



**English teachers' well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic:
Understanding their perseverance**

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English for Upper Secondary School Teachers

EXE601: Degree Thesis II, 15 credits

Department of Social and Behavioral studies

Spring Term 2022

Degree Thesis 2: 15 credits

Title: English teachers' well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic: Understanding their perseverance

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Date: March 2022

Abstract

Language teachers often face unique challenges in their professions. The advent of Covid-19 created new stressors that teachers had to adapt to in order to persevere. This study examines twelve English language teachers' well-being and perseverance during the Covid-19 pandemic in Sweden. The purpose is to understand how they persevered in the face of adversity. The aim is to understand how the Covid-19 pandemic affected English teachers' working situation and well-being. This qualitative research study seeks to answer the following question: How can we understand the perseverance of English teachers under the Covid-19 pandemic? The data is interpreted and analyzed through the lens of positive psychology, and we used 'EMPATHICS' as our framework. The focus of the study is on Perseverance and its themes of *Resilience*, *Hope*, and *Optimism*. These themes are identified and analyzed through a thematic content analysis which follows an iterative process. The results showed that internal and external factors influenced the teachers' perseverance and ability to create pathways and strategies to handle adversities. In conclusion, teachers persevered by being resilient, hopeful, and optimistic during the pandemic.

Keywords:

English language teachers, Sweden, Covid-19 Pandemic, Positive psychology, Well-being, EMPHATICIS.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Literature Review.....	5
2.1 Teacher well-being	5
2.2 Teacher well-being in relation to perseverance	6
2.3 Teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic	7
3. Study and Purpose.....	8
4. Theoretical Framework	9
4.1 Perseverance	10
4.1.1 Resilience.....	10
4.1.2 Hope.....	10
4.1.3 Optimism.....	12
5. Methodology	12
5.1 Research design	13
5.1.1 Collecting data	13
5.1.2 Analyzing Data	13
5.2 Procedures	14
5.2.1 Selection of participants.....	14
5.2.2 Data collection procedure	15
5.2.3 Analytical procedure	16
5.3 Participants	17
5.4 Ethics	17
6. Results and discussion.....	18
6.1 Resilience.....	18
6.1.1 Positive adaptation	18
6.1.2 Support.....	19
6.1.3 Educational aspirations	21
6.1.4 A sense of purpose and meaning	22
6.2 Hope.....	24
6.2.1 Capacity to produce pathways	24
6.2.2 Hopelessness	26
6.3 Optimism	27
6.3.1 Confidence	27
6.3.2 Positive expectations for the future.....	28

6.3.3 Strategies when facing adversities and problems	29
6.3.4 Explanatory lifestyle	30
7. Conclusion.....	31
8. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research	33
References	35
Appendix 1	40
Appendix 2	42
Appendix 3	43

1. Introduction

The outbreak of Covid-19 took us all by surprise, and we found ourselves in a position where we had to adapt to the new situation. Covid-19 has had far-reaching implications, with perhaps one of the most affected groups being language teachers. When Covid-19 was declared a pandemic, the Public Health Agency of Sweden restricted school access and urged upper secondary schools to convert to online teaching (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). Since then, teaching in Sweden has had to change and cope with the new challenges.

Generally, frequent challenges for language teachers are long or irregular work hours and heavy workloads (MacIntyre et al., 2019b). In addition, English teachers in Sweden face unique challenges in their teaching as English is such a big part of students' lives outside of the school environment (Henry et al., 2019). According to Johnson (2005), even before the pandemic, the teaching profession ranked as one of the most stressful physical and psychological well-being occupations.

Since then, new stressors have been added to the list with the advent of Covid-19 and its ramifications on the population constituting a major stress factor. Researchers have for a long time been interested in stress and coping and their effects on physical well-being. However, more recently, research has taken a psychological pathway in which the current interest is more on the individual's ability to sustain well-being when experiencing stressful events (Folkman, 2011).

Compared to the immense research on learners, teachers are often neglected as they are often studied in relation to learners, not as "individuals with complex, nuanced, unique psychologies" (Mercer, 2018, p. 506). Even in the Swedish education policies and governing documents, teachers and their health are highly overlooked despite them being crucial agents to the learning process. For this reason, we seek to learn more about teachers' well-being and how they persevere in the face of adversity. Therefore, this essay will examine English teachers' well-being and their perseverance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This essay is structured as follows: In the Literature Review, relevant research on teachers' well-being, well-being in relation to perseverance, and teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic is presented. In the Study and Purpose, the purpose of the study and the research question are presented. In the Theoretical Framework, a framework used in positive psychology, namely EMPATHICS (Oxford, 2016) is outlined. In the Methodology, the research design and techniques for collecting and analyzing the data are presented. In

addition, the procedures when recruiting participants as well as participant information and lastly ethics are provided. In the Results and Discussion, the findings are presented. Finally, the essay ends with a Conclusion, Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research.

2. Literature Review

"Wellbeing emerges from a blend of personal and professional factors as well as contextual factors, in particular, our perception of our environment" (Mercer and Gregersen, 2020, p. 3). Mercer and Gregersen (2020) hold that well-being is not about having positive emotions and being happy, but rather about finding the positives in life and concentrating on these. Mercer and Gregersen (2020) have a strong belief that language teachers' well-being is not only a prerequisite for their psychological and physical health, but also to students' outcomes and achievements. However, there are many stressors that threaten the well-being of the teacher, which in turn have consequences on the learners as they "often also mirror them [their teachers]" (Mercer and Gregersen, 2020, p. 2). Therefore, there are different factors, internal and external, that affect how language teachers deal with stressors, which in turn have an impact on their well-being. In this part of our essay, we present an overview of literature on teacher well-being, teacher well-being in relation to perseverance, and teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.1 Teacher well-being

According to MacIntyre et al.'s (2019b) study, frequent stressors common among teachers are long or irregular working hours and heavy workloads. Their results suggest that those stressors are further enhanced when the line between home and work domains are blurred, (e.g., when working from home). Gregersen et al. (2020) state that the lines between personal and professional lives are often considerably blurred for teachers. For this reason, setting boundaries between personal and professional spheres is especially important for teachers and for their well-being (Mercer, 2018).

In a study of Norwegian teachers, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) examined job satisfaction, sources of stress, consequences of stress and coping strategies. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with around thirty teachers. The results revealed that the teachers described their job as satisfying, the major source of their job satisfaction being the opportunity to see pupils' development and learning. However, the teachers in this study experienced high degrees of stress, as well as physical and emotional

attrition due to the heavy workload and time pressures. Different age groups reported different coping strategies. The younger teachers prepared for and worked hard to cope with the heavy workload, whereas older teachers used sick leave to rest in order to cope with the challenges.

2.2 Teacher well-being in relation to perseverance

In his chapter "Teachstrong: The Power of Teacher Resilience for Second Language Practitioners", Hiver (2018) presents an overview of the construct, i.e., resilience, and examines its role in the teaching profession. Hiver (2018) argues that teacher resilience is not an innate trait; it is rather relational and dynamic "influenced by a complex matrix of the individual's level of biological and psychological organization, current experiences, active choices, the social context, timing of the adverse event(s) and experiences, and the developmental history of the individual" (Chicchetti, 2010, p. 145). In other words, there are many factors at play that might help or hamper teachers from adapting and recovering when facing debilitating circumstances. Protective factors could be related to self-regulation skills, supportive relationships, and the surrounding environment's characteristics. Hiver (2018) also argues that developing resilience is essential because it contributes to teachers' commitment to the profession and to "achieve optimal teaching effectiveness" (p. 237).

In a study by Desrumaux et al. (2015), the relationship between optimism (among others) and well-being in the teaching profession is examined. The aim was to study the effect of health predictors such as optimism on psychological well-being and distress. A questionnaire was used based on the model of psychological health at work that gathered information from 298 teachers. The results showed that there was a strong correlation between optimism and well-being. Furthermore, being optimistic mediates satisfaction in terms of a basic psychological need, namely competence. Desrumaux et al. (2015) argue that psychological health at work is dynamic in which multiple factors are intertwined, and therefore one should consider "a series of predictors that are centered not only on persons but also on the characteristics of the work environment" (p. 186).

Moreover, for teachers' perseverance, meaning and hope are important factors. The meaningfulness in one's work can, among other things, be a sense of calling, e.g., an aim and sense of duty that benefits others, and the job is an integral part of the person one is. In relation to well-being, finding meaningfulness through a calling correlates with higher physical health, job performance and satisfaction, and life satisfaction. (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In addition, meaning in life is found when people value their efforts to result in what

they believe is greater than themselves. However, a calling does not deny that challenges arise and adversity occurs. Rather, people with a greater sense of meaningfulness meet those challenges and adversities with resilience, optimism, and hope (Falout and Murphey, 2018). As Bullough et al. (2011) argue, hopeful teachers are better equipped when encountering problems when challenges and adversities occur; they find more pathways to solve problems and have greater determination in making these efforts.

Furthermore, in Bullough et al.'s (2012) study, the researchers conclude that 'high-hope' teachers experience a calling in their work. These teachers identify with their work and feel a strong sense of commitment. The study also suggests that 'high-hope' teachers are highly focused on their students' well-being. In addition, the researchers found strong evidence that 'high-hope' teachers with a sense of calling make their lives more meaningful with tasks that go beyond just teaching, e.g., care for others, teaching, mothering, and nurturing.

Furthermore, Falout and Murphey (2018) write that language teachers find meaning in their jobs through variation and adaptation in their work. Instead of just implementing the duties of the job as it is, they implement/add ways to work that make them feel more useful to others and also more purposeful. The higher the meaning teachers see in their work, the more engaged they are, e.g., through alteration and adaptation, and thus they enjoy greater life satisfaction and more positive emotions (Chan, 2009). One of the primary adaptations that brought teachers meaningfulness is their relationships with their students. If depersonalization in those relationships occurs, it could affect teachers' sense of meaning and be an extensive psychological risk to them, and their well-being and perseverance (Falout and Murphey, 2018).

2.3 Teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic

In a study by Mercer et al. (2020), coping strategies among language teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic were researched, using an online survey in which over six hundred teachers participated. Mercer et al. (2020) argue that the unprecedented shift from normal teaching to online teaching due to the outbreak of Covid-19 has greatly increased the sources of teacher stress. The results showed that the coping strategies used by teachers correlated with their well-being and health, revealing that active coping was associated with positive psychological outcomes while avoidant coping was associated with negative psychological outcomes. The most used coping strategies among the teachers included acceptance and

planning in advance, whereas the least used avoidant strategies embodied disengagement, substance abuse, and denial.

Moreover, for teachers' psychology and well-being, their relationship with learners and colleagues have been found to be vital factors. In the research report, "Spotlight: Quality education for all during Covid-19 crisis", Petrie (2020) writes that educators experience different types of problems due to the pandemic, and which thus interfere with those key factors. These problems include "lacking resources to discuss pandemics and uncertainties with their learners, [...] scrambling to go digital without much support & training, [...] difficulties maintaining a positive student-teacher-parent relationship" (p. 12). In addition, Petrie (2020) also concludes that the systems in which teachers have had to work were not made for use as online schooling tools. Subsequently, the best approaches for online learning are lacking, and the methods used are sometimes "emergency online homeschooling" (p. 15), and even though there are plenty of resources available, insight into how to use them in practical and effective ways are lacking.

In this section, the findings demonstrate that personal and professional domains influence teacher well-being, and that heavy workloads and time pressures affect teachers' stress levels. Concerning teachers' well-being and perseverance, it is argued that resilience is a trait that is relational and dynamic and something teachers need to work on. In addition, the findings demonstrate a strong correlation between optimism and teachers' well-being. Also, to be able to persevere, the literature shows that meaning and hope are pivotal factors. A sense of calling and being a 'high-hope' individual enforces resilience, optimism, and hope. Lastly, teaching during the pandemic revealed coping strategies that included acceptance and planning in advance. Also, vital factors for teachers' well-being have been interfered with due to the pandemic, including lack of resources, lack of support, and a diminishing student-teacher-parent relationship.

3. Study and Purpose

As emerges from the literature review, language teachers face numerous stressors in their everyday lives. The pandemic added new challenges to the teaching profession that teachers have not been prepared to deal with. Teachers compared to learners are neglected in research as few are interested in their physical and psychological well-being. Teachers constitute a major part of the teaching process because their well-being correlates with their ability to

deliver effective lessons, which in turn leads to the success of the learners. The purpose of this essay is to investigate English teachers' well-being and understand their perseverance. The aim is to understand how Covid-19 pandemic affected English teachers' working situation and their well-being and how they persevered in the face of adversity. Thus, our research strives to answer the following question:

RQ1:

- How can we understand the perseverance of English teachers under the pandemic?

4. Theoretical Framework

Positive psychology encompasses the study of valued subjective experiences, for instance, well-being, hope and optimism, and flow. It includes positive personality traits such as perseverance, future mindedness, and interpersonal skills. It also incorporates positive social values, such as responsibility, tolerance, and work ethics (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

In a positive psychology approach, the goal is to understand how people find, regain, and maintain well-being (Falout and Murphey, 2018). While other psychological perspectives have often considered problematic and distressing aspects, positive psychology considers strengths and positive aspects in the human experience and psyche. However, positive psychology does not overlook problematic and distressing aspects; instead, focusing on well-being, it looks at those challenges from human strength instead of weaknesses (Oxford, 2016). In addition, MacIntyre et al. (2019a) introduce positive psychology as something that asserts the complexity of the human experience, affirming that good health is not only about the physical state. Therefore, positive psychology fits recent language education's needs that promote both psychological and physical well-being.

In line with positive psychology and the expansion of empirical work currently taking place, Rebecca Oxford (2016) created the 'EMPATHICS' framework. This is a framework, which outlines "important psychological forces that help learners achieve high well-being" (Oxford, 2016, p. 10) and has been developed for use in the investigation of relevant phenomena in L2 learning and teaching. The 'EMPATHICS' framework consists of nine concepts: emotion, meaning, perseverance, agency, time, hardiness and habits of mind, intelligences, character strengths, self-factors (Oxford, 2016). However, for the purpose of the current study, the focus will be on Perseverance and its sub-factors of resilience, hope, and optimism. Nonetheless, the concepts do not stand alone, but are rather intertwined. As Oxford

(2016) writes, there are "numerous connections within and across the nine EMPATHICS" (p. 11).

4.1 Perseverance

To promote well-being, perseverance is of importance. Oxford (2016) describes perseverance as a trait that enables people to achieve or continue to do something regardless of adversity, failure, and challenges. Oxford (2016) argues that "perseverance involves, at a minimum, three factors: resilience, hope, and optimism" (p. 29). This section will outline these three aspects in further detail.

4.1.1 Resilience

Researchers define and describe resilience in different ways. For Masten et al. (2011), "Resilience consists of patterns of positive adaptation during or following significant adversity or risk" (p. 118). For Trubridge (2014), resilience is the ability to bounce back and adapt to changing distressing circumstances.

According to Oxford (2016), there are risk factors and protective factors that influence how individuals adapt to stressful situations. Risk factors such as experiencing undesirable and unscheduled events or stressors impede good adaptation. Protective factors are, for instance, related to personal qualities that help develop resilience in the face of adversity. These qualities include "adaptable personalities", "ability to enlist support", "a sense of purpose and meaning", and "educational aspiration" (Oxford, 2016, p. 29). Protective factors can also be attributed to social factors, and that include strong and supportive relationships. There are ways and means to help the growth of resilience. As stated by Oxford (2016), providing resources such as materials, books, and computers can foster resilience.

4.1.2 Hope

To engender and produce resilience and perseverance, hope is powerful and necessary (Oxford, 2016). As stated by Diener (2011, cited in Oxford, 2016), "Hope is broader than optimism" (p. 30), and "hope is 'desire accompanied by (reasonable) expectation' " (p. 30).

For some researchers, hope is mainly grounded in emotion. For others, hope is more than just emotions. To define hope in terms of only emotions does not come to include that hope can be a way of improving and sustaining a state which is already positive. Hope can also be cognitive, and as Breznitz (1986) contends, "hope is the cognitive expectation of goal

attainment" (cited in Oxford, 2016, p. 32). For Snyder (2002b), emotions result from goal-directed behaviors and thoughts, and positive emotions come from the conscious understanding of progress one makes towards a goal or achievement.

In positive psychology, Snyder (2002a) has created one of the most well-known hope theories, which is predominantly cognitive. The theory contends that human behavior is primarily goal-directed and that hope is a set of cognitive "beliefs in (a) his or her capacity to produce workable *pathways* to goals, which are mental targets or desired future conditions that guide actions; and (b) his or her *agency*, that is, ability and intention to initiate and sustain movement via pathways toward those goals" (Oxford, 2016, p. 32). As Oxford (2016) summarizes, goals can then be short or long-term, approach or avoidant goals, mental images, and non-conscious and conscious. Pathways thinking, i.e., strategies, are the anticipated capability to create pathways to goals. In hope theory, there are categories of higher- and lower-hoped people. Higher hoped individuals generate more pathways when encountering stressors as well as using more pathways towards goals, in contrast to lower hoped individuals (Snyder, 2000). Lower hoped people rather use strategies such as avoidance to cope. To be able to use pathways is important when the initial paths are barred, higher hoped people are more likely to utilize cognitive flexibility to find different paths, whereas lower-hoped people instead revolve around being stuck (Snyder et al., 2002b). In several studies, college students who are classed as higher hoped showed higher tendencies to be goal-oriented, confident, more energized, feelings of higher self-worth, and less depression. For older individuals, higher hope results in better subjective well-being and better life satisfaction despite their feelings regarding their ability (Oxford, 2016).

Hopeful thinking involves "the perceived ability to generate routes to a goal and the perceived ability/determination to use those routes" (Rand and Cheavens 2011, cited in Oxford, 2016, p. 33). Hope also correlates to meaning and indicates that hope and meaning can be intertwined. In contrast, to hope, there is hopelessness. Hopelessness is often associated with despair and negativity and loss of control, loss of autonomy, and suffering. Oxford (2016) describes hopelessness as "a despairing lack of self-regulation and autonomy" (p. 31). Those feelings are then connected to demoralization, including the subjective perception of hopelessness, incompetence, and helplessness.

4.1.3 Optimism

For perseverance to prevail, optimism is necessary as stated by Oxford (2016). According to Snyder et al. (2000), "Optimism and hope are variants on the theme of positive expectancy" (Oxford, 2016, p. 34). The distinction between optimism and hope, is that the former is inherent and comes naturally while the latter requires effort (University of Missouri at Kansas City, 2013).

Optimism and pessimism are associated with the individual's confidence or doubt concerning life situations. Carver et al. (2011) states that optimism is having positive expectations for the future. For example, in the pursuit of goals, an optimistic person would have a certain degree of confidence that he/she can succeed. Optimists have a greater likelihood of believing that they can achieve a certain goal and thus persevering. Pessimists, on the other hand, suspect that they can reach a certain goal, and thereupon they hold back when encountering difficulties.

Oxford (2016) holds that optimists and pessimists opt for different coping strategies. While pessimists use denial, escapism, and giving up, detaching themselves when dealing with a problem, optimists keep attempting to take care of the problem (Carver et al., 2011). If the problem could not be taken care of, optimists use acceptance as a strategy to cope with the situation, readjust, and push through forward. According to Carver et al. (2010), "Optimism has been linked to better emotional well-being, more effective coping strategies, and even to better outcomes in several areas of physical health" (p. 886).

Not only does optimism imply positive expectancy, but it is also an explanatory style, i.e., "the habitual way that people explain causes of events in their lives" (Oxford, 2016, p. 36). How people explain the causality of life events can be studied through three dimensions, namely stability, globality, and internality. A pessimist would explain bad events as internal, permanent, and global, whereas an optimist would explain those events as external, temporary, and specific (Petersen and Steen, 2011).

5. Methodology

In this section, the methods used in the study will be outlined. This section will start with the research design and techniques used when collecting the data. It will also include the method used when analyzing the data. Thereafter, procedures for the selection of participants and procedures used in generating and analyzing the data will be presented. Next, we give a brief

overview of the participants in the study. Finally, ethical considerations are discussed.

5.1 Research design

According to Dörnyei (2007), qualitative research has no set theory, practices, or methods. In aspects of applied linguistics, qualitative research can elucidate contexts formed by situational, cultural, and social factors. Moreover, "Qualitative research is concerned with subjective opinion, experiences and feelings of individuals and thus the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants' view of the situation being studied" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 38). Furthermore, qualitative research enables researchers to gain a deeper insight into investigated phenomena and possibilities to interpret human experiences (Dörnyei, 2007).

5.1.1 Collecting data

The technique used when collecting the data was semi-structured interviews. The purpose of employing semi-structured interviews is to obtain understanding and descriptions of the interviewees' lifeworld and to interpret the participants' experiences (Kvale and Brinkman, 2012). Kvale and Brinkman (2012) characterize semi-structured interviews as non-standardized. According to Gillham (2005), the semi-structured interview contains the same questions to all the participants. The questions asked are established through the thematic focus to assure the topic focus (Kvale and Brinkman, 2012). In addition, in semi-structured interviews, "approximately equivalent interview time is allowed in each case" (Gillham, 2005, p. 70), and the questions are open, and the answers to the questions are, thus, open. Decisions regarding follow-up questions are made during the interview, which demands knowledge regarding the subject discussed by the interviewer (Kvale and Brinkman, 2012). Also, semi-structured interviews enable the interview to take the shape of a conversation rather than having mere questions and answers. For those reasons, we chose to do semi-structured interviews. We created an interview guide (Appendix 1) to ensure that the main questions were the same for all the participants and to stay focused on the topic.

5.1.2 Analyzing Data

The method used for analyzing the collected data is thematic content analysis, following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Maguire and Delahunt (2017) define a thematic analysis as a process of discovering patterns in the qualitative data and identifying themes that are significant to the research questions.

In a thematic content analysis, the analysis could follow a top-down approach that is navigated by the research questions, or a bottom-up, i.e., when the analyst lets the data speak for itself, and the themes emerge from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analysis could also follow an approach where the themes have not emerged on their own and are not predetermined. Instead, the themes have come from what the researcher wishes to know and how the researcher interprets the data from the applied theoretical framework. The analysis procedure is then highly reflexive and takes the form of "a loop-like pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting the data as additional questions emerge, new connections are unearthed, and more complex formulations develop along with a deepening understanding of the material" (Berkowitz, 1997, p. 2). Such a process is called an iterative process, and as Morgan and Nica (2020) describe, an iterative thematic process is guided "by the development of themes", and starts by "the development of themes as early as possible, through an assessment of initial perceptions" (p. 1).

Our data analysis fits into the thematic content analysis through an iterative process based on these descriptions. Our themes emerge from what we want to know and will be interpreted from our theoretical framework. Using an iterative process also allows us to go back and forth between the data and framework to "connect them with emerging insight" (Berkowitz, 1997, p. 2).

5.2 Procedures

5.2.1 Selection of participants

For the study, we decided that we would interview twelve English teachers. This number was chosen since it would allow a comprehensive thematic analysis to be conducted and would provide good opportunities for coherent themes to be identified. To recruit participants, we drafted an email to send to six contacts we had gathered during our education. In this email we described our study. The email was sent to supervisors at our VFU-schools and other teachers we had worked with from those schools. In the email, we explained our goal for the study; we gave an approximate time for the interview session and informed the teachers that the interviews would take place whenever it suited them. From that, we attained four interviews from the six emails that were sent out.

Furthermore, a request via email was also sent to two teachers of English in upper secondary school with whom we had a personal relationship. In the email, we explained the study's purpose, gave an approximate time for the interview session, and informed them that

the interviews would take place whenever it suited them. From that, we attained two participants.

We also sent out a request via a Facebook page for English teachers in Sweden to recruit more participants. In the request, we gave information regarding the purpose of our study, the approximate time the interview would take, and that the interview was voluntary and anonymous. From that, we attained six interviews.

Lastly, we sent an additional request via the same Facebook group since we lacked one participant. In the request, we gave information regarding the purpose of our study, the approximate time the interview would take, the interview was voluntary and anonymous, and a note that we needed one more participant for our study. From that, we attained one interview.

The participants gave us their contact information, and they were sent more information and an information form (Appendix 2) in which further information regarding the study was given. In the email, the participants were informed that the interview would be transcribed and that the interview was voluntary and anonymous, and that they could withdraw at any time.

5.2.2 Data collection procedure

Once a teacher had agreed to participate in an interview, we sent them a zoom link and a letter with information about the study (Appendix 2). The teachers were also told that the interview would take place whenever it was suitable for them. We decided to split the interviews between us, and we each carried out six interviews in a one-to-one conversation. We used this strategy to save time and to create conditions for a more comfortable interview. The drawbacks of this decision could be that we were not able to help each other with follow-up questions and note-taking.

All twelve interviews took place using Zoom. The interviews started with greeting the interviewees, thanking them for their participation, and explaining the reason for the interview. According to Dörnyei (2007), "understanding the purpose of the questions will increase the motivation of the interviewee to respond openly and in detail" (p. 140). The interviews varied in length, with the shortest interview being thirty minutes, and the lengthiest around one and a quarter hours. The interviews were conducted in Swedish to allow the teachers to freely talk about their experiences. It should be noted that the teachers were

interested in answering our questions and were very talkative. This we ascribe to the relevance of the topic.

Thereafter we transcribed the interviews. A first step in analyzing data is to "transform the recordings into a textual form" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 246). We chose not to include pauses and utterances such as "mm" and "uh" as these do not contribute to the meaning in the context of carrying out a thematic content analysis. Dörnyei (2007) argues that it is possible to remove any linguistic surface phenomena if the analyst focuses on the content rather than the form. Another reason is that it is time-consuming, as Dörnyei (2007), states, "with very fine-tuned transcriptions, [...], it can take 20 hours" (p. 246).

5.2.3 Analytical procedure

We used Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework to perform the thematic content analysis. Step one involves becoming familiar with the data. We familiarized ourselves with the data by transcribing the interviews and reading the transcripts over and over again. Step two involves generating initial codes. Because we are doing an iterative analysis, we were able to choose what dimension from the 'EMPATHICS' would be our focus and we chose perseverance. This enabled us to remove information that was irrelevant to the purpose of the study. We used NVivo 12, which is a qualitative data analysis software, to code our data. We created a project in NVivo into which we imported our transcribed files. In the project, we carried out the coding by reading each transcript, dragging and dropping texts into already established nodes, and new nodes that were created during the coding under the focus of perseverance. Since we were coding separately at first, we had to merge our projects together to read each other's transcripts and modify the codes established. Finally, after reading the transcripts and modifying the codes we generated our initial codes. Step three entails searching for themes. First, we examined the codes and combined those that fit together. We called each bundle of codes something, for example, "hopeful", "hopeless", "perseverance", "aspirations" and these were our initial nodes. Some of the codes could fit under more than one theme and therefore we had to create new subthemes to manage these codes. We created new subcategories under our initial nodes, dragged and dropped the codes under these subcategories namely "support", "educational aspiration" etc... Step four requires reviewing the themes. We asked ourselves the questions in Braun and Clarke's guide (Appendix 3) to help us modify and develop the preliminary themes that were established in step three. We read the codes under each node and when we were satisfied that the codes fitted, we moved to the next step. Step five is about

defining the themes. In this step we had to identify the nature of each theme to see how the themes relate to each other. The theoretical framework made it easier for us to settle for these final themes Resilience, Hope, and Optimism. Step six is the final stage and involves the writing-up of the report (which in this essay is section Six).

5.3 Participants

This table presents information about the participants in our study. The table presents the teachers' pseudonyms, gender, subject combination, years in the profession, and age.

Teachers	Gender	Subject Combination	Years in the profession	Age
Erika	Female	English /Math	20 -30	50-60
Pontus	Male	English /Spanish	0- 10	30-40
Robin	Male	English/ History	0-10	20-30
Daniel	Male	English/ History	0- 10	20-30
Rickard	Male	English / History	20 -30	40-50
Lovisa	Female	English/ Social studies	20-30	40-50
Malin	Female	English/ Swedish	0-10	20-30
Nelly	Female	English/ History	10-20	40-50
Anna	Female	English/ Swedish	0-10	20-30
Sofia	Female	English/ History	0-10	20-30
Amanda	Female	English/ French/ Spanish	20-30	60-70
Lisa	Female	English/ Geography	0-10	30-40

5.4 Ethics

All the participants were informed about the study via email and in the information form (Appendix 1) that was attached to the email. They were informed that the meeting would take place over Zoom. Since the interviews could not be held in person, the email with information and the information form was sent out ahead of the meeting, so they had time to read it. In the Zoom meeting, the participants were asked if they agreed to be recorded, and they also needed to accept in the Zoom application for the recording to be possible.

Furthermore, orally in Zoom, the participants were informed of the study. They were informed that the interview would be recorded, that they could withdraw at any time, that their participation would be entirely anonymous, that the interviews would be transcribed, and that the data from the interviews would be analyzed. Lastly, the participants were informed that they would get the completed essay when it was done.

6. Results and discussion

The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of how the Covid-19 pandemic affected English teachers' working situation, well-being and how they persevered. The focus of the study is for that reason on Perseverance. The data has been coded, and three themes *Resilience*, *Hope*, and *Optimism* have been identified.

The first theme is *Resilience*, and it includes four aspects: positive adaptation, support, educational aspirations, as well as a sense of purpose and meaning. The second theme is *Hope* and includes two aspects: the capacity to produce workable pathways and hopelessness. The third theme is *Optimism*, which includes four aspects: Confidence, positive expectations, strategies when facing adversity and explanatory lifestyle. The findings from these themes enable us to answer our research question, "How can we understand the perseverance of the English teachers under the pandemic?"

6.1 Resilience

6.1.1 Positive adaptation

A broad definition of resilience is the ability to positively adapt in the face of adversity, trauma and/or everyday stress (Oxford, 2016). In several interviews, teachers have shown positive adaptation through changed routines. Most of them used the extra time during the period of online schooling to spend more time doing what they liked. They understood that the coming time during the pandemic would be challenging and started to adapt by taking extra care of themselves. For example, Pontus described the need to make extra time for personal interests in the following way: "But the most important perhaps is that I try to find time for myself more. But also think about giving time to recovery, has been very important." This teacher's response indicates how a large part of positive adaptation involved comprehending and developing new routines in the face of the new challenges that arose in association with the pandemic and its effect on the working of teaching English. This aligns with most of the teachers' responses, where it became clear that a larger part of positive adaptation involved creating new routines. As Hiver (2018) writes, resilience is not an innate trait and therefore needs to be continuously worked on, which our study has shown that most of the teachers understood and did. However, one of the teachers felt that it was hard to create new routines despite her continuous efforts.

With the pandemic, a larger portion of the teachers' time at work was from home. As shown above, most teachers positively adapted through changed routines. In those routines,

the realization that it was essential to create a space at home for their work emerged from the interviewees. For example, Nelly expressed how she made space for her working life at home: "but I had a pretty good routine anyway because it's like I made a little little corner at home and when I sat there then I was like at work so". This answer implies and aligns with other teachers' answers, where it became clear that when they worked at home, they created a space that could substitute for their office. Gregersen et al. (2020) state that the line between personal and professional lives is often blurred for teachers. Setting boundaries between working life and home life for teachers' well-being is important. The interviews then uncover that most of the teachers in the study positively adapted their situations at home in such a manner that enhanced their well-being when creating a substituted work office. However, a few teachers in the study had problems creating that space for themselves; both due to the limited space at home but also because they were not able to positively adapt their home domain to a working domain.

In addition, the interviews revealed that teachers' attitudes to their experiences were divided. Approximately half of the teachers in the interviews felt that the adaptations they were making could be brought with them for the future. For example, Erika described her attitudes toward the experience in the following way: "yes but it's a new experience. But as I said, I think it can certainly continue". As Oxford (2016) writes, good adaptation includes believing in the future, in this case, seeing some positive outcomes of the pandemic that the teachers can apply in the future. As stated, some teachers saw some positive outcomes that they could bring with them while others did not. They did not have the attitude that the experiences they have had could bring any positive features or methods to continue with, which indicates how in that regard, they might not have as good adaptation as the teachers who saw some positive outcomes.

6.1.2 Support

The development of resilience when facing adversity requires certain personal protective factors such as the ability to enlist support (Oxford, 2016). The teachers' ability to enlist support is strongly manifested in all the interviews. For example, when asked how they solved a problem no one had an issue asking for help as Rickard described, "yes but I could always ask a colleague". While most of the teachers asked for help from their colleagues, two teachers turned to their students when facing a problem. Whether teachers had to ask for help

from colleagues, or students, teachers had to rely on others for assistance in order to persevere through the pandemic.

However, the majority of the teachers had difficulties asking for help when they were at home during the switch to online teaching. For example, when asked how collegiality was affected by the pandemic, Lisa explained, "so in normal cases, it was like this, how should I formulate this email so that this parent does not get angry at me, or now this student was ill and now has three retests to do, I do not have to make those decisions myself without checking with someone else, but during periods there I probably felt that I was more like with myself". This reveals that before the pandemic, teachers could assist each other as they had the opportunity to chat about everything regarding work and students. However, during the switch to online teaching, this had changed. Reaching out for help involved an additional step, as the teachers explained. Not only that, but one teacher was also doubtful about how many times a person could ask for help. This shows that teachers need to talk and help each other constantly but teaching from home has impeded this natural interaction.

Despite that, the interviews reveal that almost all the teachers had a strong collegial unit. When asked about what the collegial work looked like during the pandemic, most of the teachers explained that the pandemic has strengthened the relationship between colleagues. For example, Robin described his relationships with his colleagues in the following way: "I have a relationship with many more colleagues today than I had before which is a direct consequence of the fact that I have helped them with something IT-related". This indicates that the new challenges the pandemic created for the teacher profession led teachers to seek help from each other, which in turn strengthened the relationships between them as they had a greater need of thinking together to solve tough situations. This, in turn, made teachers feel less stressed. According to Oxford (2016, p. 30), "the dynamic process of resilience includes assets [...] such as supportive relationships". In other words, the support that the teachers received from each other can be seen as a protective factor that aided them to be resilient in the face of the various challenges they encountered during the pandemic. However, only Rickard felt that his team of English teachers was affected negatively because there were always new people whom he did not know before.

When compared to the positive outlook on collegial work, several teachers were unsatisfied with the administration. When asked about how they have experienced assistance from school during the pandemic, the teachers expressed negative thoughts about that. For instance, Lisa described her dissatisfaction with the management as follows: "the management

was pretty bad, there was no such routine as one sat as a bit lonely and forgotten". Oxford (2016) holds that providing assets can foster resilience. However, in this case, the lack of leadership can be seen as a risk factor against resilience as Petrie (2020) explains that some of the problems that teachers have encountered are a lack of support and training when having to switch to online teaching. Nevertheless, two teachers were appreciative that the administration did not set up unreasonable demands and tried to interpret that as having greater freedom and trust.

6.1.3 Educational aspirations

The interviews indicate that teachers have educational aspirations related to their role as teachers. Most teachers expressed concerns about their ability to be as good as before the pandemic. For instance, when asked whether they experienced what they want to achieve as teachers has changed during the pandemic, Anna described her attempt to do the best for her students in the following way: "I still try to be the best I can be where I am with the conditions I have. Therefore, I am very much like this pulls down the bar, pull down the level Anna, stop putting so much pressure on yourself because it is well that above all that drives you up the wall". This reveals that teachers still have the same aspirations and that is doing the best for their students, however with the prerequisites at hand, teachers might not be able to perform as they would wish to. Oxford (2016) explains that personal traits such as having educational aspirations help develop resilience when experiencing hardship. However, this led to teachers lowering their ambitions to withstand the pandemic. In other words, teachers aspire to perform at their best, but they must lower their ambitions to fit with the surrounding circumstances in order to persevere. It is reported in Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2015) study that six of the participating teachers had to lower their ambitions because of stress, which aligns with our findings.

The interviews indicate that several teachers aspired to see their students succeed but only to reach basic qualifications. When asked about how they had experienced teaching online Lisa reflected on her experience in the following way: "what was my reflection together with students and other colleagues was that we could teach them basic knowledge but to reach up to this nuanced complex more A level knowledge they have to do that on their own". This reveals that the teachers had to lower their aspirations because otherwise, that would affect their well-being. In other words, teachers were forced to admit to the reality that

they cannot aspire to higher grades during the switch to online teaching and that accepting passing criteria would help them keep going and thus foster their resilience.

Two of the teachers had other aspirations related to career goals. When asked whether their goals have changed during the pandemic, Robin described his desire to find a new role in his job in the following way: "I feel now also when I have undergone something like this, I also feel that I want to do something more than just teaching. Yes, I aim to get some type of other assignment, area of responsibility at school, I feel that this is about finding my own or finding my own role in some way in the organization". For Robin, the pandemic gave him the opportunity to try new things outstretching his capacity, which in turn made him realize that he can aspire to something more than merely teaching. According to Mercer and Gregersen (2020), "people can flourish under a certain degree of stress" (p. 105). Therefore, the stressors that Robin has encountered have helped him aspire to a new position in his career, which in turn implies that he has developed his resilience.

6.1.4 A sense of purpose and meaning

Oxford (2016) states that personal traits such as a sense of purpose and meaning in life and social protective factors as opportunities for meaningful participation and responsibility enhance resilience. Through our interviews, most of the teachers conversed about how a sense of purpose and meaning are factors that make them feel fulfilled as well as factors that make them persevere. For example, Erika describes the perception of purpose and meaning in the following way: "and it's something that you are passionate about for this so it nothing can stop us I think". In line with several other answers, Erika's response reveals that their job as teachers is a calling rather than merely work. She perceives it as something beyond just going to work. According to Wrzesniewski (1997), to perceive your job as a calling enhances the sense of meaning. In turn, that correlates with higher well-being and more resilience when facing adversities (Falout and Murphey, 2018), such as the Covid-19 pandemic. In that regard, for the teachers to be able to appreciate that their job is a calling rather than just means of making money enhances their sense of meaningfulness. That sense of meaningfulness then helps them to develop and foster their resilience and well-being.

Furthermore, during the pandemic, the school setting changed. When asked about how Pontus felt about his opportunities for meaningful participation during these changes, he described it in the following way: "Even more so in fact. Now it becomes clearer than ever that when young people are exposed to this kind of stress and pressure and anxiety, they say

that children in general, when life and everyday life are unstable, need a safe, secure anchor". Pontus's answer implies that, during the pandemic, he felt a stronger sense of purpose and meaningful participation due to the students' need for a safe and consistent environment that he could provide. As Chan (2009) writes, teachers experience more life satisfaction when they see their work as meaningful. This aligns with other teachers' responses. It became clear in the interviews that they have perceived their work as meaningful and purposeful for their students under the pandemic, which enforces their resilience to carry on. However, two teachers felt different. For example, when Rickard was asked about his sense of meaningful opportunities at work, he answered, "Yes it felt like I was a movie from the Education Radio just played that was there". His answers contrast with the feelings that the other teachers held. When they perceived a positive change of meaning during the pandemic, Rickard's response indicates how he did not connect to the students in association with the pandemic, especially during online teaching, which made him feel a decline in meaning compared to other teachers in the study. He just felt like a clip being played. He felt depersonalized when his opportunities for meaningful participation with the students were lacking. Falout and Murphey (2018) write that if depersonalization occurs, it can be a risk to teachers' well-being and, thus, a risk for their resilience and perseverance.

Moreover, the interviews also revealed that the teachers' sense of purpose and meaningful participation through responsibility differed during the pandemic. The majority of teachers answered that their sense of responsibility had stayed the same, but for the most part, they felt that it had been heightened: "Yes, it has because I feel that I have a greater responsibility because if I do not do it then who does it? So that instead of waiting for this yes but it is certainly someone else's, that it is in someone else's lap why cannot I just take the initiative". The answer indicates how instead of feeling a declining responsibility, this teacher has found a stronger sense of purpose through responsibility, which enforces resilience as stated by Oxford (2016). Likewise, that perception of responsibility is indicated in several of the other teachers' responses. However, Rickard felt that his sense of responsibility had changed, and he felt less responsibility than before the pandemic.

One of the three essential factors in perseverance is resilience (Oxford, 2016). As our findings suggest, the teachers have shown resilience through positive adaptation and new routines, building stronger collegial units and supporting each other, aspiring to do their best with the prerequisites at hand, and a sense of purpose and meaning with factors such as meaningful

participation and responsibility. Therefore, one aspect of understanding English teachers' perseverance is through their patterns of developing and fostering resilience.

To further understand the perseverance of the English teachers, we proceed with our second theme, *Hope*.

6.2 Hope

6.2.1 Capacity to produce pathways

One of the aspects that helps us understand the perseverance of English teachers under the pandemic is their ability to create workable pathways towards goals. Through our interviews, most of the teachers described how the pandemic has forced them to do things differently. Pontus described it like this: "And there I thought that you need to kind of rethink, that the circumstances are different so then the teaching cannot be static, it must follow to satisfy our students' changed context". The answer indicates how this teacher has started to think differently when planning and executing his teaching. This aligns with most of the other teachers' answers. As Oxford (2016) writes, hope is, among other things, the belief in your capacity "to produce workable *pathways*" (p. 32). In our study, none of the teachers answered that they could not adapt, or not produce workable pathways in association with the pandemic and when the circumstances changed. However, a few teachers demonstrated a greater resilience in keeping with their produced pathways and perceived them as long-term. For example, Sofia described how her new pathways are something long-termed: "to record lectures and the like that may exist or that you record small sections of lectures that you can watch afterwards if there is someone who is ill or if they have not really understood, I think I will continue and use that". As Sofia conveys, she will maintain parts of her new pathways for the future. Despite other teachers not expressing that their new paths were long-term, several of them still assert that the new pathways, such as keeping two teaching designs, are something they will continue with since they do not know if they will be thrown into online teaching again. For that reason, they will keep some new pathways open.

The interviews also disclosed how teachers created pathways that contained planning ahead in greater magnitude than before. MacIntyre et al. (2020) pointed out that planning in advance is an active coping strategy that is important for teachers' well-being. Thus, the teachers' ability to create pathways that include planning ahead indicates how they are actively coping and producing settings with higher well-being.

Being able to create pathways also presented itself in the interviews when the teachers expressed their ability to understand and adapt to their new way of teaching. We noted how most teachers had created new means to teach, but when they perceived their new routes of working as not feasible anymore, they made new paths. For example, Lovisa described the need for new paths in the following way: "[...] and then I said that this is not possible, I cannot do double for this, to do two things at the same time it does not work so well it is also one of the big challenges that becomes very stressful and burdensome to have students at home and in the classroom. [...] but then I chose to do everything at distance so the students, those who were in place, in the school sat in different places and could sit with me in the classroom if they wanted". The answer demonstrates how, in this case, Lovisa realized that her original plan, i.e., pathway, did not work and renewed it thereafter. Her ability to do so aligns with several other teachers' answers where they can sustain movement via pathways toward their goals by adapting and renewing existing pathways. According to Oxford (2016), that shows tendencies of hope. Furthermore, as Snyder's (2000) hope theory describes, higher hoped people are more capable of using pathways toward their goals when their initial paths are blocked compared to lower hoped people who rather use avoidance. Therefore, we can say that since the teachers in our study showed qualities of using other pathways when they are blocked, we can perceive them as higher hoped rather than lower hoped.

However, even if the teachers were able to create and renew their pathways, several of them expressed how exhausting that was. They described how much more time it took from their regular working hours and further increased their workloads. For example, Anna said, "Everything has to be rearranged all the time. So, it's annoying it is. It is time consuming, exhausting". Anna's answers accord with Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) and Macintyre et al. (2019), describing teachers' heavy workloads as frequent stressors. Nevertheless, in response to stressors, such as devoting more time to planning and adjustments, most of the teachers were able to create pathways for them to manage those stressors. Lovisa said that "what I do when I need to feel better is to go out and work in the garden and that has suited me because I have been able to do that a lot". The answer discloses that the teacher understands that she actively needs to create means to cope and feel good despite the stressors. According to Snyder (2000), creating more pathways when facing a stressor is a trait of higher hoped people. Furthermore, Lovisa's answer aligns with tendencies that Oxford (2016) describes as higher hoped people to have, i.e., better subject well-being and life satisfaction. In line with

other teachers, Lovisa shows tendencies to, despite stressors, be able to create conditions of subject well-being and satisfaction.

Moreover, higher hoped people are more likely to use cognitive flexibility (Oxford, 2016). In the interviews, answers such as, "yes, but it goes well most of the time sometimes things come up that make it impossible to keep your planning, it can be K-days or that many students are ill and you have to extend projects or you have to rethink because it does not work as you have, so you have to be quite flexible" (Sofia), together with, "and then you got like ok but if you have not done this we will take it orally when you come back" (Rickard) imply how the teachers use cognitive flexibility when encountering stressors and problems and finding alternative paths to take. Rickard was, for example, flexible when encountering problems of how to assess students' oral skills and found an alternative path; Sofia is flexible and realized that the pandemic would result in students having more sick days and therefore adjusts her projects.

The interviews also indicate how the teachers had their students' interests and well-being in mind. Sofia described the focus on the students in this way: "but you still want to do what is best for the students so that they get the prerequisites they need." As Bullough et al. (2012) conclude, higher hoped teachers focus on their students' well-being, and they often go the extra mile for their students and often go beyond just teaching. In addition, higher hoped teachers usually have a higher sense of meaningfulness. Sofia's answer aligns with most teachers' answers; they want the best for their students. However, even if a focus on the students is a trait of 'high-hope' teachers, that does not take from the fact that that focus has shown to sometimes lead to even more stress in our interviews.

6.2.2 Hopelessness

As the preceding sections reveal, the teachers demonstrate to be highly hoped and hopeful. However, there were also tendencies of hopelessness. A few teachers said that they felt a loss of control, both in relation to their students and their teaching, for example, Lisa said, "I often felt kind of powerless, that I did not have any control". Others felt demoralized when they felt how they lost some of their autonomy. For example, Anna described how the administration made fast decisions without input from the teachers, which greatly increased the teacher's workload and that, in turn, made her feel forgotten and overlooked.

In this section, aspects of *Hope* have been presented in order to understand how the teachers persevered during the pandemic. As Oxford (2016) describes in 'EMPATHICS', hope is one

of three important factors to be able to persevere. Our findings suggest that the English teachers in our study, in regard to hope, are 'high-hope' teachers and, for the most part, hopeful. 'High-hope' teachers are better equipped when encountering problems, and they find more pathways to do so (Bullough, 2011), which our study supports. The teachers have encountered problems but have found both personal and professional pathways to solve or adapt those pathways. Therefore, one aspect of understanding English teachers' perseverance is through their ability to create pathways and their ability to sustain movement via those pathways, which foster their perseverance.

To further understand the perseverance of the English teachers, we proceed with our third and final theme, *Optimism*.

6.3 Optimism

6.3.1 Confidence

A key factor in optimism is the individual's belief and confidence that one can achieve a certain goal (Oxford, 2016). In most of the interviews, the teachers described their ability to achieve teaching-related goals as satisfactory. However, approximately half of the teachers in the interviews mentioned external factors that seemed to impact their confidence in reaching the goals that they had set for their lessons. For the teachers, their degree of confidence is tied to the group of learners they deal with, as Lovisa explains, "it's very much about which students we have in front of us, we have for example a college preparatory program most of them come here with a fairly open and decent prior knowledge like that, but then we have a creative program there we have many wonderful individuals as well, and that's what's fun but also challenging".

The pandemic also seems to affect teachers' confidence in attaining teaching-related goals. When asked the follow-up question whether their perception of their ability had changed during the pandemic, almost all teachers answered yes. For example, Amanda experienced a change in her perception of her ability compared to the time before the pandemic in the following way: "no it is not as good at all". Therefore, to be able to understand and examine teachers' confidence, one should consider all the factors that might influence that. Desrumaux et al. (2015) argue that comprehending psychological health at work entails "considering a series of predictors that are centered not only on persons but also on the characteristics of the work environment" (p.186).

One more question was asked to study teachers' confidence, namely how confident they are that what they do will succeed. The answers reveal a division between the teachers since some teachers are confident while others are not. Several teachers described their feeling of confidence nearly the same as Lovisa: "I have self-confidence myself say yes but then as I said I feel quite confident in my teaching role". These teachers feel comfortable and secure, and they have a degree of confidence that they can achieve their goals. On the other hand, some other teachers described their uncertainty like Amanda: "I can never be sure of that because you never know what's going on in their heads. I just know I can do my best and if it does not work then I do not know". According to Carver et al. (2011), pessimists have doubts about reaching their goals. However, it cannot be concluded that these teachers are pessimistic since, as they explain, their success is inherent to the learners, and thus, they cannot be completely confident.

6.3.2 Positive expectations for the future

Optimists are characterized by their positive anticipations for the future, in contrast to pessimists who anticipate negative outcomes (Carver and Scheier, 1998). The interviews show that despite the difficulties that the teachers encountered during the pandemic, their goals did not change. When asked whether their goals have changed, Lovisa described her pursuits as a teacher in the following way: "As a teacher, no. So, my goals have always been since I started as a teacher, then it becomes clearer and clearer maybe, but they have always been that all students should learn as much as possible and that I want to reach every student, yes, it is a bit of a utopia but I still want to strive there also and so that my goals are still the same, as a teacher my mission is to ensure that all students develop as much as possible". This reveals that the teachers still have the same expectations of themselves despite adversity, which implies that they are rather optimistic. However, in connection with students, the teachers still doubted that their students were going to succeed due to insecurities regarding their ability to meet the needs of the learners since they were neither prepared nor trained for that. Therefore, it was difficult to always expect positive outcomes as it was hard not to worry about the learners and their future that might be destroyed due to a mistake concerning assessment, for instance.

According to Mercer and Gregersen (2020), optimists try to search for the positives to build a balanced perspective on their experiences. Each of the teachers gave more than one positive outcome caused by the pandemic. When asked what opportunities they had seen

during online teaching, the teachers provided diverse answers. For example, Nelly described how teaching online gave the students the chance to speak more English as follows: "I actually have a chance when it comes to English then to get the children or students to speak a lot of English". Amanda witnessed that students who were usually drowsy in the class had flourished when studying online: "if perhaps have been very powerless in the classroom so to speak who have not accomplished so much in the classroom, they have turned out to be interested then when it was online where they could be in their little cocoon". For Erika, she had the opportunity to have more one-to-one interaction with the students during online teaching which helped students develop: "when we had online lessons and then when we could have one-to-one and then it becomes a lot they blossomed up they showed a side that we never thought they would have". This reveals that teachers still saw some positive outcomes of teaching online, not only negatives, which in turn helped them persevere in the face of adversity. As Mercer and Gregersen (2020) contend, well-being is not about being happy; it is about seeing the positives in life.

6.3.3 Strategies when facing adversities and problems

Optimists and pessimists use different strategies to cope with adversity. Optimists are more determined to solve problems and keep on going than pessimists who try to pull away from the problem facing them (Carver et al., 2011). All the teachers in the interviews stated that they tried different strategies and looked at the problems from different perspectives until they solved them. When asked how they solved problems, they explained that they had to keep on trying to make things work. For example, Sofia described the process of solving a problem as follows: "it was simply such a test and fail and, in the end, it will be right". This reveals that the teachers are adamant about solving their problems to keep on going. Teachers are also not afraid to explore and try out new things because they know that doing that would help push them forward. In other words, the teachers are optimistic because they do not distance themselves from obstacles. Instead, they deep dive into these problems until they succeed at solving them.

According to Oxford (2016), "optimists use other strategies, such as acceptance (restructuring their experience to come to grips with the reality of the situation)" (p. 35). The interviews indicate a high degree of acceptance among the teachers. When asked how the teachers handled and adapted to the situation during the pandemic, all the teachers answered that they had to accept the situation for what it was. In the study of MacIntyre et al. (2020), the coping strategy that the teachers used the most was acceptance and that aligns with our

finding since all teachers mentioned acceptance as a strategy to deal with the difficulties. However, acceptance did not only imply accepting the situation, but it also implied accepting that they were good enough. For example, Lisa described the need to accept her performance in the following way: "I try to accept when it is not what it is like so there so under the conditions it is well still perfectly okay happy as well". For the teachers accepting the situation implies realizing that it is all right to not reach the same standards as before. In other words, the teachers expressed that they must be more forgiving and kinder towards themselves, which was a part of accepting the situation. However, for Lisa and Anna, it was not that simple accepting that everything was all right when everything had changed as Lisa explained, "but yes when you when you want to do a good job like that, it's hard to think that this is just that this flows on like". Therefore, at times Lisa had thought about leaving the profession but cultivating an attitude of acceptance that everything could not be perfect prevented her from pursuing that. One can say that accepting and keeping on working despite the extreme situations were vital strategies to persevere through the pandemic.

In the face of adversity, optimists readjust themselves and look forward to the future (Oxford, 2016). The teachers in the interviews used different strategies other than acceptance to handle the situation. When asked how they had experienced their work during the pandemic, several teachers used reflection as a strategy to see what worked and what did not. For instance, Erika described the need to reflect on their practice in the following way: "the first bunch of students went out then, of course, we made many mistakes too and we cannot say we were flawless we made a lot of mistakes we could have done much better we realized we could reflect and realized that yes, we could have done in a different way maybe different things". The answers from the teachers indicate that they had to rethink, reconsider, and reflect in order to make things work during the pandemic. According to Mercer and Gregersen (2020), reflecting on "why a class worked or did not work [...] help us to see possible options for the future" (p. 42-43). Therefore, reflection can be seen as a strategy for the teachers to readjust and come to grips with the situation, which in turn makes the future less frightening and that makes the teachers more optimistic.

6.3.4 Explanatory lifestyle

The way a person interprets and explains the causality of life events differs between optimists and pessimists. While the former see bad events as temporary and external, the latter consider them as permanent and internal (Oxford, 2016). Most teachers in the interviews explained the

difficulties as temporary and unstable. For example, Robin described what makes him keep going as follows: "I just had the attitude from the beginning that now this is the way it is, I just have to like it, it will not last for long". This indicates that the teachers view the difficulties as impermanent and that they will end someday, which in turn implies that the teachers are optimists. However, for Rickard, not knowing when the pandemic would end was the reason he felt dispirited at times.

The majority of the teachers also demonstrated that they felt sad for the learners but that it was not their fault. When asked how they felt about their work during the pandemic, the teachers empathized with the students who risked failing, but they also affirmed that it still was hardly their fault. The teachers also associated bad events with external factors such as lack of resources. For example, Malin described the need for more teachers in the following way: "I know these students need something extra, it's not just me who's needed. You would need two teachers when you have 30 students for example or yes so that you can have time to see everyone and sit with everyone and so on". According to Mercer and Gregersen (2020), "an optimist explains negative events as occurring because of factors external to the self" (p. 43).

In this section, four aspects of *Optimism* have been presented in order to understand how the teachers persevered during the pandemic. As Oxford (2016) argues, perseverance involves optimism, among other things. The main result of this section is that teachers feel confident about their ability to achieve goals, but there are external factors that make them doubtful. The findings also demonstrate that teachers, in general, anticipate positive outcomes and could see diverse positives with teaching online. Different strategies were used by the teachers, such as being persistent in solving a confronting problem, accepting the situation and their performance during this period, and readjusting through reflection. Finally, the teachers saw negative events as temporary and external. Therefore, one way to understand English teachers' perseverance is through being optimistic. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the teachers were not optimistic all the time. The reason is that optimism is dynamic and can be affected by different factors.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to generate insights into English teachers' well-being and perseverance during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that the teachers who were

interviewed had maintained their well-being through being perseverant. To study the well-being of the teachers, we focused our examination on three factors underpinning their perseverance. Through the lens of *Resilience*, our aim was to understand how the teachers adapted to the sudden changes in working practices brought about by the pandemic. The study indicates that the teachers had been forced to adapt to the new circumstances due to Covid-19 and its implications by creating new working routines. It also revealed how several of them could bring their positive adapted circumstances and experiences with them for the future. The teachers also resorted to each other for help. However, during the switch to online teaching, the natural interaction between the teachers was impeded and additional steps were needed so that they could reach out to each other. Overall, the findings suggest that the pandemic has strengthened the relationship between colleagues as they needed and drew on each other's competencies. Conversely, the support from the administration was not perceived to be satisfactory, as teachers at times felt lonely and forgotten. The findings also suggest that teachers have high aspirations and goals for their work. However, the situations brought up by the pandemic hindered teachers from reaching the standards that they normally aspired to. Therefore, teachers had to lower their ambitions in order to survive and persevere through the pandemic. The working conditions during the pandemic made teachers realize that they could not aspire to higher grades and for that reason accepting passing grades was important for their perseverance. In addition, our study also demonstrates that the resilience of the teachers was enhanced by their possibilities for meaningful and purposeful participation. Our findings suggest that most of the teachers were able to find meaning and meaningful participation during the pandemic and that, in several instances, those feelings could be enhanced. However, a few teachers experienced a decline in meaning. With the heightened sense of meaning and purpose, we suggest that the teachers' perception of responsibility echoed that notion, which our findings support. The teachers that felt meaningful also felt a greater sense of responsibility.

Secondly, through the concept of *Hope*, we intended to understand teachers' capacity to produce workable pathways to perseverance. Our findings suggest that when the teachers were forced to do things differently, they found pathways to achieve that, and most of them also believed in their capacity to do so. However, a few teachers showed greater tendencies than others to create and to stay on these pathways. The study also shows that the teachers are able to adapt and renew their pathways when they are blocked which, we suggest, categorizes them as higher-hope individuals. To create new pathways and sustain movement via those

pathways indicate that the teachers were able to remain hopeful in the face of adversity and stressful situations, a quality which enforces perseverance.

Finally, through use of the concept of *Optimism*, we intended to examine teachers' beliefs of their capacity to achieve goals, their anticipations of positive outcomes, their use of different strategies in the face of adversity, and their explanations of life events to understand how they persevered during the pandemic. The findings suggest that teachers are confident of their ability to reach their goals to a certain degree. However, there are external factors that affect this confidence. The study also shows that teachers' goals did not change as they set high standards. However, it was at the same time difficult to always expect good outcomes as they were doubtful as to whether all of their students would succeed. The teachers still saw myriad of positives with the pandemic, such as getting students to speak more English, some students flourished during this period, and the one-to-one interaction was appreciated by many teachers and students. Teachers used different strategies to cope with the pandemic, such as being adamant about solving a problem, accepting the situation and their affected performance, and using reflection to move forward and look for the future. The findings also suggest that teachers explained bad events as temporary and external. All these aspects had helped teachers to be optimistic despite adversity, and accordingly, they were able to persevere through the pandemic.

Ultimately, our findings suggest that we can understand the teachers' perseverance through their capacity for and use of strategies to maintain resilience, hope, and optimism. We suggest that the teachers are better equipped to tackle future problems that may occur due to their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the need to be perseverant.

Our findings suggest that teachers need more organizational support. In addition, competence development and provision of more resources might be essential factors to be worked on in schools to create a healthier workplace environment and promote teachers' well-being.

8. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has some limitations. In terms of carrying out empirical research, we are novices and, more precisely, are inexperienced as interviewers. With more experience, our interviews could have been more extensive, and we could perhaps have gained a deeper understanding of the interviewee's experiences with better follow-up questions. In addition, this study only

involves 12 teachers, with a more extensive set of data, perhaps more information could have been gained.

For future research, we noticed that the teachers had much to say regarding online teaching, which is only a small part of our study. Therefore, we suggest that it would be interesting to focus more on online teaching during the pandemic.

In addition, the 'EMPATHICS' framework consists of nine dimensions, and we have only focused on one dimension, namely perseverance. It would be interesting to explore and study other dimensions, in particular Emotions and Meaning, as they were ostensible in the interviews.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

Emotions

1. Hur har du känt dig under de senaste pandemiåren? Hur brukar du vanligtvis känna dig? (Glad, lycklig, ledsen, stressad, nyfiken, intresserad, exalterad, uttråkad, oro, rädsla...)
2. Hur hanterade du dina känslor och tog hand om dig själv?
3. Hur har du upplevt ditt arbete under pandemin? (nöjd, ansträngningar, stolt)
4. Hur har du upplevt att pandemin har påverkat dina relationer? (stärkt dem? försvagat dem?)

Perseverance

5. Hur anpassade du dig till den nya vardagen?
6. Hur var dina upplevelser av att undervisa under pandemin, hur har du gjort saker annorlunda? Kan du förklara/utveckla? (om/när det stötte på problem, hur löste du dem/ vad fick dig att fortsätta?)
7. Vilka möjligheter/utmaningar såg du med att jobba online?
8. Har du upplevt att arbetet har varit mer krävande? (har du ändrat ditt tillvägagångssätt/förhållningssätt, hur har du hanterat det som varit mer krävande?)

Self-efficacy

9. Hur upplever du din förmåga att kunna uppnå det du har planerat i din undervisning? Har det förändrats?
10. Hur självsäker är du att det du tar för dig kommer att lyckas? Har det förändrats?

Agency

11. Har du upplevt att det du vill uppnå som lärare har förändrats under pandemin?
12. Har dina mål förändrats? (både personliga och i arbetet)
Under fråga - har du kunnat uppnå dem? Utveckla

Meaning

13. Kändes ditt jobb meningsfullt innan pandemin? Har ditt arbete känts lika meningsfullt som innan / Hur känns det nu? Utveckla
14. Hur har du känt dig över det ansvar som du har? Har din känsla av ansvar förändrats?

Character Strength

15. Hur har du upplevt stödet från skolans håll? (T.ex har du behövt mer handledning, riktlinjer, hjälp med onlineundervisning, material...)
16. Hur har det kollegiala arbetet sett ut/påverkats? Hur brukar det vanligtvis se ut? Har det hjälpt dig? Har det varit tillräckligt med kollegialt arbete? Har pandemin stärkt det kollegiala arbetet?

Appendix 2

Information Letter



Till dig som är engelsklärare på gymnasiet.
Information och förfrågan om deltagande i intervju.

Covid-19 har kommit med stora förändringar på samhället, personer och läraryrket. Vi vill därför genomföra en intervjustudie/analys som kan leda till mer information angående engelsklärares välmående under denna tid.

Syftet med studien är att undersöka engelsklärares upplevelser under pandemin och erat arbete med undervisning under pandemin.

Lärare i engelska på gymnasiet kommer att tillfrågas om deltagande i denna intervjustudie.

Det är helt frivilligt att delta i studien och du kan när som helst avbryta ditt deltagande. Intervjun kommer att genomföras på Zoom och kommer att ta ca 40 minuter.

Materialet kommer att hanteras och behandlas så att du garanteras anonymitet och det kommer att förvaras så att ingen obehörig kommer att ha tillträde till det. Det insamlade materialet kommer att transkriberas och sedan tematiskt analyseras. Det insamlade materialet kommer bara att användas i denna studie.

Vi heter Sara Menhem och Anna Josefsson och vi läser ämneslärarprogrammet på Högskolan Väst i Trollhättan. I utbildningen ingår examensarbete därav genomförs denna intervju. Har du några frågor så hör gärna av dig till oss.

Göteborg 2022-01-26

Studerande:

Anna Josefsson

anna.*****se

Ansvarig handledare:

Alastair Henry

Professor Högskolan Väst

Ala*****hv.s

Studerande:

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Sara*****.se

Appendix 3

Braun & Clarke's guide

Do the themes make sense?

Does the data support the themes?

Am I trying to fit too much into a theme?

If themes overlap, are they really separate themes?

Are there themes within themes (subthemes)?

Are there other themes within the data?