



# Nurture: Psycho-educational e-mental health intervention on burnout for Grade R educators

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## Abstract

Arguably, the well-being of educators is one of the most important factors if early childcare education is to be effective. Grade R educators are vital to the future success of children. This is because educators in the early childhood phase influence not only a child's cognitive development but also their physical, emotional, and social development. A career in education is often seen as demanding and stressful and, since depression and burnout are common, this can lead to many negative outcomes for both educators and learners. As indicated in the literature, the development of a psycho-educational e-mental health intervention is encouraged. In this paper, we aim to explain how an e-mental health intervention focused on burnout and created from the perspective of positive psychology can psycho-educate Grade R educators. In this qualitative research study, we used a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm with a phenomenology research design. Through the exploration of participants' responses related to the school readiness and assessment of learners, along with their being overburdened and under pressure in the school context encapsulated the very specific circumstances of Grade R educators. These circumstances lead to feelings of frustration and powerlessness that can lead to burnout. The knowledge generated from this research allowed us to create a psycho-educational e-mental health intervention, NURTURE, a short five-day e-format video series on burnout aimed at Grade R educators. In this article, NURTURE as a psycho-educational e-mental health intervention is explored.

**Keywords:** burnout, e-mental health, flourishing, grade R educators, positive psychology, psycho-educational interventions, well-being, work-related stress

## Introduction

Since Grade R plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, it can have a lasting impact on children throughout their lifetime (Connelly et al., 2020; Du Toit et al., 2022; Skae et al., 2020). The role of educators is emphasised in studies showing that the mental health of teachers has an exponential effect on their learners (Cann, 2019; Carson et al., 2016; Hofmann et al., 2020; White, 2020). Given that South African early childhood educators face working conditions that include long hours, poor reimbursement, and emotionally challenging situations, the prevalence of poor mental health is a reality for many of them (Mabusa & Govender, 2021; Otten et al., 2019) who suffer from stress, tiredness, loneliness, mental exhaustion and, most commonly, burnout (Antoniou et al., 2023; Burns et al., 2022; Cann, 2019; Li & Zhang, 2019). Burnout is a prolonged response to stress in a specific context that negatively impacts psychological health (Capone & Petrillo, 2018; Maslach et al., 2001). With research highlighting the mental health of educators in general, especially as it relates to their learners, the literature yields very few studies that focus on the well-being of early childcare educators (Benevene et al., 2020). According to these limited studies, the development of protective factors appeared to be more beneficial than simply identifying risk factors in the teaching community (Benevene et al., 2020; Marais-Opperman et al., 2021). Hence, the development of psycho-educational e-mental health interventions was encouraged (Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2018; Capone & Petrillo, 2018; Carson, 2016; Hofman et al., 2020, Manasia et al., 2020; Wessel & Wood, 2019).

A psycho-educational intervention refers to any construct aimed at providing educational information from a psychological perspective whereas e-mental health refers to the electronic method of delivery of psychological services (Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2018; Baumeister et al., 2014; Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, 2019; Wessel & Wood, 2019). There are various advantages of e-mental health of which accessibility and the promotion of equality in care prevail (Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2018; Baumeister et al., 2014; Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, 2019; Wessel & Wood, 2019). As the gap in the literature indicates, very limited research on the well-being of Grade R educators exists, so this e-mental health intervention aims to address the burnout of educators through utilising psycho-educational techniques developed from positive psychology. It is clear that the creation of a psycho-educational e-mental health intervention can be beneficial for Grade R educators in South Africa and that it can serve as a protective factor against burnout.

In this article, therefore, we aim to explore the creation of a psycho-educational e-mental health intervention on burnout for Grade R educators in South Africa. We did this through a careful appraisal of the literature while conducting qualitative research from a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm; this enabled us to create the intervention while receiving feedback from Grade R educators on the application of the intervention.

## Literature review

In South Africa, members of the early childhood sector include Grade R educators, who have a bachelor's degree in Foundation Phase education or a teaching diploma (Department of Basic Education, 2022). These educators in the early childhood sector are instrumental in the teaching, learning, and development of learners since they not only influence the cognitive, social, and emotional development of their learners but, most importantly, their overall well-being (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019; Cann, 2019; Vo & Allen, 2022; Wessels & Wood, 2019). Furthermore, according to Skeen (2022), the South African Child Gauge 2021/2022 illustrates that having positive child-educator relationships can serve as a protective factor for the mental health of learners while concurrently influencing their academic performance (Hofmann et al., 2020; Skeen, 2022; White, 2020). The mental health of educators is of the utmost importance because it influences learners directly and indirectly (Cann, 2019; Otten et al., 2019).

Mental health is best described as the holistic well-being of the individual; this includes the emotional, psychological, and social aspects of a person (Wissing, et al., 2019). In the teaching community, educators often face various mental health problems (Cann, 2019; Casely-Hayford et al., 2022; Coetzee et al., 2022). Li & Zhang (2019) have explained how grade R educators often experience challenges like burnout, stress, tiredness, loneliness, and mental exhaustion. Of these mental health challenges, burnout and stress are often found to be the most common (Greenberg et al., 2016; Harding, et al., 2019; Kassandrinou et al., 2023). Reports indicate that educators have very high levels of burnout and very poor indicators of well-being (Stansfeld et al., 2011; Turner & Thielking, 2019; White 2020).

The working conditions of early childhood educators such as long hours, poor reimbursement, and heavy workloads in adverse situations are often associated with poor mental health (Cann, 2019; Mabusa & Govender, 2021; Otten et al., 2019). The nature of their work, along with its volume, can further affect educators negatively (Capone & Petrillo, 2018; White, 2020). Mabusa and Govender (2021) explained that, although all teachers experience various stressors, Grade R educators are further affected by the unique challenges of their careers, such as whether children are school-ready, and the immense pressure exerted on them to guarantee the academic success of their learners.

It is obvious that there is an inadequate focus in the literature on the mental health of early childcare educators (Benevene et al., 2020; Hendriks et al., 2021; Otten et al., 2019). Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2012) pointed out the gap in the literature regarding South African educators. More than a decade later, a noteworthy gap still exists in the literature. The promotion of mental health is crucial to the education sector although it is complex (Hascher et al., 2021; McInerney et al., 2018). Benevene et al. (2020) highlighted that any interventions aimed at improving the mental health of educators can be seen to be a protective factor against effects such as burnout. In the teaching community, existing interventions focus mainly on the prevention of burnout as opposed to the promotion of well-being (Brady & Wilson, 2020; Manasia et al., 2020; White, 2020). This is problematic since the absence of disease does not

guarantee the presence of health (Antonovsky, 1996); educators need intervention programmes to promote their mental health.

Following their research on South African educators, Fourie and De Klerk (2024) strongly encouraged the implementation of a burnout management programme. As an intervention strategy or programme, an e-mental health intervention has proven to be very successful (Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2018; Denecke et al., 2022). The term “electronic mental health”, better known as “e-mental health”, falls under the umbrella term of e-therapy, used widely to describe psychological services administered through a digital platform (Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2018; Denecke et al., 2022). Internet-based therapies are effective in treating many mental illnesses, but the accessible nature of e-mental health interventions is an added benefit (Chen et al., 2022). With wider access and availability, diagnosis and care are available to more people (Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, 2019). Research has emphasised the need to implement feasible interventions to enhance personal well-being among South African educators (Fourie & De Klerk, 2024). With this in mind, we began to conceptualise a psycho-educational e-mental health intervention.

## Theoretical and conceptual framework

In research studies, the theoretical framework guides the research by acting as a detailed plan or template (Garvey & Jones, 2021) while the conceptual framework identifies the elements involved in the study to indicate the inter-relationship of the core concepts and how they relate to theory (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). For this research, it was important to consider aspects of positive psychology such as flourishing, for example, to inform the psycho-educational e-mental health intervention. We explore the relevance of this after we elaborate on the core concepts involved to provide a clear understanding of the inter-connected nature of the study we call NURTURE: Psycho-educational e-mental health intervention on burnout for Grade R educators.

### Core concepts

#### *Psycho-education*

The term psycho-education refers to any intervention or act that involves the systematic, didactic, and structured transfer of knowledge regarding the improvement of mental health. This also involves the teaching of skills or therapeutic interventions (Ekhtiari et al., 2017; Firth et al., 2020).

#### *E-mental health*

E-mental health, also known as electronic-mental health, involves all mental health services that take place on a virtual platform. This ensures that mental health services are more accessible to the general population (Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2018).

### *Burnout*

Burnout is best described as the experience of prolonged feelings of exhaustion, detachment, and anxiousness (Caruso, 2019). Burnout can be classified as a negative mental health state where an individual responds to a specific stressor within a specific context for an extended period of time (Capone & Petrillo, 2018; Maslach et al., 2001).

### *Grade R educators*

Grade R educators in South Africa hold a bachelor's degree in foundation phase education or a teaching diploma (Department of Basic Education, 2022). These educators are skilled at providing learning opportunities to young children and can be seen as instrumental to the development of young children (Connelly et al., 2020).

We used these core concepts to investigate and understand the theoretical foundations of the study. The core concepts of psycho-education, e-mental health, burnout, and grade R educators were arrived at and understood from the perspective of positive psychology that has flourishing as its goal.

### **Positive psychology**

In the field of positive psychology, health is described not merely as the absence of disease but also the presence of health elements (Antonovsky, 1996). Positive psychology is a social construct that focuses not only on repairing illness but also on the development of strengths and virtues (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In contrast to the field of psychology, positive psychology aims to move away from dysfunction and abnormalities and to focus instead on strengths and qualities that enable individuals to thrive (Barman et al., 2022; Compton & Hoffman, 2020). Barman et al. (2022) explained that this field focuses on the way people flourish through happiness, meaning, and well-being.

Since positive psychology aims at optimal mental health, aspects such as flourishing, health and happiness are important (Allen et al., 2021; Barman et al., 2022; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). However, these factors are often lacking in the teaching community, with schools around the world constantly reporting teacher stress and burnout as recurring themes that lead to various problems in the education sector (Eyal et al., 2019; Fourie & De Klerk, 2024). Research conducted by Zulu et al. (2022) in South Africa emphasised the stress and burnout of educators by explaining how inadequate classroom conditions and heavy workloads put immense pressure on them. This is especially true for educators from poorer communities that often lack quality teaching materials, infrastructure, and support. This leads to high turnover rates and stress and overall instability in the teaching sector. Stress and burnout can threaten the well-being of educators, and this becomes problematic since the science of well-being aims to support people on their journey towards flourishing (Hart, 2021). Ample research indicates the benefits of high levels of well-being among educators yet very little support is available in this regard (Cann, 2019; Carson et al., 2016; Wessel & Wood, 2019). By utilising aspects of positive psychology, e-mental health interventions can be created to address this gap in the literature (Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2021; Denecke et al., 2022) and in practice. This is because

e-mental health is a very versatile and adaptable resource that can be applied effectively to various fields, including that of positive psychology and to constructs such as flourishing (Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2021; Denecke et al., 2022).

## Flourishing

Keyes (2002) posed the question: If a person spends a lifetime free from mental illness, will they then automatically experience mental health? This has proved to be important in the field of positive psychology because well-being is integral to the definition of mental health (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Keyes, 2002). Keyes (2002) explained that mental health can be seen as a syndrome of symptoms operationalised in subjective well-being, which refers to the individual's perceptions and evaluations. In positive psychology, there is a mental health continuum. This continuum consists of three main themes: flourishing, which refers to high levels of mental health; moderate levels of mental health; and languishing, which refers to low levels of mental health (Keyes, 2002; Redelinguys & Rothmann, 2020; Wissing et al., 2019). In positive psychology, flourishing represents high levels of well-being that contribute to the mental health of an individual (Compton & Hoffman, 2020). This multidimensional concept of flourishing sees happiness from a holistic perspective (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Seligman, 2011). Research has also emphasised that flourishing is not merely the opposite of mental illness—a lack of mental illness does not guarantee mental health (Ackerman, 2018; Compton & Hoffman, 2020).

In focusing on Grade R educators, we identified a gap in the literature. From general research conducted on educators in other phases, we reached certain conclusions. The importance of Foundation Phase educators is widely accepted yet the stress associated with this role is often overlooked (Fourie & De Klerk, 2024; Petersen, 2017). Research conducted by Lee et al. (2020) found that educators' ability to flourish is connected to the context in which educators' function. This supports the findings of research by Vo and Allen (2022) that a holistic approach to school-based positive psychology interventions is necessary. Psycho educational e-mental health programmes have proven to be a beneficial and effective resource because of the accessibility and versatility of the intervention while it simultaneously provides relevant psychological information to participants (Apolinário-Hagen et al., 2021; Denecke et al., 2022; Phillips et al., 2019; Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, 2019). Since it promotes educator well-being and flourishing, a psycho-educational e-mental health intervention addressing burnout should be encouraged.

## Research methodology: Constructivist-interpretivist philosophical orientation and phenomenology research design

This research relied on the constructivist-interpretivism paradigm, which focuses on a person's ability to create meaning through their own world experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). This paradigm is easily connected to the phenomenology research design since experiences create meaning (Cohen et al., 2018; Nieuwenhuis, 2019). Therefore, in using the constructivist-

interpretivism paradigm, this research aimed to understand Grade R educators' perspectives on an e-mental health psycho-educational intervention aimed at promoting mental health.

### Qualitative research approach

Since the constructivist-interpretivism paradigm highlights the social nature of this research, the research approach was qualitative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In qualitative research, both linguistic and visual data are used to create meaning (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). For this research study, data was generated by exploring the perspectives of specific Grade R educators in the Motheo district in Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa.

### Purposeful sampling

This research used purposeful sampling; we selected the participants according to specific criteria (see Nieuwenhuis, 2019). This enabled us to access knowledgeable individuals (see Cohen et al., 2018). The participants met the required inclusion criterion of being early childcare educators currently teaching Grade R. They were all female but varied in age and years of experience. All the participants were fluent in English and Afrikaans but preferred participating in the study in Afrikaans.

### Data generation methods

Focus group interviews were used as the main form of data collection in this research, with audio recordings, observations, and fieldnotes as supplemental resources. This was done because of the unique ability of a focus group to produce valuable, rich data for research through engagement with participant responses (Cohen et al., 2018; Nieuwenhuis, 2019). For this research, although 10 educators were invited to take part in the focus groups only five agreed to do so.

### Reflexive thematic data analysis and interpretation

We used the reflexive thematic data analysis method of Braun and Clarke (2019). The following steps were followed: (1) familiarisation with the data set; (2) data coding; (3) initial theme generation; (4) theme development; (5) theme refining, defining, and naming; and (6) writing up the results. The main themes of the research were generated from our use of these steps.

### Quality criteria

In qualitative research, the trustworthiness of a research study can become problematic given the dynamic properties of human nature (Maree, 2019). The triangulation of the data took place through our use of the four pillars of trustworthiness: credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability to ensure the objectivity of the research (see Guba, 1981; Nieuwenhuis, 2019). In this study, credibility was ensured by grounding all our work in well-established research while debriefing with supervisors and member checking. This ensured the accurate representation of the data. Transferability was established through thick descriptions, while the

dependability of the research came to light through the research journal and clear research design. Finally, confirmability was ensured through audit trails to eliminate research bias and deliver trustworthy results.

## Ethical aspects

During any academic exploration, the best interests of the participants should be the focus (Maree, 2019). Before the commencement of this research, permission to conduct it was obtained from the relevant scientific and ethics committees. The Free State Department of Education (gatekeeper) was also approached for approval. The participants had to sign informed consent forms where they noted that they understood and agreed to the nature of the research. They were also informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any time. Owing to the use of focus groups, confidentiality and anonymity were limited. We mitigated this by using codes and pseudonyms. During the research, a registered counsellor was available in case adverse effects were brought on by participation in the study.

## Results, findings, and discussion

In this research, we examined Grade R educators' perspectives on psycho-educational interventions for the promotion of e-mental health. The data collected through focus group interviews was analysed, interpreted, and categorised into patterns through coding to create meaningful information (see Clarke and Braun, 2022). In qualitative studies, reflexive thematic analysis can be used to analyse text and the meaning surrounding it (Clarke & Braun, 2022). In this research, we used a systematic process of coding through which themes were identified.

From the initial focus group, themes emerged that guided the development of a psycho-educational e-mental health intervention. The themes included (i) strain resulting from work-related stress, (ii) assessment, (iii) pressure in the school context, and (iv) school readiness. Therefore, the unique circumstances of Grade R educators were discussed in detail. All these aspects lead to feelings of (v) frustration and (vi) powerlessness that contribute to burnout. Uncovering these themes assisted in the creation of NURTURE, the psycho-educational e-mental health intervention into burnout for Grade R educators. Thereafter, the participants were able to provide their perspectives on NURTURE. The feedback from the participant yielded informative and favourable results with the themes of (vii) positive experience and (viii) learning experience emerging.

## Circumstances of Grade R educators

### Strain resulting from work-related stress

Occupational stress, also known as work-related stress, refers to an individual's inability to cope with aspects of their career (Carrim et al., 2020). With more than 40% of illnesses linked to work-related stress, this can have a costly effect on the South African economy (Carrim et al., 2020).

During the focus group interviews, the participating educators<sup>1</sup> explained how various aspects of their careers caused severe stress in their lives. According to Participant 4, “. . . time is a big thing.” All the other participants agreed. In the hourly subject outline, as proposed in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), Home Language, Mathematics, and Life Skills culminate in 23 teaching hours per week. Because of this, educators experience pressure concerning time, especially when they consider the individual needs of learners in very large classes. Participant 3 explained that class size plays an important role,

If you have a small class, it is wonderful. . . but now your numbers can reach more than 30. . . and that is difficult.

## Assessment

Research has found that the workplace can be the cause of great stress in an individual’s life (Carrim et al., 2020). One’s workload is listed consistently as one of the biggest factors leading to educator burnout (Cann et al., 2022). A large part of a Grade R educator’s workload involves assessment as Govender and Hugo (2018) have pointed out. For South African educators, assessment is an integral aspect of teaching because it expresses the academic progress of learners (Department of Basic Education, 2011). However, the volume of assessment tasks in the classroom can prove stressful for both educators and learners (Govender & Hugo, 2018).

Two aspects were highlighted in the focus group interviews. The participants felt that the number of assessments was too high and, they perceived the CAPS standard as inadequate to meet the needs of their classrooms. In Grade R, classroom informal assessment is conducted daily. A large class can pose many difficulties with assessment given its time-consuming nature. Participant 4 explained that it caused “negativity. . . the amount of assessment with the small ones.” This becomes a great challenge because young learners work mostly in the concrete phase. She further explained that “with such small children . . . everything has to be clear, most of the things have to be concrete.”

## Pressure in the school context

Various research studies illustrate the pressure and poor working conditions faced by educators around the world, which is the reality in South Africa, too (Mabusa & Govender, 2021). Research has shown countless times that a supportive and collaborative school context can prevent aspects such as burnout and depression (see Addimando, 2019; Agyapong et al., 2022; Cann, 2019; Wessels & Wood, 2019).

In the focus group discussion, pressure in the school context was a recurring theme. School readiness is a unique and challenging aspect of the conflict between Grade R and Grade 1 educators. The participants explained that other educators lacked insight into and understanding of the complexities surrounding school readiness. They also explained that other educators often underestimated the influence of parents concerning school readiness. Participant 1 mentioned that she sometimes advised that a child was not ready for Grade 1, but

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<sup>1</sup> The words of the participants have not been edited.

ultimately, the parents must decide. They elaborated that this issue is further exacerbated by the inconsistencies in the CAPS. Participant 1 explained,

You get pressure from the primary school, because it has happened before that a child is not ready for school, but the parents insist that the child progresses to Grade 1. . . but you get unhappiness from the Grade 1 educator because we send them kids who are not ready.

From this, the pressure in the school context and how it contributes to the stress of the educators can be seen. Since a collaborative and supportive working environment is at the forefront of all recommendations, this aspect can become a significant problem in the school context (Mijakoski et al., 2022; Munnik & Smith, 2019).

### School readiness

School readiness is an integral aspect of Grade R, since, typically, it refers to the ability of a child to make the transition from Grade R to Grade 1 (Amod & Heafield, 2013; Munnik & Smith, 2019). The physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional functioning of children is very important since a distinction can be made between the readiness to learn and the readiness for school (Amod & Heafield, 2013; Munnik & Smith, 2019). Munnik and Smith (2019) explained that cognitive abilities are associated with readiness to learn, whereas the ability to adjust and benefit from a curriculum refers to school readiness.

In the focus group, Participant 1 explained,

. . . the stress of school readiness because school readiness does not begin in Grade R . . . and I think there is a stigma out there.

From this, a sense of frustration emerges; educators feel responsible for a child's school readiness when it is not entirely within their control. Participant 1 emphasised the emotional component of school readiness in saying,

If a child is not emotionally ready, then it's on you, and that is a heavy feeling. . . even if the marks are good but there is no emotional maturity; so, it influences me. I cry. And we feel for our Grade Rs [everyone softly agrees verbally]. School readiness feels like a mountain on my shoulders.

Participant 1 used emotive language in saying, “[S]chool readiness feels like a mountain on my shoulders” in the focus group session. This showed the commitment, responsibility, and care often felt by educators. Grade R educators face unique challenges in their careers while playing a very important role in the lives of the children they teach (Khumalo, 2023).

These negative aspects regarding Grade R teaching proved to be stressful and emotionally challenging to the participants. Frustration and powerlessness were recurring underlying themes throughout the discussion. From the literature, we know that Grade R educators are often expected to fill a multifaceted role that encompasses many duties other than teaching

(Hadebe-Ndlovu & Ede, 2023). This additional pressure led us to the conclusion that feeling appreciated is crucial for educators since it serves as a protective factor against other adversities. From this focus group session, it emerged that the work-related stress of Grade R educators leads to feelings of frustration and powerlessness that are related to burnout.

## Feelings of Grade R educators

### Frustration

Research conducted by Ansari et al. (2022) found a gap in the literature with regard to the emotional state of educators. With the link between educator well-being and a healthy teaching environment clearly illustrated, the importance of a healthy emotional state of mind cannot be underestimated. Frustration is a negative emotional state (Anasari et al., 2022). Throughout the focus group interview, the participants expressed feelings of frustration with their contributions.

While discussing Subtheme 2.2 (school readiness), the participants expressed that this aspect could cause great stress and frustration. Participant 5 explained that she lay awake in bed at night. She said, “You lay awake every day [everyone laughs and agrees] . . . there are children who keep you up at night.” From this, the emotional toll of teaching becomes evident, as noted by Turner and Thielking (2019), and this underlines clearly the high levels of stress found in the teaching community. This view was supported by Participant 3, who said that she really felt pressure in the teaching context and often felt that her contribution was insufficient. She said, “It is really like this pressure you feel; you feel like you did not do your part . . . It’s bad being in that position.”

During this conversation, all the participants gave verbal and non-verbal cues indicating their agreement. From this, the subtheme of powerlessness was conceptualised since it illustrates the participants’ feelings of not having control over their situation.

### Powerlessness

We can conceptualise powerlessness as feeling inadequate to an overwhelming degree (Savva, 2017). This feeling often presents itself in stressful situations, and education is seen worldwide as a stressful career often leading to burnout (Mabusa & Govender, 2021; Savva, 2017). During this study, feelings of powerlessness became a common thread in the discussions. Participant 5 explained, “We cannot do anything; even if we fight, it will not work, we must just accept it. You mustn’t think about it, you must just put it behind you and go on.”

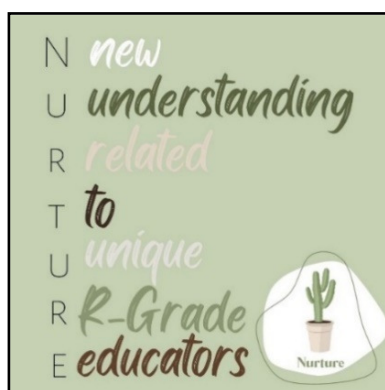
In a study conducted by Sayed and de Kock (2019) on South African educators, only 26% of the participants wanted to stay in the teaching profession. These results can, to some extent, be linked to the current study since the powerlessness experienced by the participating educators can have negative implications.

## Psycho-educational e-mental health intervention for grade R educators

The themes that emerged from the study informed us about the specific needs that exist in the teaching community. In line with the literature, elements of burnout featured consistently, leading to the creation of NURTURE. This intervention consists of a video series over five days to represent the workdays in a week. The length of each video is approximately two minutes. This length was chosen to ensure that each video grabs the attention of the participants without becoming a long and taxing task to be completed. The information in the short videos, while concise, communicates valuable information. The aim is to psycho-educate the participants to equip them with a basic understanding of burnout along with practical, easy tips to combat some of the negative effects. This illustrates, from a positive psychology perspective, the larger goal of this study which is to help Grade R educators in South Africa to help themselves in their quest for well-being that ultimately leads to flourishing.

Therefore, the perspectives and feelings of the participants contributed to the creation of a psycho-educational intervention that focuses on burnout as the overarching topic of the e-mental health intervention. With this intervention rooted in positive psychology, the main focus is on the positive aspects of the individual (see Allen et al., 2021; Barman et al., 2022; Wissing et al., 2019). From the study, symbols of growth and bloom emerged, and this led to the creation of NURTURE—New Understanding Related to Unique Grade R Educators as illustrated in Figure 1. This psycho-educational e-mental health intervention focuses on burnout. Figure 1: NURTURE illustrates the imagery used for the psycho-educational e-mental health intervention. The design was specifically connected to Grade R educators since it enables them to nurture their own well-being.

**Figure 1**  
NURTURE

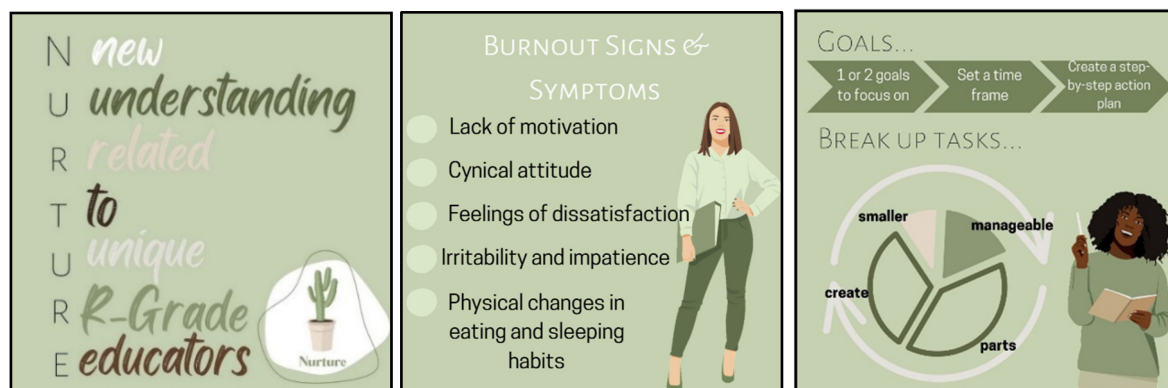


The burnout video focuses on the symptoms shown in Figure 2: Examples from the intervention. The series consists of five themed videos, of which Day 1 serves as an introduction to the overarching theme of burnout. Burnout is seen, typically, as a type of stress associated with an individual's environment. According to the Mayo Clinic (2021), the signs and symptoms of burnout include a lack of motivation, a cynical attitude, feelings of dissatisfaction, irritability, and impatience. In this series, the videos provided the educators

with information and practical tips and tricks to challenge themselves. In Figure 2, examples from the intervention illustrate the practical and informative nature of each themed video.

**Figure 2**

Examples from the intervention



From the general feedback on the e-mental health intervention, the participating Grade R educators felt that it was a positive and informative learning experience.

## Feedback from educators

### Positive experience

In the second focus group interview, the participants professed that this video series had had a positive impact on their lives. The participants described the series as “cute” (Participant 5), “positive” (Participants 4, 1, and 3), and “a lot of fun” (Participant 1). While discussing the slide about improving motivation, Participant 1 said,

I think it is good to be reminded of these things. . . this helps me to think how I am going to implement it. . . something to try for the future.

Participant 4 added,

A lot of fun. It allows us to think about things you would not usually think about. . . the music and the colours gave peacefulness. I left it for a time when I could relax while watching it. It was like an escape.

Participant 1 agreed, saying she liked the use of the word “escape”. Participant 2 responded,

Yes, it takes you out of the hustle and bustle; you have to sit, listen and watch. It is fun, it feels like a spa day, a calming opportunity every day.

### Learning experience

In the second focus group discussion, the participants indicated that the intervention was educational. Participant 1 explained that the information was understandable and easy. She stated that the concepts were well explained by their being divided into smaller pieces. The

participants felt empowered and motivated to try the step-by-step tips given in the intervention. Participant 1 said,

I understood it [others agree]. Sometimes there would be a concept that I did not know; then you broke it up into smaller parts, and then I got the bigger picture. Or it was step by step, enabling me to feel empowered.

Participant 5 added that the information and content were just enough. She said,

It's not a long explanation that discourages me but just enough information for me to learn something.

## Recommendations for policy and practice

From the literature-based and empirical aspects of this research, a few recommendations were derived.

### Recommendation 1

There is a need for mental health intervention in South African schools. According to Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., (2021) the intervention at the school level seems very effective. Traditionally, the focus on risk factors has proved to be important, but this strategy did not create lasting and effective protective factors, which, in turn, can lead to greater and long-lasting success (Benevene et al., 2020). Various studies have emphasised the big impact of the school setting on educators' well-being and mental health (Addimando, 2019; Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Thorpe et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2022; Wessels & Wood, 2019). Zulu et al. (2022) illustrated the adversities faced by various early childcare centres across South Africa, along with the effect thereof on the mental health of Grade R educators. Aspects such as burnout are consistently emphasised throughout the literature, which led to the belief that the need for the promotion of e-mental health through psycho-educational intervention can be regarded as vital (Capone et al., 2019; Du Toit et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2018). From this, we conclude that there is a need for mental health intervention in South African schools. This study aimed to address this through an intervention that is suitable for Grade R educators.

### Recommendation 2

There is a need for further research into the topic of a psycho-educational intervention for the promotion of e-mental health for Grade R educators. Given the gaps in the literature, further research into a psycho-educational intervention for the promotion of e-mental health for Grade R educators is highly recommended. This need became evident based on two factors. The first is the integral role of Grade R educators in the development of learners (Cann, 2019; Connelly et al., 2020; Hine et al., 2022). From this research, we found that both the mental health and well-being of educators have a very big impact on learners (Hadebe-Ndlovu & Ede, 2023; Harding et al., 2019). Second, the literature yielded very limited information on this topic (see Benevene et al., 2020; Otten et al., 2019). This encourages further exploration of this topic if we are to create useful and meaningful information. In this study, we aimed to provide a

valuable contribution to the understanding of the symptoms of burnout faced by Grade R educators in South Africa through conducting a well-structured thematic analysis supported by participant testimony and existing literature.

## Limitations of the research

Qualitative research has the specific aim of understanding phenomena in a specific context. Therefore, this study explored the perspectives of Grade R educators on the developed psycho-educational e-mental health intervention on burnout (see Fouche, 2022). In this research, a general lack of diversity was a limiting factor since educators from rural schools were not represented. Furthermore, time proved to be one of the biggest factors limiting the study. According to the research guidelines set out by the Free State Education Department, research may not use up any teaching time. This led to the focus group taking place after school hours when many educators were unable to attend it owing to other commitments.

## Conclusion

From this research, the importance of Grade R educators was highlighted and examined. The literature review revealed extensive examples of the negative effects of burnout on educators (Brady & Wilson, 2020; Eyal et al., 2019; Ishibashi et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2018; Mariani et al., 2020; Zulu et al., 2020), which motivated the creation of an intervention aimed at prevention. Based on the gap in the literature, further studies about psycho-educational interventions for the promotion of e-mental health for Grade R educators in South Africa are encouraged (see Otten et al., 2019; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). With the advantages of interventions at the school level emphasised, this research highlighted aspects of e-mental health intervention programmes (Addimando, 2019; Cann, 2019; Thorpe et al., 2020; Wessels & Wood, 2019). The conceptualisation of an e-mental health intervention proves to be vital in the promotion of educator well-being.

As illustrated in this study, educator well-being that combats burnout leading to flourishing is not only possible, but feasible when following the psycho-educational e-mental health intervention. Ultimately this enables the educators to *NURTURE* themselves through psycho-education, grow their levels of well-being and bloom through flourishing as illustrated in Figure 3: *NURTURE, GROW, BLOOM*.

**Figure 3**  
NURTURE, GROW, BLOOM



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