn and adapt. We learnt to use the tools and be ready for new things.
- Teachers know how to teach – but now we must be taught about communication online in case we end up in this situation again.
- Very exciting and enriching time because I was forced to learn a lot to be able to function online. Has opened new vistas!
- It has opened possibilities for distance education and should be explored.
- Never too late or too old to learn things. I've become aware that IT can offer learning much. Will definitely use IT in my teaching from now on.

Students and ICT

- Some students enjoyed online teaching and they benefitted, while others lost interest.
- Students who were not engaged before became involved in the online environment and that was delightful to see! Even shy students.

- As we had smaller groups of students online, it made learning exciting for them and rewarding for me. Managed to do three times more than with a full classroom.
- The smaller class sizes made it easier for me to guide students.
- Assignments were submitted on time.

Student self-directed learning

- Students have had greater responsibility for their school work and their own learning.
- We have seen how important it is that students become self-sufficient and take responsibility.
- Our eyes have been opened to how important it is to help students be independent and take responsibility for their learning.

The variety in the responses adds a richness and depth to the data and offers perspectives that afford a clear insight into the thoughts and feelings of the teachers. This become meaningful input for the extended study in the pipeline.

COVID-19 impact on teachers

The dichotomy of the teacher as person and teacher as professional are delineated in the challenges the teachers experienced. While not unique to the teaching profession, it nevertheless gives added depth to the discussion on the impact of the pandemic on teachers and teaching.

Complex cognitive and social skills underpin success in online-learning environments. Many teachers focused on just digital competences and became stressed and unmotivated. Lack of teacher mentoring and support for remote/online-based activity in some cases added to teacher stress. Teachers had to acknowledge the increased importance of relationship-building to facilitate student participation, create effective online study habits and teach students how to request help. They were forced to reduce pace of teaching and adjust expectations of student progression and give more timely constructive feedback ‘live’ to maintain pace. Teachers were required to engage more socially and intellectually to cope with student sense of isolation and be aware of the impact on their self-efficacy and self-confidence and its implications for the quality of their teaching.

As teaching is an “emotional practice”, student & teacher well-being is reciprocally interrelated (Hargreaves, 2021). Teacher pronounced worry and anxiety about student well-being was exacerbated by personal worries at home with children of their own and challenges of being parent/teacher/caregiver concurrently. Professional capital – ‘a group’s professional worth that enables it to achieve its goals’ (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 37) comprises human capital (knowledge, talents and capabilities of teachers); decisional capital (professional judgment and expertise built over time through experience); social

capital (professional capital acquired and shared through peer collaboration. It requires ‘...technical knowledge, high levels of education, strong practice within schools and continuous improvement over time that is undertaken collaboratively, and that calls for the development of wise judgment’ (ibid). The value of teachers’ earned expertise (not easily replaceable by parents/caregivers) and pivotal role in education was certainly highlighted by the pandemic (Lauermaun and König, 2016). It also drew attention to the lack of social justice in education – for lack of equity in terms of accessibility to computers, internet connection at home, ability/possibility of parents/caregivers to help their children may have contributed even more to the achievement gap among students (Carrillo and Flores, 2020). Sometimes, in the haste to adapt to online teaching, acquiring digital competence may have dominated teacher discourse, but the data positively and categorically reveals teacher concern for student wellness.

Evaluation of the COVID-19 crisis for organisational learning

Managing crises calls for learning at all levels of an organisation as crises can accelerate learning processes. When managed appropriately, they stimulate organisational flexibility and improvement (Lopez, Peon, & Ordas, 2005). The power of feedback and a discussion post-crisis facilitates teacher well-being, involvement in the profession, a forward-looking work ethic and a proactive organisation, which serves to comfort teachers and make them feel that their voices can and have been heard (Kelly, 2005).

A perusal of the findings on feedback uncover three categories. Teachers state that there has been evaluation – the most common description of it is in a single word, ‘meetings’ or a phrase ‘lots of meetings’, and this is the majority response. The second is meetings with no real conclusion or solutions, and thirdly, ‘have had a lot of meetings where both leader and teachers expressed their opinions and decisions were made for a coping strategy’ mentioned by just one teacher. Discussions serve to identify fears and frustrations, success experiences and otherwise, but where commingled voices are heard and thoughts have been aired, it is loss of valuable input if it does not foster a strategy to cope in similar situations.

Schwandt and Marquardt (2000) define a learning system as “a system of actions, actors, symbols and processes that enables an organization to transform information into valued knowledge which in turn increases its long-run adaptive capacity” (p. 61). The knowledge gleaned from the crisis experience can generate learning that becomes part of the organisational memory and fortifies it with resilience against crises in the future. Therefore, learning from a crisis is key to leadership and staff performance. If, as the data indicates, there have mainly been discussions of COVID-19 experiences, they cannot substitute for creating a strategy for the future. Based on this, one may cautiously conclude that learning in context, which is a powerful tool for organisational learning and development,

may not have been optimally anchored in Faroese schools at the time of the study.

The COVID-19 online environment not only reduced teacher control of active learning time but emphasised the pertinence and importance of student self-regulation, motivational abilities and increased parental involvement in learning time. All these promote volitional competence and learner autonomy (Strayhorn, 2014). While the teaching status quo challenged teachers, it also revealed that students, as one teacher puts it, 'go it on their own sometimes'.

'Learning loss' and impact of COVID -19

When it comes to 'learning loss', Hargreaves (2021) makes a strong case when he declares that it is neither testing nor technology that ensures equity in student learning but investing in the professional capital of teaching' (p. 1837). He underlines the connection between strong and proficient teaching profession as inextricably linked to effective learning outcomes. He emphasises the importance of avoiding working conditions that threaten teacher emotional well-being as they have negative consequences for teachers and students. The COVID-19 context was indubitably one which systematically affected teacher role in schools, so the occurrence of some 'learning loss' and negatively impacted self-efficacy is not unrealistic. Both teachers and students were strongly impacted by the crisis affecting their ability to engage in the teaching-learning environment fully and positively during the period. Furthermore, Hargreaves (2021) underlines the truism that teachers are able to maintain commitment to teaching if they experience that peers & leaders value them as trusted colleagues (Sahlberg & Walker, 2021). With regards to the positive feedback about Faroese school leadership, teachers had this support, which may have mitigated some of the negative impact on teacher performance.

It is increasingly evident that supporting students' learning is complex. The necessity for involved support from parents/caregivers, teachers, leaders and other stakeholders would ensure students realise challenging and long-term outcomes (Kundu, 2017). Teachers require empowerment, and as the analysis has revealed, continued professional development of teachers in digital competences, tackling emotional and pedagogical well-being of students, optimal access to digital learning tools, involvement of the home and a proactive approach towards creating student agency and autonomy become unquestionably important in a learning environment that is recovering from the pandemic. It offers a golden opportunity to also explore innovation in education, which cannot but include increased use of digital learning. Teachers' role as facilitators was enhanced in the online environment, and a need for self-directed learning student-centric environments functioning within well-established frameworks and digital environments to ensure continuous student progress become paramount (Hargreaves, 2021).

Implications for teacher education

Teacher education should invest in quality and ‘professional capital’ of teachers, build interactional skills of teachers to support innovation & learning. Focus should be on upskilling staff so digital proficiency becomes endemic to pedagogical repertoire – ‘professional digital competence’. It is imperative for teacher education to invest in appropriate digital tools to make teaching relevant to pre-service teachers. Lessons learnt from the emergency online pedagogical praxis can help develop quality online teaching and learning. It would be beneficial to build continuing professional learning (CPL) communities to maintain/promote meaningful cooperation and collective learning, encourage team-based approach to build a communicative and supportive culture. Teacher education must model for pre-service teachers the reality of functioning in the digital educational environment together with other crucial pedagogical skills to equip them to cope in a complex environment.

Conclusion

This article in its exploration of the COVID-19 impact on teaching and teachers’ evaluation of leadership time during this uncertain period has revealed that education had much to learn from the COVID-19 crisis, and it was a steep learning curve. The teachers appear to have appreciated the help from principals and help with digital pedagogy, while asking for more investment in their social capital and access to technological and digital skills. The call for more blended and personalised learning, innovation in education, and a reduction to a silo approach to education all seem to have been highlighted in this period.

It appears that teacher challenges have been personal, professional and as individuals and team members. They have shown consistent care for student well-being and learning, which appears to have dominated their discourse in this turbulent time. Organisational learning with a view to entrenched knowledge that can be transformed into future strategy does not emerge clearly from the data, which is something schools should focus on to meet future crises with robust resilience to mitigate interruption to student learning and achievement.

The findings in this study corroborate those of a previous study conducted with school principals (Vijayarathan, 2021) using the same mixed questionnaire, but with added semi-structured interviews. The similarity in findings with regard to teacher challenges and teacher evaluation of their leaders is very high indicating that both these studies offer valuable input to the comprehensive study which is to commence shortly.

Academic contribution

The article breaks new ground as no research exists on school teachers in compulsory schools in The Faroe Islands during the Covid-19 school crisis. In its focus on the significance of the teacher to the teaching-learning environment, it

may have opened opportunities for debate on what Faroese schools need to become full-fledged members of 21 century schools with focus on digital competencies, technological progress and continued professional development of teachers to contribute to excellence in education.

Future Study

A study is in the pipeline to assess impact of COVID-19 on student learning and well-being from teacher, principal and student perspectives. This would complete the triangle of important players in schools and offer insights into how student learning and well-being were affected. The lapse in time may make it easier for the subjects of the study to contemplate and reflect on the pandemic experience.

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