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Learning from Lockdown:

Examining Scottish Primary Teachers’ Experiences of Emergency Remote Teaching

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Abstract

More than 1.5 billion students experienced disruption to education as a result of COVID-19, representing the most substantial interruption to global education in modern history (UNESCO, 2020). Many educational institutions transitioned to emergency remote teaching (ERT) overnight, which has presented an array of distinct challenges for educators. Using virtual interviews and an experiential approach to thematic analysis, the study examined Scottish primary teachers’ (n=10) lived experiences of adapting to ERT practice. Findings demonstrated three main themes; ‘Meeting Learners’ Needs,’ ‘Influencing Engagement’, and ‘The Impact of ERT on Teachers’. Key findings suggested that differentiating learning, engaging, and communicating with learners is more difficult during ERT than face-to-face teaching. Parental engagement is vital, however, is influenced by several mitigating factors. Finally, ERT is likely to have substantial effects on the wellbeing of those involved. Implications of these findings are considered and discussed.
In March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) formally declared Sars-CoV-2 (COVID-19) a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). The high rate of contagion necessitated countries around the world to enforce national lockdowns (Sanche et al., 2020). The WHO recommended social distancing measures to slow the rate of infection, which compelled the closure of public spaces and non-essential services. Educational institutions were closed internationally, disrupting the education of over 1.5 billion students worldwide (UNESCO, 2020). In light of advice from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), the Scottish Government mandated the closure of primary schools across Scotland in March 2020 to all but children in essential (children of key workers) and vulnerable groups (e.g. children at risk of harm, looked after children, children with additional support needs or disability). This directive resulted in the urgent transfer of teaching to a remote and largely digital methodology.

**Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)**

Bozkurt et al. (2020) defined ‘distance education’ as a planned method of educational delivery whereas ERT is derived from necessity during crises. This distinction represents a departure from established distance learning pedagogies, which are grounded in psychological learning theories and practitioner experience (Xiao, 2018). Thus, ERT presents several barriers to effective education including a weak theoretical underpinning; gaps in professional knowledge; and difficulties in application due to the novel contexts in which it occurs (Trust & Whalen, 2020). As such, educators are faced with unique challenges in adapting to such practice with little warning and with variable resources, experience, and training (Flack et al., 2020a).

ERT also presents challenges for children and caregivers. These challenges are intensified by the impact of COVID-19 on individuals’ physical and psychological wellbeing (Miller, 2020; Lee, 2020). Parents and caregivers are increasingly responsible for managing
home learning, creating additional psychological stress (Burke & Dempsey, 2020). Thus, as educators have become progressively dependent on parents to facilitate learning, parental capacity to provide support has varied due to differentially increased pressures between households (Doyle, 2020).

The uncertainties which characterise COVID-19 and ERT have further compelled a need for teachers to adapt to a care-centred pedagogy (Moss et al., 2020). Research supports that communication is an important aspect of such pedagogical approaches (Noddings, 2012) and the remote nature of ERT has raised concerns due to reduced communication with learners in primary education and this influence on student-teacher relationships (Flack et al., 2020a). Thus, unique challenges are associated with providing pastoral care during ERT, the identification of which are key considerations for both policymakers and research (Moss et al., 2020).

**The Role of Teachers**

Research has demonstrated that teachers have considerable professional knowledge of children’s pastoral and educational needs; both of which influence children’s educational outcomes (Mainhard et al., 2018). One of the largest sources of variance in children’s educational outcomes has been linked to teachers. Peek and colleagues (2017) noted that children identified teachers and schools as having a pivotal role in their recovery from disasters. The role of educators, therefore, extends beyond day-to-day educational facilitation.

The need to ‘get it right for every child’ (GIRFEC), is a fundamental tenet of Scottish educational policy that influences the day-to-day decisions of Scottish primary teachers (Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, 2014). GIRFEC represents a challenge for Scottish educators during ERT; their role underpinned by a need to consider the influence of the wider ecology of children when adapting teaching practice. This is supported by Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, which demonstrates that individuals exist
within several dynamic and transactional spheres of influence. This constructivist paradigm highlights the multifaceted environmental influences which impact children, their behaviours, and development (Kelly et al., 2016). Teachers are therefore required to consider children’s physical and psychological wellbeing, as well as an array of environmental influences when adapting teaching practice to ERT.

Understanding teachers’ perceptions of ERT is crucial given the link between teachers’ beliefs and subsequent behaviour. For example, research has shown that teachers’ beliefs impact their use of ICT (Salleh & Laxman, 2014), inclusive practices (Wilson et al., 2016) and digital learning materials (Dunn et al., 2018). These findings suggest teachers’ opinions play an important role in their practice and thus to understand the use of ERT.

The current study

The existing evidence on ERT is continually evolving, with some initial data emerging from international research. However, ambiguity exists in the experience of educators engaged in ERT, and the influence of ERT on their beliefs and subsequent behaviours. This deficit in knowledge is evident within the context of Scottish research on ERT, for which there are no published studies to date. The need for further research led to the development of the current research question: What is the lived experience of Scottish primary teachers engaged in ERT?

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited through existing teaching networks and social media groups, using a mixture of convenience (Suri, 2011) and snowball (Allen, 2017) sampling methods, and met the following inclusion criteria: they were Scottish Primary teachers registered with the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS); were in a full-time class teacher post within a Scottish local education authority; and had engaged with remote teaching
since 20th March 2020 (the date of school closures in Scotland). Ten female participants took part, recognised as a sufficient sample size for thematic analysis, and recruited from a range of local authorities to ensure geographic diversity within Scotland (Braun & Clarke, 2013). See Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

**Data Collection**

After ethical approval was obtained, virtual interviews utilised WebEx, a secure online video conferencing platform. Data collection took place during June and July 2020 and thus participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of ERT during the first national lockdown. Interviews followed a semi-structured approach that aligned closely with critical-realist ontological perspectives (Braun & Clark, 2013). The interview questions focused on answering the research question: *What is the lived experience of Scottish primary teachers engaged in ERT?*. See Appendix 1 for the interview schedule.

**Data Analysis**

NVivo 12 software was used to transcribe and code the dataset. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants’ anonymity, and any other identifiable features of participants were omitted. An inductive experiential approach to thematic analysis was employed, following Braun and Clarke’s (2012) six stage process. The first stage involved familiarising ourselves with the data. In the second stage, initial latent and semantic codes were generated using a complete coding approach. In stage three, codes were cross-checked through pattern-based analysis to create potential patterns across the dataset. In the fourth stage, initial themes were reviewed for viability; before being finalised and formally defined in stage five of the process. The sixth stage culminated in the production of this paper.
Analysis and Findings

The study aimed to address the research question: *What is the lived experience of Scottish primary teachers engaged in ERT?*. The analysis produced three key themes and six sub-themes which are shown below in Table 2, and then discussed in turn.

[Table 2 about here]

Meeting Learners’ Needs

This first focus examined the challenges teachers faced in meeting the needs of learners throughout ERT, encompassing the adaptations made to teaching practice. ERT relies heavily on access to digital resources, raising concerns that this exacerbates existing inequalities (Doyle, 2020). Participants voiced concerns regarding the availability and accessibility of the internet and technological resources, particularly for lower socioeconomic status (SES) groups.

Consider the following:

“if you’re a kid whose parents are at home; who are well educated; earning enough money to have a laptop and Wi-Fi... you're gonna’ get on okay... But if you’re a person that doesn’t know when they're getting their next meal? You're... you're not gonna do well. I think it highlights that we need to try and break the circle of deprivation...” (Maggie)

“...I think it's difficult if there is a lot of children in the household and adults needs access to the internet and that's potentially not possible.” (Daisy)

Maggie perceived a disparity in resources between higher- and lower-income households, and this as an extension of existing inequalities and deprivation. Similarly, Daisy recognised accessibility to be constrained by increased demands on available technology during lockdown, thus further limiting children’s access to support and education during ERT. The concept of a ‘digital divide’ between differing SES households is emphasised in research. This has generated political discussion on ‘digital poverty’ and wider social inequalities that
have become apparent during lockdowns (Ramirez, 2021). Participants’ concerns regarding inequitable access for vulnerable groups also extended to children with additional support needs. Teachers perceived ERT to have disproportionately affected these learners:

“...I've got a little girl with English as an additional language... the direct face-to-face teaching being in the environment, talking to the other children... is SO beneficial for her. I think that would have had a hugely negative impact on her not being around people who are speaking English all of the time.” (Rachel)

“...it's been harder to, meet individual needs. Needs have been kind of, being met as a class but it’s been really hard to differentiate work” (Maggie)

Participant concerns extended to support that cannot be easily replicated online, such as immersion in the English language and differentiating learners’ needs. Teachers perceived differentiating learning tasks to suit individual learning needs to be one of the most challenging aspects of ERT. Research has shown that, without such support, learners may become demotivated by tasks which are out-with their capabilities (Takase et al., 2019). These findings extend existing knowledge by identifying why ERT may be difficult for low SES families as well as highlighting the importance of being able to provide inclusive education, introducing the need to consider the type of support teachers are required to provide.

Concerns relating to meeting learners’ needs extended beyond access to digital resources and educational attainment but to meeting the emotional needs of children:

“...our biggest concern the whole time has been their social and emotional wellbeing because it’s a tough area.” (Maggie)

Maggie identifies the wellbeing of learners as “our biggest concern”; a priority shared by all participants. Maggie further perceived that support in ERT must consider the wider
environmental influences on children’s lives, as detailed in current literature (Doyle, 2020; Flack et al., 2020b). This is further qualified by perceptions that psychological distress had increased in children due to the experience of ERT:

“He just was so emotional and just not the same happy, bubbly little boy that he was in March. I think there is going to be major health and wellbeing implications for children of all ages...” (Daisy)

“...a lot of the time I focused on a mental health point of view of lack of school, lack of education, lack of seeing your friends, that kind of thing.” (Nicole)

Daisy and Nicole perceived the experience to have elicited wellbeing changes in some children, which were not present before the transition to ERT. Thus teacher support extended beyond typical academic achievement. These perceptions are supported by current research, which notes that psychological distress, including anxiety and depression, has increased in children due to the pandemic (Lee, 2020; Miller, 2020). Our findings suggest that ERT may add to distress through loss of school community and access to support.

Participants recognised the need to adapt their pedagogical approaches during ERT as suggested by Nicole. However, some participants expressed concern that this was not a priority for all local authorities:

“...there seems to be no consistency. Which I know you have to link into your establishment and the demographic of the kids that you've got, but I just feel like there, maybe should've been a blanket approach to it considering that it affects so many children.” (Bernadette)

“I've got a friend that lives 10 minutes away. But that falls into a different local authority, and she's had a very, very different experience. To what I know I gave my learners you know? So it's been very, very patchy.” (Jane)
Participants voiced concerns at the lack of unified approach across schools to support teachers. Bernadette suggested that different priorities existed between educational authorities, resulting in diverging directives for teachers. Jane believed that this resulted in “very different” experiences of ERT across educational authorities and identified a need for a consistent approach. Thus although teachers recognised the need to adapt practice, their ability to do so may be dependent on local authority priorities.

In summary, the first finding of ‘Meeting learners’ needs’ highlights teachers’ perceptions of the challenges of successful ERT. Teachers perceived gaps in accessibility and that vulnerable learners are disproportionately affected by inequitable barriers to ERT. The need for support extends beyond accessibility as teachers highlighted the role of schools as a provider of emotional support. However, differences in priorities exist across authorities resulting in differing levels of support for children. These perceptions highlight a need for greater communication between authorities, to provide a centralised approach to support learners and educators.

Influencing Engagement

Student engagement encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioural factors that are central to learning and wellbeing outcomes (Flack et al., 2020a). Participants believed that student engagement had fallen as a consequence of ERT. This finding examines the factors which teachers perceived as influencing engagement within ERT. Teachers perceived there to be several factors influencing children’s engagement and believed ERT had impeded communication between teachers and learners:

“…it's difficult when you are trying to email things and you’re not getting contact with them… they are choosing to ignore you or potentially they have other things going on. Or potentially they are working away, and you’re just not aware.” (Daisy)
“having that face-to-face contact with them goes a long way. Even just when they're needing support, a tap on the shoulder, or having a wee bit of banter with them...” (Nicole)

“...you realise how much communication isn't language-based. Like, you're sitting teaching, and you'll look round the class, and you can gauge who's getting it and who is not...” (Jane)

Participants identified that communication with learners was constrained by ERT. Daisy suggested ERT can lead to uncertainty regarding student engagement, while Nicole and Jane describe the marked difference in ease of communication between ERT and in-person practice. Jane suggests that non-verbal communication is important in teaching and is missing from ERT. Further, other participants suggested that ERT is a departure from social learning theories which have formed the basis of pedagogies and practice:

“We lack the basic things that were taught at university on how to teach. Modelling goes out the window; scaffolding – all of that goes if you don’t have a live lesson” (Dorothy)

Dorothy believes that central psychological concepts for communicating learning did not transfer to ERT practice, including “modelling” (Bandura, 1977) and “scaffolding” (Vygotsky, 1978). This loss was supported by most participants who believed that established ‘face-to-face’ elements of teaching practice were missing from ERT. In addition to learner communication, teachers highlighted an increased dependency on parental engagement during ERT. Such engagement varied but strongly influenced student engagement:

“...it depends who is sitting at home with them. If they’ve got maybe younger siblings… that will take up a lot of time. Mum and Dad, maybe if they’re working, they’ll not be able to sit with the children and support them” (Nicole)
“Even doing a trip to the zoo, online with the kids. That didn't engage them, like, there's... a lot of it comes from the parents, it needs to come from the parents. It's been tricky.” (Alecia)

Participants perceived parents as having a substantial role in reinforcing student engagement. The extent of this influence is highlighted by Alecia who identified that parental engagement had a sizeable mediating role in student engagement. The influence of the home environment was further supported by Nicole, who discussed how pressures at home negatively impacted parent’s availability to support learner engagement. Thus, teachers perceived parental support as important, but varied during ERT. Research indicates that parents experienced additional pressures due to the pandemic and ERT (Lee, 2020; Miller, 2020). This was recognised by participants who suggested a need to balance educational priorities against supporting the wellbeing of families:

“...parents have really said that they're struggling. So I've had to kind of speak to parents in that way and say do not worry. Do what you can. Do whatever you can when you've got the time... we've been trying to keep everything calm.” (Alecia)

“... I could phone them but you didn’t always necessarily always want to do that because you didn't know what was going on at home.” (Bernadette)

ERT has increased the need for caregivers to provide support at home resulting in increased pressures and dependency on parents in the home environment. Participants were conscious of placing additional pressure on families recognising difficulties they may be facing. Consequences of lockdown have been experienced by many families including employment disruption and increased financial hardship (The Scottish Government, 2020a). Although primarily viewed as a supporting factor, parental engagement may inadvertently do more damage than good:
“I think that's been kind of the hardest part, parents aren’t trained the way we are in behaviour management techniques and stuff.” (Anna)

“Like what we teach, we maybe wouldn’t have been taught that way at school. Therefore, see like maths strategies and things like that, it’s totally different nowadays. You don’t teach parents to teach that.” (Rachel)

Although participants recognised that parents are trying, they noted that parents are not trained to teach children. This suggests an assumption that there is only one way to teach and parents are not able to do this. This may be a result of rigid school constructions and curriculums. It appears that partnerships in learning are not happening. Better communication between teachers and parents is needed to allow for discussion of the child’s learning and this may increase parental engagement (Clinton et al., 2007). This need to foster family-school relationships is further highlighted by the OECD (Gouédard et al., 2020) who noted that differences in parental engagement are likely to widen existing educational inequity.

‘Influencing engagement’, therefore, details the factors affecting student engagement. Teachers highlighted the difficulties in adapting teaching practice to a remote format, recognising the difficulties faced by learners in engaging with online content and emphasising the need for continued support. Participants perceived that parents are essential for supporting children’s engagement but that this need increases already heightened pressures within the home environment. The theme also highlights the challenges of parental teaching which may negatively impact student learning.

**The Impact of ERT on Teachers**

Until this point, the analysis has considered how ERT has affected learners. However, the data suggested that teachers have also been impacted by the change of teaching methods.
Teacher burnout results from prolonged exposure to stressors in the educational environment (Maslach et al., 2001). The current pandemic has resulted in additional psychological stress, which is further increased by the demands of ERT (Miller, 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020). Participants in the current study similarly highlighted that the shift to ERT negatively affected teachers:

“The last day, I was just a bubbling wreck I was just so emotional because you're thinking these children have been such a big part of your life... I don't know if I'm ever going to see them again, it was just really difficult.” (Daisy)

“...there will be a lot of teachers out there who perhaps don't realise, but are going through vicarious trauma with their pupils... it might catch up with them, on the return.” (Lilly)

Participants perceived ERT to have impacted their wellbeing. Daisy expressed a sense of loss over being disconnected from her learners, whilst Lilly identified the possibility of trauma. Participant perceptions are important given that such emotional stressors are highlighted as contributing to teacher burnout (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008) and adverse mental health outcomes (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001). The increased stressors of ERT may negatively impact the long-term psychological health of teachers and so there is a need for additional support for teachers’ wellbeing. Although most participants expressed there had been support in some form, the extent of this was varied:

“My head teacher’s been great as well. They’ve said ‘look, text us, email us, phone us if there's ANYTHING you’re worried about, you phone us’. And they’ve both been fab.” (Nicole)

“The fact that we stopped the individual meetings, wasn't so great. Because we didn't then have that same time to just chat to a member of management and let them know what was going on, how we were getting on...” (Rachel)
Previous research has indicated that sustained support interventions can significantly reduce teacher burnout (Iancu et al., 2017), further highlighting a need for this to continue. Such a lack of continuity raises implications for the need for a more unified national approach to ERT, such as those raised in the first theme. Most participants also perceived that ERT had negatively impacted work-life balance:

“....I know that, one of the girls (a colleague), obviously is looking after the kids all day. So it's maybe 9 o'clock at night before she sits down to do her day's work.” (Lilly)

“I think that's definitely the hardest thing about working from home is being able to switch off.” (Rachel)

Lilly discusses the difficulties of balancing personal and professional responsibilities, while Rachel highlights the challenges of being able to “switch off” from her job, suggesting that teachers perceived ERT to impact work-life balance negatively. This lack of work-life balance may have been exacerbated by additional workloads placed on teachers during ERT:

“...people haven't really stopped to consider that teachers have been online, 12, 14 hours a day. To be there for pupils. I mean, I've had emails at midnight. And you respond to them because you don't want to be the person that leaves them hanging...” (Lilly)

Lilly identifies that teachers have perceived themselves as responsible for ensuring the wellbeing of children during ERT, even out with their usual working hours. Scottish educational policy outlines the responsibility of teachers to support the wider pastoral care of learners (GIRFEC, 2014). Thus, the need to consider the broader ecological influences on children may have resulted in vicarious stress on teachers during ERT. Previous research has similarly indicated that teachers experience secondary traumatic stress as a result of vicarious trauma from learners (Caringi et al., 2015). The data indicates several adverse psychological
and emotional health outcomes for teachers, which are associated with ERT. Thus, there is a need to examine the support and interventions made available to teachers during and following ERT practice.

In addition, the data detailed teachers’ perceptions of the return to school and how their job may change as a result. In May 2020, the Scottish Government announced a blended return to schools in the new term. The proposed approach consisted of both in-person and online teaching. This was to support social distancing measures in schools, with classes split and pupils receiving in-person and digital teaching on alternate days. Initial interviews with participants indicated that teachers’ perceived the blended approach to provide additional support for learners’ due to reduced class sizes. However, in June 2020, the Scottish Government updated this policy, indicating that schools would open to learners full-time in August. The change in approach was viewed negatively by all participants:

“…They’ve put everybody into a panic… they found out Tuesday that they’re going back. They set up all their classrooms for it to be two metres distance. And then, Wednesday they're finished. That's it. They’ve got no time to do anything.” (Alecia)

Participants expressed frustration that the changes had nullified the substantial preparations undertaken by schools for a phased return. Many classrooms prepared for the phased return became redundant, with no additional time to allow teachers to adapt the learning environment. Participants further expressed concerns that the change in approach would not allow for sufficient pastoral support of learners, an issue highlighted in current research (Doyle, 2020; Peek et al., 2017):

“My fear is that they (pupils) are completely overwhelmed, and I can already think of maybe three or four pupils in my class who I know will need specialist support.” (Lilly)
Participants viewed the change in approach as negatively impacting the wellbeing of children upon returning to school. This perception is particularly noteworthy, considering the levels of trauma and psychological distress young people have faced during the pandemic (Miller, 2020). The importance of ensuring sufficient support for learners is emphasised by Peek and colleagues (2017), who noted that following disaster, children identified teachers, schools, and their peers as the biggest influences in their recovery. Thus, the return to education provides an opportunity for governments to assess support and to redress inequities highlighted during the pandemic.

Teachers observed there to be valuable lessons learnt from adapting to ERT:

“I don't think it will ever be the same again. We have all said that. Education is never going to be the same.” (Lilly)

“It’s important that we take the positives from it I think and if we can take those positives, can we put that into face to face learning? Some of it, that we didn't think before, but remote learning has taught us.” (Nicole)

Participants suggested that their experience with ERT would change teaching practices in Scotland, recognising the importance of implementing new skills into existing teaching practices. The United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction agency (UNDRR), further supports the need for professional development following ERT. The “Build Back Better” model supports that the transactional dynamics of immediate response, short term recovery, and medium-term preparedness builds resilience in the wake of disasters (UNDRR, 2015). This supports a need to not only redresses the damage caused by the current crisis, but to build resilience in educational systems (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

'The Impact of ERT on Teachers’ highlighted several considerations for ERT practice. ERT has not only impacted children and families, but also educators who have experienced
additional stress in adapting to ERT practice. This is compounded by physical isolation and the psychological effects of supporting children and families. The theme also highlighted a need for continued support for teachers, and the impact of returning to full-time education, in addition to how the experience will impact future teaching practices. These findings will now be considered in further depth.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine Scottish primary school teachers’ lived experience of ERT. The first focus of ‘Meeting Learners’ Needs’, highlighted that ERT involves so much more than just delivering teaching online: teachers recognise that learners’ needs involve the likes of socialisation, access to technology, and individual support before even contemplating engaging with curricular content. They also noted the impact on wellbeing of pupils, but that there was no ‘blanket’ guidance in terms of what to do about this.

The findings suggest that vulnerable groups in particular may be disproportionately affected by the transition to ERT. Previous work (e.g. Fishman et al., 2018; Shelemy et al., 2019) highlights the importance of support for pupil success at school level, though this is a complex and multifaceted issue: an extension of current issues in building the capacity for equality and equity in the Scottish education system (GIRFEC, 2014). Although strides towards equality have been made in mainstream education in recent years, the findings from our study highlight an urgent need to review support provisions for vulnerable groups during ERT. This need is further emphasised by the role of schools as essential providers of pastoral care, particularly during times of emergency such as the current pandemic (Moss et al., 2020).

The second focus, ‘Influencing Engagement’, highlighted the importance of communication in ERT, and that communication between the home and school environments had been impeded by ERT. Research has demonstrated that communication is an essential
component of distance learning, similar to the methods employed during ERT (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019). The developmental limitations of primary aged learners also increased reliance on parents in facilitating home learning (Huang et al., 2017; Vygotsky, 1978) which may have caused additional stress within the home environment due to reduced direct communication with teachers as well as a lack of parents’ pedagogical knowledge (Clinton at al., 2007). This is noteworthy as both of these elements have been shown to influence effective home learning (Harris & Goodall, 2008). This is particularly pertinent given the young ages/educational levels (5-11 year olds) of the pupils taught by participants in the current study are so dependent on support and have not yet developed the autonomy to work independently. There is a need to build capacity in schools for effective digital communication, and to foster strong links between home and school environments during ERT.

The final focus, ‘The Impact of ERT On Teachers’, examined the implications of ERT for teachers’ wellbeing and future educational practice. Findings suggest that ERT may negatively impact the wellbeing of educators; further highlighting the association between teachers’ psychological wellbeing and burnout (Collie et al., 2016). This indicates a need to examine the professional support available to educators during ERT, to ensure both teachers’ wellbeing and successful implementation of the ERT practice. In addition, participants detailed the limited time they had available to prepare for the ‘full’ return to the classroom during Lockdown 1, and expressed concerns over personal safety and for the wellbeing of learners in adjusting to the return to school. Previous research has demonstrated the benefits of adapting professional practice to support active recovery following disasters (Peek et al., 2017; Mutch, 2018) suggesting that there is a need for teachers to uptake this additional role.

**Implications**
Our findings suggest that the education system must be more prepared for future emergencies that require remote learning. It is therefore important to put in place actions that will enable a smoother transition to remote teaching and learning that addresses the needs of children and is supportive of both teachers and parents. Based upon current findings, we suggest the following as important considerations for ERT:

- Increased communication between parents and teachers during ERT
- Additional support and training in digital technologies for parents, teachers and pupils
- Provision of psychological and behavioural interventions to support teachers and children on the return to school.

We acknowledge constraints to the above (financial, work load, ability, time) and note that the ‘emergency’ nature of this teaching posed challenges in terms of training and resources. However, the above steps would ensure a more equitable and supportive environment for all parties undertaking ERT.

Limitations

Despite the above illuminating findings, this research is subject to limitations. To begin, we did not note teachers’ familiarity or comfort with using technology, which could drastically impact on their ability to engage with ERT. Even data collection may have been impacted by this: for example, the study employed virtual interviews, but adapting such an online methodology may have limited the sample diversity, particularly for those who have limited digital literacy or access to technologies resulting in the production on biased findings towards views of teachers with higher levels of digital literacy (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In addition, the experiences of the limited number of participants interviewed, whilst valuable, may not be representative of every teacher’s circumstance; particularly given the variability in lockdown approaches and restrictions within the UK. Further research incorporating the experiences of teachers world-wide (including broader demographic samples such as males and part time
employees) would help to provide a more holistic representation of ERT not only during the current disruption, but for any future transitions to online teaching and learning. In addition, the experiences of school leaders and senior management teams require further investigation. Similarly, the study only considered ERT for school children so future work may wish to focus on further and higher education teachers’ and students’ experiences, given that college and university students, in some instances, face the additional challenge of being isolated in university accommodation whilst engaging in ERT.

Finally, these results could be extended by exploring children’s experiences of ERT. Research has demonstrated the negative impact of lockdown on children (Singh et al., 2020) and the Scottish Government (2020b) has announced funding to support children’s mental health. It is therefore crucial to understand the experience of ERT from children’s perspective.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that ERT has been a uniquely challenging experience for teachers. The concerns expressed by teachers’ perceptions indicated that overall, ERT was not as supported or developed as it could be, and that this impeded teachers’ ability to adapt to ERT as a result. Teachers perceived ERT as less effective than face-to-face teaching practice. Several barriers qualified this perception, the identification of which supports a need for further research; particularly given that future lockdowns are possible, if not likely. These findings have important implications such as a need to consider inclusive teaching during ERT and better communication between teachers, parents and students. There is also a need for a more centralised approach from policymakers and acknowledgement of the effects to wellbeing for those involved. Such findings should now be used to guide intervention aimed at enhancing ERT.
References


