

**COVID-19 AND LEARNERS' EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS IN DIFFERENT
SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN EMPANGENI, KWAZULU-NATAL**

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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to the originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



12 October 2023

SIGNATURE

DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loved ones and my friends. A special dedication to my daughter, Philasande Mlambo; my friend, Buddys Mlambo; and my mother, Nomusa Cele. These people have been there for me since the beginning of my studies, supporting and cheering me on. They have encouraged me to be patient and to put all my effort into finishing this degree. I often missed spending time with them because I was busy working towards completing my schoolwork. Even when I felt like quitting, they comforted me and told me not to quit but to take a break and tackle it again.

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ABSTRACT

The unexpected occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic changed people's lives in many ways worldwide, especially during the lockdown periods. Livelihoods, socialisation, employment, and education have been negatively affected. The Empangeni district in KwaZulu-Natal was not spared; however, although, in the same district, schools were not affected in the same way. This brought to the fore the inequalities that existed and still exist between public and private schools.

The study sought to explore the effect of COVID-19 on the Empangeni district schools, assessing the factors that affect teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools. The objective of the study was to determine the factors that affect teaching and learning in schools, evaluate how these factors were exposed during COVID-19, and establish the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and a grounded theory research design. Data was collected through structured interviews, which were conducted with four (4) school principals, eight (8) teachers, and sixteen (16) learners from the Empangeni district schools. The participants were purposefully selected. Data from the study were thematically analysed. The findings revealed that the factors affecting teaching and learning are leadership, budget, teaching and learning methods, resources, learner attendance and participation, and the scope of subjects. The findings also revealed that the factors affecting teaching and learning impact on academic growth, learner performance and results, teacher wellbeing, interaction with the teachers and the learning approach used in schools. These factors were exposed during COVID-19, when learners were sent home due to the lack of adequate classrooms to allow social distancing, and through the interrelations and communication among and between teachers and learners.

Data from the study further revealed that the strategies that can be implemented to resolve the challenges exposed by COVID-19 include the provision of adequate and equal resources by all stakeholders involved, the provision of support such as moral, psychological, and emotional support, and the facilitation of extra classes and one-on-one consultations. Based on the findings, the study recommends that schools should source resources for online teaching and learning, which will be used during COVID-19, and that the schools should

develop a model for online teaching and learning that will promote teacher wellbeing and enhance learner results and academic growth.

Keywords: COVID-19, educational achievement, socioeconomic status, public schools, private schools, Empangeni, educational inequalities, learning conditions, school resources.

OPSOMMING

Die COVID-19-pandemie wat almal so onverwags getref het, het mense se lewens wêreldwyd op baie maniere geraak, veral gedurende die grendeltydperke. Mense se bestaan, sosialisering, indiensneming en onderrig is negatief beïnvloed. Die Empangeni-distrik in KwaZulu-Natal het ook in die slag gebly; skole in dieselfde distrik is egter nie op dieselfde wyse geraak nie. Dit het die ongelykhede wat bestaan het en steeds bestaan tussen openbare en privaat skole weer op die voorgrond geplaas.

Die doel van die studie was om die uitwerking van COVID-19 op die skole in die Empangeni-distrik te ondersoek, en die faktore te assesser wat onderrig en leer in skole met 'n lae sosio-ekonomiese en hoë sosio-ekonomiese status beïnvloed. Die doel van die studie was om die faktore te bepaal wat onderrig en leer in skole beïnvloed, te evalueer hoe hierdie faktore gedurende COVID-19 blootgestel is, en die strategieë te bepaal wat geïmplementeer kan word om die uitdagings wat deur COVID-19 blootgestel is, op te los.

Die studie het 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering en 'n navorsingsontwerp met 'n gegronde teorie aangeneem. Data is ingesamel deur gestruktureerde onderhoude, wat uitgevoer is met vier skoolhoofde, agt onderwysers en 16 leerders van die Empangeni-distrikskole. Die deelnemers is opsetlik gekies. Data van die studie is tematies ontleed. Die bevindings het getoon dat die faktore wat onderrig en leer beïnvloed leierskap, begroting, onderrig en leer-metodes, hulpbronne, leerder-bywoning en -deelname, asook die omvang van vakke insluit. Die bevindings het ook getoon dat onderrig en leer 'n impak het op akademiese groei, leerders se prestasie en resultate, die welstand van onderwysers, interaksie met onderwysers, asook die leerbenadering wat in skole gebruik word. Hierdie faktore het gedurende COVID-19 na vore gekom toe leerders huis toe gestuur is weens 'n gebrek aan genoeg klaskamers om 'n sosiale afstand te handhaaf. 'n Skoolbywoningsrotasie is later bekend gestel.

Data van die studie het verder getoon dat die strategieë wat geïmplementeer kan word om die uitdagings op te los wat deur COVID-19 blootgestel is, die voorsiening van genoegsame en gelyke hulpbronne deur alle belanghebbers betrokke, die voorsiening van ondersteuning soos morele, sielkundige en emosionele ondersteuning, asook die fasilitering van ekstra klasse en individuele konsultasies insluit. Die studie beveel aan, gebaseer op die bevindings, dat skole voorsien moet word van hulpbronne vir aanlyn onderrig en leer, wat aangewend kan word indien 'n soortgelyke situasie soos COVID-19 weer sou plaasvind. Skole moet 'n model ontwikkel vir aanlyn onderrig en leer wat die welstand van onderwysers en die resultate en akademiese groei van leerders sal bevorder.

Sleuteltermes: COVID-19, onderrigprestasie, sosio-ekonomiese, openbare skole, privaat skole, Empangeni, onderrig-ongelykhede, leertoestande, skoolhulpbronne.

ISIFINQO

Isigameko esingalindelekile sobhubhane loKhuvethe siguqule izimpilo zabantu ngezindlela eziningi emhlabeni jikelele, ikakhulukazi ngezikhathi zokuvalwa. Indlela yokuziphilisa, ukuhlalisana kwabantu, ukuqashwa, kanye nemfundo kuthinteka kabi. Isifunda saseMpangeni KwaZulu-Natal asizange silondolozwe; nokho, nakuba, esifundeni esifanayo, izikole azizange zithinteka ngendlela efanayo. Lokhu kwaveza ukungalingani okwakukhona futhi okusekhona phakathi kwezikole zikahulumeni nezizimele.

Lolu cwaningo belufuna ukuhlola umthelela woKhuvethe ezikoleni zesifunda saseMpangeni, ukuhlola izici ezithinta ukufundisa nokufunda ezikoleni ezisezingeni eliphansi lezenhlalo nezomnotho kanye nezinga eliphezulu lezomnotho. Inhloso yocwaningo bekwukuthola izici ezithinta ukufundisa nokufunda ezikoleni, ukuhlola ukuthi lezi zici zidalulwe kanjani phakathi noKhuvethe, nokuthola amasu angasetshenziswa ukulungisa izinselele ezidalulwe wuKhuvethe.

Ucwaningo lwamukele indlela yocwaningo olusezingeni eliphezulu kanye nomklamo wocwaningo lwethiyori enesisekelo. Idatha yaqoqwa ngenhlokhono ehlelekile, eyaqhutshwa nothishanhloko abane (4), othisha abayisishiyagalombili (8) kanye nabafundi abayishumi nesithupha (16) basezikoleni zesifunda saseMpangeni. Abahlanganyeli bakhethwe ngenhloso. Idatha yocwaningo ihlaziye ngokwetimu. Okutholakele kuveze ukuthi izinto ezithinta ukufundisa nokufunda ubuholi, isabelomali, izindlela zokufundisa

nokufunda, izinsiza, ukuya kwabafundi nokubamba iqhaza, kanye nobungako bezifundo. Okutholakele kuphinde kwaveza ukuthi izinto ezithinta ukufundisa nokufunda ekukhuleni kwezemfundo, ukusebenza kwabafundi kanye nemiphumela, ukuphila kahle kothisha, ukuxhumana nothisha kanye nendlela yokufunda esetshenziswa ezikoleni. Lezi zici zidalulwe ngesikhathi soKhuvethe, lapho abafundi bebuyiselwa emakhaya ngenxa yokuntuleka kwamakilasi anele okuvumela ukuqhelelana emphakathini, futhi kamuva kwethulwa ukushintshana cofounder esikoleni.

Imininingwane yocwaningo iphinde yaveza ukuthi amasu angasetshenziswa ukuxazulula izinselelo ezidalulwe wuKhuvethe ahlanganisa ukuhlinzekwa kwezinsiza ezanele nezilinganayo yibo bonke ababambiqhaza abakhona phakathi, ukuhlinzekwa kokusekelwa okunjengokwesekwa kokuziphatha, kwengqondo, kanye nemizwa, kanye ukwenza lula amakilasi engeziwe kanye nokubonisana komuntu ngamunye. Ngokusekelwe kokutholakele, ucwaningo luncoma ukuthi izikole kumele zinikezwe izinsiza zokufundisa nokufunda nge-inthanethi, ezingasetshenziswa uma kwenzeka isimo esifanayo naleso seKhuvethe. Izikole kufanele zenze imodeli yokufundisa nokufunda nge-inthanethi ezothuthukisa ukuphila kahle kothisha futhi ithuthukise imiphumela yabafundi nokukhula kwezemfundo.

Amagama abalulekile: UKhuvethe, impumelelo yezemfundo, isimo senhlalakahle yezomnotho, izikole zikahulumeni, izikole ezizimele, EMPangeni, ukungalingani kwezemfundo, izimo zokufunda, izinsiza zesikole.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, people's lives globally have changed. Livelihoods, socialization, education, and employment have been negatively affected. In South Africa, many people lost their occupations since most companies had to shut down, negatively affecting most families' socioeconomic status. The sudden transition to online learning without preparation or planning created numerous challenges for teachers and learners. Schools had to shut down, and educators had to switch to online teaching. While learning continued without any impediments for learners in high socioeconomic status schools, learners from low socioeconomic schools faced difficulties with the new learning method as most pupils needed access to computers or internet in their households.

It was also challenging for educators in low socioeconomic status schools to use the online teaching method, unlike in well-established school where most pupils have computers and internet access at home, making it simpler to use the online learning method. Scarce resources have been an issue for most low-socioeconomic schools in the Empangeni district. The lack of better technology and equipment for online learning resulted in the low socioeconomic schools being affected mainly by COVID-19. Most low socioeconomic status schools in the Empangeni district also need more space to prevent overcrowding in the classrooms. During COVID-19, the government of South Africa could not provide more mobile classrooms in schools to resolve the issue of the overcrowding of learners. This research thus focused on the effects of COVID-19 on the education of learners from low socioeconomic status schools and those from high socioeconomic status schools.

COVID-19 impacted the low socioeconomic status schools and high socioeconomic status schools differently due to their socioeconomic standing. Socioeconomic standing measures individual or family social status, and significantly affects individual or family health, education, diet, and lifestyle (Wani, 2019). Higher rates of despair, anxiety, self-destruction, cigarette dependency, illicit drug use, and heavy alcohol consumption in the youth are

associated with low socioeconomic status. These differences in socioeconomic status are concerning since learners from disadvantaged households already achieve more diminutive than those from high socioeconomic status schools (Andrew, Cattan, Costa-Dias, Farquharson, Kraftman, Krutikova, Phimister & Sevilla, 2020). Well-established school learners achieve more during learning than pupils in low socioeconomic status schools because of the differences in social standing.

Socioeconomic status incorporates not merely financial gain but also monetary security and class. In South Africa, high socioeconomic status schools are already better equipped with technology (Swart, Pottas & Maree, 2021); they have adequate buildings in their schools which made it easier to adapt to the new enforcements in the schools during the pandemic. For example, the number of learners had to be limited to avert the spread of COVID-19. Most low socioeconomic status schools in South Africa lack adequate buildings and resources, which makes it challenging to keep the classrooms less populated, while high socioeconomic status schools have plenty of classes to keep the numbers of pupils in the classrooms limited and have better resources to continue facilitating learning (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). High socioeconomic status schools have fewer learners, while low socioeconomic status schools are commonly overcrowded. There is still limited research on the effect of COVID-19 on South African education as researchers are still researching on the virus.

1.2 Rationale of the study

This research explores the effect of COVID-19 on education in low socioeconomic schools and high socioeconomic status schools in the Empangeni district of KwaZulu Natal, and thus identifies new ways to develop advanced educational systems and potential channels to improve learning during a global pandemic such as COVID-19. During the pandemic, learners were not getting the education they were supposed to, especially those from the less advantaged schools as they could not participate in online learning due to a lack of resources. This research draws attention to how COVID-19 has exposed inequalities and gaps among the schools in the South. Siddiqui and Gorard (2017) state that pupils from high socioeconomic status schools get better results than pupils in low socioeconomic status

schools due to the differences in socioeconomic standing. In the Empangeni district, the difference in socioeconomic status has been the cause of the gap in school performance. Low socioeconomic status schools are the lowest performing schools than high socioeconomic status schools due to this.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted education in schools in the Empangeni district, particularly the academic achievement. Learner achievement has declined since the beginning of the pandemic because the schools had to shut down, and learning was disrupted for a long time. The 2020 matric pass rate in Empangeni was 74%, which shows a decline in learner performance in comparison to the 79.3% rate from 2019. This decline indicates that COVID-19 had an effect on learner results since learners stayed at home for a long time when they were supposed to be in school, learning. When learning resumed, both the teachers and learners did not have adequate time to cover the work they were supposed to finish by the end of the year. Pupils from low socioeconomic status schools already had poor academic achievements than pupils from high socioeconomic status schools in the Empangeni district. Since the beginning of the pandemic, education in low socioeconomic schools has been plagued by challenges as the schools could not accommodate all the learners in the schools at once due to the shortage of resources and classrooms. Contrary, high socioeconomic status schools had more buildings and better access to technology, hence adjusting to the new enforcements was much simple.

Socioeconomic status leads to an imbalance in resource allocation, which results in the scarcity of resources and poor performance in schools. Most low socioeconomic status schools in South Africa have low academic achievement because of the lack of resources, while the low socioeconomic status school system was not built or prepared to overcome such a pandemic (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). The government allocates funds for low socioeconomic status schools; however, the curators misuse the funds, which results in the learners not getting the required resources such as books, libraries, and proper classrooms. The researcher explored the effect of COVID-19 on both the low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools' academic achievement in the Empangeni district.

1.4 Research questions

What was the effect of COVID-19 on low socioeconomic status and high socioeconomic status schools in the Empangeni district in KwaZulu Natal?

The following secondary questions were answered:

1. Which factors affect teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic schools?
2. How do these factors affect the teaching and learning of learners in school?
3. How were these factors exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. Which strategies can be implemented to resolve the challenges exposed by COVID-19?

1.5 Aim and objectives of the study

This research aimed to explore the effect of COVID-19 on the Empangeni district schools' educational achievement and how they can improve their academic achievement during the global health pandemics. The study sought to establish the factors affecting teaching and learning in low socioeconomic status and high socioeconomic status schools and how these factors impact teaching and learning. Further, the study aimed to determine if equal resources can be available for low socioeconomic status schools, just as is in high socioeconomic status schools in the Empangeni district.

1.6 Literature review

Literature review is an overview of the scientific sources on a particular topic. It provides an overview of the current state of knowledge and allows the researcher to identify relevant theories, methods, and gaps in existing research (McCombes, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted both low and high socioeconomic status schools' learning achievement, although low socioeconomic status schools were the most affected because of

their already poor learning conditions. The pandemic impacted the socioeconomic standing of many families in South Africa and worldwide (Martin, Markhvida, Hallegatte & Walsh, 2020). Socioeconomic status (SES) could be a persistent, crucial construct for academics and experts in health, economics, education, and alternative social sciences. It embodies a brutal realism for uncountable people, with extensive costs on the standard of life. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the social standing of different low and high socioeconomic status schools and has also exposed the inequalities in the South African education system. A family's socioeconomic standing is the critical issue influencing educational action. However, the relationship between SES and educational activity could diverge across culturally diverse contexts (Liu, Peng & Luo, 2020).

According to the International Association of Universities (IAU), on 1 April 2020, UNESCO reported that schools and higher education establishments were shut down in 185 countries, affecting 1 542 412 000 pupils which constituted 89.4% of the total registered pupils. At the start of May, some countries experiencing declining cases and deaths started lifting confinement measures. However, on 7 May, schools and higher education institutions were still shut down in 177 nations, affecting 1 268 164 088 learners, which comprise 72.4% of the total enrolled learners. As of 1 April 2020, an additional 3.4 billion individuals representing 43% of the world's inhabitants were in lockdown in more than 80 nations and territories around the globe. The lockdown and social distancing procedures instantly had a detrimental impact on education. The successful social distancing and quarantine procedures adopted by China and strongly recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) encouraged other countries to take the same measures. South Africa also enforced the social distancing measures the country over. Social distancing meant small gatherings to limit the spread of the virus. These social distancing measures also had to be adopted and adhered to in schools, suggesting that principals must minimise the number of learners attending school at any given time.

The Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA) trusts that independent schools are [were] well-resourced to manage COVID-19 infrastructure (ENCA, 2020). Most high socioeconomic status schools had better classrooms, technology, laboratories, and equipment such as computers and projectors, making learning easier for teachers and

learners through the COVID-19 pandemic. In these times of COVID-19, most high socioeconomic status schools had easier access to computers and the internet, making it probable for the teachers to conduct lessons online so that learning can continue. However, academic achievement in low socioeconomic status schools was the most affected because of the lack of access to technology and the inaccessibility of learning materials in poor homes. The paucity of the groundwork for learning before the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic cases caused much damage, considering that the parents or guardians do not have the equipment to teach their children since most of them did not go to school, they were not familiar with schoolwork. The existing learning plans will not mitigate the learning losses for pupils with no computers or internet in their residential homes.

1.6.1 Learning conditions

Hammond and Harvey (2018) state that faculty conditions contribute significantly to the learning rates of learners. Most high socioeconomic status schools have big classrooms which are spacious, and they all the equipment needed to facilitate online learning, which enabled them to continue teaching and learning without any disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Having adequate classrooms and resources improves the learning experiences and performance in schools. High socioeconomic status schools also have libraries, computers, and chemistry labs, making learning much more comfortable because the learners can experiment the theory they study in class. In contrast, low socioeconomic status schools lack resources and do not have libraries or laboratories, and this makes it challenging to learn through experiments which some of the lessons require. Commonly, low socioeconomic status school classes are overcrowded, with more pupils in each classroom. During COVID-19, pupils had to take turns to attend school to minimise crowding in the spaces, while high socioeconomic status schools continued learning, although virtually. This is because low socioeconomic status schools do not have the suitable and required equipment, technology, and learning spaces to prevent social distancing violations. This lack of resources results in learning being derailed; hence the learners do not perform well in school.

Kraft, Marinell, and Yee (2016) state that learning surroundings play a substantial role in student success. Most educators have assumed this for years, and now they have evidence showing that schools can potentially boost student achievement by refining their learning surroundings. Chen, Kong, Gao, and Mo (2018) note that family features like socioeconomic standing are essential predictors of a student's performance in school. The family's social status influences how the learners perform at school, as low socioeconomic class has a negative impact on student achievement. Low socioeconomic status is connected to lower educational action and lower academic progress rates compared to higher socioeconomic standing communities.

The General Household Survey of 2018 indicates that only 22% of homes have a computer (StatsSA 2020: 56-63), and only 10% of the households have an internet connection in their homes. In contrast, over 90% of South African families report access to a cell phone, and only 60% report access to the internet using their cell phones (StatsSA 2020: 56). One cannot assume that children in a family had unlimited cell phone access to educational content during the lockdown. In low socioeconomic status areas, numerous children in the same home share a mobile phone because they do not own personal cell phones; and there is the high cost of data bundles, even though there are now learning sites available (Duncan-Williams, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, educators tried to facilitate learning through WhatsApp messenger. However, most pupils in low socioeconomic status schools did not have access to a cell phone to use WhatsApp. Further, learners who own cell phones do not have internet access or data. Even if the educators sent out the work to the pupils, most pupils could not access it, while only a few could. Unlike pupils from high socioeconomic status schools who have access to computers, tablets, and the internet in their households, low socioeconomic status school learners do not have access to such resources. The lack of access to the internet made it difficult for the teachers and learners in low socioeconomic status schools to continue teaching and learning, which causes low academic achievement.

1.6.2 Socioeconomic status in education

Nam and Terrie (2021) describe 'socioeconomic status' as the standing of a family or person on a social structure or judging a person by their position in society. In economics where the aim is habitually measured, socioeconomic status connects to proxies such as income, education, or occupation. Social inequality is generally accepted to increase the risk of children developing mental health problems. To better understand this, various studies on social inequality and mental health have focused on low socioeconomic status (SES) as the most crucial causal variable. Socioeconomic status is a concept that summarises an individual's social status in society. As shown in many studies, the socioeconomic position in terms of family economics and educational aspects, as an SES indicator, has a substantial impact on the health and welfare of children (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2018). Parents' maximum level of education and family income have a strong positive effect on school performance. This is attributed to differences in parental involvement, except for the academic achievement test scores of students whose mothers work part-time (Muller, 2018).

Socioeconomic status has a much more substantial influence on educational achievement in wealthy rather than poor schools. In most deprived schools, not even relatively well-off students perform well. In affluent schools where the learners' socioeconomic status is more strongly related to their performance, even learners from poor backgrounds nevertheless achieve relatively well (Moses, Van Der Berg & Rich, 2017). Most parents lost their occupations during and due to COVID-19 since most companies had to shut down as they lost their business. Parents could no longer afford to pay for their children's school bills and other essentials. The socioeconomic standing in most families was affected since there was no income during the pandemic. Due to this, some of the pupils had to move from high socioeconomic status to low socioeconomic status schools which has a negative effect on the pupils' performance at school.

Socioeconomic standing could incline people to specific thought patterns such as mind-wandering, which eventually contribute to the SES educational action breach (Gearin, Fine & Nelson, 2018). It is widely known that the families' socioeconomic standing greatly influences the learners' instructional actions. First, parents compete for quality educational opportunities for their children, and better educational opportunities lead to better academic performance. Second, their parenting behaviour and educational support can foster the

children's learning habits and affect school performance. Further, the socioeconomic status of the families more strongly influences the academic performance of urban students than rural students (Li & Qiu, 2018). Parents in higher socioeconomic positions can offer improved developmental surroundings for their children (Liu *et al.*, 2020). For example, parents in higher socioeconomic positions can provide more stimulating home environments, afford healthier childcare or preschool facilities, and access improved schools for their children, compared to parents in inferior socioeconomic statuses. Most parents whose children learn in low socioeconomic status schools do not have tertiary education, neither do they have high-paying jobs unlike parents whose children learn in high socioeconomic status schools. This makes it difficult to offer better developmental environments for the children in low socioeconomic status schools. To bridge this gap, the government should provide the low socioeconomic status schools with resources, bursaries, and career guidance.

Differences in school accomplishment are linked with students' upbringing characteristics (Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey & Woessmann, 2019). The most noticeable upbringing variables might diverge within education systems, and a considerable amount of student achievement variance because of family socioeconomic standing. Therefore, family socioeconomic standing is essential in education research, although there are challenges concerning the best measure of SES operationality. The families' socioeconomic position has huge implications for the wellbeing of the family, including the children. An individual or group's relative socioeconomic place describes their access to resources and the likelihood of being subjected to inevitable consequences or discrimination (Assari & Lankani, 2018). Well-established school learners have parents who can afford resources that are directly crucial to their wellbeing and are able to mobilise resources that decrease exposure to hazards (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2019).

Years of studies have revealed that quality teaching and learning are scarce in underprivileged neighbourhoods (Buheji, Costa-Cunha, Beka, Mavric, De Souza, da Costa-Silva, Hanafi & Yein, 2020). Students in poor communities are regularly exposed to stress-inducing experiences and hostile living environments that harm their physical, social, and emotional wellbeing. These learners were dealing with COVID-19, and they were also

coping with poverty in their homes, drugs in their neighbourhoods, and uninvolved parents. The acknowledgment of the role which the government plays in education, and the part of education as an engine for the development of communities, motivated a full extension of studies, often fostered by the state, on the factors that may perhaps determine the outcome of the learning experiences, in low and high socioeconomic status schools. There is still a significant breach between high socioeconomic status schools and low socioeconomic status schools. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) state that the government should provide low socioeconomic status schools with resources needed by the pupils to bridge the gap between these institutions. However, the support never makes it to the schools because of the government's misuse of funds directed to the schools. If low socioeconomic status schools were to receive equal resources and funding from the government, they would be at the same level as high socioeconomic status schools regarding education and opportunities.

Parental educational contribution in primary and secondary schools is linked to students' academic success. Once parents are invested in their children's education and contribute to their success, the children have better chances of performing well. Individuals from higher socioeconomic levels can produce high-yielding career aspirations (Benner, Boyle & Sadler, 2016). Pupils from high socioeconomic status schools are equipped for employment because they have access to resources such as career offices, guidance counsellors, better schools, high-level “social actors”, and family experience with higher education (Njogu, 2019). While this may be true, low-income families try to guide their children and provide them with resources to shape their future. However, this is difficult to achieve as they do not have familial experiences with higher education.

1.6.3 Inequalities in Education

Educational inequality is the unequal distribution of academic resources, including but not limited to school funding, qualified and experienced teachers, books, and technology for marginalised communities (Musisi & Kiggundu, 2018). Educational inequality is a vital subject in educational research owing to its involvement with academic qualifications and social positions in the community, thus reflecting inequality.

McKeever (2017) states that what is essential about educational inequality is its central role in determining other forms of social inequality at specific times. Much of the disparity observed in South Africa can be traced back to the racist policies that began in the colonial era and were fully realised under the apartheid laws. This legal system was very clear in implementing various educational opportunities based on the racial affiliation of the residents. No one can dispute the inequality that results from years of education. However, because it is an unequal country, it provides a crucial case for exploring the possibility that qualitative differences may still be significant, despite the large quantitative differences in achievement.

COVID-19 revealed inequalities in South Africa's education system that the citizens were both unaware and aware of (Wilson, 2020). Inequalities in low and high socioeconomic status schools come in many variations, including resources and the quality of education. These schools have different management systems and environments for education and learning. Low socioeconomic status schools rely entirely on the state for funding and administration, while high socioeconomic status schools rely on student payments and private charities, and rarely on the government for additional funding (Karlsson, McPherson & Pampallis, 2020). High socioeconomic status schools have better learning conditions than low socioeconomic status schools, and the differences in attitude can affect learner performance. These are related to the formal differences in educational administration and the tendency towards tighter informal relationships between the board and high socioeconomic status school instructors.

Underprivileged children bring to school many issues that wealthy children do not regularly have, and this disrupts their willingness to learn and their ability to benefit from what they need to learn. These issues include poor health, poor eating habits, increased family instability, frequent movements, unstable communities, lack of books, and limited educational resources at home and in their neighbourhoods (Jack, 2019). Others are most likely to have parents or guardians who have little formal education, speak little English, and are at risk of racial or ethnic discrimination. In this regard, policymakers should narrow the class gap by tackling these issues.

Boteman, Musterd, Pacchi and Ranci (2019) state that educational systems can promote social mobility, but the structure and institutional arrangements of educational systems are also important drivers of social inequality. How the education system provides different opportunities for children and how these differences are amplified along the length of individual education paths cause inequality in health, wealth, and welfare. The education system's responsibility for creating social inequality depends largely on the specific institutional and spatial arrangements at different levels of countries, cities, and regions. Differences and cultural subdivisions between groups have increased inequality in most countries, with other social and ethnic backgrounds and differentiated access to cultural and material commodities. School differences reflect existing social and spatial disparities and play an essential role in perpetuating and exacerbating them. How the processes of family differences and school differences are linked and mutually strengthened is the key to understanding how this happens. It is necessary to understand how various aspects of institutional and spatial contexts are interrelated, and thus work together to minimise these inequalities and understand how educational inequality exists.

Improved learning conditions can increase the reputation of high socioeconomic status schools over low socioeconomic status schools and attract a wide variety of students. Since high socioeconomic status schools are likely to charge parents tuition, low socioeconomic status schools are likely to be free since their social backgrounds differ, especially regarding their professional, academic, and financial characteristics. Therefore, more students with a more favourable background will attend high socioeconomic status schools, and the school population's social structure will improve. The more students in a good environment, the higher the enrolment in secondary school; and the better the conditions of education and learning, the more likely it is that the academic performance will improve.

Different behavioural patterns between teachers and students may develop due to possible disparities between students, parents, the social composition of the school population, school management, and educational and learning conditions between low and high socioeconomic status schools. These different behaviours encourage a common belief in what students should learn, the proper norms of instruction, and how students and teachers should relate to one another. These patterns that form the school's atmosphere can reduce the efficiency of education and learning in these schools. These patterns also affect teacher morale and the efficiency of education. Various learning conditions and parents' social positions influence students' learning in many ways. Other students get all the resources they need to afford a

better school, but other pupils do not have adequate funding. The South African government needs to provide equal opportunities for all students. During the difficult times of COVID-19, low socioeconomic status school students took turns to attend school, while high socioeconomic status school students attended school daily, resulting in educational inequalities.

Darmawan and Keeves (2006) suggest that the lack of fairness in the education system needs to be addressed to achieve a fair comparison between the schools. The researcher believes students will perform well in school if they have equal opportunities and resources. Researchers also believe that the government must bridge the gap between high socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status schools. Governments must provide low socioeconomic status schools with the resources to ensure equal learning opportunities between the two types of educational institutions. If low and high socioeconomic status schools had equal opportunities and resources, there would be no difference in academic performance. The government should allocate more funds and resources to bridge this gap between low and high socioeconomic status schools.

Berg and Gustafsson (2019) state that South Africa is one of the unequal states in the universe. The inequalities were a product of the apartheid era. However, these inequalities still exist even today, and not only in education, but in almost every aspect, including employment. Standard measures of inequality related to learning outcomes show that inequality in South Africa is as high as in other developing countries. However, exceptionally, inequality in South Africa is due to the past laws which the government was prescribed to. During COVID-19, the country witnessed the inequalities which were created by the apartheid government.

Excellent quality students need specific resources to develop, and highly motivated parents hunt for the top options available. Schools have severely restricted access due to paying tuition fees at most high socioeconomic status schools. Students enrolled in high socioeconomic status schools are self-selected for all these reasons, and students in both low and high socioeconomic status schools tend to be diverse. Most private students come from privileged homes with educated parents who invest more in education. In contrast, most low socioeconomic status school students come from unprivileged families. During COVID-19,

these low socioeconomic status schools worked in an attempt to accommodate all learners in the school. However, they could not conduct online teaching because students did not have access to the internet and computers. Most high socioeconomic status schools could accommodate their learners in online learning since they have adequate classrooms and resources. Even if they could not accommodate all learners simultaneously, they conducted online teaching because their students had internet access and computers.

To bridge the gap, there is a need to provide low socioeconomic status schools with the same resources as high socioeconomic status schools, hence it can be said that the government afforded equal opportunities to both low and high socioeconomic status schools. The parents' low income is also another crucial obstacle to academic accomplishment and development on the students' part. If the parents cannot afford to buy the learner the resources needed for learning, the learner will perform poorly. A learner's academic accomplishment can be affected significantly by the socioeconomic issues of parents, the family, and networks (Boonk, 2018). Boonk (2018) believes that the parents' income plays a vital role in learner achievement because if they cannot afford to buy the resources needed for school, the children will not perform well. The lack of resources is, therefore, the main problem in low socioeconomic status schools. COVID-19 has made the differences in public and private education more visible. Therefore, the lack of resources is the most common inequality in low and high socioeconomic status schools which is largely a result of the parents' inability to afford due to their low income.

1.7 Research methodology and design

This section discusses the research methodology and design adopted for this study.

1.7.1 Research approach

Chetty (2016) defines a research approach as a strategy and method that comprises vast assumptions, thorough data collection procedures, analysis, and interpretation. A research approach has two classes, namely, the process of data gathering, and the approach of data analysis or reasoning. This study adopted the qualitative research approach to analyse the

study results. Qualitative research is articulated in words, and it comprehends concepts, opinions, and experiences. It emphasises gathering data on naturally occurring phenomena. The researcher used the grounded theory research design to better explain the phenomenon under study and suggest recommendations. Grounded theory is a study that uses data to explain a phenomenon. The researcher collected primary data through interviews in the Empangeni district schools.

1.7.2 Population and sampling

The study population were the principals, teachers, and learners in the Empangeni district schools who had first-hand experience with the effect of COVID-19 on their schools' achievement. The principals and teachers are responsible for the triumph of learners, while the learners are the ones who were learning under the COVID-19-regulated conditions. The researcher selected two (2) high socioeconomic status schools, one primary school and one high school; and two low socioeconomic status schools, one primary school and one high school. The schools are conveniently located in the Empangeni district where the researcher also resides. The participants comprised an equal number of males and females to avoid bias who were selected using the comprehensive sampling method which involves all participant groups. The researcher thus developed open-ended questions on the effect of COVID-19 on education. Further, the researcher sought permission to conduct the study from the Department of Education district offices. Consequently, the researcher conducted the interviews at the schools.

1.7.3 Instrumentation and data collection

The researcher used standardised one-on-one interviews with each participant to collect data. The interviews were audio-recorded using a voice recorder. The researcher developed open-ended questions to allow the participants to answer based on their experience, knowledge, feelings, and understanding. The participants questions were asked in English to accommodate all the participants.

1.7.4 Data analysis and interpretation

Data from the interviews was transcribed by the researcher and analysed using the thematic analysis method. The researcher categorised the data and generated themes and codes. Further, the researcher compared the codes to ensure that there were no duplications.

1.7.5 Reliability and validity

The researcher adopted a prolonged and persistent fieldwork strategy to improve the validity of the research design. This strategy enabled the analysis and confirmation of data and ensured that the discoveries from the study and participants' realities match. To ensure credibility, the researcher resent the interview questions to participants after a period of a month to see if they would get the same results as the first time.

1.7.6 Ethical considerations

De Vos *et al.* (2005:57) define ethics as a set of moral principles proposed by an individual or a group, are subsequently widely acknowledged, and offer guidelines and behavioural expectations on experimental subjects and the participants. The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee and obtained permission to conduct the study from the Department of Education district offices in Empangeni. The researcher consequently sought consent from the school principals to interview the participants using the consent forms. The researcher allowed the participants to ask questions and voice out any concerns regarding the interviews. The participants were informed that participation is voluntary, and that withdrawing from the study at any time would not have any consequences. Furthermore, the researcher did not record the personal details of the interviews for the purposes of anonymity and privacy.

1.8 Delimitations and limitations of the study

The study was delimited to only four (4) schools in the Empangeni district, and the researcher did not include other schools in Empangeni. The study was limited by interviews as a data collection method. This is premised on the fact that an interviewer's presence may overstimulate the participant(s) to the extent that they might provide imaginary information to make it enjoyable. To this end, reliability and validity of the collected data may be compromised. However, to prevent the provision of imaginary information, the researcher used open-ended questions that allowed the participants to provide their own thoughts and opinions.

1.9 Definition of key theoretical concepts

This section provides the definitions to the following various key concepts and terms used in this study:

COVID-19 pandemic – A contagious disease caused by the newly discovered Coronavirus.

Socioeconomic standing – An economic and sociological joint total measure of an individual's or family's economic and social standing concerning others.

Social class – A set of conceptions in the social sciences and political theory focused on social stratification models. The researcher groups participants in categories such as upper, middle, and lower classes.

Education systems – Any system that has the effect of making someone more educated.

Curriculum – An educational unit and academic content taught in school. It combines classroom practice, learning experience, and student grade evaluation.

Ethics – A set of moral principles recommended by individuals or groups which are enthusiastically accepted and provide behavioural rules and expectations for subjects and respondents.

Effectiveness – The degree to which something is successful in producing the expected result. When something is considered sufficient, it has an envisioned or projected outcome or creates a deep, vivid impression.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The primary intent of this chapter is to review extant literature on the effect of COVID-19 on education in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools. The chapter discusses the inequalities which were exposed during the pandemic and those that existed before the pandemic, including the learning conditions in high socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status schools. The literature review identifies strategies to enhance the educational system in South Africa and bridge the gap between private and low socioeconomic status schools.

Literature review comprehensively reviews the literature on topic, theories, and methods, and summarises previous research to strengthen the existing knowledge base. It entails discovering relevant publications such as books, critically analysing them, and explaining the findings. A literature review overviews scientific sources on a particular topic (Paul & Criado, 2020). It also indicates the current state of knowledge and allows the researcher to identify relevant theories, methods, and gaps in existing studies.

2.2 Overview

UNESCO (2020) reported that at the end of April 2020, 186 countries had shut down educational institutions worldwide. China and South Korea had already stopped learning in January as they were the first countries of the virus break out, and the number of the cases was growing. Other countries, including South Africa, closed learning institutions and business organisations as the virus spread to the countries. School closures seemed to be the best way to contain the virus as it was spread, among other things, by large crowds. With schools being part the many places where people gather, they were among the places that had to close until the government figured out a way for them to continue functioning temporarily. The anticipated duration of school closures was unknown, and it depended on the severity of the pandemic in the country and sub-regions.

School closures extended the learning gap between learners from low-income and high-income households. The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruption in the educational systems worldwide, affecting the lives of more than 1.5 billion students and their families (Walters, 2020). Most countries, for example, America, China, and India, tried to curb the spread of the virus by discontinuing in-person contact in most physical places, but it was already late as the virus had rapidly spread in high numbers.

The main response by the government to curb the spread of the virus was putting in place social distancing measures that limited the ability of many to work, as well as the closure of businesses, and restricting meetings to specific criteria, including education and learning. The temporary ban of face-to-face education in schools and higher institutions limited learning opportunities for students, leading to early dropouts, drug use, early pregnancies. Most schools introduced alternative ways to continue learning during the time when face-to-face lessons were not possible, but these methods had a varying degree of effectiveness since students come from varying social backgrounds. Nambiar (2020) in their study found out that most of these methods of learning were not compatible with all learners. The study revealed that teachers preferred face-to-face classroom settings because they could provide immediate feedback to teachers and students on the quality of the lessons, delivery, and experience. Nambiar (2020) further mentioned that in a classroom setup, the teacher can observe the student's body language and the non-verbal cues that help the teacher to immediately adjust in their teaching approach to best suit the needs of the students.

Additional questioning and individualised attention in the classroom environment to gain a more detailed idea on the student's clarity with concepts being taught is a major advantage of face-to-face teaching compared to online methods such as electronic device usage or internet usage which were, however, not accessible to some learners and students. Means and Neisler (2021) argue that more than one in six students experienced frequent internet connectivity issues and/or hardware and software problems severe enough to interfere with their ability to continue learning their courses. The South African government addressed the challenges of the overnight transition to online learning by increasing support for teachers and coordinating assessment and testing guidelines (Monareng, Ramraj & Mashau, 2020). The immediate policy response aimed to ensure ongoing curriculum-based education

through various distance learning modalities, including online, television/radio, paper-based takeaway, or other approaches. Specific actions were taken to ensure that the groups at risk of being excluded from distance learning platforms were included and the provision of support for student wellbeing. However, these actions still excluded some learners because of the lack of resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed the education systems' capabilities and outcomes, some of which were already stressed in many ways. The South African public education system is neither built nor prepared to deal with the pandemics such as COVID-19. The public education system lacked the structure to maintain effective education and learning during school closures and offer the safety net support which many children receive at school. Conversely, the education system in high socioeconomic status schools had and continue to have a better structure to maintain effective learning during school closures. Researchers and international organisations studied the effects of school closures on student learning and found a measurable loss in acquiring basic skills, particularly for the most disadvantaged children (Quinn, Cooc, McIntyre & Gomez, 2016; Cattaneo, Oggenfuss & Wolter, 2017). The pandemic likely impacted the students' competencies and increased education inequalities.

2.3 Inequalities in education

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic did not affect people the same way (Jackson, Bradbury-Jones, Baptiste, Gelling, Karen Morin, Neville & Smith, 2020). Before the pandemic, there was inequality in different aspects such as gender, race, age, and geography within the population and other groups (Blundell, Costa-Dias, Joyce & Xu, 2020). This study discusses the inequalities which were exposed by COVID-19 which include education, training, wages, employment, health, gender, ethnicity, and intergenerational inequalities globally and, particularly, in South Africa.

Disadvantaged learners are more likely to be severely affected than learners with an established background because of the lack of resources. These effects can be due to financial resources, household resources, the schools they attend, school resources, and the

communities they live in. Before the pandemic, there were significant inequalities in the economic outcomes of the rich and the poor, different social groups, and different regions of South Africa. These existing inequality features are crucial to understanding the long-term implications of COVID-19. The inequalities in high socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status schools existed worldwide, even in the years before. These inequalities include financial, household, and school resource inequalities. There has always been a distinction between low and high socioeconomic status schools, their operations, curriculum, and even buildings.

Educational inequality is the unequal distribution of academic resources, including but not limited to school funding, qualified and experienced teachers, books, and technology for marginalised communities (Musisi & Kiggundu, 2018). McKeever (2017) notes that what is essential about educational inequality is its central role in determining other forms of social inequality at specific times. Much of the disparity observed in South Africa can be traced back to the racist policies that began in the colonial era and were fully realised under apartheid laws. This legal system was very clear in implementing various educational opportunities based on the racial affiliation of the residents. The inequality that results from the years of education cannot be disputed. However, since South Africa is an unequal country, it provides a crucial case for exploring the possibility that qualitative differences may still be significant, despite the large quantitative differences in achievement.

COVID-19 revealed the inequalities in South Africa's education system that we were unaware of and those we knew existed (Wilson, 2020). Low and high socioeconomic status schools have certain variations, including resources and the quality of education. Further, these schools have different management systems and environments for education and learning, one of the numerous reasons they are so different. Low socioeconomic status schools rely entirely on the state for funding and administration, while high socioeconomic status schools rely on student payments and private charities, and rarely on the government for additional funding (Karlsson et al., 2020). High socioeconomic status schools have better conditions than low socioeconomic status schools, but the differences in attitude can affect performance. These differences are related to the formal differences in educational

administration and the tendency towards tighter informal relationships between the board and high socioeconomic status school instructors.

Underprivileged children bring to school various issues that wealthy children commonly do not have, which disrupt their willingness to learn and their ability to benefit from what they need to learn. These issues include poor health, poor eating habits, increased family instability, frequent movements, unstable communities, lack of books, and limited educational resources at home and in their neighbourhoods (Jack, 2019). Other learners are most likely to have parents or guardians who have little formal education, speak little English, and are at risk of racial or ethnic discrimination.

Boteman *et al.* (2019) state that educational systems can promote social mobility, but the structure and institutional arrangements of educational systems are also important drivers of social inequality. How the education system provides different opportunities for children and how these differences are amplified along the length of individual education paths cause inequalities in health, wealth, and welfare. The education system's responsibility for creating social equality depends strongly on the specific institutional and spatial arrangements at different levels of countries, cities, and regions. Differences and cultural subdivisions between groups such as social and ethnic backgrounds and differentiated access to cultural and material commodities have increased inequalities in most countries. School differences reflect existing social and spatial disparities and play an essential role in perpetuating and exacerbating them. The key to understanding how this happens is understanding how the processes of family differences and school differences are linked and mutually strengthened. It is necessary to understand how various aspects of institutional and spatial contexts are interrelated and work together to minimise these inequalities, and to understand how educational inequalities exist.

Improved learning conditions can improve the reputation of high socioeconomic status schools over low socioeconomic status schools and attract a wide variety of students. Since high socioeconomic status schools are likely to charge the parents tuition, low socioeconomic status schools are likely to be free since their social backgrounds differ, especially concerning their professional, academic, and financial characteristics. Therefore, more students with a more favourable background will attend high socioeconomic status

schools, and the school population's social structure will improve. The more students in a good environment, the higher the enrolment in secondary school; and the better the conditions of education and learning, the more likely it is that academic performance will improve. Learning conditions at home are also very important, especially since the children were learning from home. It is easier to get distracted at home because there are a lot of things happening inside the home and outside. Aguilera-Hermida (2020) in their study found out that many learners reported that their biggest challenge of learning at home was concentration or lack of concentration.

Different behaviour patterns between teachers and students may develop due to possible disparities between students, parents, the social composition of the school population, school management, and educational and learning conditions between low and high socioeconomic status schools. These different behaviours encourage a common belief in what students should learn, the proper norms of instruction, and how the students and teachers should relate to one another. These patterns that form the school's atmosphere can reduce the efficiency of education and learning in these schools. These patterns also affect teacher morale and can affect the efficiency of education. Various learning conditions and parents' social positions influence student learning in many ways. Some students get all the resources they need to afford a better school, while other students do not have adequate funds to pay for school, hence they do not get the resources they need. The government needs to provide equal opportunities for all students. During the difficult times of COVID-19, low socioeconomic status school students took turns attending school, while high socioeconomic status school students attended school daily, resulting in inequalities in education.

Darmawan and Keeves (2006) suggest that the lack of fairness needs to be corrected to achieve a fair comparison between schools. The researcher believes that the students will work well if they have equal options and resources. Researchers also believe that the government should close the gap between high and low socioeconomic status schools by providing low socioeconomic status schools with the resources and funding to ensure equal learning opportunities between the two kinds of institutions, thereby bridging the gap between the schools.

Berg and Gustafsson (2019) state that South Africa is one of the unequal states in the universe. The inequalities were a product of the apartheid era, but they still exist even today. The standard measures of inequalities related to learning outcomes show that inequality in South Africa is as high as in other developing countries. However, exceptionally, inequality in South Africa is due to the past laws which the government was subscribed to. These inequalities are visible across the country, and not only in schools, but also in employment and other sectors. During COVID-19, the country witnessed these inequalities which were a product of the apartheid government.

Excellent quality students need specific resources to develop, while highly motivated parents hunt for the top options available. Schools have severely restricted access due to the system of paying tuition fees at most high socioeconomic status schools. Students enrolled in high socioeconomic status schools are thus self-selected for all these reasons, while students in low and high socioeconomic status schools tend to be diverse. This is because most high socioeconomic status school students come from privileged homes with more educated parents who invest more in education. In contrast, most low socioeconomic status school students come from underprivileged families suffering from poverty where they also did not have control over their background. During COVID-19, these low socioeconomic status schools are suffering from a lack of resources and were working towards accommodating all learners in the schools simultaneously. The learners took turns to attend school since their classes would become overcrowded. They cannot even conduct online courses because students do not have the proper internet and computers. Most high socioeconomic status schools can accommodate all their children since they have plenty of rooms and more resources. Even if they cannot accommodate all of them simultaneously, they conduct online classes because their students have internet access and computers. To bridge the gap, it is essential to provide low socioeconomic status schools with the same resources as high socioeconomic status schools and to uniformise the curriculum to be used in all schools. With this said, the government would have afforded both low socioeconomic status and high socioeconomic status school learners' equal opportunities.

A learner's academic accomplishment can be anticipated significantly by socioeconomic issues in parents, family, and networks (Boonk, 2018). The author conducted research on

socioeconomic issues influencing students' educational achievement in Nigeria. The researcher believes that the parents' income plays a vital role in the learner academic achievement because if they cannot afford to buy the resources needed for learning, their children will not perform well. A lack of resources is thus the main problem in low socioeconomic status schools. Most parents take their children to high socioeconomic status schools where they will have access to all the resources which they need to perform well. COVID-19 has made the differences in public and private education more visible. Low socioeconomic status schools lack resources and infrastructure, which made it even harder to continue learning during the pandemic. Therefore, it can be said that the lack of resources is the most dominant inequality between low and high socioeconomic status schools.

2.3.1 Financial inequalities

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a long-term and challenging impact on South Africa's economy since the country's lockdown which began in March 2020. The pandemic has adversely affected virtually everyone, although such adverse effects are not uniform, and certain parts of the society were more likely to be affected than others, assuming that already vulnerable individuals such as the unemployed, precariously employed, and those from poor homes are more prone to bear the brunt of a pandemic than relatively wealthy individuals. The impacts of COVID-19 on employment have been felt disproportionately by several vulnerable groups, including women. COVID-19 has found fault lines in both the developed and developing countries, from the failure of public health systems to racial inequality. The pandemic has exposed unfair structures that fail the most vulnerable and marginalized groups (Perry, Aronson & Pescosolido, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven 88 to 115 million people into poverty in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). South Africa was among the worst affected countries with its high poverty rate. The World Bank classifies South Africa as the greatest unequal country globally. Inequality caused by the legacy of apartheid and colonialism has driven most of the population into poverty and landlessness. The 2020 Oxfam Report warned that "inequality is out of control in South Africa," as the income of 461 black women in the bottom 10% of the workforce is not for the average worker. It is not unreasonable to presume that more than

60% of black South Africans living below the poverty line are likely to live in poor areas. Their children are likely to attend schools that are not fully functioning, and which lack electricity, running water, and functioning cleaning equipment (Spaull, 2013). This phenomenon is still widespread in the rural schools of South Africa (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Many poor children rely on meals offered through school lunch programmes which are managed by local education authorities, although recent studies suggest that food safety awareness and attitudes are of particular concern (Sibanyoni & Tabit, 2017).

Spending on education has stagnated in most countries, including South Africa, as the government seeks to contain the budget deficit caused by COVID-19. Another shock to education funding comes from family spending. Low and middle-income parents struggle to maintain the essential resources which they spend on their children's education. This has a spillover effect as the parents cannot pay their children's tuition fees, further affecting the school budget. The COVID-19 pandemic drove millions of children into extreme poverty (Du Plessis, 2020).

Disadvantaged learners have less frequent access to digital resources and the internet due to financial constraints at home. Most of them do not have mobile phones or home computers because their parents cannot afford to buy them, let alone own them. Learners in high socioeconomic status schools are likely to access all digital resources, including the internet, with easy access to information and lessons (Di Pietro, Biagi, Costa, Karpiński & Mazza, 2020). Well-established school parents are likely to work for reputable companies and make a fair income. Others own businesses that help them efficiently and effectively provide their children with the necessary resources. Underprivileged school parents have low income or do not work, barely make ends meet, and have difficulty caring for their children. Economic capital determines how parents can financially support their children's school activities. If parents do not have funds, their children also do not have the funds either since their parents are the bearers of their financial support.

With soaring unemployment, national school district closures, and stay-at-home orders, the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly changed the daily lives of children and families worldwide. Most parents lost their jobs, and it was difficult to find new employment since most companies were closed. These parents could no longer afford to support their families

financially; others had to depend on a single person's income which had to afford to care for the children's school needs. In particular, the turmoil and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic posed and still pose a significant risk of increased domestic violence, including child abuse (Lawson, Piel & Simon, 2020). Some parents were considered essential workers, while others were asked by their employers to work from home, hence they became redundant and frustrated. For parents who continued to work, the increased responsibility for household needs forced them to do both household chores and paid work simultaneously which blurred the line between work and family life (Andrew *et al.*, 2020). Many people who worked from home did not have an official telecommuting arrangement, and instead took their work home (Guyo & Sawhill, 2020).

Poverty can affect the poor and wealthy families differently and it continues to impact school preparation significantly. Higher levels of depression and more disciplinary parenting styles may be due to financial stress, and models controlling these factors underestimate the full effect of poverty on school preparation (Schuler, Bauer, Lumeng, Rosenblum, Clark & Miller, 2020). Children from lower-income households had much less overall learning time during the lockdown which is bound to have severe effects in the long-term unless there is a very significant investment in remedial education and relaxation of the usual standards that enable children to transition between different stages of education.

2.3.2 Household resources inequalities

Stats SA (2019) defines a household as a group of people who live together, eat together, share resources, or one person living alone, at least four nights a week. The definition is much more limited than the term 'family'. Household members are usually involved in forming a household, but relatives are not a prerequisite. Learners rely on their parents or family's financial wellbeing for support. If their family cannot afford economic, social, or physical support, they cannot perform well in school. Many people lost their jobs when the COVID-19 pandemic began (Rew, Yeargain, Peretz & Croce, 2021), and they could no longer afford to provide their children with the needed resources at home. Low socioeconomic status families were affected the most since they were the ones who lost more jobs (Terrier, Chen & Sutter, 2021). At least for high-income-earning parents, it was not difficult for them since most of them owned businesses which were operational.

A quality home learning environment is widely documented as essential for children to acquire basic skills (Dowd, Friedlander & Jonason *et al.*, 2017). Recent evidence shows the importance of parental involvement in children's learning and the significant differences in home learning environments inside and outside the country (Brossard, Kardoso & Kamei *et al.*, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). With the closure of schools due to COVID-19, home learning became essential, and the role of parents and caretakers in supporting children's education had to change. Parents also had to try by all means possible to provide the learning resources for their children to use at home. Most schools had to migrate to virtual learning methods which meant that the parents were supposed to provide electronic and other resources. Kohnke and Moorhouse (2021) state that although there has been an increase globally in both blended and online methods of learning due to their apparent benefits, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the rapid adoption of online teaching methods, although these transitions presented challenges for both the teachers and learners who had to adapt to online learning. In addition to learning, vulnerable families also had to take additional responsibility for the wellbeing of their children, including childcare services such as meals previously provided by and in schools (Gromada, 2020).

When schools were re-opened, some learners were not prioritised in their return to school. These learners included elementary school children. A study by Branden *et al.* (2021) compared the mental wellbeing of elementary school students to other grades and found out that learners who were not prioritised in returning to school had behavioural and emotional difficulties which were 40% higher than the standard deviation of those who were prioritised to return to school. For some learners who did not return to school, alternatives were child labour, child marriage, and teenage pregnancies (Stevens, Rockey, Rockowitz, Kanja, Colloff & Flowe, 2021) which could have been avoided if the children were in school. The children's being at home also resulted in parents quitting their jobs, especially in countries where family vacation restrictions are absent or limited. This was despite the evidence that schools were not the leading cause of COVID-19 infections in the community. Closing the schools helped reduce COVID-19 infections (Alfano, 2022), as much as it led to a loss in hours which educators could have spent teaching the children in schools. Another study by Alves, Lopes and Precioso (2021) found out that teachers were satisfied with the education

system before the pandemic, but the pandemic reduced the perception of ‘wellbeing’ in the face of the profession, creating some concern among teachers about their professional future.

Erfurth and Ridge (2020) state that the online platform is an essential first step, but the home learning environment is crucial for the students' learning ability. Students need a quiet place to study as well as resources such as computers and internet access. Unfortunately, these resources are unlikely to be available to low-income households. Social isolation, viral concerns, and family financial concerns create unknown physical and mental health risks. Bhaumik and Priyadarshini (2020) state that schools and colleges ensured that learners continued to engage in learning and did not suffer academic losses. However, that was not the case in low socioeconomic status schools. Online education is still in its infancy in the low socioeconomic status school system, with face-to-face classroom instruction being the standard method for teaching and learning. The lack of better technology and equipment for online learning means that low socioeconomic status schools are the greatly affected by COVID-19. Low socioeconomic status school learners found it difficult to use online learning programmes because they did not have the resources to use them (Dube, 2020). Unlike high socioeconomic status school students, most learners have computers and internet access. Resource depletion is also a problem for most low socioeconomic schools in the Empangeni district. Some students had access to distance learning while schools were closed, but many struggled due to a lack of support.

Technology, connectivity, and access to electricity enable online distance learning disproportionately for those who lack the resources in rural and low-income families to learn online. These resources should be accessible to everyone; hence the government should provide these tools and equipment to all the learners who need them. While 53% of the households worldwide are connected to the internet, the percentage of students who do not have internet access at home varies from less than 15% in Western Europe and North America, to 80% in sub-Saharan Africa. These students, mainly from low-income households or rural households, are virtually excluded from online distance learning during school closures (Giannini, 2020; International Telecommunication Union, 2020). Most low socioeconomic-status schools in South Africa lack technology and electricity. Due to the lack of these resources, many learners were left behind in education during the lockdown.

Most low-socioeconomic schools around Empangeni could not use online distance learning methods because most students did not have the necessary resources. Students continued to study online in high socioeconomic status schools, but students with low socioeconomic status could not study or learn from home.

Even though the South African Schools Act states that all learners should be provided with the same quality of learning opportunities (Karlsson, 2020), this statement is far from true. Individuals have always been unequal regarding their socioeconomic status – the inequality in socioeconomic standing results in people not affording the same standard of living (Settersten, Bernadi, Harkonen, *et al.*, 2020). When parents cannot afford most of the things which they need, it also affects how they can afford the resources needed by the learners in school. Due to low private liquid resources and relatively high levels of unsecured debt, many families rely on the government to protect them from unexpected events (Blundell *et al.*, 2020). The South African government did not, however, provide adequate financial assistance to people who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they did not offer any support for their children's school resources. This support could have come in the form of money or resources which most people needed at the time.

Although higher compared to most developed countries, South Africa's household income inequality has been widespread and stable over most income distributions. From the 1990s to the early 2000s, the relatively low wage growth of poor households was supported by the Labor government's increased employment and tax credits (Belfield, Blundell, Cribb, Hood & Joyce, 2017). However, income inequality has continued to grow at the peak of income distribution since the 1990s (Burkhauser, Héroult, Jenkins & Wilkins, 2018) primarily due to wage growth in the financial sector (Bell & Van Reenen, 2014). Children benefit from the involvement of parents and families in learning and development. Wong, Ho, Wong, *et al.* (2018) suggest a link between family involvement in preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school children. The results showed that parental participation in home education was positively linked to the children's language skills and psychosocial wellbeing, and that the association was linked to the children's school involvement.

Most schools in South Africa came up with the ideas for online learning and other learning methods such as sending schoolwork through WhatsApp messages (Nel & Marais, 2020). Even though these methods were helpful to most learners, they were not suitable for every student since their backgrounds greatly differ. Children in low-income households live in situations that make home-schooling difficult. Online learning would work well for the high socioeconomic status schools since they already had the resources such as computers and tablets, which they were already using before the pandemic and lockdown. Low socioeconomic status schools faced many problems since they did not have access to such resources. Even if the educators were to send the lessons on WhatsApp, most students would still need access to them.

The General Household Survey 2018 indicates that only 22% of households have a computer (Stats SA, 2020: 57-63), and only 10% of households have an internet connection at home. In contrast, more than 90% of South African families have access to mobile phones (Stats SA, 2020: 56), and only 60% say they access the internet through mobile phones. It was unlikely that family children would have unlimited mobile access to educational content during the lockdown. Currently, there are several online learning sites; but many children in the same household need to share high data costs and mobile phones (Duncan-Williams, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, educators attempted to facilitate learning through WhatsApp Messenger, but most low socioeconomic status school students did not even have mobile phones. In addition, learners with mobile phones did not have internet access, connection, or data bundles. Even if the teacher e-mailed the schoolwork to the students, most students could not access it. The lack of access to the internet has made it difficult for low socioeconomic status school teachers and learners to continue teaching and learning during the pandemic which can lead to poor grades in low socioeconomic status schools.

Poverty is one of several risk factors that low socioeconomic status schools face. Poverty causes the gaps that exist between high socioeconomic status school and low socioeconomic status schools. Parents living in poverty are often poorly educated, are more likely to experience depression and health problems, and have poor parenting skills in certain aspects. Low socioeconomic school parents tend not to afford their children's resources to study or

do schoolwork at home. Most of these parents are not working; if they are, their jobs pay minimum wages, and all they can afford are household necessities such as food and clothes.

There are several ways which family income can directly impact a child's development. From an economic point of view, low-income families have less access to the resources which they need for healthy growth such as nutritious diets, affluent home environments, quality care facilities, and world-class health resources (Steyn, de Villiers, Gwebushe, *et al.*, 2015). Children from poor backgrounds also suffer from living in places with high crime, air pollution, and noise pollution (Kim, Lee, Jung, Jaime & Cubbin, 2019). From a psychological sense of view, the trauma of living in poverty is one of the other forms of psychological stress that can profoundly affect parents and their interaction with their children and can adversely result in depression and anxiety. During the pandemic, most parents experienced depression and anxiety because some had lost their jobs and family member(s) and had to provide for the household needs. When this happens simultaneously, it can cause stress and depression for the parents who thus find it challenging to provide their children with the resources they need at school as they cannot afford the school supplies.

2.3.3 School resources inequalities

Over the years, the South African education system has failed to balance the resources between state and high socioeconomic status schools. Since way back, there have been many inequalities between these institutions. The South African government promoted online learning as the only alternative in the context of COVID-19. In many regions, this model lacks the resources to connect to the internet, learning management systems, and low-tech software. The learners from low socioeconomic status schools were excluded from education and learning. Low socioeconomic status school learners also played an essential role in education and the fight against COVID-19, and they were not supposed to be left behind in learning just like high socioeconomic status school learners (Dube, 2020). There is an insufficient educational infrastructure, and the educational facilities available at various institutions are generally inadequate. The school infrastructure is poor, the equipment is old, vehicles are unavailable, classrooms are overcrowded, the staff is inadequate, the semesters are unstable, and there is low staff morale.

When COVID-19 worsened, all learning in schools had to be stopped, and most schools began to offer virtual education (Hamilton & Finley, 2020; Lake & Dusseault, 2020), but there was a growing concern about the impact of the unprecedented change (Malkus, 2020). Low-income students are concerned that the transition to online learning will be challenging since they have less access to online resources to make up for lost face-to-face instruction (Horowitz, 2020). As states and districts consider the best ways to educate post-pandemic students, it is crucial to understand the impact of pandemic-related school closures and students' access to online learning resources, especially for low-income students. In South Africa, virtual education is not suitable for most low-income school students because the majority of them do not have computers and the internet where they can access virtual classes. Virtual classes work better in high socioeconomic status schools where all the learners have access to computers and the internet at home (Dube, 2020).

The state of the existing infrastructure of public education institutions is impoverished (Zar, 2020). Most low socioeconomic status schools do not have vast classrooms with enough space and resources to facilitate learning. They do not have libraries, computers, laboratories, and enough resources which makes learning impossible, and which could have made it easier for the COVID-19 virus to spread rapidly. The government is only making little effort to improve this situation of overcrowding classrooms by providing mobile classrooms in other schools. These mobile classrooms are not adequate, and they were not provided to all the schools with crowding issues (Mathebula & Runhare, 2021). Parents are trying to find institutions that can provide quality education for their children at all costs, hence they can afford take their children to high socioeconomic status schools where their children will have enough classroom space and get attention from their educators. People generally feel that education determines the success and failure of their lives. The chances of an individual's life also depend on the quality of the education received, as parents dream of providing quality education for their children (Langenkamp, 2019).

Libraries or media resources centre provide students with the materials and equipment that facilitate and encourage learning. School library facilities are the foundation of the educational system. They are an integral part of the efforts to achieve effective teaching and learning outcomes. Some high socioeconomic status schools in South Africa are most likely

to have libraries on their premises which often have more and significant collections that meet the needs of the students. High socioeconomic status schools have computer rooms with free Wi-Fi and internet access. Learners have access to all the materials they require for their schoolwork and all the information they need for research purposes. High socioeconomic status schools also have laboratory resources where the learners experiment with science projects. Regrettably, not all these resources are accessible in low socioeconomic status schools.

Low socioeconomic status school learners do not have libraries and laboratories. Going to public libraries usually costs money that they do not have. Learners from low socioeconomic status schools must use the public library when they need information and internet cafes when they need the internet for work or research. All these resources should be available to any learner who goes to school, whether low socioeconomic status or high socioeconomic status school. Learners should be given equal resources to bridge the existing gap between high socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status schools. The negative impact that the lack of resources causes on learning in low socioeconomic status schools is far more significant than the impact in high socioeconomic status schools, as this problem has resulted in low socioeconomic status schools losing more learning time.

The government should provide low socioeconomic status schools with the resources needed to facilitate learning. These schools have lacked resources, from books, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and stationery. The lack of school resources in low socioeconomic status schools has been a matter that has existed for years, and up to this day, the government is failing to allocate these resources or bridge the gap between private and low socioeconomic status schools (Dube, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has made these resources visible in light because they are needed to facilitate learning without facial contact. It is now apparent how much low socioeconomic status schools lack resources. Funding is allocated every year towards the advancement of the low socioeconomic status school resources and conditions, but apparently, they do not reach the schools, evident in the lack of improvements in the resources of low socioeconomic status schools each year. The books delivered to the schools are inadequate because they have many learners who enrol yearly; hence learners must buy them their own books. The high enrolment also results in

overcrowding in the classrooms. These are all the resources that the government should be providing to the schools.

2.4 Learning conditions

Supportive learning conditions aid good results in schools, boost morale for teachers and learners, and help them perform well because they have all the support they need in the classroom. In general, teaching and learning conditions refer to the school's systems, relationships, resources, environment, staff, teachers' ability to educate their students successfully, and the support needed by the teachers and educators from the school principal to create supportive working conditions. School leaders also impact teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions. Muthusamy (2015) in a study on Umlazi schools noted that teachers identified specific situations that made them feel stressed in a crowded classroom. These conditions included inadequate classroom space, safety and health issues, minimal student-teacher interaction, destructive behaviour, teacher emotional and psychological problems, increased workload, and teaching time. Some factors that contribute to a painful experience are the lack of management support, policy implementation, teacher education, professional development, and a lack of resources.

Gunawan and Gunawan (2019) state that the role of the principal cannot be ignored in personality formation, as the principal has the function of nurturing the character of professional teachers and students. The values and ethical leadership presented by school leaders are critical to the success of the personality-building programme in schools. For students to have a personality, the principal and teacher must first show their personality, as they are the role models for the students. With the cooperation of the principal and the teacher, developing the student's personality is effective. The school staff must have a good working relationship to run the school effectively. During the COVID-19 pandemic times, the principals could have provided supportive working conditions for the teachers and learners in their schools for learning to progress. Supportive learning conditions assure the learners and teachers that they are cared for and that their needs are considered. Kraft and Papay (2014) state that the learning surroundings play a substantial role in the students' success. Most educators have assumed this for years, and now they have evidence showing

that school conditions can boost learners' achievement if they are advanced. Suna, Tanberkan and Bekir *et al.* (2020) state that family features like socioeconomic standing are essential predictors of students' performance in school, besides the opposite school aspects, peer factors, and student factors.

Kraft and Papay (2014) found that teachers working in a more supportive professional environment became more effective over time than teachers working in non-supportive situations. Ten years later, teachers in well-conditioned schools predict that students' academic growth will be higher, even when comparing schools that serve demographically similar student groups. A more supportive work environment increased to about one-fifth of the standard deviation overall in the distribution of teacher effectiveness compared to teachers working in less supportive work environments. Researchers argue that the failure to promote teacher development hinders the teachers' ability to accelerate student performance.

Kraft and Papay (2014) also found out that the state of school leadership was crucial compared to other conditions. The study concluded that the impact of school leaders was nearly double the favourable conditions associated with school resources and facilities. The study also mentions that the conditions significantly impact teacher effectiveness and retention more than they impact time, school facilities, or educational resource schedules. The social conditions include a consensus relationship in which a teacher has a productive work relationship with a peer and the degree to which the school director's leadership or teachers feel that the school director is supportive and creates a good school environment for learning. The school culture is thus characterised by mutual trust, respect, openness, and a commitment to student achievement.

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) state that it is the school principal's responsibility to create the conditions under which the effectiveness of teachers and education can be achieved. They further state that teachers must build productive and collaborative partnerships with their colleagues, and effectively manage their schools. School management must, therefore, be characterised by trust, respect, communication, collaboration, and a supportive school environment focused on student learning (Haines, Gross, Blue-Banning, Francis & Turnbull., 2015). School principals also influence

education and learning indirectly through staff motivation, commitment, and good working conditions" (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2020).

Maxwell (2016) states that the school building conditions affects students' grades. Students are most likely to perform well when they learn in comfortable classrooms where they are not crowded. They need space to breathe and not be crowded by more than 70 of their mates in a tiny classroom. School classrooms play an essential role in how learners behave. It is harder to control many learners than to maintain a smaller number. A smaller number will likely listen when given instructions, and it is easier to discipline than managing a classroom full of more pupils. Better school buildings mean more space and classrooms, and learners can be placed in smaller numbers since they have more classrooms. Poor schools have smaller and limited classrooms, making it hard to manage the learners properly.

Parents are essential to the development and success of their children inside and outside school. Still, no manuals or solid strategies exist for raising a happy, compassionate, confident, and booming child. Parents will do their best with the information they have or are given to help the child walk, talk, learn and play, and prepare the toddler for success at school. Teachers are also enthusiastic about promoting academic performance and their students' social and emotional development. Parents and teachers experience many conflicts along the way as they work in good faith to guide their children. During the COVID-19 era, children spent most of their time at home as they were sent to study at home. Parents are regularly asked to help their children in their studies because some of the schoolwork requires parental help. Therefore, staying in a home with a conducive environment is crucial to providing support. Parents must provide supportive learning conditions for their children at home to help them perform well at school.

2.5 Socioeconomic status

The American Psychological Association (APA) (2018) explains socioeconomic status as the "social status or class of an individual or group". Socioeconomic status (SES) is widely used as a latent structure for measuring family background (Bofah & Hannula, 2017). However, empirical studies have no consensus on the best ways to implement the concept. Socioeconomic status is a pervasive predictor of child development. In various studies, less attention has been paid to measuring SES, and there is very little debate about why certain

indicators were used more than others (Bornstein & Bradley, 2014). Parenting is a huge part of that reason. There is evidence that parenting mediates the relationship between socioeconomic status and child outcomes across different populations and development zones, and that social inequality is part of the process of being passed on to generations (Hoff & Lassen, 2019).

Socioeconomic status includes not only economic interests, but also financial security and class. It includes income, education level, financial stability, and subjective social status and class (Rahal, Huynh, Cole, Seeman & Fuligni, 2020). Socioeconomic status may consist of the 'quality of life' characteristics, and the opportunities and privileges offered to society (Gomes Rebelo, de Queiroz, de Queiroz-Herkrath, Herkrath, Rebelo-Vieira, Pereira & Vettore, 2020). Education is a chance for young people to be at the disadvantage of social upbringing by inserting themselves on an associate degree equal footing with others upon entering the market. Socioeconomic standing could incline people to specific thought patterns such as mind-wandering, that eventually contribute to the SES educational action breach (Gearin *et al.*, 2018). When these breaches ensue, the learners do not perform well in school and will lack concentration.

This differentiation regarding social capital and resources meant a differentiated set of home learning experiences. During this period, all learners suffered learning losses, but children with poor backgrounds did little learning because three-quarters of the learners did not have access to educational inputs (Azevedo, Gutierrez, Hoyos & Saavedra, 2022). The educational outcomes of efforts to narrow the gap between the foundation of socioeconomic inequality and socioeconomic status are of great concern to researchers worldwide, and narrowing the performance gap is common in most education systems. Policymakers have repeatedly attempted to break the link between student learning and socioeconomic background, but these interventions have been incapable of ending the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic performance (Hanushek *et al.*, 2019).

This literature review focused on socioeconomic status and related components, the relationship between socioeconomic standing and educational background, and the differences in educational systems. There is a significant educational gap between people in

different socioeconomic groups which becomes apparent even before school begins and increases over years of schooling (Feinstein, 2003; Hansen & Dawkes, 2009).

Socioeconomic inequality in young people's achievement is a critical academic and political issue in modern day age. Public policymakers worldwide seek to raise young people's cognitive skills from disadvantaged backgrounds, and to narrow the rich and poor gap. However, narrowing these gaps will not be possible if young people from poor backgrounds fail to reach these opportunities. Children with poor socioeconomic status do not perform well in school and are less likely to receive higher education. One of the reasons this is noticed as an urgent issue is social justice is that one does not choose his family or his natural socioeconomic position. As a result, most people find it unfair that family background determines life opportunities. Socioeconomic status inequality can be expressed in concrete ways such as appearance, body language, diet, pronunciation, and handwriting. Inequality is expressed in cultural properties such as photographs, books, dictionaries, and access to machines. Education systems aim to narrow the achievement gap between low and high socioeconomic standing students, and improve the disadvantaged students' performance (Broer, Bai & Fonseca, 2019).

Children in families and societies with low socioeconomic status develop less academically than those in high socioeconomic groups (Poon, 2020). Low socioeconomic status in childhood is linked with decreased cognitive development, language, memory, and social and emotional processing, resulting in reduced income and health in adulthood. School systems in low socioeconomic status communities are often poorly developed, hence they negatively impact school progress and student performance (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019). Poor education and high dropout rates affect a child's academic performance and maintain a low SES status in the community. Improving school systems and early intervention programmes can help reduce some of these risk factors. Therefore, further research on the link between SES and education is essential. People in the higher social class tend to succeed in career-oriented development, and generally work because they have access to career offices, career counsellors, better schools, and have affording families and are ready for the world of higher education experience (Miyamoto, Yoo & Levine *et al.*, 2018). If all these

advantages were also made available to learners from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, the impact COVID-19 has on them would be minimal.

Parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds are likely to be frontline workers with high potential exposure to the COVID-19 virus (Afridi & Block, 2020). These people were contracting the virus more and were losing their lives. Their children had to find the means to survive without their parents, and some had to drop out of school because there was no one to pay for their studies and school necessities. Children who live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods tend to lack the resources they need in school which hinders their performance. If these resources were to be accessible, these children could improve their performance in school.

In contrast, people with high socioeconomic status are more likely to work from home or spend their vacations in facilities with well-stocked pantries, stable internet, and a spacious living environment (Reeves & Rothwell, 2020). Families in low socioeconomic conditions face second-rate housing, insecure areas, inadequate schools, and added stress in their regular lives compared to wealthy families, with psychological and developmental consequences hindering their children's development. Children of high socioeconomic status continued school with minimal challenges since they had the resources to engage in online learning. The government should present equal opportunities to all people of its country, regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background. Being offered the same opportunities and resources will lessen these inequalities among the people. Persistent performance inequality suggests the need to rethink policies and practices to reduce the achievement gap between low and high socioeconomic status schools.

2.6 Conclusion

This literature review aimed to discuss the impact COVID-19 on low socioeconomic status schools and high socioeconomic status schools. It was revealed in the literature review that during COVID-19, low socioeconomic status schools were the most affected between these two kinds of institutions. This literature review has highlighted many inequalities between low and high socioeconomic status schools which existed long before COVID-19, most of these which should not exist, but they do due to unequal opportunities offered to people because of their socioeconomic status. Low socioeconomic status schools are not provided

with adequate resources to facilitate learning. There is no improvement in the school resources, yet the government assigns millions of rands to them yearly. To get a reasonable chance at success, learners should be afforded equal opportunities, irrespective of whether they learn in a low socioeconomic status or high socioeconomic status school. The resources should be provided, and equally; and the learning conditions should also be the same, regardless of the socioeconomic status of the learners.

Student achievement is declining due to a lack of resources in schools. If all the schools had adequate resources when COVID-19 began, the learning hours lost would be minimal because all the learners would have continued their online lessons. High socioeconomic status school students continued learning efficiently because they had the relevant and required resources at home and school, hence they lost minimal learning time. The government should provide resources to schools, especially the low socioeconomic status schools. During the national shutdown, the government should have provided more support to low socioeconomic status schools. However, that was not the case. Therefore, the schools lost many hours of learning. This chapter revealed the disparities between low and high socioeconomic status schools, and the discrepancies between high socioeconomic status background and low socioeconomic background learners, and how these backgrounds have affected the education of the learners.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed literature on the effect of COVID-19 on the education of learners in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools. This chapter discusses the research methodology adopted for this study. Seleyew (2019:27) defines research methodology as the path through which researchers conduct their study. It demonstrates how the researchers construct their problem and purpose, and present their findings based on the data collected during the study period. It covers the entire research technique of the study, from the research strategy to the dissemination of the findings. This research design and methodology chapter demonstrates how the outcome is reached per the study goal. The research methodology employed during the study is discussed in this chapter.

Research methodology is a technique for solving a research problem in a methodical manner (Kothari, 2020). It can be thought of as a science that studies how scientific research is conducted. The researcher must understand the research methods or techniques, and the methodology, and which of these methods or procedures are related and which are not, and what they mean and indicate, and why. Further, the researcher must also comprehend the assumptions underlying diverse methodologies and the criteria by which they can determine whether certain techniques and processes will be applied to specific issues.

The design strategies, research plan, data collecting, and data analysis are all discussed in this chapter. The chapter also outlines how reliability and validity was measured during the research. The sampling procedure, population, and ethical factors to be considered during the research are also discussed.

This study adopted the qualitative research method to collect data. Qualitative research is a broad term for a group of research methods that yield results without relying on quantitative

measurement or statistical analysis. Traditionally, qualitative methods describe how things are in various areas (Hamilton & Finley, 2020). Qualitative research methodologies are used when there is limited current understanding on a complicated phenomenon that cannot be addressed simply by taking physical measures, when a problem is studied from a new perspective, or when existing knowledge is fragmented (Kyngas, 2020).

3.2 Rationale for empirical research

This study focuses on the effect of COVID-19 in high socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status schools, and it identifies new approaches to develop advanced educational systems. These differences include school resources, home resources, socioeconomic status, and learning conditions. The qualitative research approach was adopted because it is descriptive in nature, and it is not only concerned about the process or the outcome, but it is grounded in matters of observation or experience. The problem under study was studied most effectively through conducting interviews with learners, teachers, and principals from low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools. Qualitative research offers a much more flexible approach; if the valuable insights are not captured, the researcher can quickly adapt questions or change the setting to other variables to improve responses. Further, if the participants' responses do not fit a researcher's expectations, they are equally valuable qualitative data to add context to issues that numbers alone cannot reveal.

3.3 Research paradigm

Paradigms are diverse ways of looking at the world and are frequently used as the foundation for research. They are a collection of assumptions about what is true, how knowledge is formed, and what is worthwhile to learn (Davies & Fisher, 2018). A research paradigm refers to the underlying philosophical perspectives of researchers about truth and reality in general, and the research subject. As a result, a research paradigm is a philosophical perspective about the earth or the nature of truth, and how we approach it to comprehend it. It is, therefore, an intellectual framework around which research is built. It provides a set of beliefs and understandings upon which a research project's theories and methods are based. Research paradigms are essential because they form the philosophical source of a research project. They impact how different schools of learning undertake their research. Once a

research philosophy has been determined, a suitable methodology can be chosen. Fisher and Davies (2018) mentions that every paradigm has the below tenets and they offer a sharp contrast when they are compared across paradigms.

- i. Ontology answers the question, "What is reality?" That is, does a single reality exist in your study?
- ii. Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Epistemology integrates the validity, parameters, and techniques of acquiring knowledge. It responds to the problem: "How is it possible to know reality?"
- iii. Research methodology answers the question, "How do we go about discovering the answer or reality?" Research methodology should define how a researcher conduct their research and reveal that the findings are valid. The research must include the process of data collection and analysis.

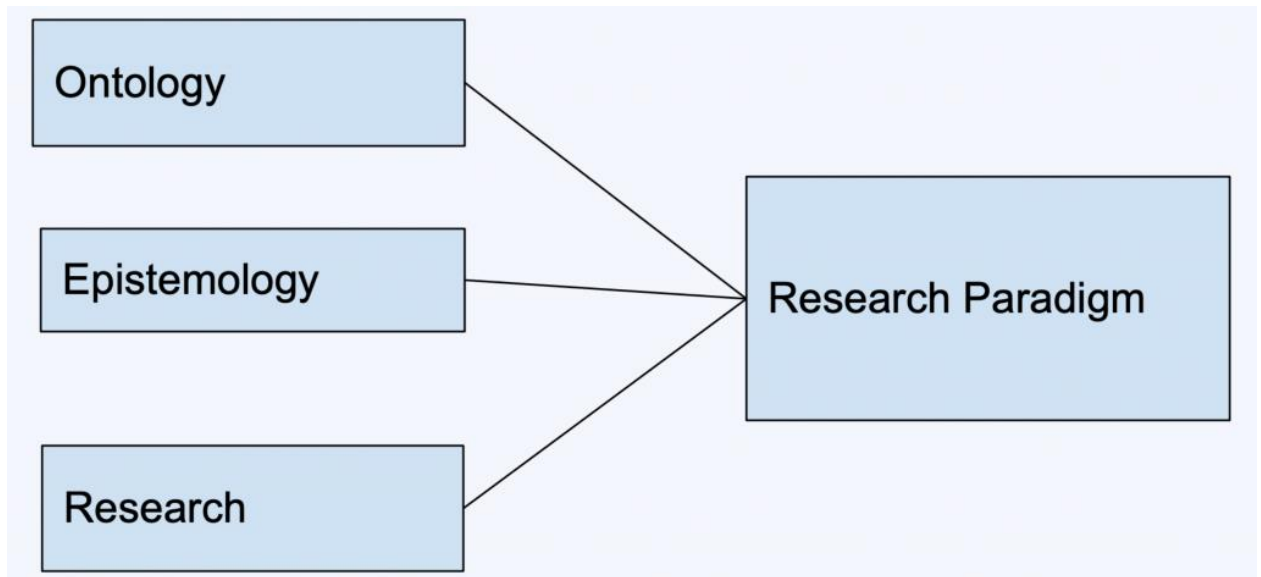


Figure 3.1: Research paradigm

Slawewski (2018) notes the following paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism, and the participatory paradigm.

- i. **Positivism** is the realistic view of social reality. It thus posits the existence of an objective universe external to the researcher, in which the researcher seeks laws, rules, and repetitive patterns of activity isolated from a non-significant context. In terms of epistemological principles, positivism is based on dualism and objectivism. It is feasible to

preserve an external observer's attitude and eliminate the influence of values, opinions, and subjective beliefs. The study aims to explain, predict, and manage the social phenomena under investigation. Knowledge, which accumulates over time, is gathered through testing theories and establishing facts and laws. Positivism refers to the realistic idea of social reality; it suggests the existence of an objective universe external to the researcher. A positivist paradigm is appropriate for both quantitative and qualitative research. However, the former is limited to measuring variables, and the latter to applying the technique.

ii. Postpositivism is a weakened variant of positivism. Critical realism distinguishes it in ontological assumptions – recognising the objective existence of reality, while accepting that it can only be understood imperfectly and roughly due to the limitations of the human senses. Postpositivists believe that the goal of their investigations is prediction and control, but in epistemology, they employ a modified version of dualism/objectivism. They discover, above all, that it is difficult to eradicate the researcher's impact on the phenomenon under study, but it should be minimised as much as possible.

iii. Critical theory inherits the acceptance of the objectivist image of the universe from the natural sciences. It proposes a subjectivist position in epistemology which is closer to the reality under examination. The authors define historical realism as the belief that reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and other values. As a result, the actuality of beings and the presence of some objective truth are assumed while acknowledging the sociocultural basis of human behaviour.

iv. Constructivism has the subjectivist approach towards reality at the ontological layer, allowing relativism, that is, the existence of multiple locally built and reconstructed facts. It presumes the presence of diverse social worlds, above all in human minds, rather than all objectively available, common outward structures. The goal is to bring forth specific individual constructs, interpret them, and compare individual meanings to generate one or more shared constructs.

v. Participatory recognises the subjective-objective nature of reality at the ontological level. Interaction, participation in the exchanges between the knower and the known, is assumed in epistemology. The roles are interchangeable – the known is also a knower because qualitative research deals with societal paradigms, not nature. Mutual cognition is

imperfect and is subject to change. At the methodological level, the kinds of study that are practical, intellectual, empathetic, and imaginal in nature are used. Inquiry necessitates the ability to detect and construct an intersubjective space founded in a specific cultural context.

In this research I chose positivism paradigm since the study aims to explain, predict, and manage the phenomena under investigation which is the impact of COVID-19. Positivism paradigm relies on measurement and reason, that knowledge is revealed from a neutral observation of activity, action and reaction. This research aimed to explore the effect of COVID-19 on the education of learners in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools, and to determine the resource shortages due to the low socioeconomic status which worsened the impact for some learners.

3.4 Research strategy

A research strategy is a comprehensive plan for carrying out a study. It helps the researcher to organise, carry out, and monitor the study (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014). The analysis of the data was based on the interviews, and the researcher used interviews to pose open-ended and closed-ended questions to the participants. The researcher used open-ended questions because they do not limit the participants to one or two responses; instead, they allow for various responses and further investigation. As a data collecting tool, the principals, teachers, and students were asked four unique questions. The researcher took field notes and recorded the interviews using an audio recorder.

3.5 Research approach

Chetty (2016) describes a research approach as a strategy and method that comprises vast assumptions to thorough data collection procedures, analysis, and interpretation. It has the following two classes: the process of data gathering and the approach of data analysis or reasoning. The researcher adopted the qualitative research approach to explore the problem under study. Qualitative research is articulated in words and comprehends concepts, opinions, and experiences. It emphasises gathering data on naturally occurring phenomena.

Chetty (2016) defines a research approach as a strategy and technique that includes general assumptions to specific data collection, analysis, and interpretation procedures. As a result,

it is based on the nature of the study problem. The qualitative research design enabled the researcher to gain insights into the meaning they give to social experience, and it allowed them to obtain thick and rich descriptions of the participants' thoughts, feelings, and views on COVID-19, explaining the patterns of cultural and social relationships, and putting them into context.

Aspers and Corte (2019) define qualitative research as an iterative process in which an improved understanding of the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions by getting closer to the phenomenon being studied. Interviews convey a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than is possible with purely quantitative methods such as questionnaires. Interviews are ideal when little is known about a research phenomenon or when detailed insights from individual participants are desired. It is also beneficial for discussing sensitive topics that participants do not want to discuss in a group setting.

3.6 Research design

A research design is a plan that gives the underlying structure to integrate all parts of a study such that the results are reliable, clear of bias, and most generalisable (Dannells, 2018). The study design determines how participants are chosen, which variables are included and controlled, how data is collected and evaluated, and how irrelevant variability is managed to address the main research problem. Although statistical analysis is sophisticated, the researcher's conclusions may be useless if an ineffective research design is adopted.

Kumar (2020) defines a study design as a procedure used by a researcher to answer questions in a legitimate, objective, accurate, and cost-effective manner. A research design allows them to decide on and communicate to others what study design they intend to use, how they intend to collect information from the participants, how they intend to select the participants, how the data intended to be collected will be analysed, and how they intend to communicate their findings.

The researcher used the grounded theory research design to explain better the phenomena rather than an existing theory and suggest changes. Grounded theory is a study that uses data

to explain a phenomenon. The researcher collected primary data in the Empangeni district schools using interviews as the method of data collection.

3.7 Population and sampling

The study population comprised the principals, teachers, and learners from the Empangeni District schools. The researcher conducted the study with the teachers, principals, and learners because they are the people who experienced first-hand the effect of COVID-19 on their schools' achievements. The teachers and principals are responsible for overseeing the triumph of learners, and they can evaluate the schools' achievement before, during and after the pandemic. The learners are the ones who were learning under these COVID-19-induced conditions. The schools are located in the Empangeni district, where the researcher also resides. The researcher selected two high socioeconomic status schools— one primary school and one high school, and two low socioeconomic status schools – one primary school and one high school. These schools were selected using the comprehensive sampling method.

Sampling is a procedure used to select a sample from an individual or a large population group for research purposes (Bhardwaj, 2019). There are two categories of sampling, namely, probability sampling, and non-probability sampling. Bhardwaj (2019) notes that sampling provides accurate and efficient results, saves time and money, allows for estimation of sampling errors, requires less space and equipment, and is the optimal approach when resources are limited.

The researcher adopted the purposeful sampling method to select the participants for the study. Purposeful sampling is a common approach in qualitative research aimed at identifying participants with the same experience of a central research phenomenon (Thorne, 2016). Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to identify individual participant with the experience on the effect of COVID-19 on education. A purposive sample is one whose characteristics are defined for a purpose relevant to the study. Purposeful sampling is an efficient and cost-effective method that produces accurate results, allows for estimation of errors, requires less space and equipment, examines only the population of interest, and makes the sample homogeneous.

The researcher selected two high socioeconomic status schools— one primary school and one high school, and two low socioeconomic status schools – one primary school and one high

school. The study sample comprised two (2) teachers from each school, one (1) principal from each school, and four (4) learners from each of the four schools in the Empangeni district. Therefore, the study consisted of a complement of eight (8) teachers, four (4) principals, and 16 learners, hence a total of 28 participants. The learners selected in secondary schools were between grade 6 and 12, while in primary school they were between grade 6 and 7. For the learners to participate, they were required to sign the assent form after their parents or guardians had permitted them to participate in the study.

3.8 Instrumentation and data collection

Data collection is assembling and measuring information on targeted variables in an established system, enabling one to respond to related questions and evaluate the outcomes. Data collection allows the researcher to accumulate information required from the research participants. Data collection techniques include document analysis, observations, and questionnaires, depending on the kind of research. In interviews, information is gathered by way of questioning the participants. Individuals can be interviewed, or their responses recorded, or a mix of these techniques might be used to gather the data. Structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and concentrated group discussions are the four different forms of interviews. For this study, the researcher used interviews to collect data from the participants.

The researcher conducted standardised one-on-one interviews with each participant, where a series of close-ended and open-ended questions were to allow the participants to answer based on their complete knowledge, experiences, feelings, and understanding on the effect of COVID-19 on the education of learners. The researcher recorded the interviews using a voice recorder. Questions were asked in English to accommodate all the participants. The researcher developed an interview schedule for the three groups of participants, namely, principals, teachers, and learners. Each group of participants was asked a unique set of questions based on their roles and responsibilities.

Compared to surveys, interviews are an interactive form of data collection (Adler & Clark, 2014). In interviews, researchers ask questions directly from the participants. Interviews can be face-to-face, over the phone, or more recently online, with or without video. Interviews, whether face-to-face or online, often provide a more personal exchange of information than

research. Interviews have several benefits, including the ability to gather comprehensive data with greater understanding, higher response rates than with questionnaires due to their greater personalization, greater control over the order and flow of questions, and the ability to make necessary schedule adjustments based on preliminary findings (Abawi, 2017).

Kumar (2020) lists several advantages of interviews as outlined in this subsection. Interviews are advantageous for gathering detailed information through probing and nonverbal reactions. They are best suited for complex and sensitive topics as the interviewer can ask questions, prepare the participants, and explain complex ideas in person. Additionally, all questions can be answered accurately with less chance of misinterpretation. The interview questions in this research were structured. Each group of participants were asked the same questions in the same order according to their categories. The questions consisted of open-ended and close-ended questions.

Open-ended questions in an interview can provide a wealth of knowledge, making the participants feel comfortable to express their opinions and be fluent in the language used. Participants are not 'conditioned' by having to pick answers from a list, and open-ended questions virtually eliminate the likelihood of investigator bias. Closed-ended questions have limitations in terms of depth and range of information gathered. There is a higher chance of investigator bias as the researcher may only list desired response patterns. Participants may not express their true opinions as they may simply agree or disagree with the researcher's analysis of the situation. However, closed-ended questions make it easier to obtain and analyse information.

3.9 Data analysis and interpretation

After gathering the data, the researcher moves on to analysing it. Data analysis involves various procedures, including creating classifications and implementing these categories to raw data by coding, tabulation, and drawing statistical inferences. For further examination, the bulky data must be summarised into a few digestible groups and tables. As a result, researchers should arrange the raw data into meaningful and usable categories. Coding is typically performed at this stage in which data categories are turned into symbols that may be tabulated and counted. The stage is now ready for tabulation after coding. Tabulation is

a technological operation that involves arranging classified data into tables. Relationships or differences supporting or contradicting original or new hypotheses should be subjected to relevance tests during the analysis process to ascertain whether valid data may be said to imply any conclusion.

Data analysis necessitates various closely connected procedures such as creating categories, applying these categories to raw data via coding and tabulation, and drawing statistical inferences. The researcher transcribed the interviews, and completed and typed the handwritten field notes. The researcher thus organised the data into categories and generated codes and themes from the data using the thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes in data (Lochmiller, 2021). This definition implies that the analyst creates a general understanding of the coded data based on the repeated application of codes and patterns associated with those codes. The more frequently a code appears in a data set, the more likely it is that an analyst will point to that code as underlying a theme. Although thematic analysis can take coding frequencies into account when generating themes, this analytical approach should not be considered a purely quantitative exercise. Rather, it often requires the analyst to look beyond frequency to verify the magnitude and significance of the underlying data set.

In thematic analysis, the researcher discovers something about people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences, or values from a set of qualitative data, for example, interview transcriptions, social media profiles, or survey responses (Caulfield, 2023). The following are the distinct approaches to thematic analysis:

- An inductive approach involves allowing the data to determine your themes.
- A deductive approach involves coming to the data with some preconceived themes you expect to find reflected there, based on theory or existing knowledge.

This study adopted the inductive approach.

3.10 Reliability and validity

This research ensured reliability and validity through various measures to guarantee that the findings are accurate and not biased. The researcher adopted a prolonged and persistent

fieldwork strategy to improve design validity. This strategy enabled the analysis and confirmation of intermediate data and ensured that the findings and the participants' realities match. To ensure reliability and validity, the researcher took detailed field notes, and recorded the interviews which were consequently transcribed.

3.10.1 Validity

Validity refers to how well a study finding matches what the study was designed to measure. The most crucial criterion is validity which reveals how an instrument measures what it is intended to. Validity relates to the correctness of any research value, tools and techniques, and processes, including data collection and validation (Mohamad, Sulaiman, Sern & Salleh., 2015). In other words, validity is the point to which variations identified with a measuring instrument represent genuine differences among the people being examined. To ensure the validity of the interviews, there was a one-to-one correspondence between the interview questions asked and the underlying competency. The following are the three types of validity to check:

- i. Content validity** is how a measuring instrument delivers adequate coverage of the topic under study. Content validity is useful if the instrument contains a representative universe sample. Its fortitude is primarily judgemental and insightful. It can also be defined by using a panel of people who decide how well the measuring instrument knows the standards, although there is no statistical way to articulate it.
- ii. Criterion-related validity** relates to our ability to foresee some result or estimate the reality of a current condition. This validity indicates the accomplishment of measures used for practical approximating purposes.
- iii. Construct validity** is exceptionally intricate and abstract. A measure is said to possess validity to the degree that it confirms predicted correlations with other theoretical suggestions. Construct validity is the degree to which results on a test can be accounted for by the explanatory concepts of a sound theory. For defining construct validity, we associate a collection of other propositions with the results received from using our measurement instrument.

3.10.2 Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which the research results can be reproduced when repeated under similar circumstances. In qualitative research, reliability encompasses a wide range of paradigms, with the aspect itself being epistemologically contradictory and difficult to define (Russell, 2014). Therefore, consistency is required to sustain and develop reliability in qualitative research. Techniques such as refutational analysis, the use of complete data, ongoing testing and comparison of data, tables to record data, and the inclusion of bad examples can all be used to construct reliability tests for qualitative research. These strategies can help to support the research process of data sourcing, data validation, and data presentation, as well as the claim of reliability in terms of form and context.

Triangulation is another crucial factor in developing trust in the system. Triangulation means using multiple datasets, methods, theories, and investigators to address a research question (Bhandari, 2022). Triangulation is a research strategy that can help to enhance the validity and credibility of research findings. A measuring instrument is dependable if its results are consistent. For this study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with education stakeholders such as school principals, teachers, and learners. A reliable measuring instrument contributes to validity but does not have to be valid. As a result, reliability is less valuable than validity, yet it is easier to analyse reliability than validity. If an instrument meets the reliability criterion, the transitory and situational elements can be trusted to be not interfering with its use. There are two aspects of reliability, namely:

- i. The stability aspect which focuses on obtaining consistent findings from repeated measurements of the same individual and instrument. The degree of stability is regularly determined by comparing the results of repetitive measurements.
- ii. The equivalence aspect considers how much inaccuracy different investigators or samples of the items being investigated may add.

Comparing two investigators' observations of the same occurrences is an excellent technique to test for the equivalence of their measures. Two methods exist for increasing reliability:

- i. Standardising the conditions under which the measurement takes place – there is a need to ensure that external sources of variation such as boredom, fatigue, and others are minimised to the extent possible. That will improve the stability aspect.
- ii. Carefully designed directions for measurement with no variation from group to group, using trained and motivated persons to conduct the research, and broadening the sample of items used.

3.11 Ethical considerations

De Vos *et al.* (2005:57) define ethics as a set of moral principles proposed by an individual or a group, subsequently widely acknowledged, and that offer guidelines and behavioural expectations about experimental subjects and the participants' proper behaviour in research. Ethics in research define guidelines for conducting professional research (Hasan, Rana, Chowdhury, Dola & Rony, 2021). It also teaches and regulates researchers to ensure that they follow a strict code of ethics when conducting research. They are the disciplined study of morality. Ethical considerations are an assembly of principles and values that must be followed while doing studies that involve humans. The ethical considerations ensure that no one acts in a harmful way to humanity or any person. It refrains persons and organisations from indulging in vicious conduct (Bhasin, 2020). Since most educational research involves people, it is crucial to understand the ethical and legal implications of conducting research. The researcher's responsibilities is to ensure that the participants are entirely informed of the ethical and legal norms that must be followed.

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee and obtained permission to conduct the study from the Department of Education district offices in Empangeni. The researcher consequently sought consent from the school principals to interview the participants using the consent forms. The researcher allowed the participants to ask questions and voice out any concerns regarding the interviews. The participants were informed that participation is voluntary, and that withdrawing from the study at any time would not have any consequences. Furthermore, the researcher did not record the personal details of the interviews for the purposes of anonymity and privacy. The researcher adhered to the following ethics when conducting this research:

3.11.1 Full disclosure

The researcher fully disclosed the study's goal to the participants and was honest with them. The participants were not asked to provide personal information, hence this established trust. The researcher allowed the participants to ask questions and express any concerns which they may have had about the interviews.

3.11.2 Voluntary participation

Voluntary participation means that the researcher will compel no participant to participate if they do not wish to. The participants were informed that they are free to withdraw from the study anytime if they no longer wanted to participate. Since their participation was voluntary, declining to participate or withdrawing from the study while still ongoing had no consequences on them.

3.11.3 Anonymity

The responses on the questionnaires were anonymous, meaning that no school names or participant names appeared on the study or in any publication, and no information mentioned by the participants in the study will be used by the researcher or anyone against them.

3.11.4 Informed consent

The researcher obtained consent from the principals to conduct the study in the schools. Afterward, the researcher provided the participants with written consent forms to sign to show informed consent. The researcher also provided the learners with the consent forms to give to their parents or guardians to sign their consent since most of them were underage.

3.11.5 No harm or risk to participants

This research did not cause physical or mental discomfort, harm, or injury to the participants. The researcher did not reveal any information to embarrass or endanger the home life, school performance, friendships, or relations of the participants.

3.11.6 Privacy

To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the information provided by the participants, the researcher stored data appropriately, and no one had access to it except the researcher. Further, the researcher removed any identifiers to create a clean data set which did or does not comprise information that identifies the participants such as names or physical or email addresses. If, by any means, there is a mention of any personal information, the researcher will ensure that it is removed.

3.12 Delimitations and limitations

The study was delimited to only four (4) schools in the Empangeni district, and the researcher did not include other schools in Empangeni. The study was limited by interviews as a data collection method. This is premised on the fact that an interviewer's presence may overstimulate the participant(s) to the extent that they might provide imaginary information to make it enjoyable. To this end, reliability and validity of the collected data may be compromised. However, to prevent the provision of imaginary information, the researcher used open-ended questions that allowed the participants to provide their own thoughts and opinions.

3.13 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted academic achievement in low and high socioeconomic status schools in South Africa and beyond. The pandemic has also immensely affected school performance in the Empangeni district. Teachers and learners lost much time staying at home during the national lockdown which they still need to recover to continue learning. The pandemic has shown how significant the breach is between private and low socioeconomic status schools, and has also exposed how unprepared the country is, and how far behind we are with online learning and the use of technology in schools. Although online learning has a significant potential to improve learning in schools, the country still needs to prepare for it. Most learners in low socioeconomic status schools do not have computers or access to one. The government does not train educators to facilitate online learning, and the schools do not have the required resources to implement it. Online learning is an excellent teaching method, except that it only works for the privileged few pupils with access to computers and the internet at home. The less advantaged pupils still face challenges with online learning since they cannot access computers or the internet.

COVID-19 exposed the lack of school resources in schools which leads to low academic achievement and educational inequalities. The pandemic has also revealed how socioeconomic status environments lead to a more significant lack of resources for learning. The shortage of resources and lessened reserve capacities can affect the students' achievement in school. During this pandemic, education would have continued with fewer challenges had all the schools and learners had adequate and relevant resources. This calls for the government to provide school resources, particularly to low socioeconomic societies.

3.14 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the research design, methodology, population and sampling, data collection and analysis techniques, and the ethical considerations. The chapter outlined how the researcher ensured the reliability and validity of the research. The next chapter presents and analyses the findings from the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology adopted for the study. This chapter presents findings and analyses data on the objectives of the study, which sought to determine the factors that affect teaching and learning; assess the effects of these factors on teaching and learning; examine how these factors were exposed during COVID-19; and establish the strategies which can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. According to Islam (2020), data analysis is the practice of ordering and organizing raw data so that valuable information can be extracted from it. The process is key to understanding what data is contained and what data is useful. Kent (2020) defines data analysis as a process whereby researchers take raw data that have been taken matrix and generate information that can be used to tackle the objectives for which the research was undertaken. He further says that the raw data are of slight useful value until they have been organized, and summarised, and a range of conclusions drawn from them. Data is displayed and analyzed according to the objectives of the study. The study answered the following main question:

1. Which factors affect teaching and learning in low socioeconomic status schools and high socioeconomic status schools?
2. How do these factors affect the teaching and learning of learners in school?
3. How were these factors exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. Which strategies can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19?

4.2 Demographic profiles of participants

Data was collected through structured interviews conducted with 28 participants who were purposively selected. The study participants comprised four (4) principals, eight (8)

teachers, and 16 learners. The principals were selected because they are the personnel who manage the schools and were involved in the teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, while the teachers and learners were also involved in the teaching and learning. Data was analysed and presented using the sequential approach. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 display the demographic profiles of the participants.

Table 4.1: Demographic profiles of the principals

Principal code	School	How long have you been a school manager?	Has your school been poorly impacted by COVID-19 in teaching and learning? Y/N	Have you been satisfied with the Department of Education’s response to COVID-19? Y/N	Do you think that COVID-19 impacted the ability to teach and learn in your school? Y/N	Did you feel you had the necessary support and resources needed for effective teaching and learning in your school during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Did you experience any inequalities in education during COVID-19? Y/N
PSP1	Primary School 1	7 months	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
PSP2	Primary School 2	23 years	Yes	Yes	Yes, but with little impact	Yes, although with some challenges	Yes
HSP1	HSP1	22 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

HSP2	HSP2	14 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
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Table 4.2: Demographic profiles of teachers

Teacher code	School	How long have you been teaching?	What grades are you teaching?	Have you been impacted by COVID-19 in teaching and learning? Y/N	Have you been satisfied with the school's response to COVID-19? Y/N	Do you think that COVID-19 impacted your ability to teach or learn? Y/N	Did you feel you had the necessary support and resources you needed to effectively teach or learn during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Did you experience any inequalities in education during COVID-19? Y/N
PST1	Primary school	21 years	Grade 7	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
PST2	Primary school	15 years	Grade 1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, although I needed more	Yes

PST3	Primary school	12 years	Grade 5	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
PST4	Primary school	3 years	Grade 6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
HST1	High school	17 years	Grades 8-11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
HST2	High school	9 years	Grades 8-9	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
HST3	High school	5 years	Grades 9&10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
HST4	High school	8 years	Grades 11&12	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Table 4.3: Demographic profiles of learners

Learner code	School	What grade are you doing?	Were you affected by COVID-19 on your school performance?	How were you receiving your learning during the school shutdown	Do you think the school responded well regarding the pandemic?	Did you enjoy staying at home and not going to school?	Were you able to ask questions from your teacher during the pandemic?
PSL1	Primary school	Grade 7	No	WhatsApp and school	Yes	No	No

PSL2	Primary school	Grade 7	No	Online	Yes	No	Yes	
PSL3	Primary school	Grade 6	No	School	Yes	No	No	
PSL4	Primary school	Grade 7	Yes	Google Classroom	Yes	Yes	No	
PSL5	Primary school	Grade 7	No	WhatsApp	Yes	No	No	
PSL6	Primary school	Grade 6	No	WhatsApp	No	No	Yes	
PSL7	Primary school	Grade 6	No	WhatsApp and school	Yes	No	Yes	
PSL8	Primary school	Grade 6	No	We were not receiving schoolwork	No	No	No	
Learner code	School	What grade are you doing?	Were you affected by COVID-19 on your school performance ?	What method of learning were you using during the COVID-	Which method of learning do you prefer?	Do you think the school responded well regarding the pandemic?	Do you think high socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status	Was learning easy or difficult during the pandemic?

				19 pandemic?			school received the same impact from COVID-19?	
HSL1	High school	Grade 10	Yes	WhatsApp	Face-to-face	Yes	No	Difficult
HSL2	High school	Grade 10	Yes	WhatsApp	Face-to-face	Yes	No	Difficult
HSL3	High school	Grade 10	Yes	I was watching learning channels on TV on my own	Face-to-face	No	No	Difficult
HSL4	High school	Grade 11	Yes	WhatsApp	Face-to-face	Yes	No	Difficult
HSL5	High school	Grade 11	Yes	WhatsApp	Face-to-face	Yes	No	Difficult
HSL6	High school	Grade 11	Yes	WhatsApp	Face-to-face	Yes	No	Difficult
HSL7	High school	Grade 10	Yes	WhatsApp and school	Face-to-face	Yes	No	Difficult

HSL8	High school	Grade 10	Yes	WhatsApp	Face-to-face	Yes	No	Difficult
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4.3 Presentation of findings: Themes, subthemes, codes and quotes

This section presents the findings from the interviews conducted with the principals, teachers, and learners who were purposively sampled. Tables 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 display the themes, subthemes, and codes which emerged from the data, including the supporting quotes from the participants.

Table 4.4: Findings from the principals – Themes, subtheme, codes and quotes

Question	School A (Primary School 1)	School B (Primary School 2)	School C (High School 1)	School D (High School 2)	Codes	Themes and subthemes
Which factors affect teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high						THEME 1: Factors affecting teaching and learning

socioeconomic status schools?						
How helpful was the leadership (department of education) at your school been in resolving learning challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?	<i>The department was very much involved but the pity part of it is they were not much resourced in terms of meeting the standards of COVID-19 or mitigating the challenges that the schools faced but they were trying but had no resources. Some of the challenges hindered the progress of teaching and</i>	<i>SGB especially the parents' component of it, they were not familiar with these things they were new to them. They were also swimming in a pool of confusion. (PSP2)</i>	<i>The department was trying their best when it came to resolving issues. Even though their efforts seemed to be not helping because they did not have the necessary resources we needed in schools. They did not have the budget to fund all the new resources that were needed in schools to help to ease the situation. But they tried giving us extra</i>	<i>The department was very helpful when it came to support. Although sometimes they also did not know what they were doing because no one was prepared for the pandemic. They had no clue on how to deal with some matters, but I understand because they were also dealing with a lot. (HSP2)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Resources 	SUBTHEME 1.1: Leadership

	<p><i>learning in our school because the department itself did not have enough resources to face those challenges.</i></p> <p><i>During COVID-19 each learner had to have their own book which was impossible and that needed a budget because which the department had not budgeted for because they did not plan for the pandemic so there was no budget. So,</i></p>		<p><i>books and they even hired the EAs to help us in schools. So yes, they were helpful. (HSP1)</i></p>			
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	<p><i>we decided on the learners to alternate so that we will have enough textbooks. That is how we were managing the learning challenges.</i></p> <p><i>(PSP1)</i></p>					
<p>How was the communication from school leadership? What about from district leadership?</p>	<p><i>That's a problem because in terms of the department, we have a restricted number of officials within the department and they cannot cover all the schools in their district, so the</i></p>	<p><i>The district leadership and the department tried their best, but they did not have enough ideas to deal with the situation at school management we showed character in dealing with a</i></p>	<p><i>I was satisfied with our leadership; we were communicating frequently with our SGB members and parents. We had a WhatsApp group for SGB, and we had another one for parents. We</i></p>	<p><i>There was communication but not as frequent as we are used to. As I have said they were also dealing a lot. We had formed WhatsApp groups with our SGB and parents and were communicating all</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication 	

	<p><i>communication was just rendered in terms of communication. Even if you want to have clarity in terms of communication, it will be hard for you as a principal to find the exact content that needs to be covered. We were sharing information with other principals; even if we did not understand something we shared and implemented what</i></p>	<p><i>situation and that is being proved by our learners that they are ready for anything.</i></p>	<p><i>communicated everything in the group regarding the measures to be taken and all the other concerns during that time. The district leadership was also trying to communicate mainly by email and calls, but it was not that frequent.</i></p>	<p><i>the information via those groups.</i></p>		
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	<p><i>we were told, even if we were not sure if we were we implementing the right or the wrong way but we just implemented that is what we were receiving from our leadership as principals</i></p> <p><i>The school leadership was very much involved, all stakeholders, SGB, donors, and parents of learners were all involved in terms of</i></p>					
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	<p><i>communication.</i></p> <p><i>Since some of the learners have to come to school because they did not have anyone to stay at home with, it was important to include parents in all the communications.</i></p> <p><i>So, if we ask the learners to alternate when attending school, we had to involve parents so that they can also arrange for the person who will</i></p>					
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	<i>be staying at home with the learners when they have to stay at home. We were calling the SGB members now and again and communicating using letters with the stakeholders.</i>					
			<i>The department did not have the budget to provide us with the electronic resources that were needed that time.</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources 	SUBTHEME 1.2: Budget
How do these factors affect the teaching and						THEME 2: Effects of the factors on

learning of learners in schools?						teaching and learning
How did the availability and accessibility of electronic resources affect the teaching and learning in your school during the school's shutdown?	<i>How can we have enough resources when we are a school situated in a township? Resources for COVID-19 were short, we were even short of textbooks so I cannot even mention the electronic resources since we are short of simple textbooks. The resources we had were not</i>	<i>Luckily in our school most teachers are equipped with electronic knowledge, so it was easy to use Google Classroom methods and they have laptops. Maybe there is a little percent of the teachers who are not that well equipped with technology but to most teachers it</i>	<i>We had no electronic resources to facilitate learning. It was difficult since we are the school in a disadvantaged area. We had to try other means like using our own cellphones and our own data to create these groups of learning so that we can continue teaching.</i>	<i>We had all the electronic resources as teachers. Luckily for my school, all educators have laptops, so it was easier to migrate to virtual teaching and most of the educators have knowledge of current technology. We just had to set up those classes and do some minor things and we were running.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources 	SUBTHEME 2.1: Teaching

	<i>sufficient during that time of COVID-19.</i>	<i>was business as usual.</i>				
How was the students' academic growth after COVID-19?	<i>There were contents that were taken out during COVID-19, learners were alternating coming to school so they couldn't cover all the content they were supposed to finish during those times. We are trying to introduce ways to give that content they didn't cover</i>	<i>COVID-19 pushed us to make some plans to cover the lost time. There was a time where we even had to minimize our break times to cover the lost time and to catch up with schoolwork. There was a time whereby some teachers engaged with extra classes, we communicated</i>	<i>I am very concerned about our learner's growth. We lost so many learning hours during COVID-19, and we cannot get them back, we lost a lot of time staying at home. Learners did not learn a lot of content that they were supposed to learn and now when they go to the next grade, they don't</i>	<i>It is sad to see how the pandemic impacted our education and we cannot get back all that time we lost. Our learners were struggling to continue with schoolwork that was supposed to be taught during that time because the electronic or the virtual learning platforms were new things that they had</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content learned. • Adoption of technology 	SUBTHEME 2.2: Academic growth

	<p><i>back to them. We are trying to introduce new extra classes to assist. Can you imagine introducing extra classes/weekend classes at primary school level just to fill that gap of COVID-19 so as result the academic growth of our learners has been deprived due to COVID-19 so we are trying to cover that gap so that the learners can be similar and</i></p>	<p><i>with parents regarding this. But now we are fine we were able to catch up, recently our school came on top when it came to answering some questions on some district evaluations.</i></p>	<p><i>have a clue of what is going on in other chapters. You find that those chapters are the ones that were not covered during the times of COVID-19. Most school curriculum you find it in the next grade, so if you did not learn it on the previous grade, you are in trouble. Now our teachers have to go back to the previous grade's textbook and teach that work so that the learners can have a better</i></p>	<p><i>to adapt to. Change has never been easy, so adapting to that learning method was challenging at first but we got used to it as time went on. We are very behind on every content, and I don't think we will recover. Our teachers are trying all they can, but we will see with time. Even though we had the resources, it was not the same as teaching in the classroom. For me virtual classrooms</i></p>		
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	<i>be equivalent to those learners who were privileged to get education during the pandemic?</i>		<i>understanding. This is delaying the content that is supposed to be done currently. The learners were really affected when it comes to their academic growth.</i>	<i>are just not as effective and the physical classes.</i>		
How were these factors exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic?						THEME 3: Exposure of the factors during COVID-19
What inequalities did you notice during COVID-19 between low socioeconomic	<i>Yes, definitely I experienced the inequalities. We had a lot of learners in our</i>	<i>The inequalities I saw was the disadvantage of being under-resourced schools</i>	<i>These inequalities were always there even before the pandemic. Some schools were</i>	<i>Some schools in our districts did not have the same advantages of electronic learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of resources • Lack of teaching space 	SUBTHEME 3.1: Learners sent home

<p>status schools and high socioeconomic status schools?</p>	<p><i>classrooms even while there was no COVID-19 and high socioeconomic status schools have a less number maybe 15 learners in their classrooms and definitely those learners could afford to continue with their classroom attendance since they are a small number they could cater for social distancing while in our schools we</i></p>	<p><i>and well-resourced schools. Resources were a real disadvantage because at the end of the day these are all learners, and they compete in the same global market, so I sympathized with those who were under-resourced learners. That was calling for commitment on the side of teachers, commitment of using electronic</i></p>	<p><i>continuing learning because they had all the resources, they needed and other schools like ours had to send children to home for a really long time since we did not have the resources to continue with learning.</i></p>	<p><i>resources. The learners had to stay at home unfortunately. Some did not have enough space to separate their learners since they are so many in classes.</i></p>		
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	<p><i>could not. The high socioeconomic status schools had the privilege of employing more educators to assist but we still had to use the same staff we had, and we were running low on staff since others were already sick and we did not have any teachers to replace them with.</i></p>	<p><i>devices which were not even there.</i></p>				
<p>Which strategies can be implemented to rectify the</p>						<p>THEME 4: Strategies that can be implemented</p>

challenges exposed by COVID-19?						
<p>In your opinion, what do you think can be done to bridge the gaps that exist between these institutions?</p>	<p><i>First and foremost I appreciate what the department is doing in low socioeconomic status schools they recruit students from high schools to be sponsored by Fundza Lushaka Bursaries, which is a huge initiative because the person once recruited they render a service to low</i></p>	<p><i>I think the Department of Education must come to the party and the government also must come to party, these rural schools must be equipped with resources so that our children in those schools are not disadvantaged. They must also follow up with the urban schools</i></p>	<p><i>The government should provide equal resources to all schools regardless of their location. You find that there are low socioeconomic status schools all around the area, but they are not funded equally, they are not provided the same resources that should stop. If one school is getting a computer, all other schools should get a</i></p>	<p><i>I think our government can do something when it comes to resources. They should supply sufficient resources in schools so that if we are faced with another pandemic, we would be able to function.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Technological gadgets • Opportunities 	<p>SUBTHEME 4.1: Provision of adequate and equal resources</p>

	<p>socioeconomic status schools, so if they can make sure that each and every person who has been funded by this bursary goes directly to the low socioeconomic status school maybe we can try mitigate the gap. Our school is an English home school, but it is hard to find an English home speaker to come and teach in the township they tell</p>	<p>because this does not mean that they are a 100% equipped with everything so they should not lose focus on them too. But I think the major focus should be given to rural schools, they should try to balance the resources that is what matters the most.</p>	<p>computer there must not be favoritism that is happening. All learners should be afforded equal learning opportunities regardless of where they come from or their skin.</p>			
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	<p><i>you that the person cannot come to the township so they rather place them in urban schools, that's a gap I think can be breached. Maybe if we can try to get the level of teaching and the programs in private and bring it to low socioeconomic status schools, I think that gap can be filled. In terms of resources I think the department is</i></p>					
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	<p><i>doing the best they can the problem is they use the figures or the numbers that you provided them the year before to issue the resources only to find that we will have to take in some more learners when the year starts and that makes us to run short of the resources because we have added the learners now they are more than what we had</i></p>					
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	<p><i>submitted to the department. We take up more learners because if you have fewer learners in your school that means that you have small enrollment, and the department will then move some of the teachers in your school and place them in other schools.</i></p>					
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Table 4.5: Findings from teachers – Themes, subthemes, codes and quotations

Question	School A (Primary School 1)	School B (Primary School 2)	School C (High School 1)	School D (High School 2)	Codes	Themes and subthemes
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<p>Which factors affect teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools?</p>						<p>THEME 1: Factors affecting teaching and learning</p>
<p>Which teaching method which you were you using during</p>	<p><i>We did not have virtual/WhatsApp due to being in a poor community and disadvantaged schools. (PST1)</i></p>	<p><i>We had e-classrooms which we did on Google Classrooms, it wasn't effective. We also dealt with some school kids who</i></p>	<p><i>I was using the WhatsApp group method. (HST1)</i> <i>I was using WhatsApp; I did not want to be too fancy since most of parents</i></p>	<p><i>I was using Google classroom to continue teaching and learning. (HST3)</i> <i>We had a WhatsApp group. I did not enjoy the WhatsApp</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WhatsApp • 	<p>SUBTHEME 1.1: Teaching method</p>

<p>the school shutdown?</p>	<p><i>We did not have virtual classes we only made groups where we were communicating with parents on which days the grades should come to school. (PST2)</i></p>	<p><i>were not financially sound their parents. The internet/Wi-Fi to access the e-classrooms was not available and there was no support from parents. You would post the work maybe out of 40 learners only 10 would do the work. And as Maths teachers that was really bad. Support from parents is a major issue even now without COVID-19. I did not enjoy the e-classrooms I prefer to be hands-on when</i></p>	<p><i>and learners have WhatsApp. I used to send activities on WhatsApp then I would give my private time for them to ask questions on WhatsApp. (HST2)</i></p>	<p><i>method of learning because I couldn't reach all the learners. Most learners were not attending, not even 50% of the class was attending. So, I did not enjoy that learning method. (HST4)</i></p>		
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		<p><i>I'm teaching, I prefer the learners to participate in the lesson and not just give them work and expect them to teach themselves. (PST3)</i></p> <p><i>I was using WhatsApp classes. I did not enjoy the WhatsApp method because lots of parents had problems when it came to data, some of them would say they cannot afford the data. (PST4)</i></p>				
Which challenges	<p><i>N/A (PST1)</i></p> <p><i>N/A (PST2)</i></p>	<p><i>The most challenging part</i></p>	<p><i>Excess of tools, not having contact with</i></p>	<p><i>Most times I had network problems.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological devices 	<p>SUBTHEME</p> <p>1.2: Resources</p>

<p>did you face with the online learning experience?</p>		<p><i>about this Google Classroom method was that it couldn't reach everyone and not all parents signed up for Google Classrooms. I remember my first-year class had 34 learners but only 17 parents on Google classrooms and even then, we tried to give pack of work to the learners but even those packs they returned to school not having done the work on them. (PST3)</i></p>	<p><i>learners. Having longer holidays created an open space between teachers and learners. Learners were not studying at home since they had to take care of their families and still juggle schoolwork, so it was challenging. (HST1)</i></p> <p><i>What was challenging was the network problems, some learners would come in an hour or two hours later and say they did not have the internet. Some</i></p>	<p><i>My computer would lose network in the middle of a lesson and that was not a good thing. (HST3)</i></p> <p><i>Most learners did not have the cell phones and the data to log in to WhatsApp. (HST4)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network connectivity 	
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			<p><i>learners could not afford the data to attend the WhatsApp classes. I used to mark the register on our WhatsApp classes, and I always aimed for at least 50% of the class to be online. Then I would attend to those who were left behind. But it was never a 100% attendance. (HST2)</i></p>			
		<p><i>Some learners were not participating at all on the WhatsApp lessons of which when they came back</i></p>		<p><i>Not all learners were attending, only a few learners would join our online classrooms. (HST 3)</i></p>		<p>SUBTHEME 1.3: Learner attendance and participation</p>

		<i>from school, we had to start again teaching the work we had sent on the WhatsApp. (PST4)</i>		<i>Learners were not attending in full numbers; we could not do assessments. (HST4)</i>		
What challenges are you facing with the current learning model at your school?			<i>I am not really satisfied but I don't have a final say on it. On our ATP we teach until a week before the school closure which is not a reality. We should be teaching until a month before school closure to allow space for revisions and assessments. If I can show you my ATP it goes until a</i>			SUBTHEME 1.4: Scope of subjects

			<i>week before school closure and it doesn't mention the exams and revision. (HST2)</i>			
How satisfied are you with the current learning model at your school?	<i>I am satisfied with everything in my school. (PST1)</i> <i>I am satisfied but I think we could do better. I think we should have some video learning sometimes to switch the method of learning so that the learners can have a different way of learning. (PST2)</i>	<i>I am satisfied; however, the number of learners is a problem for us. We sit with a number of learners in class that is too much; others are about 44 in each class. There is no space, you cannot supervise the kids at the back because there is no place to walk, the passages are very minimal and as a Maths teacher I am</i>	<i>Because we are now going back to the normal, I am happy, I am good kids are attending and I can see the learners every day, we are able to check, have contact with them and also the parent involvement of which we couldn't do during the COVID-19 is now possible. (HST1)</i>	<i>I am satisfied with the way things are managed in our school. There is no work overload, and we have a good work relationship with the colleagues. (HST3)</i> <i>I am satisfied; everything is getting back to normal. Our kids are at school, and we do not need social distancing and masks anymore. (HST4)</i>		

		<p><i>teaching 4 grade 5 classes everyday which is about 168 learners. Even though I don't struggle with discipline but it's just the whole logistics of trying to get through the classroom and trying to give some children a special individual attention while they are so many in class. (PST3)</i></p> <p><i>I would say I am satisfied because we are able to work with the learners. (PST4)</i></p>				
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<p>How do these factors affect the teaching and learning of learners in school?</p>						<p>THEME 2: Effects of the factors on teaching and learning</p>
<p>What effect did the virtual/WhatsApp classrooms have in teaching and learning?</p>	<p><i>I think the virtual classrooms were effective to those who had them because they could reach out to their learners during the shutdown. PST1</i></p> <p><i>I think they were to those schools that had them. PST2</i></p>	<p><i>The Google Classrooms were not effective. There were internet problems, not everyone had access to it and learners were unable to teach themselves from the work that was given to them and there was a lack</i></p>	<p><i>We had a WhatsApp group, we did not have any solid virtual learning method, because of lack of resources for our learners, and learners live in different places, parents did not have the data to receive</i></p>	<p><i>They were not effective, because we couldn't assess the learners. We didn't know if they understood what we were teaching because we didn't have a way of giving them tests. Parental involvement was also</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved • Did not improve 	<p>SUBTHEME 2.1: Learner performance and results</p>

		<p><i>of parental involvement. PST4</i></p> <p><i>Yes, I think they were effective, there was improvement here and there. PST4</i></p>	<p><i>the work since others were not working. As teachers we had the information to pass to the learners the problem was to get that information to them. I had to use my impact on social media to try and send the work to the learners and that was helping a bit. Every time when you are starting a new thing it has that effect, and it was not nice because we are used to having face to face contact with our learners and we did</i></p>	<p><i>an issue for us because most parents are not involved in their learner's schoolwork. If we had a good parental involvement, I am sure we would have worked together with parents to provide learners with more learning. (HST3)</i></p> <p><i>Our WhatsApp classes were not effective because they did not reach each and every learner and when we had to assess the learners you could see that their level of</i></p>		
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			<p><i>not have time to follow-up if they understood.</i></p> <p><i>I can't really say the online learning/WhatsApp was effective for me, those who were excellent in class were still doing well and those who were struggling they were still struggling. Virtual learning worked depending on the resources, some schools it worked for them. If you had the many resources and tools, it worked well, but if you lacked the</i></p>	<p><i>performance has declined, and I always thought it's because of the learning method we were using. What was sad is that we couldn't do anything about it, WhatsApp was the only way that was better than nothing. (HST4)</i></p>		
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			<p><i>resources and tools, it was not effective. (HST1)</i></p> <p><i>The WhatsApp method was not effective, there was a decline in performance, and some learners enjoyed chatting on WhatsApp with their teacher online and not worrying about the main aim of having the WhatsApp class. (HST2)</i></p>			
<p>What effect does the current learning</p>	<p><i>There is no effect on my social-emotional well-being. (PST1)</i></p>	<p><i>I would say my social well-being is balanced but also as teachers we get</i></p>	<p><i>I would say positive one, seeing the performance and the result now, on the</i></p>	<p><i>My emotional well-being is perfect, I don't have to worry about any sick</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact • Negative impact 	<p>SUBTHEME 2.2: Teacher wellbeing</p>

<p>model having on your well-being?</p>	<p>Since we see learners and communicate with them almost every day, we come across some situations that have the effect on us. One of my learners has a physical problem in his knees and that is really affecting me, and I have even tried to reach out to the social workers to see how we can try to help because when he walks its difficult. (PST2)</p>	<p>frustrated. When you have a smaller class, you are able to give individual attention however when you have a bigger class it becomes a little impossible to do that. And you as a teacher you end up being frustrated because you know your job but when you see the learners not understanding the work you give them and there's no time for you to help them individually it frustrates you. There are a lot of days</p>	<p>emotional part I can say that the kids we deal with today are battling with a lot of things, so we don't only teach by the book but you need to look at the whole child and even go to their homes and check on them because they also bring things from home like family problems. (HST1)</p> <p>As we speak, I am planning a Saturday class and not because I have been absent from work, but I have to have</p>	<p>learners or colleagues since COVID-19 decreased and I don't have to do any extra classes. (HST3)</p> <p>My social well-being is good. I get off work on time and I don't have to teach on weekends or extra classes am not worried about my learners catching Covid or any of my colleagues being admitted to the hospital because of complications. I am just happy and content. (HST4)</p>		
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		<p><i>when you have burnout as a teacher, I have burnout quite a few times and now since I'm pregnant it is even worse. (PST3)</i></p> <p><i>Everything is fine right now; I have no complaints. (PST4)</i></p>	<p><i>those extra classes to finish the work. And that is affecting my social life. (HST2)</i></p>			
How were these factors exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic?						THEME 3: Exposure of the factors during COVID-19
What changes did you notice	<p><i>I missed my learners and teaching. (PST1)</i></p>	<p><i>I missed being myself as a teacher in the classroom,</i></p>	<p><i>Interrelationships and communication and the learners. I</i></p>	<p><i>I missed seeing the learners and teaching. I missed the</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal contact and physical interaction 	SUBTHEME 3.1: Interrelations

<p>between the physical classroom and the virtual teaching and learning?</p>	<p><i>I missed seeing my learners and giving the feedback to them same time on how they did on their work. I missed attending to those who were not doing well and giving them that special attention. (PST2)</i></p>	<p><i>being able to call up learners to do things physically on the board or physically be able to mark their books because at that point we were not supposed to touch the learners' exercise books so that was the most difficult part being not able to interact with them. For tests we had to leave the books for a couple of days for the virus to die but I would use the stamp to show</i></p>	<p><i>missed that I did not have time to check on the learners, since from time to time I have to check on them especially those in lower classes. (HST1)</i></p> <p><i>I missed the personal contact with my learners, I missed that when in a physical class you can read the body language to see if they understand when you are teaching, and I was missing that interaction. (HST2)</i></p>	<p><i>bond we had we the learners, understanding them and getting to help them with their schoolwork problems. I missed the environment of the school and also seeing learners performing their schoolwork. (HST3)</i></p> <p><i>I missed the physical interaction with the learners. I also missed being in the school environment and my colleagues. (HST4)</i></p>		<p>and communication with learners and colleagues</p>
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		<p><i>that I checked the work. (PST3)</i></p> <p><i>I missed one-on-one teaching. (PST4)</i></p>				
<p>What do you prefer between virtual learning and the physical class? Why?</p>	<p><i>I prefer the face-to-face method of teaching. (PST1)</i></p> <p><i>I prefer physical attendance because even though we have large numbers in our classes, but we know how to spot learners who are struggling and attend to them. Even if I don't spot the learner with a problem but seeing them physically</i></p>	<p><i>I prefer the physical method of attendance because the kids and parents have little interest with working online or working at home for that matter because even now, they don't do the homework even when there is no pandemic anymore. (PST3)</i></p> <p><i>I prefer physically attendance of classes</i></p>	<p><i>I prefer the physical attending of classes, because I can check on the learner's progress and shortfalls, and I am able to reward them when they are doing well so physical contact does really work. (HST1)</i></p> <p><i>I don't mind having 20% of the virtual learning if there is a need, but the physical attendance in class</i></p>	<p><i>I prefer the physical attendance of my learners because I want to see them and look them in their faces to see if they understand the lesson. (HST3)</i></p> <p><i>I prefer physical attendance in my class. That special bond we build with our learners. Learners become family when we teach them and not seeing</i></p>		

	<i>would allow me to see them and help them. (PST2)</i>	<i>because it is easier to attend to learners with barriers and be able to work with them physically. (PST4)</i>	<i>for that personal contact with the learners will always do it for me because of the physical interaction with the learners. (HST2)</i>	<i>them for a long time has that effect on you as a teacher. You end up missing them because they are your children. (HST4)</i>		
Which strategies can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19?						THEME 4: Strategies that can be implemented
In your opinion, what do you		<i>I think they could have provided us with more emotional</i>	<i>Number one, it could be the emotional support because this</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental/emotional • Moral 	SUBTHEME 4.1: Providing support

<p>think the school can do or provide to the teachers and learners to counter the challenges exposed by COVID-19?</p>		<p><i>and psychological help and motivation because as a teacher you are pushed to your limit where you had to be at work all the time and be around the kids who are coming from different places. Emotionally and psychologically, it did affect us because it was a lot for both teachers and learners. (PST3)</i></p>	<p><i>thing was more than a health issue, it was also an emotional/mental. So, I think in those grounds whereby a loss of a child/ loss of a parent, teachers needed that moral support to continue their teaching and learning. (HST1)</i></p> <p><i>I think COVID-19 came as a surprise as a result we did not get much education about it and we had to get information about it along the way and we had to comply, and we did</i></p>			
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			<p><i>not get much education about it COVID-19. I was expecting counseling to be provided because you might not get infected yourself but be affected maybe from your family or your learners, one of my learners got infected and I was affected, I got in her shoes, and I felt for her. (HST2)</i></p>			
	<p><i>I wish the department could have provided us with online learning classes and the learning channels</i></p>	<p><i>I think the major problem was space, but I don't think they could have done anything about it. Introducing the park</i></p>	<p><i>In terms of the resources, I cannot put the blame on the school because it's the Department of Education's</i></p>	<p><i>I wish the school could have provided us with data to better facilitate the online learning programs, for me data was a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human resources • Physical resources • Electronic resources 	<p>SUBTHEME 4.2: Providing resources</p>

	<p><i>where we would broadcast maybe It would have been easy to continue teaching when the learners were staying at home. (PST1)</i></p> <p><i>We needed anything that could have helped at that time. I think the textbooks, different learning models could have helped us. We needed time so that we can use WhatsApp classes or more staff so that we could have extra classes. I wish the</i></p>	<p><i>homes would have helped provided he park homes were not used to take on more children. (PST3)</i></p> <p><i>Visual aids. (PST4)</i></p>	<p><i>responsibility to provide more resources. There was social distancing and we had to be fewer in class, but we were short of desks. So, we had to ask the learners to alternate in coming to school in order to have enough social distancing space, we had the classes to separate the learners, but we were short of desks. (HST2)</i></p>	<p><i>real issue because it is expensive. Imagine having to teach all day long using your own data, it was costly for me because I had to use my own money to buy the data. I also wish there was some form of counselling for the teachers and learners because everyone was scared and they were losing loved ones to COVID-19, others were sick in hospitals it was just too much for everyone. It was really easy to sink</i></p>		
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	<p><i>school could have given us data so that we could facilitate the WhatsApp groups. (PST2)</i></p>			<p><i>into depression. (HST3)</i></p> <p><i>Additional classrooms and educators would have really made a difference. They did try to give us the Assistant Educators, but it wasn't enough wish they could have also provided us with vitamin C supplements in schools because most learners couldn't afford those vitamins to at least boost their immune systems. (HST4)</i></p>		
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Table 4.6: Findings from learners – Themes, subthemes, codes, and quotations

Question	School A (Primary School 1)	School B (Primary School 2)	School C (High School 1)	School D (High School 2)	Codes	Themes and subthemes
Which factors affect teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools?						THEME 1: Factors affecting teaching and learning
When you had online schoolwork during	<i>I had a phone, and my mother was buying me data, so it</i>	<i>I was using my mother's cell phone; she does not work so it was easy for me to</i>	<i>I was only using a cell phone; my mother couldn't</i>	<i>I had access to the computer, cell phone and internet. I think I can say I had access</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological devices • Access to the internet 	SUBTHEME 1.2: Resources

<p>COVID-19 pandemic, which technological resources did you have (laptop, tablet, computer, etc.) to do the schoolwork ?</p>	<p>was always sufficient. (PSL1)</p> <p>I was using a laptop to do my schoolwork. The teachers gave us a lot of work to take home so that we will be keeping busy. (PSL2)</p> <p>I had no technology. (PSL3)</p> <p>I used to have 3-4 hours with a tablet. (PSL4)</p>	<p>have access to a phone most times. (PSL5)</p> <p>I was using my father's cell phone when he comes back from work. (PSL6)</p> <p>3-4 hours I was using a phone and a laptop. (PSL7)</p> <p>3-4 hours I was using a laptop that has a program called i-tutor. (PSL8)</p>	<p>afford to buy other things. (HSL1)</p> <p>I was using a cell phone and I did not have it every time because it was not mine, I was using my parent's phone. Sometimes they would be using the phone. (HSL2)</p> <p>I had no technology to use at home and we were not receiving any work from school, we were just staying at home doing nothing. (HSL3)</p>	<p>to technology all the time when I needed to do schoolwork. (HSL5)</p> <p>I had access to cell phone and internet all the time. (HSL6)</p> <p>I was using my mother's phone. I did not have other gadgets like laptop and other things. (HSL7)</p> <p>I always had the technology to do my schoolwork. I have a computer at home, and I have a cell phone. (HSL8)</p>		
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			<i>I had the resources to do all the work. My parents were very supportive and providing me with the technology and resources. (HSL4)</i>			
How difficult or easy it was to stay focused on your schoolwork during the online/virtual classes?	<i>It was difficult because while I was learning at home, some family members would be taking or calling on me so it was difficult to focus unlike at school where I could focus without any distractions. (PSL1)</i>	<i>It was easy to focus on home, they gave me time to do my schoolwork. (PSL5)</i> <i>It was difficult because I would see my friends playing outside and I would just go and play with them. (PSL6)</i> <i>It was difficult because I was getting a bit</i>	<i>It was difficult, sometimes when I was in the WhatsApp class some messages would pop up and I would check them which was distracting. (HSL1)</i> <i>It was not easy because I always got distracted easy by Facebook and other</i>	<i>It was not easy because at home there are many distractions including my friends. Sometimes I just wanted to do other things not schoolwork. (HSL5)</i> <i>It was not easy because I would read the messages that came through during</i>	• Concentrati on	SUBTHEME 1.2: Learning method

	<p><i>I was able to focus on my schoolwork because I was doing the schoolwork in my room and my mother allowed me space and there were no distractions. (PSL2)</i></p> <p><i>It was difficult because a lot of things were happening. (PSL 3)</i></p> <p><i>It was difficult because we have a little child at home and the baby used to distract me. (PSL4)</i></p>	<p><i>distracted and sometimes, I couldn't understand a question and I couldn't ask the teacher. (PSL7)</i></p> <p><i>It was not difficult because I had help from my parents, there were no distractions. (PSL8)</i></p>	<p><i>WhatsApp messages. (HSL2)</i></p> <p><i>It was difficult, having to come back to school after staying at home for a long period. It was difficult to focus, and I was not taking studying seriously that time. (HSL3)</i></p> <p><i>It was hard doing the work on WhatsApp because sometimes you would get a text from other people in the middle of a lesson and get distracted. (HSL4)</i></p>	<p><i>the WhatsApp class. (HSL6)</i></p> <p><i>It was not easy because people would call my mother's phone while I'm doing the work and I had to wait for her to finish her calls. (HSL7)</i></p> <p><i>It was not easy because when you are at home it's easy to be distracted. (HSL8)</i></p>		
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<p>How do these factors affect the teaching and learning of learners in school?</p>						<p>THEME 2: Effects of the factors on teaching and learning</p>
<p>What were the effects of learning online or virtually on the way you heard from your teachers individually ?</p>	<p><i>I could not contact the teacher on WhatsApp, the teacher could only send work on the group, but we could not ask any questions on the group. (PSL1)</i></p> <p><i>I could communicate with</i></p>	<p><i>I could ask them [teachers] questions on WhatsApp and get the help I need. (PSL5)</i></p> <p><i>I could not ask the teacher on WhatsApp, I used to ask my dad when he comes back from work. (PSL6)</i></p>	<p><i>It was difficult to get a one-on-one interaction with a teacher. It was different than being in class, while we were learning in class it was easy to ask a question and get help from the teacher. On our</i></p>	<p><i>I could WhatsApp the teacher and ask if I needed help and they would help. (HSL5)</i></p> <p><i>I could WhatsApp the teacher on our WhatsApp group. (HSL6)</i></p> <p><i>I could write a WhatsApp to the teacher. (HSL7)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking questions or contacting the teachers 	<p>SUBTHEME 2.1: Interaction with the teachers</p>

	<p><i>the teacher on the side if there was something I did not understand. The teacher would then assist me individually on what I would ask and explain to me. (PSL2)</i></p> <p><i>There was no communication between me and the teachers during my stay at home. Whenever I did not understand I would ask my parents. (PSL3)</i></p>	<p><i>If I did not understand something my parent had to contact the teacher and ask on my behalf. (PSL7)</i></p> <p><i>3 to 4 times, I could ask questions from my teachers. (PSL8)</i></p>	<p><i>WhatsApp group we couldn't write back to the teacher or ask question, only a teacher could post work on the group, and we would only receive the message but not be able to type back. (HSL1)</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes I couldn't understand the teacher during the WhatsApp classes, but I could respond to the teacher and ask a question and the teacher would explain. (HSL2)</i></p>	<p><i>The teachers allowed us to ask questions on WhatsApp if we needed more clarity. (HSL8)</i></p>		
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	<p><i>I did not have any chance to ask a teacher for clarity if I did not understand. I used to ask my mother for help because she is also a teacher. (PSL4)</i></p>		<p><i>I did not hear anything from my teachers during COVID-19. there was no communication from the teachers. (HSL3)</i></p> <p><i>When I needed something from the teacher I could text and our WhatsApp group it was open for learners to text. If I did not understand I could just ask on the group. (HSL4)</i></p>			
<p>What was the most challenging aspect of</p>	<p><i>What was most challenging with using WhatsApp was that I did not</i></p>	<p><i>What was challenging was when we had the school project that</i></p>	<p><i>What was most challenging was that I couldn't ask the teacher questions</i></p>	<p><i>Staying focused was my main challenge. (HSL5)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration/distractions • Interaction with the teachers 	<p>SUBTHEME 2.2: Learning approach</p>

<p>online learning?</p>	<p><i>understand some features on WhatsApp, so it was challenging because I had to ask my mother on how to do most things on WhatsApp. (PSL1)</i></p> <p><i>It wasn't easy because I missed seeing my friends at school and playing with them. (PSL2)</i></p> <p><i>I couldn't see my teachers and I couldn't see my friends. (PSL3)</i></p> <p><i>You couldn't ask any questions; you didn't know if you</i></p>	<p><i>needed materials from the shops, I couldn't get the materials because most shops were also closed, and we could not do group projects since we were all living in different places. It was also challenging when it came to understanding questions because there was no face-to-face interaction with the teacher. (PSL5)</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes when my dad left for work, I couldn't get the schoolwork, I had to</i></p>	<p><i>when I don't understand the WhatsApp lesson. Sometimes if I did not understand something that we learned during the WhatsApp class and I had to ask some of my classmates to explain, some of them did not have the patience to explain further. If I did not understand what they were telling me. Unlike the teacher who can explain much better so I can understand. During the COVID-19</i></p>	<p><i>Network challenges were a problem for me. When there was load shedding, I would lose the network completely. (HSL6)</i></p> <p><i>The network and the data. Data was expensive and my mother had to make sure to buy it so that I can get schoolwork. (HSL7)</i></p> <p><i>Not hearing the voice of the teacher while I'm used to hearing the voice and seeing the teacher in front of me. The data was</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation • Resources • Interaction <p>with peers</p>	
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	<p>were wrong or right on your schoolwork you just wrote because no one was giving you that individual attention that you needed. Even after submitting your work online, you couldn't get the results back and there was no time to do corrections it was just something to keep us busy, I guess. Not knowing my marks also was stressing me out because I always had questions like</p>	<p>wait for him to come back from work in order for me to start doing my schoolwork. (PSL6)</p> <p>What was most challenging with using WhatsApp was that sometimes I did not have the data to log in and I couldn't use the internet and other features I needed like Google. (PSL7)</p> <p>What was most challenging with using a laptop was that the computer used to freeze, and I</p>	<p>pandemic we couldn't cover all the content we had to learn so now it's difficult because we find that work on the next grade and now, we struggle because the teacher now needs to teach us the previous grades content in order to help us understand. (HSL1)</p> <p>Distractions were the most challenging part for me and also procrastinating. (HSL2)</p>	<p>expensive, my parents always had to buy me data. (HSL8)</p>		
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	<p><i>“what if I failed?”. I did not have my self-esteem and I did not trust myself that I am doing well. (PSL4)</i></p>	<p><i>had to restart it and the class would be moving. (PSL8)</i></p>	<p><i>I think getting distracted easy and the fact that no one is keeping tabs on you so it's easy to just skip the online/WhatsApp class. (HSL3)</i></p> <p><i>Data was expensive and the funding from parents was not always there. (HSL4)</i></p>			
<p>How were these factors exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic?</p>						<p>THEME 3: Exposure of the factors during COVID-19</p>

<p>While you were learning online or virtually, how often did you hear from your teachers individually?</p>	<p><i>I could not contact the teacher on WhatsApp, the teacher could only send work on the group, but we could not ask any questions on the group. (PSL1)</i></p> <p><i>I could communicate with the teacher on the side if there was something I did not understand. The teacher would then assist me individually on what I would ask and</i></p>	<p><i>I could ask them [teachers] questions on WhatsApp and get the help I need. (PSL5)</i></p> <p><i>I could not ask the teacher on WhatsApp, I used to ask my dad when he comes back from work. (PSL6)</i></p> <p><i>If I did not understand something my parent had to contact the teacher and ask on my behalf. (PSL7)</i></p> <p><i>3 to 4 times, I could ask questions from my teachers. (PSL8)</i></p>	<p><i>It was difficult to get a one-on-one interaction with a teacher. It was different than being in class, while we were learning in class it was easy to ask a question and get help from the teacher. On our WhatsApp group we couldn't write back to the teacher or ask question, only a teacher could post work on the group, and we would only receive the message but not be able to type back. (HSL1)</i></p>	<p><i>I could WhatsApp the teacher and ask if I needed help and they would help. (HSL5)</i></p> <p><i>I could WhatsApp the teacher on our WhatsApp group. (HSL6)</i></p> <p><i>I could write a WhatsApp to the teacher. (HSL7)</i></p> <p><i>The teachers allowed us to ask questions on WhatsApp if we needed more clarity. (HSL8)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-centred approach or a one-way communication • Two-way communication • Indirect 	<p>SUBTHEME</p> <p>3.1: Interaction with the teachers</p>
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	<p><i>explain to me. (PSL2)</i></p> <p><i>There was no communication between me and the teachers during my stay at home. Whenever I did not understand I would ask my parents. (PSL3)</i></p> <p><i>I did not have any chance to ask a teacher for clarity if I did not understand. I used to ask my mother for help because she is also a teacher. (PSL4)</i></p>		<p><i>Sometimes I couldn't understand the teacher during the WhatsApp classes, but I could respond to the teacher and ask a question and the teacher would explain. (HSL2)</i></p> <p><i>I did not hear anything from my teachers during COVID-19. there was no communication from the teachers. (HSL3)</i></p> <p><i>When I needed something from the teacher I could text and our WhatsApp</i></p>			
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			<i>group it was open for learners to text. If I did not understand I could just ask on the group. (HSLA)</i>			
Which strategies can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19?						THEME 4: Strategies that can be implemented
In your opinion, what do you think could have been			<i>I think the school did the best they could to continue with learning, but I also wish they could have</i>	<i>Maybe if we were given more classrooms so that we could still attend in small numbers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data • Classroom space 	SUBTHEME 4.1: Provision of resources

<p>done better during the COVID-19 crisis to help you get the most from your studies?</p>			<p><i>at least provided us with data because some of us couldn't afford data to be on WhatsApp classes every day. When it comes to things like computers and other gadgets, I don't think they could have done anything to help with those. (HSL1)</i></p> <p><i>I wish the school could supply us with data. (HSL2)</i></p>	<p><i>rather than sitting at home. (HSL7)</i></p>		
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	<p><i>I wished that teachers could give us extra lesson and I wish we were able to go to the teacher's house to ask questions. (PSL2)</i></p>	<p><i>I wished we could come to school and learn but wear our masks so we could be safe. Also, I wish they could have made a YouTube channel where we could learn or maybe give us questions via WhatsApp and then we could use Google classrooms. (PSL5)</i></p> <p><i>I wished we could have online learning or any virtual classes where we could see the teacher teaching. (PSL6)</i></p>	<p><i>I think it would have been better if we were to have weekend classes so that we would understand the work that was given to us on WhatsApp. (HSL1).</i></p> <p><i>I wish they could have started an online class because we did nothing for six months we were just staying at home, and we came back in September. I wish we had online learning because we missed so much work and now,</i></p>	<p><i>I think online classes could have helped instead of using WhatsApp only. (HSL5)</i></p> <p><i>A learning channel or virtual class could have been more helpful. (HSL6)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekend classes • Online or virtual classes • Extra schoolwork 	<p>SUBTHEME</p> <p>4.2: Facilitation of extra classes</p>
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		<p><i>Nothing, I think WhatsApp was better. (PSL7)</i></p> <p><i>I wish the teacher could have given me more homework. (PSL)</i></p>	<p><i>we struggle. I also wish they could have made WhatsApp classes or send to our parents so we would carry on learning at home. (HSL3)</i></p> <p><i>I wish they could have something more even though I don't know what they could do. I wish maybe the teachers could do extra classes maybe in the libraries or some places that were not overcrowded. (HSL4)</i></p>			
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	<p><i>I wish the teacher could have some spare time where we could ask questions, the work was difficult, so I wish the teacher was available to answer the question when we do not understand. (PSL1)</i></p>					<p>SUBTHEME 4.3: Facilitation of extra and/or one-on-one consultations</p>

	<p><i>I wish they could give us individual attention, each and every child to be given an extra attention by their teacher. (PSL4)</i></p>					
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4.4 Conclusion

This chapter analysed and presented the findings of the study in line with the objectives. The chapter presented the themes, subthemes and codes which emerged from the data. The data presented was developed from the information collected by means of interviews with the principals, teachers and learners from low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools in the Empangeni district. The next chapter discusses the findings, concludes, and makes recommendations based on the research findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the data collected through structured interviews. This chapter discusses the findings of the study and makes conclusions and recommendations. This chapter is organised in line with the themes that emerged from data analysis and is guided by the research objectives. According to Denscombe (2007), the concluding chapters in a research study aimed to draw together different threads of research to reach a general conclusion and suggest a way forward in addressing the research problem. Habib, Pathik and Maryam (2014) note that topics for future research can be identified based on the study's limitations, methodologies, statistical tools, challenges, and findings. This study was conducted with the principals, teachers, and learners in the Empangeni schools to determine the impact of COVID-19 on the schools' educational achievement. The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Assess the factors affecting teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools
- ii. Determine the effects of the factors on teaching and learning in schools.
- iii. Evaluate how these factors were exposed during COVID-19; and
- iv. Establish the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19.

5.2 Discussion of findings from principals

This section discusses the findings and the themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with four (4) principals. Data gathered emerged with the following themes.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Factors affecting teaching and learning

Theme 1 reflects the factors affecting teaching and learning. This theme aligns with objective 1 of this study which sought to assess the factors of teaching and learning in low socioeconomic status and high socioeconomic status schools. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. How helpful was the leadership (department of education) at your school been in resolving learning challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- ii. How was the communication from school leadership? What about district leadership?

Data from the interviews indicated that the sub-questions sought to illicit diversified and in-depth information on the factors affecting teaching and learning. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the answers provided by the participants. Under this theme, data from the interviews emerged with the following subthemes: leadership; and budget. The factors affecting teaching and learning subthemes and codes are discussed in subsequent sections.

5.2.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Leadership

Teaching and learning are affected by the school and district leadership as they play an important role in education. The study established that all the principals highlighted that leadership affects teaching and learning. Leadership is an important element in teaching and learning as they are tasked with various leading roles, without which teaching and learning are under threat. Data from the participants revealed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the leadership provided:

- support:

“The department was very helpful when it comes to support.” HSP2

The findings further indicate that although the leadership was supportive, their efforts were not evident due to the lack of resources.

“The department was trying their best when it comes to resolving issues. Even though their efforts seemed to be not helping because they did not have the necessary resources we needed in schools.” HSP1

“The department was very much involved, but the pity part of it is they were not much resourced in terms of meeting the standards of COVID-19 or mitigating the challenges that the schools faced but they were trying but had no resources.” PSP1

The findings show that the school’s leadership played the role of nurturing teachers and learners by providing the required and necessary support to their schools, although their efforts were shadowed by the lack of resources. This is in line with Gunawan and Gunawan (2019), who say that the role of the principal cannot be ignored in personality formation, as the principal has the function of nurturing the character of professional teachers and students and providing support to their staff and learners. Data from the participants further revealed that the leadership was:

- **communicating:**

“There was communication but not as frequent as we are used to. As I have said they were also dealing a lot.” HSP2

“I was satisfied with our leadership; we were communicating frequently with our SGB members and parents. We had a WhatsApp group for SGB and another one for parents. We communicated everything in the group regarding the measures to be taken and all the other concerns during that time. The district leadership was also trying communication mainly by email and calls, but it was not that frequent.” HSP1

“That’s a problem because, in terms of the department, we have a restricted number of officials within the department and they cannot cover all the schools in their district, so the communication was just rendered in terms of communication. Even if you want clarity in terms of communication, it will be hard for you as a principal to find the exact content that needs to be covered.” PSP1

The findings indicate that the leadership communicated with the SGB, teachers, parents, and other principals. Data from the interviews reveal that the communication was not entirely effective, although the leaders did their best by facilitating online communication, which is

commonly efficient. This concurs with Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) who state that it is the school principal's job to create the conditions under which the effectiveness of teachers and education can be achieved, and teachers must build productive and collaborative partnerships with their colleagues and effectively manage their schools. Haines *et al.* (2015) correspondingly mention that school management must be characterised by trust, respect, communication, collaboration, and a supportive school environment focused on student learning.

5.2.1.2: Subtheme 1.2: Budget

Teaching and learning require a budget to facilitate teaching and learning activities in schools. The study established that one out of four principals highlighted that the budget is a factor that affects teaching and learning. A budget is required to ensure prosperous and progressive teaching-learning, without which teaching and learning are at risk. Data from the participants revealed that the budget is dedicated to:

- **resources:**

“The department did not have the budget to provide us with the electronic resources that were needed that time.” HSP1

The findings indicate that the school did not have electronic resources to bridge the teaching and learning gap imposed by COVID-19. The findings further indicate that the lack of a budget affected the school's availability and access to resources. This is in line with Nasson (2020) who trusts that independent schools are well-resourced to manage COVID-19, and the opposite may be true regarding government schools.

5.2.2 Theme 2: The effects of lack of electronic resources on teaching and learning

Theme 2 reflects the effects of these factors on teaching and learning. This theme is in line with objective 2 of the study, which sought to determine the effects of a lack of resources in teaching and learning in schools. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. How did the availability and accessibility of electronic resources affect your school's teaching and learning during the shutdown?
- ii. How was the students' academic growth after COVID-19?

Data from the participants indicated that the sub-questions sought to illicit diversified information on the effects of the factors on teaching and learning. The findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the answers provided by the participants. Under this theme, data from the interviews emerged with the following subtheme: teaching; and academic growth. The effects of the factors on teaching and learning subthemes and codes are discussed in subsequent sections.

5.2.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Teaching

Teaching is an effect of the factors discussed under Theme 1. The study established that all the principals highlighted that the factors affecting teaching and learning influence teaching. Teaching is a necessary component in schools, without which the impact of education is not guaranteed. Data from the participants revealed that the effects on teaching are due to the:

- resources:

“How can we have enough resources when we are a school situated in a township? Resources for COVID-19 were short, we were even short of textbooks so I cannot even mention the electronic resources since we are short of simple textbooks. The resources we had were not sufficient during that time of COVID-19.” PSP1

However, data from the participants further revealed that these resources are adequate in some schools.

“We had all the electronic resources as teachers. Luckily for my school, all educators have laptops, so it was easier to migrate to virtual teaching and most of the educators have knowledge of current technology. We just had to set up those classes and do some minor things and we were running.” HSP2

These findings reveal some differences regarding the availability of resources for teaching. Data from the participants indicated that two out of four schools had the resources to

facilitate teaching, while the other two schools did not have the resources. This indicates that the availability of resources for teaching positively affects teaching in schools, as learners continue to learn even during a global health crisis, while the unavailability of the resources negatively affects teaching in schools as the learners miss out on the opportunity to continue learning. This is supported by Horowitz (2020), who indicated that low-income students' transition to online learning is challenging since they have less or no access to resources to make up for lost face-to-face instruction. Dube (2020) adds that low socioeconomic status school learners found it difficult to use online learning programmes because they did not have the resources, unlike high socioeconomic status school students who had computers and internet access. Data from the participants indicate some inequalities, differences, or uniqueness in the schools as they are affected differently by the factors discussed under Theme 1.

5.2.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Academic growth

The academic growth of the learners is another effect of the factors discussed under Theme 1. The study established that all the principals highlighted academic growth as an effect of the factors that affect teaching and learning. Academic growth is at the heart of schools the world over, without which the success and role of educational institutions are under threat. Data from the participants revealed that academic growth is dependent on:

- the content learned:

"I am very concerned about our learner's growth. We lost so much learning hours during COVID-19, and we cannot get them back, we lost a lot of time staying at home. Learners did not learn a lot of content that they were supposed to learn and now when they go to the next grade, they don't have a clue of what is going on in other chapters. You find that those chapters are the ones that were not covered during the times of COVID-19. Most school curriculum you find it in the next grade, so if you did not learn it on the previous grade, you are in trouble. Now our teachers have to go back to the previous grade's textbook and teach that work so that the learners can have a better understanding. This is delaying the content that is supposed to be done currently. The learners were really affected when it comes to their academic growth." HSP1

- the adoption of technology:

“It is sad to see how the pandemic impacted our education and we cannot get back all that time we lost. Our learners were struggling to continue with schoolwork that was supposed to be taught during that time because the electronic or the virtual learning platforms were a new thing that they had to adapt to. Change has never been easy, so adapting to that learning method was challenging at first but we got used to it as time went. We are very behind on every content, and I don’t think we will recover. Our teachers are trying all they can, but we will see with time. Even though we had the resources, but it was not the same as teaching in the classroom. For me virtual classrooms are just not as effective and the physical classes.” HSP2

These findings indicate that the academic growth was affected by the content learned in schools which was taught in the smallest available time due to the COVID-19 regulations. Further findings reveal that adopting technology by both the learners and teachers was not easy, affecting the amount and type of content learned. This indicates that due to this, the academic growth of the learners was consequently affected. These findings are in line with Kohnke and Moorhouse (2021) who argue that although there has been an increase globally in both blended and online methods of learning due to their apparent benefits, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the rapid adoption of online teaching methods, but these transitions presented challenges for teachers and learners who had to adapt to online learning.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Exposure of the inequalities in education

Theme 3 reflects the exposure to inequalities during COVID-19. This theme aligns with objective 3 of the study, which sought to evaluate how the inequalities were exposed during COVID-19. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. What inequalities did you notice during COVID-19 between low socioeconomic status schools and high socioeconomic status schools?

Data from the interviews revealed that this question sought to illicit diversified information on the exposure of these factors. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity of the responses by the participants. Under this theme,

interview data emerged with the following subthemes: learners sent home. The exposure of the factors subthemes and codes are discussed in subsequent sections.

5.2.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Learners sent home

The factors were exposed when learners were sent home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study established that all the principals highlighted that the factors affecting teaching and learning were exposed when the learners were sent home for various reasons. Learners should be in the classroom where teaching and learning occur; hence their failure to do so poses a high risk for educational institutions. Data from the participants revealed that learners were sent home due to the:

- lack of resources:

“These inequalities were always there even before the pandemic. Some schools were continuing learning because they had all the resources, they needed and other schools like ours had to send children at home for a really long time since we did not have the resources to continue with learning.” HSP1

“Some schools in our districts did not have the same advantages of electronic learning resources. The learners had to stay at home unfortunately. Some did not have enough space to separate their learners since they are so many in classes.” HSP2

- lack of teaching space:

“Yes, definitely I experienced the inequalities. We had a lot of learners in our classrooms even while there was no COVID-19 and high socioeconomic status schools have a less number maybe 15 learners in their classrooms and definitely those learners could afford to continue with their classroom attendance since they are a small number they could cater for social distancing while in our schools we could not.” PSP1

These findings indicate that the schools have inequalities, such as the availability of resources and teaching space in the classrooms. Further findings reveal that the learners were sent back home during COVID-19 due to insufficient resources and inadequate space for social distancing. The findings indicate that some schools had an advantage regarding resources as they continued to keep their learners in class since they had the electronic

resources, enough books, enough staff, and adequate space for social distancing, while other schools did not enjoy the same privileges. This aligns with Musisi and Kiggundu (2018) who note that educational inequality is an unequal distribution of academic resources, including but not limited to school funding, qualified and experienced teachers, books, and technology for marginalised communities.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Strategies that can be implemented

Theme 4 reflects the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. This theme is in line with objective 4, which sought to establish the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. In your opinion, what do you think can be done to bridge the gaps that exist between these institutions?

Data from the interviews indicated that this question sought to illicit diversified and personal opinions on the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the responses provided by the participants. Under this theme, interview data emerged from the following subthemes: provision of adequate and equal resources.

5.2.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Provision of adequate and equal resources

Adequate and equal resources are a requirement for teaching and learning. The study established that all the principals suggested providing adequate and equal resources to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. Adequate and equal resources are critical factors in teaching and learning, without which the success of schools is under threat. Data from the participants revealed that adequate and equal resources include:

- funding:

“The government should provide equal resources to all the schools regardless of their location. You find that there are low socioeconomic status schools all around the area, but they are not funded equally, that should stop.” HSP1

- technological gadgets:

“If one school is getting a computer all other schools should get a computer there must not be favouritism that is happening.” HSP1

- learning opportunities:

“All learners should be afforded equal learning opportunities regardless of where they come from or their skin.” HSP1

These findings suggest that there are inequalities in providing resources to schools. The findings reveal that some schools are provided with resources such as computers and funding, while others are not; hence they further lack the learning opportunities that some schools have. These findings suggest that providing adequate and equal resources may rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19, such as educational inequalities. This is in line with Darmawan and Keeves (2006) who suggest that the lack of fairness needs to be corrected to achieve a fair comparison between schools.

5.3 Discussion of findings from teachers

This section presents the findings and themes identified from the interviews with eight (8) teachers from both low socioeconomic status and high socioeconomic status schools in the Empangeni area. Data gathered emerged with the following themes.

5.3.1 Theme 1: Factors affecting teaching and learning

Theme 1 reflects the factors affecting teaching and learning. This theme aligns with objective 1 of this study, which sought to assess teaching and learning factors in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. Which learning method were you using during the school shutdown?
- ii. Which challenges did you face with the online learning experience?

- iii. What challenges are you facing with the current learning model at your school?
- iv. How satisfied are you with the current learning model at your school?

Data from the interviews indicated that the sub-questions sought to elicit diversified and in-depth information on the factors affecting teaching and learning. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the answers provided by the participants. Under this theme, data from interviews emerged with the following subthemes: teaching method; resources; learner attendance and participation; and scope of subjects. The factors affecting teaching and learning are discussed in subsequent sections.

5.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Teaching method

Teaching and learning require effective teaching methods in times of world health pandemics. The study established that six (6) out of eight (8) teachers highlighted that they were using online or virtual teaching methods, while two (2) out of eight (8) highlighted that they were not using any virtual or online teaching methods. Teaching methods that are adaptable to the needs of the situation or learners are required to ensure teaching and learning progress, without which the success of the schools is at risk. Data from the participants revealed that the teachers who used virtual or online teaching methods used:

- Google Classroom:

“We had e-classrooms which we did on Google Classrooms, it wasn’t effective. We also dealt with some school kids who were not financially sound their parents. The internet/Wi-Fi to access the e-classrooms was not available and there was no support from parents. You would post the work maybe out of 40 learners only 10 would do the work. And as Maths teachers that was really bad. Support from parents is a major issue even now without COVID-19. I did not enjoy the e-classrooms I prefer to be hands-on when I’m teaching, I prefer the learners to participate in the lesson and not just give them work and expect them to teach themselves.” PST3

“I was using Google Classroom to continue teaching and learning.” HST3

These findings reveal that some teachers used Google Classroom to teach the learners virtually or online. The findings further reveal that Google Classroom required access to the internet via Wi-Fi or data unavailable due to the lack of support from the parents. Further, the findings reveal that only 25% of the learners had access to the schoolwork sent through Google Classroom; hence, the teaching method was ineffective. This aligns with Boonk (2018) who argues that a learner's academic accomplishment can be significantly anticipated by socioeconomic issues in parents, family, and networks. Data from the participants revealed that other teaching methods used by the teachers are:

- WhatsApp:

“I was using WhatsApp classes. I did not enjoy the WhatsApp method because lots of parents had problems when it came to data, some of them would say they cannot afford the data.”

PST4

“I was using WhatsApp; I did not want to be too fancy since most of parents and learners have WhatsApp. I used to send activities on WhatsApp then I would give my private time for them to ask questions on WhatsApp.” HST2

These findings reveal that other teachers used WhatsApp to teach the learners. The findings reveal that this method was not effective for some teachers as it required data that was not affordable. Further findings reveal that some teachers used WhatsApp since most parents also had the application. The findings indicate that the teaching method was effective for learners who had access to data and Wi-Fi; hence access to the internet was the dynamic influencing the effectiveness of the teaching method. This is in line with Dube (2020) who mentions that virtual classes or WhatsApp classes work better in high socioeconomic status schools where all learners can access the computer and the internet at home.

5.3.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Resources

Resources are a requirement for successful teaching and learning. The study established that six (6) out of eight (8) teachers highlighted resources as a factor affecting teaching and learning. Adequate resources enable progress in the learners' learning, without which their academic success is threatened. Data from the participants revealed that the teachers faced challenges with resources such as:

- technological devices:

“Most learners did not have the cell phones and the data to log in to WhatsApp.” HST4

These findings reveal that access to resources such as technological devices was a challenge for most learners. The findings further reveal that those with the devices did not have data to access WhatsApp. This indicates that technological devices are a vast resource challenge that affects teaching and learning. The statement supports Nel & Marais (2020), who state that even though these learning methods were helpful to many learners, they were not suitable for every student since the backgrounds of students differ a lot. Data from the participants revealed that the teachers were faced with other resource challenges, including:

- network connectivity:

“Most times I had network problems. My computer would lose network in the middle of a lesson and that was not a good thing.” HST3

“What was challenging was the network problems, some learners would come in an hour or two hours later and say they did not have the internet.” HST2

These findings reveal that network connectivity was challenging for teachers and learners. The findings reveal that the teachers lost network connectivity during the lessons, while the learners came late for the lessons due to this challenge. This indicates that network connectivity was another resource challenge affecting school teaching and learning. This is in line with Means and Neisler (2021) who mention that more than one in six students experienced frequent internet connectivity issues and hardware and software problems severe enough to interfere with their ability to continue learning.

5.3.1.3 Subtheme 1.3: Learner attendance and participation

Learner attendance and participation are a requirement for effective teaching and learning. The study established that three (3) out of eight (8) teachers highlighted learner attendance and participation as factors affecting teaching and learning. Learner attendance and participation are required to ensure the progressive learning of the learners, without which

their academic growth is at risk. Data from the participants revealed that learner attendance and participation were:

- low:

“Learners were not attending in full numbers; we could not do assessments.” HST4

“Some learners were not participating at all in the WhatsApp lessons of which when they came back from school, we had to start again teaching the work we had sent on WhatsApp.”

PST4

These findings reveal that the learners were not attending and participating in online or virtual learning in full numbers which resulted in the need for teachers to repeat the work that was covered during these lessons when the students returned from school. Further findings reveal that there were not enough learners present for the teachers to conduct assessments. This indicates that it impacted the ability of teachers to evaluate learner performance. This is in line with Yusuf and Ahmad (2020) who note that most learners did not have internet access leading to the disruption of classes, and students did not attend the online classes as scheduled.

5.3.1.4 Subtheme 1.4: Scope of subjects

The scope of the subjects taught in schools has an impact on teaching and learning. The study established that all the teachers highlighted the scope of the subjects as a factor affecting teaching and learning. The scope of the subjects is a necessary component in teaching and learning without which, the goals of the school are under threat. Data from one (1) participant revealed that the scope of the subjects is:

- unsatisfying:

“I am not really satisfied but I don’t have a final say on it. On our ATP we teach until a week before the school closure which is not a reality. We should be teaching until a month before school closure to allow space for revisions and assessments. If I can show you my ATP it goes until a week before school closure and it doesn’t mention the exams and revision.” HST2

These findings reveal that the teacher is not satisfied with the current teaching model which only goes up until one week before school closure although they do not have the authority to make any changes themselves. These findings indicate that this is not practical as it does not allow enough time for revisions and assessments. Further, the findings suggest the importance of adequate time for revisions and assessments in the teaching process, and the potential limitations of unrealistic schedules that do not allow for flexibility and adjustment. Further findings revealed that the majority (7) of the teachers revealed that the scope of the subjects is:

- **satisfying:**

“I am satisfied but I think we could do better. I think we should have some video learning sometimes to switch the method of learning so that the learners can have a different way of learning.” PST2

“I am satisfied with the way things are managed in our school. There is no work overload, and we have a good work relationship with the colleagues.” HST3

These findings reveal that the teachers are satisfied with the current scope of the subjects although they believe that incorporating video learning could be beneficial to provide a different method of learning for the learners. The findings also reveal that the teachers are satisfied with the management of the school and the working relationship with colleagues. Further, the findings suggest that positive relationships and supportive work environments can have a positive impact on teaching and learning.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Effects of the factors on teaching and learning

Theme 2 reflects the effects of these factors on teaching and learning. This theme is in line with objective 2 of the study which sought to determine the effects of the factors on teaching and learning in schools. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. What effect did the virtual/WhatsApp classrooms have on teaching and learning?
- ii. What effect does the current learning model have on well-being?

Data from the interviews indicated that the sub-questions sought to elicit diversified and in-depth information on the effects of the factors affecting teaching and learning. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the answers provided by the participants. Under this theme, data from interviews emerged with the following subtheme: learner performance and results; teacher well-being; and learner progress. The effects of the factors affecting teaching and learning are discussed in subsequent sections.

5.3.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Learner performance and results

Learner performance and results are an effect of the factors discussed under Theme 1. Data from the study established that one (1) out of eight (8) teachers highlighted that the virtual classrooms influenced learner performance and results, while seven (7) other teachers highlighted that it did not have an effect. Learner performance and results are an effect of the factors that affect teaching and learning. Data from the participants revealed that learner performance and results:

- improved:

“Yes, I think they were effective, there was improvement here and there.” PST4

These findings reveal that the teacher believes that virtual learning was effective to some extent as there was some improvement in learner performance and results. But they also mentioned that virtual learning is suitable for a short period, or it can be used as an additional method of learning. However, the findings do not provide specific details on the extent of the improvement or the factors that contributed to it. This is in line with Wilcha (2020) who states that while short-term virtual learning is effective, long-term virtual learning would have significant negative effects on teachers and learners.

Further data from most of the participants suggests that learner performance and results:

- did not improve:

“I can’t really say the online learning/WhatsApp was effective for me, those who were excellent in class were still doing well and those who were struggling were still struggling. Virtual learning worked depending on the resources, some schools it worked for them. If

you had the many resources and tools, it worked well, but if you lacked the resources and tools, it was not effective.” HST1

“The WhatsApp method was not effective, there was a decline in performance, and some learners enjoyed chatting on WhatsApp with their teacher online and not worrying about the main aim of having the WhatsApp class.” HST2

These findings reveal that learner performance and results were not impacted for learners who were already doing well in class and may not have been effective in helping struggling learners; hence virtual learning was ineffective in improving learner performance and results. Further, the findings reveal that some learners may not have been fully engaged in the learning process during these virtual classes. The findings suggest that the effectiveness of virtual learning depends on the availability of resources and tools. This is in line with Simamora (2020) who argues that the effectiveness of virtual learning depends on the availability of resources.

5.3.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Teacher wellbeing

Teacher well-being is an effect of the factors discussed under Theme 1. The study established that seven (7) out of eight (8) teachers highlighted that their well-being is not affected by the current learning model, while one (1) teacher highlighted that the current model affects them. Teacher well-being is an effect of the factors affecting teaching and learning whose state puts the learner’s progress at risk. Data from the participants revealed that teacher well-being is:

- positive

“There is no effect on my social-emotional well-being.” PST1

“I would say positive one, seeing the performance and the result now, on the emotional part I can say that the kids we deal with today are battling with a lot of things, so we don’t only teach by the book but you need to look at the whole child and even go to their homes and check on them because they also bring things from home like family problems.” HST1

These findings reveal that the current learning model does not affect teachers' wellbeing. The findings suggest that teacher well-being is positively impacted by improved learner

performance and results. This highlights the importance of recognising positive learning outcomes' role in supporting teacher wellbeing. Further findings reveal the importance of considering the emotional wellbeing of learners and recognising that learners may be dealing with significant challenges outside of the classroom.

The findings further indicate that addressing these challenges and providing support to learners can help the teachers to create a more positive and supportive learning environment which can, in turn, benefit their wellbeing. Data from the participants also revealed that teacher well-being is:

- negative:

“As we speak, I am planning a Saturday class and not because I have been absent from work, but I have to have those extra classes to finish the work. And that is affecting my social life.” HST2

“Since we see learners and communicate with them almost every day, we come across some situations that have the effect on us. One of my learners has a physical problem in his knees and that is really affecting me, and I have even tried to reach out to the social workers to see how we can try to help because when he walks its difficult.” PST2

These findings reveal that the current teaching model affects some teachers' well-being. The findings suggest that some teachers sacrifice their social life to plan and conduct additional classes on a Saturday to complete the necessary work. Further findings reveal that learners' personal experiences and challenges impact their teachers emotionally and motivate them to seek additional support to help their learners overcome the challenges. This suggests that the current teaching model can negatively impact teacher well-being, leading some teachers to sacrifice their personal time and social life and extend their role in helping the learners. This is in line with a study by Alves *et al.* (2021) who found out that teachers were satisfied with the education system before the pandemic, but the pandemic has reduced the perception of wellbeing in the face of the profession, creating some concern among teachers about their professional future.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Exposure to the factors

Theme 3 reflects the exposure to these factors during COVID-19. This theme aligns with objective 3 of the study, which sought to evaluate how these factors were exposed during COVID-19. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. What changes did you notice between the physical classroom and the virtual teaching and learning?
- ii. What do you prefer between virtual learning and physical class? Why?

Data from the interviews indicated that the sub-questions sought to elicit diversified and in-depth information on the exposure of the factors that affect teaching and learning. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the answers provided by the participants. Under this theme, interview data emerged with the following subtheme: interrelations with and communication with learners and colleagues. The exposure of the factors that affect teaching and learning are discussed in subsequent sections.

5.3.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Interrelations and communication with learners and colleagues

Interrelations and communication with learners and colleagues are a requirement for successful teacher-learner or teacher-teacher correlations. The study established that all the teachers highlighted the interrelations and communication with the learners and colleagues as exposure to the factors that affect teaching and learning. Interrelations and communication with learners and colleagues are required for successful teaching and learning within schools, without which the success of the schools is in jeopardy. Data from the study established that interrelations and communication with learners and colleagues include:

- personal contact and physical interaction:

“Interrelationships and communication and the learners. I did not have time to check on the learners, since from time to time I have to check on them especially those in lower classes.”

HST1

“I missed the physical interaction with the learners. I also missed being in the school environment and my colleagues.” HST4

These findings suggest that the factors that affect teaching and learning were exposed through the interrelations and communication with the learners and colleagues. The findings suggest that the teachers could no longer regularly communicate and check in with the learners, particularly those in lower classes. The findings indicate the need for physical interaction with students and the school environment for effective teaching and learning. The statement concurs with Horowitz (2020) who posits that low-income students are concerned that the transition to online learning will be challenging since they have less access to online resources to make up for lost face-to-face instruction.

The study also sought to establish which teaching method is preferred by the teachers. The study established that seven (7) out of eight (8) teachers highlighted that they prefer the:

- traditional classroom teaching method:

“I prefer physical attendance because even though we have large numbers in our classes, but we know how to spot learners who are struggling and attend to them. Even if I don’t spot the learner with a problem but seeing them physically would allow me to see them and help them.” PST2

“I prefer physical attendance in my class. That special bond we build with our learners. Learners become family when we teach them and not seeing them for a long time has that effect on you as a teacher. You end up missing them because they are your children.” HST4

These findings reveal that teachers prefer physical attendance in the classroom to virtual teaching. The findings reveal the value of face-to-face interaction in building relationships, identifying, and addressing learner struggles, and fostering a sense of connection and family between the teachers and the learners. This suggests that virtual learning may negatively impact these aspects of teaching and learning, and it may potentially demotivate and emotionally disconnect the teachers. This aligns with Nambiar (2020) who found out that most new learning methods were incompatible with all learners.

The study revealed that teachers preferred face-to-face classroom settings because they could supply immediate feedback to teachers and students about the quality of lessons, delivery, and experience. They further mention that in a classroom setup, a teacher can see

students' body language and the non-verbal cues that help the teacher to immediately adjust their teaching approach to best suit the needs of the students. Further data from one (1) participant revealed that they do not mind:

- mixed learning:

“I don't mind having 20% of the virtual learning if there is a need, but the physical attendance in class for that personal contact with the learners will always do it for me because of the physical interaction with the learners.” HST2

These findings reveal that while the teacher is open to virtual teaching, if necessary, they strongly prefer physical attendance in the classroom due to the importance of personal contact and physical interaction with the learners. This further indicates the value of face-to-face teaching and the emotional and social dimensions of teaching and learning. This is in line with Nambiar (2020) who noted that teachers prefer face-to-face classroom settings because they can provide immediate feedback to teachers and students about the quality of lessons, delivery, and experience. The author further mentions that in a classroom setup, a teacher can see students' body language and the non-verbal cues that help the teacher to immediately adjust their teaching approach to best suit the needs of the students.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Strategies that can be implemented

Theme 4 reflects the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. This theme is in line with objective 4, which sought to establish the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. In your opinion, what do you think the school can do or provide to the teachers and learners to counter the challenges exposed by COVID-19?

Data from the interviews indicated that the sub-question sought to elicit diversified opinions on the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the answers provided by the participants. Under this theme, data from interviews emerged with

the following subthemes: providing support and providing resources. The strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19 are discussed in subsequent sections.

5.3.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Providing support

Rectifying the challenges exposed by COVID-19 required providing support to the schools. The study established that three (3) out of eight (8) teachers suggested that providing support might rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. Providing support is a requirement for effective teaching and learning, without which the learners and teachers may be demotivated. Data from the participants revealed that support can be:

- mental/emotional and moral:

“I think they could have provided us with more emotional and psychological help and motivation because as a teacher you are pushed to your limit where you had to be at work all the time and be around the kids who are coming from different places. Emotionally and psychologically, it did affect us because it was a lot for both teachers and learners.” PST3

“Number one, it could be the emotional support, because this thing was more than a health issue, it was also an emotional/mental. So, I think in those grounds whereby a loss of a child/ loss of a parent, teachers needed that moral support to continue their teaching and learning.” HST1

These findings reveal that the teachers went through emotional or psychological trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggest teachers need emotional and psychological support during the shift to virtual learning, especially considering the added stress and emotional challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers suggest that such support is necessary to help them cope with the emotional toll of the pandemic and continue to effectively teach and support their learners. This concurs with Muldong, Garica and Gozum (2021) who state that teachers, both in private and low socioeconomic status schools, are also among those people who ensure public health by educating students on how to take good care of their wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic because aside from being facilitators of learning, teachers are also expected to provide psychosocial support to the learners through avenues for them to share and express their emotions.

Although some teachers worked from home, they experienced stress brought about by the changing modalities of learning. In the transition from face-to-face to online classes, educators were challenged to maximise the use of online platforms in delivering instructions, even though not everyone was trained in online learning. During such times of global health pandemics, even teachers need psychosocial support since more pressure is being placed on them to deliver more effective learning to learners.

5.3.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Providing resources

Rectifying the challenges exposed by COVID-19 required providing resources to the schools. The study established that seven (7) out of eight (8) teachers suggested that providing resources might rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. Providing resources is a requirement for effective teaching and learning, without which the success of the schools is at risk. Data from the participants revealed that resources include:

- electronic resources:

“I wish the school could have provided us with data to better facilitate the online learning programs, for me data was a real issue because it is expensive. Imagine having to teach all day long using your own data, it was costly for me because I had to use my own money to buy the data.” HST3

“I wish the department could have provided us with online learning classes and the learning channels where we would broadcast maybe it would have been easy to continue teaching when the learners were staying at home.” PST1

These findings indicate that there were no electronic resources in the schools to facilitate online or virtual learning. The findings suggest the need for greater support from schools or departments to facilitate virtual learning during the pandemic. Further, the findings reveal concerns about the costs of data and the need for alternative learning channels to ensure effective and accessible virtual learning for all learners. This is in line with Duncan-Williams (2020), who notes that there is a high cost of data bundles, even though there are now some learning sites. Data from the participants also revealed that resources can be:

- physical resources:

“I think the major problem was space, but I don’t think they could have done anything about it. Introducing the park homes would have helped provided he park homes were not used to take on more children.” (PST3)

“In terms of the resources, I cannot put the blame on the school because it’s the Department of Education’s responsibility to provide more resources. There was social distancing and we had to be fewer in class, but we were short of desks. So, we had to ask the learners to alternate in coming to school in order to have enough social distancing space, we had the classes to separate the learners, but we were short of desks.” HST2

These findings reveal that the major challenge with physical resources was desks and classroom space to facilitate social distancing, which resulted in learners having to alternate attending school. This is in line with Hammond and Harvey (2018) who state that faculty conditions contribute significantly to the learning rates of learners. Further, Kraft and Papay (2016) state that learning surroundings play a substantial role in student success.

The findings reveal that introducing park homes could have helped if they were not used to accommodate more children. Further findings suggest that the schools cannot be solely blamed for the shortage of resources as it is the responsibility of the Department of Education to provide more resources such as desks. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) state that the government should provide low socioeconomic status schools with the resources which the pupils need to bridge the gap between these institutions. Data from the participants further revealed that resources can also be:

- human resources:

“Additional educators would have really made a difference. They did try to give us the Assistant Educators, but it wasn’t enough.” HST4

These findings reveal that the teachers would have welcomed additional human resources such as assistant educators. The findings further reveal that the school had assistant educators, although the move was ineffective. This indicates the importance of adequate resources and personnel to ensure effective teaching and learning during global health pandemics such as COVID-19. This is in line Dube (2020) who argues that the lack of school resources in low socioeconomic status schools has been a matter that has existed for years,

but up to this day, the government still fails to allocate these resources or bridge the gap between high socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status schools.

5.4 Discussion of findings from learners

This section discusses the findings and themes identified from the interviews conducted with 16 learners. Data gathered emerged with the following themes.

5.4.1 Theme 1: Factors affecting teaching and learning

Theme 1 reflects the factors affecting teaching and learning. This theme aligns with objective 1 of this study which sought to assess the factors affecting teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. When you had online schoolwork during the COVID-19 pandemic, which technological resources did you have (laptop, tablet, computer, etc.) to do the schoolwork?
- ii. How difficult or easy it was to stay focused on your schoolwork during the online/virtual classes?

Data from the interviews indicated that the sub-questions sought to illicit diversified information on the factors affecting teaching and learning. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the responses provided by the participants. Under this theme, interview data emerged with the following subthemes: resources; and learning methods. The factors affecting teaching and learning are discussed in subsequent sections.

5.4.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Resources

Resources are a factor that affects teaching and learning. The study established that 14 out of 16 learners from both low socioeconomic status schools and high socioeconomic status

schools highlighted that they had the technological resources to do their schoolwork. Resources are required to ensure progressive teaching and learning during world health pandemics such as COVID-19, without which the success of schools is in jeopardy. Data from the participants revealed that the majority (14) of the learners had resources such as:

- technological gadgets or devices:

“I was using a laptop to do my schoolwork. The teachers gave us a lot of work to take home so that we will be keeping busy.” PSL2

“I was using a cell phone and I did not have it every time because it was not mine, I was using my parent’s phone. Sometimes they would be using the phone.” HSL2

These findings indicate that the learners had access to technological devices such as laptops and phones. The findings further reveal that most learners used devices belonging to their parents, and they only had access to these for a limited period since they did not own the devices. Further, the findings indicate that the parents supported the learners by allowing them to use their devices for learning purposes. This is in line with Li and Qiu (2018) and Liu et al. (2020) who argue that the families’ socioeconomic status more strongly influences the academic performance of urban students than rural students as parents in higher socioeconomic positions can offer improved developmental surroundings for their children.

Further data from the study established that the learners had access to resources such as:

- internet:

“I had access to the computer, cell phone and internet. I think I can say I had access to technology all the time when I needed to do schoolwork.” HSL5

“I had a phone, and my mother was buying me data, so it was always sufficient.” PSL1

These findings indicate that the learners had access to the Internet to do their schoolwork. Further, the findings reveal that the parents bought data for the learners to do schoolwork. This aligns with Liu et al. (2020), who state that parents in higher socioeconomic positions can offer improved developmental surroundings for their children.

5.4.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Learning method

The learning method used in schools affects teaching and learning. The study established that all the learners highlighted the learning method as a factor affecting teaching and learning. The learning method used in schools should be progressive for both the teachers and learners, without which the impact of teaching and learning is at risk. Data from the participants revealed that the learning method impacts:

- concentration:

“It was difficult because we have a little child at home and the baby used to distract me.”

PSL4

“It was not easy because at home there are many distractions including my friends. Sometimes I just wanted to do other things not schoolwork.” HSL5

These findings indicate that the online or virtual learning method used during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the learners’ concentration. The findings suggest that the home environment where the learners learn is not regulated to facilitate learning which requires a quiet environment where the learner can concentrate on studying. Further findings reveal that the learners may sometimes not feel like doing their schoolwork, but instead, they opt to do other things which are not school-related. This points to regulating the environment from which the learners learn virtually, which should cultivate an atmosphere that allows concentration. This is in line with Azevedo *et al.* (2022), who stated that during the pandemic period, all learners suffered learning losses, but children with poor backgrounds did little learning because three-quarters of the learners did not have access to educational inputs (Azevedo *et al.*, 2022).

The study further established that three (3) out of 16 participants revealed that they did not have challenges with concentration during teaching and learning.

“It was easy to focus on home, they gave me time to do my schoolwork.” PSL5

“I was able to focus on my schoolwork because I was doing the schoolwork in my room and my mother allowed me space and there were no distractions.” PSL2

These findings indicate that for some students, virtual learning at home was not distracted or disrupted by home activities; hence the learning method can be regarded as positively affecting teaching and learning since the learners managed to successfully do their

schoolwork and stay abreast with their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in line with Liu *et al.* (2020) who indicate that parents in higher socioeconomic positions can offer improved developmental surroundings for their children.

5.4.2 Theme 2: Effects of the factors on teaching and learning

Theme 2 reflects the effects of these factors on teaching and learning. This theme is in line with objective 2 of the study, which sought to determine the effects of the factors on teaching and learning in schools. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. What were the effects of learning online or virtually on the way you heard from your teachers individually?
- ii. What was the most challenging aspect of online learning?

Data from the participants indicated that the sub-questions sought to elicit in-depth information on the effects of the factors on teaching and learning from the participants. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the answers provided by the participants. Under this theme, data from the interviews emerged with the following subthemes: interaction with the teachers; and learning approach. The effects of the factors affecting teaching and learning subthemes and codes are discussed in subsequent sections.

5.4.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Interaction with the teachers

Interaction with the teachers affects the factors discussed under Theme 1. The study established that all the learners highlighted the interaction with the teachers as an effect of the factors affecting teaching and learning. Of the 16 learners, nine (9) highlighted that they interacted with their teachers, while seven (7) mentioned that they could not. Interaction with the teachers is a requirement for successful teaching and learning, without which the impact of education is at risk. Data from the participants revealed that the learners who interacted with their teachers could:

- ask the teachers questions:

“I could ask them [teachers] questions on WhatsApp and get the help I need.” PSL5

“Three out of four times, I could ask questions from my teachers.” PSL8

- not ask the teachers questions:

“I could not contact the teacher on WhatsApp, the teacher could only send work on the group, but we could not ask any questions on the group.” PSL1

“I could not ask the teacher on WhatsApp, I used to ask my dad when he comes back from work.” PSL6

These findings reveal that some learners could ask their teachers questions for clarity, while others could not, as they had to ask their parents to do it on their behalf. The findings indicate that the students who could ask questions could interact with their teachers, while those who could not also did not interact with their teachers. These findings suggest that for some learners, the learning approach used by their teachers was teacher-centred and did not allow them to ask questions they did not understand.

5.4.2.2 Subtheme: Learning approach

The learning approach used by the teachers is another effect of the factors discussed under Theme 1. The study established that all the learners highlighted the learning approach used by the teachers as an effect of the factors affecting teaching and learning. The learning approach used by the teacher plays a critical role in the success of teaching and learning; hence its impacts put the education of the learners at risk. Data from the participants revealed that the learning approach used has challenges such as:

- concentration or distractions:

“Staying focused was my main challenge.” HSL5

“I think getting distracted easy and the fact that no one is keeping tabs on you so it’s easy to just skip the online/WhatsApp class.” HSL3

These findings reveal that staying focused and avoiding distractions were significant challenges for learners during the virtual learning method used during COVID-19. The findings also reveal that the lack of accountability and supervision in the online/WhatsApp classes made it easier for the learners to skip classes and lose focus. This indicates that the learners may have missed important learning opportunities, which could have long-term

implications for their future academic success. This is in line with Aguilera-Hermida's (2020) study findings that many learners reported that their biggest challenge with learning at home was concentration or the lack thereof.

Data from the participants also revealed that the virtual learning method has further challenges for the learners:

- interaction with the teachers:

"What was most challenging was that I couldn't ask the teacher questions when I don't understand the WhatsApp lesson." HSL1

"Not hearing the voice of the teacher while I'm used to hearing the voice and seeing the teacher in front of me." HSL8

These findings reveal that the learners did not communicate and engage with their teachers during the virtual lessons. The findings reveal a lack of direct interaction with the teachers, including the inability to ask questions and hear the teacher's voice. This indicates that this impacted their ability to learn effectively. Further, the findings suggest that this may have negative consequences for the academic success of learners, such as a decrease in motivation and engagement which could lead to a potential decline in academic performance. This is in line with Kruszewska, Nazaruk and Szewczyk (2022) who found that in most cases, there was no two-way communication between the teacher and learners and a lack of contact between teachers and learners.

Data from the participants also revealed that the virtual learning method has challenges for the learners:

- interaction with peers:

"It wasn't easy because I missed seeing my friends at school and playing with them." PSL2

"Sometimes if I did not understand something that we learned during the WhatsApp class and I had to ask some of my classmates to explain, some of them did not have the patience to explain further if I did not understand what they were telling me. Unlike the teacher who can explain much better so I can understand." HSL1

These findings reveal that the learners experienced social isolation and a lack of peer support during remote learning. The findings suggest that this can negatively impact their academic success as social interaction and peer support are important factors in learning. Data from the participants revealed that the virtual learning method has further challenges that include:

- resources:

“Network challenges were a problem for me. When there was load shedding, I would lose the network completely.” HSL6

“What was most challenging with using a laptop was that the computer used to freeze, and I had to restart it and the class would be moving.” PSL8

“The network and the data. Data was expensive and my mother had to make sure to buy it so that I can get schoolwork.” HSL7

These findings reveal that the learners experienced challenges with technological and financial resources during virtual learning, such as network connectivity issues, laptop malfunctions, and expensive data costs. Further findings also reveal that learners require reliable and affordable resources to access virtual learning classes. The findings indicate that the lack of relevant resources can negatively impact the learners’ academic success as they can miss out on important information for their studies. This is in line with Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) who indicate that most low socioeconomic status schools in South Africa lack buildings and resources, making it difficult for them to keep classrooms less populated, while high socioeconomic status schools have plenty of classes to keep the numbers less and better resources to continue facilitating learning.

Further data from the participants revealed that the virtual learning approach has further challenges such as:

- motivation:

“Distractions were the most challenging part for me, and also procrastinating.” HSL2

These findings reveal that the learners procrastinated in attending the virtual lessons. The findings indicate that learners may struggle with time management and focus during virtual learning, negatively impacting their academic progress and success. This indicates that time management by learners is required to manage distractions and stay focused during virtual learning. This aligns with Aguilera-Hermida's (2020) study findings that many learners reported that their biggest challenge with learning at home was their lack of concentration.

5.4.3 Theme 3: Exposure of the factors

Theme 3 reflects the exposure to these factors during COVID-19. This theme aligns with objective 3 of the study, which sought to evaluate how these factors were exposed during COVID-19. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. While you were learning online or virtually, how often did you hear from your teachers individually?

Data from the participants revealed that this sub-question sought to elicit in-depth information on the exposure of the factors from the participants. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the answers provided by the participants. Under this theme, interview data merged with the following subthemes: interaction with the teachers. The exposure of the factors subthemes and codes are discussed in the subsequent section.

5.4.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Interaction with the teachers

The factors were exposed through the learners' interaction with the teachers. The study established that all the learners highlighted that the exposure to the factors affecting teaching and learning was through their interaction with the teachers. Out of 16 learners, two could not interact with the teachers, nine (9) learners could interact with their teachers, and five (5) interacted indirectly through their parents. Interaction with the teachers is a requirement for successful teaching and learning, without which education is in jeopardy. Data from the participants revealed that interaction with the teachers was:

- **teacher-centred or a one-way approach:**

“I could not contact the teacher on WhatsApp, the teacher could only send work on the group, but we could not ask any questions on the group.” PSL1

“It was difficult to get a one-on-one interaction with a teacher. It was different from being in class; while we were learning in class, it was easy to ask a question and get help from the teacher. On our WhatsApp group, we couldn’t write back to the teacher or ask questions, only a teacher could post work on the group, and we would only receive the message but not be able to type back.” HSL1

These findings indicate that the teacher is the one who interacts with the learners and not the other way around also. The findings reveal that this created difficulties for the learners in understanding the content taught by the teachers. This suggests that the teacher-centred approach in interacting with the learners was not completely beneficial to the learners as they did not have the platform to ask questions from the teachers. The findings are supported by Kruszewska *et al.* (2022) who found out that in most cases, there was no two-way communication between the teacher and learners, and there was a lack of contact between teachers and learners.

Data from participants further revealed that the interaction with the teachers was:

- a two-way communication:

“I could communicate with the teacher on the side if there was something I did not understand. The teacher would then assist me individually on what I would ask and explain to me.” PSL2

“I could WhatsApp the teacher and ask if I needed help, and they would help.” HSL5

These findings reveal that some learners were able to interact with their teachers. The findings indicate that the learners asked questions when they needed help, and the teachers assisted them. Further findings from the data revealed that the interaction with the teachers was:

- indirect:

“If I did not understand something, my parent had to contact the teacher and ask on my behalf.” PSL7

These findings reveal that some learners could not interact with the teachers directly, but rather, their parents interacted with the teachers on their behalf. These findings suggest that the teachers preferred interacting with parents for specific reasons. This is in line with Kruszewska *et al.* (2022) who found that in most cases, there was no two-way communication between the teacher and learners and a lack of contact between teachers and learners.

5.4.4 Theme 4: Strategies that can be implemented

Theme 4 reflects the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. This theme is in line with objective 4, which sought to establish the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. This theme emerged with the following questions:

- i. In your opinion, what do you think could have been done better during the COVID-19 crisis to help you get the most from your studies?

Data from the interviews indicated that the sub-question sought to elicit diversified information on the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. Findings from the study revealed a general pattern that showed the interconnectivity in the answers provided by the participants. Under this theme, data from interviews emerged with the following subthemes: provision of resources, facilitation of extra classes; and facilitation of one-on-one or extra consultations. The strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19 are discussed in subsequent sections.

5.4.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Provision of resources

The provision of resources may rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. The study established that three (3) out of 16 learners highlighted the provision of resources as a strategy to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. The provision of resources is a requirement in teaching and learning, without which the learners' academic success is at risk. Data from the participants revealed that the provision of resources includes:

- data:

“I think the school did the best they could to continue with learning, but I also wish they could have at least provided us with data because some of us couldn’t afford data to be on WhatsApp classes every day. When it comes to things like computers and other gadgets, I don’t think they could have done anything to help with those.” HSL1

“I wish the school could supply us with data.” HSL2

These findings reveal that the learners require data to do their schoolwork. Further findings also indicate that data is not affordable for some learners; hence the schools should provide them with the data. This is in line with Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) who state that the government should provide low socioeconomic status schools with the resources which the pupils need to bridge the gap between these institutions.

Further findings reveal that the resources include:

- classroom space:

“Maybe if we were given more classrooms so that we could still attend in small numbers rather than sitting at home.” HSL7

These findings reveal that the learners require more classroom space to facilitate social distancing when learning. The findings suggest that there are few classrooms, limiting the number of learners at school at a given time. This is in line with Mathebula and Runhare (2021) who indicate that the government is only making little effort to improve the situation of overcrowding classrooms by providing mobile classrooms in other schools. These mobile classrooms are not adequate, and they did not offer them to all the schools with crowding issues.

5.4.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Facilitation of extra classes

Facilitating extra classes is a strategy that might rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. Data from the study established that 10 out of 16 learners from both low socioeconomic status and high socioeconomic status schools highlighted the facilitation of extra classes as

a strategy that might rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. Extra classes are a requirement for the learners to stay abreast, ahead, or catch up with schoolwork, without which the progress and success of the learners are under threat. Data from the participants revealed that extra classes can be:

- weekend classes:

“I think it would have been better if we were to have weekend classes so that we would understand the work that was given to us on WhatsApp.” HSL1

These findings indicate that the learners are willing to learn even during the weekend to fully grasp what they are taught in school. The findings suggest that the learners do not understand the schoolwork that is given to them, hence they suggested weekend classes to bridge this gap. Further findings revealed that extra classes can be:

- online classes:

“I also I wish they could have made a YouTube channel where we could learn or maybe give us questions via WhatsApp and then we could use Google Classrooms.” PSL5

“I wish they could have started an online class because we did nothing for six months we were just staying at home, and we came back in September. I wish we had online learning because we missed so much work and now, we struggle. I also wish they could have made WhatsApp classes or sent to our parents so we would carry on learning at home.” HSL3

These findings reveal that the learners believe that online classes can help them catch up with the schoolwork they did not learn during the COVID-19 lockdown. The findings suggest that the learners were not learning during the pandemic, hence they have lost much time, and the content they must learn now is accumulating. Further, the findings from the study revealed that the weekend classes may be:

- extra schoolwork:

“I wish the teacher could have given me more homework.” PSL

The findings reveal that some learners prefer being given more homework to catch up with their schoolwork. These findings suggest that more homework may help increase learners' chances of grasping the content they are taught in school.

5.4.4.3 Subtheme 4.3: Facilitation of extra or one-on-one consultations

Extra or one-on-one consultations may rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. The study established that two (2) out of 16 learners suggested facilitating extra or one-on-one consultations as a strategy that may rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. Extra or one-on-one classes are a requirement to help bridge the gap imposed on the learning progress by the pandemic. Data from the participants revealed that may include:

- asking questions:

“I wish the teacher could have some spare time where we could ask questions, the work was difficult, so I wish the teacher was available to answer the question when we do not understand.” PSL1

These findings reveal that the learners are left with questions that they need answers for clarity. The findings suggest that the teachers do not facilitate or are not available for the learners to ask questions. This is in line with Kruszewska *et al.* (2022) who found out that in most cases, there was no two-way communication between the teacher and learners and a lack of contact between teachers and learners.

- getting individual and extra attention from the teacher:

“I wish they could give us individual attention, each child to be given extra attention by their teacher.” PSL4

These findings reveal that the learners require individual and extra teacher attention. Further, the findings suggest that the learners do not get individual or extra attention and that the teachers may be using the same approach for all the learners without giving special attention to those who need it. This is in line with Kruszewska *et al.* (2022) who found that in most

cases, there was no two-way communication between the teacher and learners and no contact between teachers and learners.

5.5 Conclusions

The conclusions of the study are based on the research objectives. According to Shuttleworth (2009), conclusions involve summing up the study and giving a very brief description of the results, although the research should refrain from going into much detail about this. Shuttleworth further posits that the conclusions merely act as an aid to memory because anyone who reads a conclusion has essentially “read the entire” research study. The study concludes the following:

5.5.1 Factors affecting teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools

This study intended to assess the factors affecting teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools. It was established from the findings that there are factors affecting teaching and learning in schools such as leadership, budget, teaching and learning method, resources, learner attendance and participation, and the scope of subjects. It can be concluded that these factors affect teaching and learning negatively, hence the educational outcomes are also impacted negatively. It was further established that these factors differ in socio-economic schools and high socioeconomic status schools. Low socioeconomic schools were adversely affected as they lacked the basic resources to continue with teaching and learning during COVID-19 such as classroom space for social distancing, and technological devices for online teaching and learning, which consequently affected learner attendance and participation. As a result, the schools’ educational achievement was also affected.

The findings of the study also revealed that high economic status were not severely affected by COVID-19. They had resources such as technological devices, connectivity, and adequate classrooms to allow social distancing, hence learner attendance and participation were not affected. This suggests that the schools’ educational achievements were not negatively affected by COVID-19. These findings reveal and suggest an imbalance and unfairness in the allocation of resources in the Empangeni district, with low socioeconomic

schools having inadequate to no resources to continue teaching and learning during COVID-19, and the opposite can be said about the high socioeconomic status schools.

5.5.2 Effects of the factors on teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools

The second objective sought to determine the effects of the factors on teaching and learning in schools. It was established from the findings that the factors mentioned in Theme 1 affected teaching and learning, academic growth, learner performance and results, teacher wellbeing, interaction with the teachers, and the learning approach in the schools. It can be concluded that teaching and learning, and the learning approach are related, while the teacher's wellbeing and interaction with the teachers are also related. Consequently, the findings reveal that these effects result in poor learner performance and slow academic growth.

As mentioned earlier, the findings further reveal that the low socioeconomic schools were greatly affected negatively, while the high socioeconomic status schools did not experience much effect. The findings suggest that with the above-mentioned effects, the educational achievements of the schools were affected differently. This further suggests that these effects directly impact teaching and learning in the schools, as they are related to the learners, teachers, and the teaching and learning approach which all contribute to the learner's performance and academic growth.

5.5.3 Exposure of the factors during COVID-19

The study intended to evaluate how these factors were exposed during COVID-19. It was established from the findings that the factors mentioned in Theme 1 were exposed when the learners were sent home due to the lack of adequate classrooms to allow social distancing. Further, the findings reveal that factors were exposed through the interrelations and communication among and/or between the teachers and learners. The findings reveal that this was due to the learning method used during teaching and learning, where some teachers disabled the option for the learners to send messages to the teachers, while other teachers did not allow the students to interact with them but rather the parents. This made it difficult for the learners to ask questions that they did not understand. Consequently, this affected

learner participation and performance. These findings suggest that the schools' educational achievements were also impacted, although the study did not establish the statistics to support this.

5.5.4. Strategies that can be implemented to resolve the challenges exposed by COVID-19

The study intended to establish the strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19. It was established from the findings that the principals, teachers, and learners put forward various strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19 in the Empangeni schools. The findings revealed that the participants recommended the provision of adequate and equal resources by all stakeholders involved. This is because the findings established that low socio-economic schools have inadequate to no resources, while high socioeconomic status schools have resources for teaching and learning during COVID-19. Further findings reveal that the participants suggested the provision of support such as moral, psychological, and emotional support. This is because the participants revealed that COVID-19 had an impact on their psychological, emotional, and moral well-being.

Further, the findings of the study revealed that the learners suggest the facilitation of extra classes and extra or one-on-one consultations. This suggests that the learners feel the need to learn further because of COVID-19 teaching and learning. It can be concluded that these suggestions will help to improve the schools' educational achievement, evident in learner performance and through their participation.

5.6 Recommendations

Recommendations are based on the findings of the study, the conclusions adduced above, and the literature reviewed. These recommendations are essential for the low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools, the government, the community, families, and other relevant stakeholders in improving the school's educational achievements. The study recommends the following based on the study findings:

5.6.1 Factors affecting teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools

The schools should source resources for online teaching and learning which will be used during such times as COVID-19. This will help the schools to bridge the teaching and learning gap so that educational achievement is not hampered. Further, the schools, together with the government should build more classrooms to allow social distancing when the need arises. The schools should also make efforts to provide the teachers, and especially the learners with data for online teaching and learning. The parents are also recommended to provide support to the learners so that they attend and participate in online teaching and learning.

5.6.2 Effects of the factors on teaching and learning in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic status schools

To reduce the effects of the factors mentioned in Theme 1, the schools should make provisions or develop a model for online teaching and learning. This way, the schools will assess and adopt an effective teaching and learning method or approach that will allow the learners to interact with the teachers. Further, such a model will promote teacher well-being and enhance learner results and academic growth. This is because the model will guide the teachers in conducting online teaching and learning for increased effect and efficiency.

5.6.3 Exposure of the factors during COVID-19

To reduce the exposure of the factors, in line with Theme 1 and Theme recommendations, the study recommends that schools build more classrooms to accommodate all social distancing for all learners during such times. This will reduce the likelihood that the students will be sent home due to a lack of adequate classroom space. Further, to improve the interrelations and communication among and/or between the teachers and learners, the schools should develop a model or framework which will guide online teaching and learning.

5.6.4 Strategies that can be implemented to rectify the challenges exposed by COVID-19

Based on the recommendations made by the participants, the study also recommends that schools, government, community, and families collaborate in providing resources and support, and in facilitating extra and one-on-one consultations for the learners. This way,

they will be able to continue learning even during global health pandemics such as COVID-19. Further, these resources should be adequate and equal for both the low socioeconomic schools and the well-established ones. This will ensure that no school is left behind, nor prejudiced, hence the schools' educational achievements can be fully realised.

5.7 Suggestions for future research

This study makes several important suggestions for additional and future research around the impact of COVID-19 on schools' education achievement. Several areas for future research include:

- i. The role of family support in schools' educational achievement.
- ii. Models for online teaching and learning for schools' educational achievement; and
- iii. The significance of extra classes and/or one-on-one consultations in bridging the teaching and learning gap for schools' educational achievement.

Future studies should:

- i. Adopt the quantitative and mixed methods approaches,
- ii. Employ a different research design, and
- iii. Focus on a different district and school, especially the rural schools.

5.8 Final word

This research study sheds light on the effect of COVID-19 on the schools' educational achievements. The findings highlight the challenges faced by the learners, teachers, principals, and educational institutions during this unpredicted time. I hope that the insights gained from this study will inform future interventions to alleviate the negative impacts of the pandemic and to promote continued educational achievement for the schools at large.

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Appendix A: Editorial certificate



EDITORIAL
Certificate

This Certificate is Proudly Presented to
Nombulelo Cele

"THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION OF LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SCHOOLS AND THOSE IN WELL ESTABLISHED SCHOOLS IN EMPANGENI KWAZULU NATAL"

It is certified that the above-mentioned dissertation is edited by professional editors at Saigh Scholarly Publishing for accuracy in language, grammar, style, tone, tense and punctuation use, including the technical formatting of the document. The certificate attests the fact that the editor did not alter the idea and aim of the researcher. It is further certified that the above-mentioned dissertation, unless further adjusted, is of a satisfactory editorial standard.


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Appendix B: Ethical certificate

 <p>UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE</p>	
Date: 2022/11/09	Ref: 2022/11/09/54870607/29/AM
Dear Ms N Cele	Name: Ms N Cele Student No.: 54870607
Decision: Ethics Approval from 2022/11/09 to 2025/11/09	
Researcher(s): Name: Ms N Cele E-mail address: 54870607@mylife.unisa.ac.za Telephone: 0763324591	
Supervisor(s): Name: Dr LM Luvalo E-mail address: luvalm@unisa.ac.za Telephone: 0124292541	
Title of research: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION OF LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SCHOOLS AND THOSE ON WELL ESTABLISHED SCHOOLS	
Qualification: MEd Comparative Education	
Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2022/11/09 to 2025/11/09.	
<p><i>The medium risk application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2022/11/09 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.</i></p> <p>The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached. 2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics. 	
 <p style="font-size: small;">University of South Africa Pretorius Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tloaneane PO Box 392, UNISA 0003 South Africa Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150 www.unisa.ac.za</p>	 <p style="font-size: small;">Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017</p> <p style="font-size: small;">University of South Africa Pretorius Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tloaneane PO Box 392, UNISA 0003 South Africa Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150 www.unisa.ac.za</p>

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
 4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
 5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
 6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
 7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
 8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2025/11/09**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.
- Note:*
The reference number **2022/11/09/54870607/29/AM** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,



Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motthat@unisa.ac.za



Prof Mphahlele
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN
qakisme@unisa.ac.za

Appendix C: Participant information sheet

<p>APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET</p> <p>UNISA university of south africa</p> <p>Date: 07/10/2022 Title: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION OF LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SCHOOLS AND THOSE ON WELL ESTABLISHED SCHOOLS</p> <p>DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT My name is Nombulelo Cele and I am doing research under the supervision of Dr. Loyiso Luvuyo, a Senior lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations towards a Master's Degree in Education at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION OF LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SCHOOLS AND THOSE ON WELL ESTABLISHED SCHOOLS</p> <p>WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY? This study is expected to collect important information that could show the inequalities that exist in public and private schools. It will also show how the shortage of resources in public schools has resulted for the performance to be lower than those in well-established schools.</p> <p>WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE? You are invited because you experienced the challenges faced with teaching and learning during the Covid-19 times and I believe you can provide the information I need to conduct this research. You are amongst approximately 250 participants who will be partaking in this research, this include principals, teachers and learners from 4 Egongweni District schools.</p> <p>WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY? The study involves questionnaires that you will be given with questions to answer according to your experiences with teaching and learning during Covid-19 pandemic. Indicate what sort of questions will be asked or show the questions in this document. The questionnaire will take less than 20 minutes to fill and you can return it once you have completed it.</p> <p> University of South Africa Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa Telephone +27 12 429 3111 www.unisa.ac.za</p>	<p>APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET</p> <p>CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE? Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent (adult)/ assent (participant younger than 18 years old) form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.</p> <p>WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? One of the benefits of taking part is that you get to write down all the things you have always felt were part of the inequalities and the things that impacted your teaching and learning during the times of Covid-19</p> <p>ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT? There are no negative consequences for participating on this study. There will be no harm or any risk to any participant, no personal information will be asked from you and the questionnaires are anonymous so no one will know that you participated in the research.</p> <p>WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL? You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research and your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. The records will be kept safe, no one will have access to it except for me the researcher and the research committee if they wish to see them. This A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.</p> <p>HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA? Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet in my apartment for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer and in the cloud for 5 years and after that I will delete them. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.</p> <p> University of South Africa Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa Telephone +27 12 429 3111 www.unisa.ac.za</p>
<p>APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET</p> <p>WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY? There will be no payment to the participants who will participate in this research.</p> <p>HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL? This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.</p> <p>HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH? If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Nombulelo Cele on 0763324591 or email celenombulelo@yahoo.com. The findings are accessible for a period of 5 years after the collection of data. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Dr. Loyiso Luvuyo on 0124292541 or email luvallm@unisa.ac.za</p> <p>Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study. Thank you.</p> <p>Nombulelo Cele</p> <p> University of South Africa Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa Telephone +27 12 429 3111 www.unisa.ac.za</p>	

Appendix D: Assent form for secondary school learners

<p>APPENDIX D: ASSENT FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>REQUESTING ASSENT FROM LEARNERS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT Title: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION OF LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SCHOOLS AND THOSE ON WELL ESTABLISHED SCHOOLS</p> <p>Dear _____ Date _____</p> <p>I am doing a study on THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION OF LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SCHOOLS AND THOSE ON WELL ESTABLISHED SCHOOLS as part of my studies at the University of South Africa. Your principal has given me permission to do this study in your school. I would like to invite you to be a very special part of my study. I am doing this study so that I can find ways that your teachers and principals can use to find out what impact Covid-19 had on the performance of learners. This may help you and many other learners of your age in different schools.</p> <p>This letter is to explain to you what I would like you to do. There may be some words you do not know in this letter. You may ask me or any other adult to explain any of these words that you do not know or understand. You may take a copy of this letter home to think about my invitation and talk to your parents about this before you decide if you want to be in this study.</p> <p>I would like to ask you to complete a questionnaire about the impact of Covid-19 on your school performance. completing the questionnaire will take no longer than 20 minutes of your time and you can even do it at home and return it by next week.</p> <p>I will write a report on the study, but I will not use your name in the report or say anything that will let other people know who you are. Participation is voluntary and you do not have to be part of this study if you don't want to take part. If you choose to be in the study, you may stop taking part at any time without penalty. You may tell me if you do not wish to answer any of my questions. No one will blame or criticise you. When I am finished with my study, I shall return to your school to give a short talk about some of the helpful and interesting things I found out in my study. I shall invite you to come and listen to my talk.</p> <p>You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for your participation in the research.</p> <p>If you decide to be part of my study, you will be asked to sign the form on the next page. If you have any other questions about this study, you can talk to me or you can have your parent or another adult call me at 0763324591. Do not sign the form until you have all your questions answered and understand what I would like you to do.</p> <p>Researcher: <u>Nombulelo Cele</u> Phone number: 0763324591</p> <p>Do not sign the written assent form if you have any questions. Ask your questions first and ensure that someone answers those questions.</p> <p>WRITTEN ASSENT</p> <p>I have read this letter which asks me to be part of a study at my school. I have understood the information about the study and I know what I will be asked to do. I am willing to be in the study.</p> <p>_____ Learner's name (print): Learner's signature: Date:</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>University of South Africa Pretorius Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa Telephone +27 12 429 3111 www.unisa.ac.za</p> </div>	<p>APPENDIX D: ASSENT FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL</p> <p>Witness's name (print) Witness's signature Date:</p> <p>(The witness is over 18 years old and present when signed.)</p> <p>_____ Parent/guardian's name (print) Parent/guardian's signature: Date:</p> <p><u>Nombulelo Cele</u> _____ Researcher's name (print) Researcher's signature: Date:</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>University of South Africa Pretorius Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa Telephone +27 12 429 3111 www.unisa.ac.za</p> </div>
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Appendix E: Assent form for primary school learners

APPENDIX E: ASSENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL



REQUESTING ASSENT FROM LEARNERS IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear learner,

Date: 07/10/2022



My name is Teacher ~~Nombulelo Cele~~ and would like to ask you if I can give you a paper with a list of questions for you to answer. I am trying to learn more about how children were learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. If you say YES to do this, I will come, and the paper and you can write down your answers. We will do a fun game where you must answer some questions for me.

I will also ask your parents if you can take part. If you do not want to take part, it will also be fine with me. Remember, you can say yes, or you can say no, and no one will be upset if you don't want to take part or even if you change your mind later and want to stop. You can ask any questions that you have now. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, ask me next time I visit your school.

Please speak to mommy or daddy about taking part before you sign this letter. Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. A copy of this letter will be given to your parents.

Regards

Teacher ~~Nombulelo Cele~~


Your Name	Yes, I will take part	No, I don't want to take part
		
Name of the researcher	Nombulelo Cele	
Date	07/10/2022	
Witness		



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Appendix F: Interview schedules

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Interview Questions (Principals)

SECTION 1 (Close-ended questions) please answer yes or no


1. How long have you been a school manager?
2. Are you a manager at a primary or high school?
3. Has your school been poorly impacted by COVID-19 in teaching and learning? Y/N
4. Have you been satisfied with the department of education's response to Covid-19? Y/N
5. Do you think that Covid-19 impacted the ability to teach and learn in your school? Y/N
6. Did you feel you had the necessary support and resources needed for effective teaching and learning in your school during the Covid-19 pandemic?
7. Did you experience any inequalities in education during Covid-19? Y/N

SECTION 2 (Open-ended questions)

1. How concerned are you about the students' academic growth after Covid-19?
2. How helpful was the leadership(department) at your school been in resolving learning challenges during Covid-19 pandemic?
3. How satisfied were you with the frequency of communication from school leadership? What about from district leadership?
4. Did you have enough electronic resources to continue teaching and learning in your school during the school's shutdown.
5. What inequalities did you see during the Covid-19 between public schools and private schools?
6. What do you think can be done to bridge this gap that exists between public and private institutions?

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Interview Questions (Teachers)

SECTION 1 (Close-ended questions) please answer yes or no


1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What grades are you teaching?
3. Have you been impacted by COVID-19 in teaching and learning? Y/N
4. Have you been satisfied with the school's response to Covid-19? Y/N
5. Do you think that Covid-19 impacted your ability to teach or learn? Y/N
6. Did you feel you had the necessary support and resources you needed to effectively teach or learn during the Covid-19 pandemic?
7. Did you experience any inequalities in education during Covid-19? Y/N

SECTION 2 (Open-ended questions)

1. What additional support and resources do you think the school could have provided to teachers and learners?
2. Did you have virtual/WhatsApp classes? If yes, did you enjoy teaching virtually? If no, why?
3. Do you think the virtual classrooms were effective in teaching and learning? Why
4. What was challenging about the online/WhatsApp learning experience?
5. What did you miss the most about physical classroom teaching and learning?
6. What do you prefer, virtual learning/WhatsApp or physically attending class? Why?
7. How satisfied are you with the current learning model at your school?
8. What kind of effect is the current learning model having on your social-emotional well-being?

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Interview Questions for secondary school learners (Grade 10 and 11)

SECTION 1 (Close-ended questions)


1. What grade are you doing this year?
2. Were you affected by covid-19 on your school performance? y/n
3. What kind of learning method was used during the schools shut down? i.e. virtual, WhatsApp etc.
4. Which method of learning do you prefer, virtual/WhatsApp or face to face?
5. Do you think the school responded well regarding the pandemic? y/n
6. Do you think private and public school were impacted the same by covid-19? y/n
7. Was learning easy or difficult during the pandemic?

SECTION 2 (open-ended questions)

1. When you had online schoolwork during Covid-19 pandemic, how often did you have the technology (laptop, tablet, computer, etc.) you needed to do the schoolwork?
2. How difficult or easy it was to stay focused on your schoolwork during the online/virtual classes?
3. While you were learning with online/WhatsApp/virtually, how often did you hear from your teachers individually?
4. What could have been done better during the COVID-19 crisis last school year to help you get the most out of your studies?
5. What was the most challenging aspect of online learning?

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Interview Questions (primary school grade -6 and 7)

SECTION 1 (Close-ended questions) please answer yes or no

1. Were you affected by covid-19 on your school performance?
2. How were you receiving your learning during the school shutdown?
3. Do you think the school responded well regarding the pandemic?
4. Did you enjoy staying at home not going to school?
5. Were you able to ask questions from your teacher during the pandemic?

SECTION 2 (Open-ended questions)

1. When you had online schoolwork during Covid-19 pandemic, how often did you have the technology (laptop, tablet, computer, etc.) you needed to do the schoolwork?
2. How difficult or easy it was to stay focused on your schoolwork during the online/virtual classes?
3. While you were learning with online/WhatsApp/virtually, how often did you hear from your teachers individually?
4. What did you wish the teachers would do to continue learning?
5. What was the most challenging aspect of online learning?

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Appendix G: Consent form

APPENDIX G: TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL CONSENT



CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to participate in the questionnaire.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname (please print) _____

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print) _____

Researcher's signature

Date



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