

Thesis Impact Statement: COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic and public health measures impacted this thesis work in a number of ways. For instance, my thesis timeline was affected completely, my supervisor and I were trying to organize our times as much as possible but working from home involved a number of barriers for both of us. As well, the study was first intended to interview a larger number of GSA advisors (i.e., 20 or more). The methodology of the study was intended to conduct in-person, face-to-face interviews with participants in St. John's and online interviews with participants outside of the city. Additionally, for the in-person interviews, I had envisioned the use of a network data collection tool (i.e., Network Canvas) which is designed to generate network maps during the interview process. This tool offers participants the benefit of generating and looking at their network maps in real time as well as to support their recall due to the interactive function of this tool. Unfortunately, during the pandemic, this methodology was not possible. However, interviews had to be conducted online and the Network Canvas tool was no longer feasible for the interview process. Additionally, the number of participants recruited for the study could not reach the ideal number.

Public health measures and restrictions during the pandemic affected schools and GSA advisors' work increasing their workload and their ability to participate in the study. In addition, the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) was facing similar challenges and their response time to my research request took longer. My study was approved by the Ethics Committee on July 24, 2020. In September of 2020 schools were reopening and principals and teachers alike were facing a greater amount of workload to get schools ready for the students to return. Initially, my recruitment strategy focused on reaching out to school principals, but because I was not getting enough responses from potential participants, I resorted to create an Amendment to my recruitment strategy to also reach out to 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive community organizations who might know GSA advisors in the province. This decision was key in reaching the final number of participants. Nonetheless, reaching to the total of participants took much longer than expected, and the first interview happened towards the end of November 2020. Furthermore, scheduling interviews with participants was also restricted due to participants heavy workloads. In fact, a number of interviews had to be rescheduled due to poor internet connection. My thesis timeline envisioned the data collection and analysis to be completed in December 2020, but because the interview process was completed just before the holiday break in 2020, the analysis of the data got delayed until 2021 and was completed in February of 2021.

As reported in this impact statement. The COVID-19 pandemic affected my thesis process in four distinct ways: first, it shifted and delayed my thesis completion timeline; second, my methodology had to be changed and I had to remove the data collection tool I had envisioned for the study; third, it affected the recruitment process due to the extenuating circumstances in which the school district, schools, and educators were facing to be able to reopen schools in September 2020; and, fourth, it restricted the number of participants that I was able to recruit for the study.