

THESIS / DISSERTATION SUBMISSION

**EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE
ON THE WELL-BEING OF LEARNERS IN RURAL
SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19**

THOBEKA ANGEL MBHELE

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Masters degree with specialisation Psychology of Education
in the Department of Education Foundations
in the Faculty of Education at the
University of the Free State.

Supervisor:

Dr K.R. Mukuna

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DECLARATION

I, Thobeka Angel Mbhele, declare that the thesis titled *“EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON THE WELL-BEING OF LEARNERS IN RURAL SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19”* is my original work submitted for the Master’s degree with a specialisation in Psychology of Education. This is submitted for the first time at the University of the Free State and has never been submitted to any other institution. This thesis contains my work. The phrases used have been re-written, sources cited and credited, and information has been referenced. However, no copy and paste have been taken from the internet without recognising the sources from this thesis.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to read 'Mbhele TA'.

SIGNED

03/10/2024

DATE

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the following people: my mother, Suliwe Mdhluli; my grandmother, Maria Mdakane, and my siblings, Asafika, Abahle, and Luyanda. I strongly believe their sincere contributions to my life are worth the dedication. To my son, Luthando, for not being there for him when he needed me the most. Their patience and the love that they showed to me will never be forgotten.

Over and above, I thank my beloved late father, Sithabiso Orgaman Mdhluli, who wished to see me as something. I will always remember your teachings. You were a great parent to me.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of family structure on the well-being of learners in rural schools during COVID-19. It determines the factors influencing family structure in learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. It further explores the challenges the family structure encountered in improving learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19 and identifies strategies to overcome these challenges on learners' well-being during COVID-19. There is limited research examining factors on the influence of family structure on the well-being of learners in rural areas. Most literature is international studies and does not focus on rural areas or delineate the effect of family structures on the well-being of learners. Thus, this study adopts a qualitative approach through a multiple case-study design. It employs an interpretive paradigm. Data were collected through including semi-structured interviews and observation. This study used purposive and convenience techniques to select four high school learners from grades 9, 10, and 11 and four high school teachers. Both teachers and learners are from two schools. Teachers' teaching experiences were considered in this study. It was conducted in the uThukela district, KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. Data were analysed through narrative analysis. The results showed that family structure affects learners' well-being and causes poor academic performance and disruptive behaviours. It further affected learner's mental health. The study found that most learners from single-parent families, nuclear families, and grand-parent families experienced difficulties at home based on parenting style, family income, and support structure. The results suggested forming a basis for different stakeholders to assist the learners in coping with the challenges emanating from their family structure backgrounds. This study recommended that the government develop counselling, self-awareness, and tutorial programmes in schools for learners who cannot afford basic needs and should be provided with food, clothes, and learning materials.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19, Family structure, Learners, Rural schools, Learners' well-being

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DOE	Department of Education
DoSD	Department of Social Development
FET	Further Education and Training
ICT	Information And Communication Technology
HIV/AIDS	Human Immune Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
N=	Sample Size
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OBE	Outcome-Based Education
PET	Physical Education and Training
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the general introduction of the study. It discusses the background of the study, problem statement, research aims and objectives, and research questions. It underpins a preliminary literature review of the study and the theory the study used. It further briefly presents an overview of the research methodology and design that the study adopted. The study briefly discusses the definitions of the keywords and the layout of the study.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Families in South Africa have certain distinct conditions that impact not just the composition of the family but also its economical and interpersonal aspects (Roman, Isaacs, Davids, and Sui, 2016). Single-parent and two-parent homes are the typical indicators of family structure, focusing on the former (Davids and Roman, 2013). The disintegration of families is a result of South Africa's colonial and apartheid background. Family structure in South Africa was significantly and permanently impacted by apartheid regulations, especially for Black Africans. Due to the migrant labour system, men were the most workers in cities and mines. In contrast, "surplus" individuals whose labour contributions were not required were housed in rural homelands (Martin, 2016). Children, as did older people and women, made up a sizable portion of that excess population.

For black families, the term 'family' meant children were separated from their parents because they were compelled to leave their families to work in towns (Roman, 2013). Changes have occurred over recent decades in children's family environments (Bradshaw, 2011). Different family configurations, including nuclear, single-parent, skip-generation, and child-headed households greatly impact how families function in South Africa (DoSD, 2021). The family environment in South Africa is diverse; many children grow up in one-parent homes, frequently run by moms (Roman, 2011). Onzima (2011) suggested that learners who grow up in single-parent families face difficulties at school. In South Africa, most single parents are unemployed, resulting in poverty, and do not have enough learning materials for their learners, which affects learners' well-being (Roman, 2011).

The Corona Virus was discovered in China and has spread around the world, infecting and killing millions of individuals. The COVID-19 crisis did not affect all families equally. According to Attanasio (2020), it is likely to harm learners of low-income status and less-educated parents with lower academic and socio-emotional skills than learners of higher-income or more-educated parents. The outbreak of COVID-19 affected the socio-economic well-being of different countries, individuals, and organisations. Education has been one of the sectors affected by the measures imposed to stop the spread of COVID-19. The environment in which learners find themselves determines their health (Pelsner, 2012). The Ministry of Education (2017) notes that, although partially unique to rural education, the problems in South Africa's rural areas are widespread among formerly disadvantaged communities to differing degrees. Learners in South Africa suffer since many of the country's schools are in rural areas.

Lockdown limitations were one of the critical backup plans governments put in place nationwide. These restrictions were implemented in South Africa using a five-level, risk-based approach. Parents' (especially mothers') time with their children increased significantly due to school closures on many occasions (Baxter et al., 2020; Calarco et al., 2020; Sevilla and Smith, 2020). School closings and learning interruptions may endanger learners' ability to learn and adjust (Kuhfeld et al., 2020), but how they affect learners depends on how much and how well their parents interact with them at home. Since the coronavirus has been more common in low-income households, these families have experienced significantly higher levels of anxiety regarding risks to their health and well-being.

The modifications brought on by the new coronavirus may also immediately impact the degree of loneliness parents and learners feel due to stay-at-home orders, including disruptions to their regular daily routines and physical and social isolation from their friends and schools. Concerns about their own and their family's health due to exposure to the virus may reduce parental and learners' well-being.

To comprehend how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected schooling, it is imperative to provide a general explanation of COVID-19. The World Health Organization (2020) states that COVID-19 is a virus that kills people and spreads quickly practically everywhere in the world. According to Platto (2020), Wuhan, China, was the site of the virus's initial discovery in 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) designated this virus to be a global pandemic in March 2020, despite the fact that it was discovered earlier in 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). A pandemic, according to Roxby (2020), is a disease that spreads concurrently throughout several nations on Earth.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Different family structures and lifestyles characterised the modern society. As a high school teacher and a member of the broader community, during COVID-19, I observed that learners from nuclear families are different from those who hail from single-headed families. This could be caused by divorce, single parent, parental conflict, death, employment (Ganong, 2020), as well as socio-economic status (Rosenfeld, 2010). According to Uwezo Kenya (2014), 3 out of 10 learners can complete their homework nationwide. According to the study, learners from troubled homes like grand-parent families and child-headed families consistently have poorer learning abilities, with many falling short of actual literacy and numeracy standards (Uwezo Kenya, 2014). According to the Mwingi Zonal Education Office (2013), some learners are categorised as the most vulnerable children based on family backgrounds, such as child-headed families, grand-parent families, and single-parent households,. However, no study has been conducted on the influence of family structure on learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. This is the knowledge gap that this study tried to fill. Teachers and learners must find ways to connect and face the challenges of change from a familiar to a new way of teaching-learning.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question was:

How did family structure influence learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19?

Sub-research questions were:

1. What factors influenced family structure on learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19?
2. What challenges did the family structure encounter in improving learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19?
3. What strategies to overcome the effects of family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19?

1.5 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study explores the influence of family structure on the learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To determine the factors influencing family structure in learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19.
2. To explore the challenges the family structure encountered in improving learners' well-being in rural schools during the COVID-19.
3. To identify strategies to overcome the effects of family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

A summary of the literature and study on the influence of family structure on learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19 is provided. A review of the literature is based on research objectives. To determine the factors influencing family structure in learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. To explore the challenges the family structure encountered in improving learners' well-being in rural schools during the COVID-19. To identify strategies that could be used to overcome the effects of family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19. By recognising and articulating connections between past studies and the current topic, this review of the body of knowledge in this field offers a theoretical base for future studies. A literature review talks about information that has been published in a certain field and occasionally information that has been published in a specific field within a specific time frame (Ramdhani, 2014). A literature review evaluates studies in a particular field of knowledge.

1.6.1 Rural education in the South African context

"Rurality" refers to a way of life, a mindset, and a culture centred on community, cattle farming, and the land. In rural areas, there are various methods for people to live off the land: farms, peri-urban areas, tiny rural towns, unofficial communities, and traditional communal places. Deficit narratives are also present in the South African "rural" discussion (Bundy 1988; Moore 1984, quoted in Ebersöhn and Ferreira 2012), especially those portraying poverty as an aftermath of apartheid. In South Africa, rural areas still lack the same amenities as their metropolitan counterparts. According to the Ministry of Education (2018), while rural education issues in South Africa are not exclusive to the sector, they are pervasive in different ways among the formerly underprivileged populations. Ministry of Education (2018) further emphasised that this is because many schools are in rural areas, and students suffer. Lindeque and Vandeyar (2010) indicated that the rural environment is notably impoverished regarding learning, livelihood, and people resources.

Gumede and Biyase (2016) report that after apartheid was abolished in South Africa in 1994, the country's educational system changed significantly. The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), which served as a platform for restructuring the curriculum in South Africa, was implemented following the review of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) in 2004. Steyn and Wolhuter (2014) state that the following describes the South African educational system: Ages 4-5 for preschool; grades 1-3 for the Foundation phase; grades 4-6 for the Intermediate phase; and grades 7-9 for the Senior phase (ages 13-15) and Further Education and Training (FET) phase (ages 16-19).

1.6.2 COVID-19 in education

The COVID-19 virus spreads quickly to practically every country in the globe and is fatal. The virus was discovered in Wuhan, China, in 2019. The World Health Organisation (WHO) nonetheless proclaimed this virus a global pandemic in March 2020 because it was discovered earlier in the year (World Health Organisation, 2020). A pandemic is a disease simultaneously affecting many countries worldwide (Roxby, 2020). The pandemic affected people's lives, including their employment, education, communications, financial situation, and health. The goal of education is to convey knowledge from teachers to learners. Typically, education takes place face-to-face between teachers and learners. The teacher instructs the class, the learners pay

attention, and they participate in various school activities. However, since COVID-19 ravaged the planet in late 2019, educational activities have been disproportionately conducted at home via online classes. Online education is thought to make the teaching and learning process during COVID-19 easier. With technology, teachers may impart knowledge and information more easily to their learners.

Moreover, teachers' software and services for managing courses are part of online learning (Ouadoud, 2016). As a result, online learning depends on technology such as computers, laptops, or smart-phones and networks such as wireless or satellites (Syauqi, 2020). This presented a wide range of obstacles during COVID-19 because learners had to learn independently, trying to absorb the subject without directly listening to teachers, according to Cao and Duru (2020). It could not be easy to make online courses exciting and engaging without utilising learning methodologies and providing internet connectivity in all institutions, as Hansen (2020) points out. The COVID-19 disaster did not have an equal impact on all families. Attanasio (2020) asserted that it is likely to hurt learners with poor socioeconomic positions and less educated parents, who have worse academic and socio-emotional skills than learners with higher socioeconomic status or more educated parents, supports. Low-income families have had noticeably higher levels of anxiety around threats to their health and well-being as a result of the corona-virus being more prevalent there.

1.6.3 Family structure

According to Sun and Li (2011), the traditional family structure comprises two biological parents who are married and other, so-called "alternative families," such as single-parent families, families with two biological non-residing parents, and step-parent families. In contrast, Miller-Keane (2003) defines family structure as how a family is set up in terms of roles, rules, power, and hierarchies. Modern society is characterised by changing family structures and lifestyles, which remain major challenges, yet the family ultimately remains the core of modern life (Frisco et al., 2007). For a long time, personality was considered to have the greatest impact on a person's well-being. However, a recent study has shown that one's social environment, specifically family and school, had a significant impact (Lee and Yoo, 2015).

1.6.4 Family structure and learners' well-being

The Department of Social Development (2021) pointed out that COVID-19 significantly influences the learners' and families' well-being in South Africa. Similarly, in contrast, Spinelli (2020) contended that the COVID-19 lockdown had exacerbated parental stress because parents had to juggle a lot of obligations, including jobs, their children's education, and personal activities, all on their own without help. They were, therefore, forced to assume the roles of mother, caregiver, friend, teacher, and entertainment. Different family structures affect learners' well-being. After divorce, families are likely to experience conflict. Kelly's (2003) findings suggested that divorce can leave learners with persistent sentiments of sadness, desire, worry, and regret.

Stephen and Udisi (2016) listed a few causes that can lead to single parenting, including migration, desertion, death of a partner, unexpected pregnancy, single-parent adoption, and divorce. The denial of paternity and rape are additional causes of single parenting (Falana et al., 2012). Single parenting is already becoming a fast and rapidly growing trend in most communities. Parental separation has a significant negative impact on how learners perceive themselves. The lack of family structure could also affect learners' behaviours. Learners feel confused, anxious, depressed, and embarrassed. This is supported by Goodwin (2012), breaking a family structure causes learners' anxiety, mental health problems, and depression. Richer and Lemola (2017) also agree that learners from single-parent families struggle with emotional disorders like hostility, hyperactivity, and aggression. In addition, learners' experience academic challenges and fear about the future when their parental love is strained or divided.

However, it has also been shown that children of single parents can develop into responsible, well-adjusted individuals. They contribute and shoulder many burdens of becoming parents (Raja, 2020). Researchers believe that various issues in education, such as subpar academic performance, have been brought on by physical distance and widespread worry regarding the COVID-19 (Sintema, 2020). Onzima (2011) indicated a high drop-out rate among learners from child-headed families. Carlson (2006) pointed out that learners from grand-parent families are more likely than others to be expelled from school and engage in risky behaviours that include not respecting teachers and bullying peers. Low income could affect the family structure and expose learners to a greater risk of learning and behavioural problems (Kalil, 2012). On the

contrary, learners raised by supportive nuclear parents have strong well-being and are well-adjusted (Grolnick, 2003).

1.6.5 Strategies for overcoming the effects of family structure on learners' well-being

Family and parental support are essential elements in development (Lemos et al., 2011). According to Bidell and Deacon (2010), learners who exhibit disruptive classroom behaviours frequently are removed from their classes for disciplinary referrals resulting in detention, suspension, or expulsion. While Hammond (2007) suggested family counselling should be available for all families. However, White and Kelly (2010) proposed that other ways for school counsellors to create successful counselling programmes while attending to the needs of students include teacher advisory programmes, tutoring help, and mentoring. According to White and Kelly (2010), these programmes can offer more specific services to learners at risk of dropping out while offering positive social and academic support for all learners. Moreover, Macaraan (2020) suggested that the increased awareness of the pandemic and behavioural changes in people's personal hygiene and self-care habits have assisted in preventing diseases and the spreading of germs, as well as COVID-19 regulations.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted Bronfenbrenner's (1989) theory as the theoretical lens for investigating the family structure influencing the learners' well-being. According to Berk (2000) and Bronfenbrenner (1995), Bronfenbrenner thought that children interacted with a variety of social-ecological systems, including the family, peers, and school environment (microsystem), the extended family (exosystem), culture and laws, social-political conditions (macrosystem), and time-oriented (chronosystem). Risk factors exacerbating maladaptive child behaviours can exist in any system; dropping out of school is one such example. According to Bronfenbrenner's hypothesis, a child's behaviour and development are more influenced by risk factors in social systems closer to them. The idea has intricate interactions that impact an individual's growth. For example, conflicts or modifications in one layer will also affect other layers. The learner's living circumstances are impacted by changes in the family dynamic brought about by COVID-19, divorce, and migration, which can determine

whether a learner continues to study well by obtaining good grades, has access to all parents' resources at school, and remains happy.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This study used a qualitative approach to elicit data from the participants. The methodology includes all the appropriate qualitative instruments to elicit data, enhancing problem-solving. According to Creswell and Path (2018), the qualitative approach focuses on individuals' subjective interpretations and interpretations of experience and their formulation of definitions. The researcher wanted to analyse data using words instead of numbers. This study implemented an interpretive paradigm. Reality is perceived through inter-subjectivity, consideration of meanings, and understanding of social and experiential aspects of the research (Saunders, 2012). The researcher wanted to understand the social world by assessing participants' meanings of their actions or experiences. This study employed multiple case-study designs. The multiple case study design examines more than one case and aims to find the common themes and patterns between the cases (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Multiple case studies allowed the researcher to replicate the same study with different participants (Yin, 2009). A multiple case study allowed the researcher to explore case differences and similarities.

The study used semi-structured interviews and observations to collect data. According to Irvine, Drew, and Sainsbury (2013:77), a semi-structured interview is "one in which the interviewer prepares a list of subjects to address and questions to ask the participants". This helped the researcher better understand the interviewees' experiences, feelings, and perspectives. Interviews were conducted through telephonic and face-to-face interviews, recorded with participants' consent. On the other hand, classroom observation is central to gaining an in-depth understanding of classroom practices (Martew, 2022). It allowed the researcher to look at what is happening in the situation rather than relying on second-hand information. The researcher wanted to match the participants' responses with what was being observed in the school environment. The researcher used two sampling methods: purposive and convenience sampling. The researcher used both purposive and convenience sampling. According to Zhi (2014), purposive sampling is the selection of a sample based on participant characteristics. Purposive sampling was used due to the nature

of the study, whereby teachers and learners were purposely selected to provide reliable information to the researcher.

Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where members of the target group that meet specific practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate, are included in the study (Dörnyei, 2007). The researcher found that teachers and learners are easily accessible to provide the required information. Four high school teachers and learners were selected from two rural schools in the uThukela district in the Kwa-Zulu-Natal province, South Africa. High school learners were from Grades 9, 10, and 11, drawn in two different schools. This study employed narrative analysis. Creswell (2012) established that getting people to share their stories and collect detailed information with participants in narrative analysis is easy. The researcher analysed narrative data consisting of actions and events to produce coherent stories as an outcome of the analysis.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study's findings explain that family structure influences learners' general well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. This study helped not only families but also society as a whole. The Department of Social and Development and the Department of Education gained from this study by learning about learners' challenges at home. The study's findings were valuable to teachers because they allowed them to better understand the impact of a learner's family background on their education and to identify strategies for assisting learners from diverse family situations in overcoming the obstacles that arise from their family structure backgrounds.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The University of the Free State granted ethical clearance to the researcher, and KwaZulu-Natal, the Department of Education, and school administrators granted gatekeeper authorisation. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), ethics safeguards study participants' welfare and rights. Fleming (2018) highlights moral conundrums involving possible harm, informed permission, confidentiality and anonymity, and voluntary involvement. This study's goal was to ensure that moral standards are followed.

1.10 DEFINITION OF KEYWORDS

1.10.1 COVID-19

According to Belay (2020:21), SARS-CoV-2, a newly identified coronavirus, causes COVID-19, an infectious respiratory disease. COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that causes an infectious disease.

1.10.2 Rural schools

The term "rural" in South Africa refers to areas under traditional leaders' jurisdiction that are far from urban areas. Msila (2010) stated that the number of people living in rural areas is lower than those living in urban areas. The researcher contends that rural areas are not functional because they are engaged in primary economic activities such as farming. Most rural communities practise subsistence farming and communal land ownership under the supervision of traditional leaders. Rural schools are under trust and presided over by traditional leaders.

1.10.3 Family structure

Sun and Li (2011) revealed that the traditional family structure comprises two biological parents who are married and other, so-called "alternative families," such as single-parent families, families with two biological non-residing parents, step-parent families, and grandparent families.

1.10.4 Well-being

According to Brown (2012), well-being is 'what people are notionally able to do and to be, and what they have been able to do and to be. Well-being is the state of being comfortable, happy, or healthy. It is also a positive state experienced by an individual or a society. It includes having good mental health or high life satisfaction.

1.11 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The study was organised into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 offers a background to the study and explains the problem statement and the critical research questions, aims, and objectives. The overview of the literature review and the methodology employed are briefly discussed.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review that covers studies conducted on the influence of family structure on learners' well-being and briefly discusses the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used to conduct the study, the research design, and the data collection and processing techniques employed. Furthermore, the chapter outlays the methods used to analyse the academic experience of learners from different family structures.

Chapter 4 begins with discussing findings that emerged from the learner's and teacher's interviews. It further explains what the researcher observed from learners at selected high schools.

Chapter 5 explained the participants' discussion, the study's limitations, and the recommendations. It ends with a discussion of the conclusion.

1.12 CONCLUSION

A description of the methodological approach was provided. It details the qualitative methods used to achieve the aims and objectives, the data collection methods, and how the sample was selected. It ends with this study's ethical considerations and the explanation of the keywords. COVID-19 has resulted in school closures worldwide, triggering unprecedented challenges for education systems and its impact on the world's education. Most studies suggest that different family structures affect learners' well-being.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This literature review explores the influence of family structure on learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. It looks into the causes of the issues that learners confronted during the COVID-19. COVID-19, in various ways, affected people's lives in terms of education, communications, financial resources, and health. Different family structures categorise South African families. Both parents raise some children, and single parents raise others. Children may occasionally take up leadership roles when their parents are still living in the home. Children living in such situations without adult supervision result from work migration. In other situations, children are essentially unsupervised by adults because their parents are terminally ill. Grandparents sometimes assist in parenting their grandchildren in situations where parents choose to leave their kids behind. However, some children become household heads due to the loss of both parents due to death. In other cases, divorce leads to one parent raising children alone. It is necessary to review the literature on children from different family structures resulting from these multiple causes mentioned above. Furthermore, this chapter examines the literature on coping strategies learners use to overcome obstacles. The theoretical framework of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory is discussed in depth.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature and a study on the influence of family structure on learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19 is provided. A review of the literature is based on research objectives. By recognising and articulating connections between past studies and the current topic, this review of the body of knowledge in this field offers a theoretical base for future studies. A literature review seeks to provide readers with an overview of the sources used to research a specific topic and demonstrate how the study fits into the larger body of knowledge (Ramdha, 2014). It also updates the reader with recent studies (Okoli and Schabram, 2010). In this study, a literature review explains the material pertinent to the influence of family structure on learners' well-being. To understand the influence of family structure on learners' well-being, it is essential first to explore the meaning of the concept 'family structure'. According to the

US Census Bureau (2009), the family structure includes interactions at the intersection of biological relatedness, married and partnership status, and living circumstances.

The education system is "the structure or framework for effective education to provide in the real education demands of the target population (De Beer, Vos, and Niemczyk, 2022:11). The educational system is a well-organised manual that emphasises the needs of everyone involved to assist in achieving quality education. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa deals with all schools from Grade R to Grade 12, including adult literacy programmes. According to Steyn and Wolhuter (2014), South African's educational system follows the following pattern: Early childhood education (ages 4-5), Foundation phase, Grades 1-3 (ages 7-9), Intermediate, Grades 4-6 (ages 10-12), senior phase, Grades 7-9 (years 13-15), and Further Education and Training (FET), Grades 10-12 (ages 16-18). This study focuses on senior and FET grades.

Education in South Africa is controversial and associated with change. Gumede and Biyase (2016:69) highlighted that "South African's educational system has undergone significant change since apartheid was eliminated in 1994". Duvenhage claimed that education reform was essential to transforming the South African community (De Wet and Wolhuter, 2009:359). OBE was the cornerstone of a new curriculum unveiled by the education minister in 1995 (Department of Education [DoE], 1997). OBE supporters praised the new curriculum for its ability to fulfill the requirements of all students, irrespective of their background, race, socioeconomic condition, or handicap. According to their claims, implementing OBE will lead to improved teaching strategies, a stronger emphasis on the curriculum, and valid and trustworthy evaluation procedures (Lombard, 2010).

Studies revealed that the curriculum was revised in 2004 and renamed the Revised RNCS for the General Education and Training Band (Zewotir and North, 2011), and in 2006, they launched the National Curriculum Statements (NCS) for the Further Education and Training Band (Lombard, 2010). Furthermore, Wilmot and Merino (2015) indicated that each subject's most recent South African curriculum review round, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), was implemented in Grades R–12. Also, the curriculum was designed to guarantee that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills that are relevant to their own lives. In this way, the

curriculum encourages knowledge in local contexts while keeping global imperatives in mind. Thus, the implementation of CAPS, in a sad repetition of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), has taken place without sufficient training of teachers (Nkosi, 2012). The Minister of Basic Education, Motshekga (2012), argued that the South African national curriculum is the result of our work for seventeen years to alter the curriculum handed to us by apartheid.

In rural areas, including all traditional communal areas, farmland, peri-urban areas, unauthorised communities, and small rural towns, there are several ways for people to live off the land. In other words, both urban and rural areas in South Africa have schools, so this study focuses on rural schools since the rural communities in South Africa continue to be poor compared to their urban counterparts. Despite being partly unique to rural education, the Ministry of Education (2012) notes that the problems in rural South Africa are common to different degrees among historically disadvantaged communities. Lindeque and Vandeyar (2014) claimed that rural areas are significantly less resource-rich, people resources and learning and livelihood resources.

2.2.1 COVID-19 influencing on education

COVID-19, in various ways, affected people's lives in terms of occupation, education, communications, financial resources, and health. Singh (2015) stated that education is a process of transferring knowledge from teachers to learners. Normally, education runs face-to-face (traditionally) between teachers and learners. The teacher teaches learners, and learners listen to the teachers and do educational assessments in the classroom. However, after the COVID-19 epidemic struck the world in late 2019, online classes have become the standard for teaching and learning, and educational activities have become abnormal. During COVID-19, online education was regarded as an appropriate technological tool for instruction (Dhawan, 2020). Teachers can better impart knowledge and information to their students by using technology.

Research has revealed variations in the use of online learning between developed and developing nations. Online learning has been more widely accepted in industrialised nations. However, schools in developing nations still lack the infrastructure needed to include online learning as a supplement to traditional, in-person instruction. For instance, students in industrialised nations are accustomed to technology and have greater access to it. On the other hand, students in developing nations lack sufficient

resources and struggle to become comfortable with technology. Venkatesh and Sykes (2013) corroborate this, stating that there is a disparity in access to technology between industrialised and developing nations due to their drastically varying levels of access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

2.2.2 Understanding of family structure

Family structure includes interactions at the intersection of biological relatedness, marriage, partnership status, and living circumstances. Studies revealed that the traditional family structure comprises two biological parents who are married and other, so-called "alternative families," such as single-parent families, families with two biological non-residing parents, step-parent families, and grandparent families (Sun and Li, 2011). Uddin (2009) states that family structure is a basic unit of social structure, consisting of marriage, residence, family size, type, role, authority, and communication patterns intended to meet human needs for human adaptation across the generations. Miller-Keane (2003) defined family structure as how a family is set up in terms of roles, rules, power, and hierarchies. There is an increasing shift in the US from the traditional family form to other types of families, such as step-parent or extended families (Sun and Li, 2011).

Families are a basic social unit. South African families are diverse due to their rich historical and societal background (Park and Lee, 2020), so families inevitably impact the progress or backwardness of communities and societies. The family plays a pivotal role in the promotion of good societal outcomes. As a functional system, the family largely contributes to economic and social development, promoting solidarity and distributing resources in households and broader societies. However, well-functioning families contribute to positive family outcomes; the absence of an enabling and supportive environment significantly impacts family well-being and functioning (October, Petersen, Adebisi, Rich, and Roman 2021). Stressful life events, such as unfavourable health and socioeconomic obstacles, might, for instance, have a detrimental impact on family dynamics and functioning, resulting in dysfunction and lowering the family's general well-being. According to Lamanna, Riedmann, and Stewart (2020), COVID-19 significantly negatively influenced South African families' quality of life. The shifting care giving responsibilities, health issues, and family member deaths all attest to this. Historically, families have undergone structural and content changes in many parts of the world. It is always evolving and adjusting to

cultural and global shifts. While the family is seen positively because of its nurturing and caring roles, in some situations, it can also encourage and legitimise the oppression of women; patriarchy, for instance, has become one of the family's most persistent forms of dominance.

2.2.3 Family structure influencing learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19

2.2.3.1 Nuclear families and learners

Ukulo (2019) states that a nuclear family is a family with a father, mother, and children. The nuclear type of family is the one in which the group consists of parents living with their children. There are advantages and disadvantages for learners from nuclear families. A study carried out by Rana, Sood, and Bhardwaj (2021) found that due to the outbreak of COVID-19, women from nuclear families got a barrage of responsibilities, causing confusion and feelings of helplessness. In other words, they are overburdened with caring for their family and household duties. Of course, the pandemic is a heavy burden for all of us, but it has also exposed the weaknesses in the structure of the nuclear family. On the one hand, Rana et al. (2021) also discovered that women have faced unique challenges as a result of living at home all the time, particularly in nuclear families where women share a single roof with young children, a greater variety of roles and responsibilities, a greater sense of helplessness and vulnerability, the need to readjust after losing their jobs, a lack of support systems, and poor mental health, all of which contribute to an almost miserable existence.

Hence, being born from a nuclear family comes with positives and negatives. The trend of quality education depends on the family's structure and size. The family structure must influence the learners' academic performance. However, studies revealed that learners from two-parent families have better schooling outcomes than single-parent, stepfamily, or other family structures (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2007). Watt's (2019) findings support that learners' academic performance improves when parents are actively involved in their education. For example, both parents tend to support their children in schooling because of getting better outcomes. Ukulo (2019) found that learners from both parents usually do well in class participation and academic performance. As parents and children spend more time together, this creates opportunities to build stronger relationships among family members and support each other.

Björklund and Sundström (2005) found out that those learners who grew up with both parents present did not enjoy any significant advantage over younger siblings who grew up after parental separation in terms of educational attainment. While this is true for some families, others experienced family feuds and conflict in their homes, as spending more time together resulted in frustration and arguments. For example, families spending more time at home also meant more women (and children) were at risk of being victims of violence in the home. Parihar (2017) identified several duties that parents have at home, such as ensuring the family's financial stability and generating more income to meet the necessities of shelter, food, and medical care. When faced with challenges, nuclear families are typically more resilient because they have learned to work together to solve difficulties and provide emotional support for one another (Dahiya, 2017). Nuclear families become closer due to their cooperation and reliance on one another to overcome difficult times.

2.2.3.2 Single-parent families and learners

Single parenting is already becoming a fast and rapidly growing trend in most communities. Chanda and Pujar (2018) explained single parenting as a family comprising a single mother or father living with their dependent children. In single-parent families, children are dependent on one parent. Studies revealed some causative factors of single parenthood, such as divorce, desertion, death of a partner, unintended pregnancy, single-parent adoption, and migration that lead to parenting in a single hand (Stephen and Udisi, 2016). Falana (2012) highlighted other reasons that cause single parenthood, which is denied paternity and rape. Mello (2016) indicated that parental separation damages learners' self-concept. They experience feelings of embarrassment, confusion, emotional stress, and depression.

According to Banerjee (2013), some factors can negatively impact a single parent's mental health, including being overworked, having family conflicts, living under stress, having child care available, having frequent changes in their family circumstances, food insecurity, housing and financial stress, unemployment, social isolation, a lack of social support, transportation, and having a lower household income. Learners from single-parent households allegedly struggle with emotional problems like coldness, hyperactivity, antagonism, and violence (Richer and Lemola, 2017). For example, children of single parents may grow into mature and well-balanced adults because they contribute and bear many responsibilities of parents on their shoulders (Raja,

2020). Guhasarkar (2020) and Raja (2020) argued that single parents spend quality time with their children, which allows them to develop a strong, unique bond. In that case, learners from single-parent families tend to be independent.

Education is essential to human social, physical, and psychological development and is linked to an individual's well-being and opportunities for better living. Nato (2016), in his study, found that learners from single-parent families performed poorly compared to learners from nuclear family backgrounds. On the contrary, Ushie (2012) study indicated no significant difference in the academic performance of learners from single-parent families and those from two-parent families as they are experiencing different challenges. This is supported by Onzima (2011) findings, which suggest that learners who grow up in single-parent families face difficulties at school. This is supported by previous studies that learners from single-parent families tend to have difficulties in school and suffer from anxiety and uncertainties when their parental love is divided or distorted (Udisi, 2016).

Furthermore, Copeland (2010) found that in single-parent families, it is hard to maintain discipline at home, which can contribute to a rise in behavioural and psychosocial problems among learners, such as smoking, drinking, delinquency, and violence at school. On the other hand, Jackson (2010) findings claimed that usual accidents such as unsafe sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, and suicide attempts happen in girls from single-parent families. Bornstein and Bradley (2014) found that the absence of the father is mainly associated with an increase in antisocial behaviours in boys at school, including violence, criminality, substance abuse, and a decrease in social adjustment. For example, learners from single-parent families are independent as they control themselves.

2.2.3.3 Grandparent families and learners

Grandparents' raising their grandkids is a global trend becoming more common. Resuming grand parenting can be due to some circumstances, including issues with the child's parents. These can include divorce, drug or alcohol addiction, neglect and abuse of the child, desertion, adolescent pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, physical or mental illness, unemployment, jail, or death (Denison, 2013). Without social protection, Zarazua, Barrientos, Hulme, and Hickey (2010) found that grandparents face financial difficulties. As a result, children living in households headed by grandparents have

their schooling prospects badly affected. For example, in South Africa, grandparents cannot support and guide their grandchildren since they are too old and dependent on pensions. Comparative studies by Bhargava (2005) found that learners from grandparents' families, including those in South Africa, experience lower school attendance than those with parents. On the other hand, the study by Monserud and Elder (2011) found that children born to never-married mothers and were co-residing with their grandparents had better schooling outcomes than those born to once-married mothers but also co-residing with grandparents.

Moreover, learners, especially girls, might face the risk of ending in child prostitution in trying to provide for their families since their families' source of income is not sufficient (Pillay, 2012). In addition, learners from grandparent families experience the pain of rejection by society, especially if parents die because of HIV (Human Immune Virus). This is supported by the study of Kanyamorwa and Ampek (2007) that society does not allow its children to play with those affected learners. Ochieng, Nyamwange, and Winga (2018), carried out on the psychological implications of HIV and AIDS on child-headed households, affirm that many learners' who experience increased levels of psychological and emotional distress, are at risk of exploitation, including labour and sexual abuse and are also not in school due to poverty, lack of parental guidance and encouragement as well as heavy domestic responsibilities and stigmatisation.

According to a 2003 report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), three major performance indicators were found in the survey done in Botswana schools: absence, repetition, and interruption. Grandparents' children frequently repeat school grades due to insufficient time for their studies.

2.2.3.4 Child headed families and learners

Both nationally and globally, families with children are becoming more and more prevalent. In 2011, 100,000 children in South Africa lived in households headed by children, according to research from the country's General Household Survey (Phillips, 2011). According to Sloth-Nielsen (2003), among other reasons, there is a rise in child-headed families in South Africa as a result of parental mortality. According to Lepheana (2010), child-headed families are those in which the adult caregiver is either permanently handicapped or not present, so the children must take on the role of caretaker. Conversely, Bequele (2007) characterises a child-headed family as one in

which all household members are younger than eighteen. One of the kids, acknowledged as the family's leader and food provider oversees the household.

Some causation factors cause children to be the head of the house. Only children live in child-headed homes because of immigration or parental deaths. Many children who are left parentless form households where the oldest sibling assumes leadership roles (Tsegaye, 2008). As per Phillips (2011), the prevalence of child-headed families has increased in South Africa due to the high death rate linked with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Department of Health AIDS pamphlets from 2005 said that as a result of their parents' deaths, children displayed risky peer relationships troubles, anxiety, Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal thoughts, misbehaviour, and despair.

The findings of the study are consistent with those of Skovdal and Daniel (2012), who noted that students from child-headed households encounter a variety of difficulties, such as discrimination, a lack of resources, a higher risk of starvation and malnutrition, a higher rate of absenteeism and withdrawal from school, subpar academic performance, inadequate access to healthcare, and sexual exploitation. Onzima (2011) contends that students from households headed by children have a high dropout rate.

Moreover, Masondo (2016) and Kabede (2015) revealed that kids from child-headed homes endure much larger family obligations than kids from adult-headed households. These responsibilities are considered inappropriate for a child's developmental stage and problematic in the classroom. In his report, Evans (2010) discovered that Tanzanian students from child-headed homes said their housekeeping responsibilities affected their academic performance, supporting this claim. However, students from households with children do not have the money to purchase the supplies and essentials for school, which results in their failing the course, according to Pillay's (2012) research. According to earlier research, these kids don't have enough time to edit their assignments and show up late. For instance, students struggle to focus in class when they worry about caring for their siblings and working to support the family. Van (2010) contended that while it can be difficult for some kids to handle their schooling and domestic responsibilities simultaneously, some manage well and succeed academically.

2.2.4 Challenges deriving from teaching and learning online under COVID-19

After COVID-19 hit the world in late 2019, schools shifted from traditional to online learning. This brought in a wide range of challenges, as Cao and Duru (2020) found, including a lack of internet connectivity, electricity, and electronic devices, especially in developing countries. While the government was still implementing efforts to guarantee inclusivity in the classroom, the reality is that access to these services is unequal, and many learners in both rural and urban areas could not benefit from the privileges offered. Syauqi (2020) suggested that the form of online learning depends on the technology (e.g., computer, laptop, or smartphone) and network (e.g. wireless or satellite). In their study, Mukuna and Aloka (2020) found that the lack of resources in rural areas means that learners are disadvantaged differently by online learning. For example, not all schools in rural areas received the learning platform of tablets and computers provided by the government because, mostly in rural areas, they have network connectivity as an issue for Wi-Fi and internet. Hansen's (2020) study suggests that making online courses interesting and engaging was difficult without utilising learning methods and providing internet connectivity in rural schools.

In addition, research has shown that not only poor connectivity, lack of electricity, and lack of devices contribute to learners' disengagement while learning online but also home distractions, lack of experience in online learning, non-user-friendly learning management systems, and life commitments and using tools that both teachers and learners are not familiar with affected the teaching and learning process (Nsengiyumva, Sibomana and Nsenga, 2022). For example, online tools could have been helpful if all households could afford electricity, a good internet connection, and technological devices and if teachers and learners had been trained well. While the South African government is promoting online learning as the only way in the context of COVID-19, Dube (2020) also revealed that this mode excludes many rural learners from teaching and learning due to a lack of resources to connect to the internet, the learning management system, and low-tech software.

Another problem is that some learners' do not have a computer or Android device, as found in research conducted by Wahab and Iskandar (2020). Such a condition makes it difficult to face reality. The study revealed that the problem is not only in the lack of learning equipment or facilities but also in the absence of an internet quota, and providing an internet quota requires a high cost (Efriana, 202). For example, learners

from rural areas do not have an adequate budget to provide an internet network and must travel a long distance for internet connectivity. Nashruddin, Alam, and Tanasy (2020) confirmed that learners cannot receive lesson materials and assignments delivered by teachers via the Internet network without internet connectivity.

Studies have suggested that another challenge brought about by COVID-19 was that online learning eliminates the chance of face-to-face interaction between individuals Cao and Duru, (2020), which is crucial for building a relationship between a learner and teachers. Mukuna and Aloka (2020) highlighted that lack of face-to-face contact between individuals could cause social isolation. It resulted in many obstacles because learners had to study independently, attempting to understand the content without directly listening to teachers.

Hence, online learning came unexpectedly, and learners have numerous challenges. In that case, learners are also unfamiliar with the online learning approach due to losing interest in learning. Alawamleh's (2020) study found that learners prefer classroom classes to online learning because they find online classrooms to be isolating and lacking in motivation, not understanding the content, and lack of communication between the teacher and the learner. Yuzulia (2021) concurs with Alawamleh's (2020) findings that learners become less motivated, more anxious, and bored or distracted during the learning process. Sheridan (2020) found parental illiteracy prevents parents from assisting their children in adjusting to new technology. For example, learners, especially those in rural areas, might not be inspired to keep learning and doing their school work and attend school because they are not looking at any examples at home and are not motivated by their parents. Similarly, Attanasio's (2020) findings assert that COVID-19 is likely to hurt learners with poor socio-economic positions at home and less educated parents with no educational background.

2.2.5 Teachers' strategies in teaching and learning during COVID-19 and broken family structures

According to Kistner (2015), teaching and learning strategies are essential to consistently promoting self-regulated classroom learning. This means that learning strategies are the main foundation for achieving the success of learning objectives because they can help teachers facilitate the teaching process. Teaching strategies

must be adapted to existing conditions. As we know, South Africa is one of the countries that has the destructive effects of the COVID-19 virus disease, including the national learning system.

Several studies have focused on the strategies teachers applied to cope with challenges brought on by COVID-19. Lockdown limitations were one of the key backup plans governments put in place nationwide. These limitations were implemented using risk-based, five-level strategies in the South African setting. Studies have revealed that maintaining social distance and social isolation are important strategies a person may adopt to eliminate the risk of COVID-19 (Mukuna and Aloka, 2020). Protective measures can reduce the spread of COVID-19. This is supported by Mukuna and Aloka (2020), who found that appealing protective measures can significantly reduce possible infections. Virtual classrooms were also a strategy to deal with COVID-19 that is accessible to complement the educational experience, such as reading modules and developing extra-class activities (Manrique-Gutiérrez et al., 2021; Nisrine and Abdelwahed, 2022).

The efficient integration of digital technology is crucial in making teaching and learning more meaningful and enjoyable (Wantulok 2020). Technology is an alternative way to solve the problems in education institutions conducting teaching and learning activities. It can even be assumed that teaching and learning activities depend on digital technology as the medium for delivering the materials. Even though some studies revealed that the limitation of technology becomes a burden for teaching and learning, the presence of technology can assist teachers and learners in avoiding the risk of spreading COVID-19 (Lestinawati, 2020; Situmorang, Nugroho, and Pramusita, 2020). The government established a learning platform to give teachers access to pertinent recordings and lesson videos.

Hence, Rugani and Grijalva (2020) discovered that synchronous learning requires multiple tools and techniques. Teachers sometimes interact with their learners through instant messaging, a popular tool like WhatsApp, blogs, or primers. According to Nsengiyumva, Sibomana, and Nsenga (2022), instructors scrambled to use technological and other multifaceted tools to be able to conduct their classes remotely and promote learners' engagement during a lockdown or when they faced circumstances that prevented learners from attending physical classes. Some

scholars revealed that teachers rely on traditional assessments in favours of more creative ones, with quizzes and tests being the most common assessment tool. Daar and Nasar (2012) found that teachers asked or invited learners who do not possess learning devices, such as Android and mobile phones, to come to school to take the assignments. Moreover, learners are given some exercises to accomplish within a certain time limit. They do those activities at home under parents' supervision and guidance.

Parents are partners in education. Nsengiyumva et al. (2022) found that the best tip for school success is to ensure parents and teachers work together as allies. Similarly, in their study, Lebaste, Novianti, and Garcia (2020) reported that parents must play an active role in their children's remote learning. In other words, teachers and parents should work together to ensure that their children engage with the content, learn excellently, and receive quality education without compromising their safety. Great teachers make the parents their allies in learners learning (Campen, 2020). For example, parents and teachers should be in regular touch, and teachers should advise parents about different means they can use to keep their children engaged and focused while learning from home.

The UNICEF (2020) found that teachers used technologies for school counselling services during the pandemic. In most public schools in South Africa, school councillors or psychologists ensure learners' well-being is good; they motivate and support learners from different backgrounds.

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.4.1 Background of the theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) was a Russian-born American psychologist who studied childhood development. His fundamental view was that a child is the result of both biology and the influence of their surroundings. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory was utilised in this study to evaluate the impact of family structure on learners' well-being in rural areas during COVID-19. This theory was published in 1979 and influenced many psychologists in analysing people and the effects of various environmental systems they encounter.

This theory has five systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfennbrenner, 1979). "The microsystem

comprises of the daily environments in which the person transits and makes reciprocal face-to-face contacts” (Hayes, O’Toole, and Halpenny, 2017:15). Learners mostly spend time with their teachers. Learners usually develop a strong bond with their teachers. The microsystems context is the immediate environment in which we live. Family, friends, learners, teachers, neighbours, and other persons with whom the learner has direct touch are all included in their microsystem. The microsystem is the context for direct social interactions with these social agents. Learners usually spend time with their friends. The mesosystem is concerned with the interactions between the microsystems in one’s life. This means that a learner’s family history may be related to his or her school experience. For example, if a learner is neglected by his parents or his/her parents’ divorce, death, or migration. Learners are unlikely to acquire a positive attitude toward teachers. In addition, the learner may feel uncomfortable in the presence of peers and may withdraw from a group of classmates. The learner may isolate him/herself.

The exosystem, a third cycle of the ecological model, is governed by “environments or contexts in which the individual is not actively involved but is indirectly affected” (Petrogiannis, 2003:143-147). The exosystem is the setting in which there is a link between the context where the person has no active role and the context wherein is actively participating. Suppose a learner is more attached to his father than his mother. The learner chooses one-sided family because of the treatment they get. This cycle mostly applies to single-parent and grand-parent families. If the father goes abroad to work for several months, there may be a conflict between the mother and the child’s social relationship, or on the other hand, and this event may result in a tighter bond between the mother and the child.

The macrosystem is the fourth and broadest level of the “individual encompassing traditions, political strategies, social and political values and cultural beliefs that influence the functioning of other systems and thus the central unit, the individual” (Hayes, O’Toole, and Halpenny, 2017: 16-17). The macrosystem setting is the actual culture of an individual. The cultural contexts involve the socioeconomic status of the person and/or his family, his ethnicity or race, and living in a developing or a third-world country. For example, a learner born to a low-income family makes them work harder every day at school. This is supported by Guhasarkar (2020) and Raja (2020)

that single parents spend quality time with their children, allowing them to develop a strong, unique bond.

This example links with Van's (2010) idea argued that although balancing the demands of managing a household with schoolwork is quite challenging for child-headed families, some learners manage well and achieve academic success. The chronosystem includes the transitions and shifts in one's lifespan. This may also involve the socio-historical contexts that may influence a person. One classic example is how divorce, as a major life transition, may affect the couple's relationship and their children's behaviours. Bronfenbrenner noted that the child interacts with different social-ecological systems such as the family, peers, and the school environment (microsystem), the extended family (exosystem), culture and laws, social-political conditions (macrosystem) and (chronosystem) time-orientated (Berk, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1995). In each system, risk factors can be present that increase the negative child behaviours, of which the drop-out at school is an example.

2.4.2 Assumptions of the theory

Bronfenbrenner assumed that risk factors in more proximal social systems exert more influence on the child's development and behaviours. Bronfenbrenner believes the primary relationship needs to be with someone who can provide a sense of caring meant to last a lifetime. Parents should ensure that they raise their children in a good manner. Parents should create a strong bond with their children. This relationship must be fostered by a person or people within the immediate sphere of the child's influence. Schools and teachers fulfill a crucial secondary role but cannot provide the complexity of interaction that primary adults can provide. For the educational community to attempt a primary role is to help our society continue denying the real issue.

The theory states that if parents and teachers have a positive relationship, this should positively shape the child's development. Likewise, the child must be active in their learning, both academically and socially. They must collaborate with their peers and participate in meaningful learning experiences for positive development. Teachers should also understand the situations their students' families may be experiencing, including social and economic factors that are part of the various systems. Theories state that teachers and parents should work together to strengthen the development of ecological systems in educational practice and benefit the child.

2.4.3 Relevancy to the theory

The theory interacts in complex ways that affect the person's development. For instance, conflicts or changes in one layer will also affect other layers. The learner's living circumstances are impacted by changes in the family dynamic brought about by COVID-19, disputes, divorce, death, and migration. In the classroom, a learner's ability to be happy in life, maintain good grades, have access to all parents, and have enough resources at school can all be determined by that one act of change. Every system depicts a learner's risk factor.

Microsystem

This system is relevant to this study as the family enters Bronfenbrenner's framework, but only in terms of interpersonal interactions with the child. Family dynamics, which include various family structures such as nuclear families, grandparental families, single-parent families, and child-headed families, are the most significant components of the microsystem in this context. The microsystem represents an individual's immediate surroundings, including regular contact with family, friends, teachers, and others. This ecological model level is crucial in determining a child's development because it considers the relationships and experiences that impact behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs.

In a microsystem, interactions are limited to one or two family members. The child interacts with his or her parents first when they are at home. The child's microsystem develops more sophisticated as they age, incorporating more individuals like their peers and teachers. The child can interact with peers or friends. Bronfenbrenner noted that as long as increased numbers in a child's microsystem mean more enduring reciprocal relationships, increasing the size of the system will enhance child development. A child's microsystem may collapse if they encounter bullying, rejection by their parents, conflict, or neglect in their family or at home. Numerous negative consequences, including lower academic achievement, social isolation, and mental health problems, may result from this. Furthermore, the child's capacity for growth and realising their full potential may be delayed if the microsystem is not offering the resources and assistance required for their development. Environmental factors, including neighbourhood quality, family resources, and socioeconomic status can influence an individual's experiences inside this system.

Mesosystem

Mesosystem is relevant to this study because it is a child interrelationship among settings, such as the home, a day-care centre, and the schools. The child's mesosystem functions in these interrelationships are influenced by the child's and parents' efforts to connect the home and the school. In the microsystem, peers give a child a sense of validation and belonging. However, they may pressure the child to fit in when they show specific behaviours or views. The mesosystem can also influence peer pressure since it can lead to pressure to conform due to contradicting expectations and messages from different settings.

The mesosystem is a connection between a family and schooling. Peer experiences include family experiences, school experiences, and church experiences. It could be challenging for children whose parents rejected them to form positive connections with teachers. For example, if a child is rejected by his/her peers at school because their parents died because of HIV, that child will tend toward bad behaviours. These children typically have bad experiences with their peers and withdraw from social interactions. A child's life can be changed by the interaction between the father and the teacher at school, as the child will suffer if the father does not get along with their teacher. Children are also missing other kinds of social interaction during the COVID-19 with play deprivation, especially with nature and the fact that their close surroundings labelled as the "Mesosystem". Peer talk, sibling talk, doing things together, going outside, observing their surroundings, and learning the symbolic language all play an essential role in meaning-making among children.

Exosystem

This system is relevant to the study since it covers other people and locations such as families' workplaces, extended families, the neighbourhood, and school boards that a child may not engage with. Still, it has an essential effect on them. The quality of interrelationships among settings is influenced by forces in which the child does not participate, directly affecting parents and other adults interacting with the child. It involves links between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role and the individual's immediate context. For instance, a mother's experiences at work may influence what a husband or child experiences at home.

The mother might receive a promotion that requires more travel, which might increase conflict with the husband and change patterns of interaction with the child. Their parent's experiences can influence a child's experience at home. A child's father and mother may have more arguments if the mother loses her work, which might affect how they interact with the child. If a parent's work schedule changes, the child may be negatively impacted because there may be less time for parent-child interaction. Even though the child may not be actively participating, he or she is aware of the positive and negative forces at play while interacting with their system. The child is now being introduced to "invisible" cultures that have visible impacts on daily life.

Macrosystem

Even though this system is the biggest and largest group of objects and people from a child, it still influences them. Macrosystems are "blueprints" for how linked macro-level societal influences shape human development. They offer the broad organisational and ideological frameworks that the meso- and exo-systems use to represent the ecosystem of human evolution. Macrosystems are constantly shifting and open to revolution and evolution. Such changes could result from, among other things, war, economic hardship, and technological advancements. This system describes the culture that people are a part of it.

Socioeconomic status, poverty, ethnicity, and developing and industrialised nations are examples of cultural contexts. It affects every system, including the geographic and ethnic location of a child. For example, financial difficulties experienced by a child's parent may harm the child. For example, in single-parent families, if a parent is experiencing financial difficulties, that could create a depression in child's life because he or she cannot be able to afford basic school needs. The effects of larger principles defined by the macrosystem have a cascading influence throughout the interactions of all outer layers. More specifically, a society is less likely to offer resources to support parents if it embraces the view that parents should have the only authority over raising their children. The structures in which the parents function are then affected by this. The child's microsystem framework influences parents' ability or inability to fulfill parental responsibilities.

Chronosystem

This system is relevant because, at each stage of development, the developmental processes undergo modifications to fit in with historical events that are taking place at that specific age. Furthermore, culture experiences constant change, how environmental events and changes develop across one's life span, and the socio-historical context. Single-parent families, when they divorce, for instance, are only one modification. Children's negative effects from divorce typically reach their peak in the year following the divorce. Two years after the divorce, family relationships have settled down and become less chaotic. This technique considers the relationship between time and a child's surroundings. The elements of this system can be internal, like the physiological changes a child experiences as they grow older, or external, like the time of a parent's death. As children get older, they might respond to changes in their surroundings differently and might be better able to predict how those changes will affect them. The environment's conditions and quality are crucial for children's growth. Interactions may become challenging when a child's physical and cognitive structures develop.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed existing literature on family structures that influence learner's well-being in rural schools. Most studies concerning nuclear families, child-headed families, and single-parent and grand-parent families have paid little attention to learners' well-being influenced by family structure in rural schools during COVID-19. However, learners have different backgrounds since they come from other family structures. This study looked closely at the academic experience of learners and their well-being. In brief, the chapter has tried to review related literature. This chapter also provided details regarding the education system in South Africa. Furthermore, it revealed the challenges of online learning, the strategies teachers could use to overcome the innumerable obstacles, and the theoretical framework. The next chapter outlines the research design and methodology used to analyse the influence of family structure on learners' well-being in rural schools.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the literature review. However, this chapter focuses on the research methodology and design of the study. This chapter discusses the research approach and research paradigm, including a qualitative interpretive paradigm. It uses a multiple case study design. The selection of participants' mechanisms will be discussed in this chapter. Data collection instruments will be developed based on the study's data analysis processes and trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with the study's ethical considerations.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Henning, Rensburg, and Smit (2004, cited in Plessis and Mestry, 2019:3) research methodology is a "coherent combination of approaches that complement one another and have the goodness of fit to give data and findings that reflect the research question and meet the goal". Irny and Rose (2012, cited in Plessis 2014:18) mentioned that methodology is a "different group of methods that complement one another and have the goodness of fit to deliver data and findings that reflect the research question and suit the purpose of the study". According to Kivunja (2017), research methodology is a term used to refer to research design, methods, approaches, and procedures used in an investigation that is well planned to find out something. The researcher used a research method to investigate the influence of family structure on learners' well-being.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research paradigm is explained by Kivunja (2017) as it inherently reflects the researcher's beliefs about the world that participants live in and want to live in.

3.3.1 Interpretive paradigm

This study adopted an interpretive paradigm that seeks to comprehend the subjective world of human experience (Dean 2018). The central endeavour of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of learners' experiences (Kivunja 2017). Thanh (2017) highlighted that a research paradigm comprises three elements: a belief about the nature of knowledge, a methodology, and criteria for validity. Creswell (2014) indicates that interpretive research aims to understand complex

situations and the subject of human experience. In educational research, the term paradigm describes a researcher's 'worldview' (Kivunja 2017). Kivunja (2017) further states that the worldview is the perspective, thinking, school of thought, or shared beliefs that inform the meaning or interpretation of research data. Interpretive paradigm usually seeks to understand a particular context, and the core belief of the interpretive paradigm is that reality is socially constructed (Thanh, 2017).

Kivunja (2017) states that in the interpretive paradigm, the researcher interprets and observes the events and provides an understanding of the social world in its natural state. The interpretive paradigm guided the researcher to explore or observe teachers and learners' during the teaching and learning process in a classroom environment as a result of getting a rich and detailed understanding of the learners' reality. The researcher intended to better understand learners' well-being from various family structures through the data collection method. Hence, the researcher tried to conduct the interviews and observations in learners' and teachers' natural environments without being invasive. Therefore, by engaging in an interaction between teachers and learners based on their well-being, the researcher acquired socially constructed meanings as the participants were placed in their social contexts. An interpretive methodology provides a context that allows the researcher to examine the participants' experiences and explore their understanding of a study (Thanh, 2017).

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

The researcher chose to conduct qualitative research to answer the research question.

3.4.1 Qualitative approach

Du Plessis and Mestry (2014:6) state that qualitative research aims to "discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or perspectives and worldviews of the people involved". Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Austin and Sutton, 2014). This implies that qualitative researchers study teachers and learners in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena regarding the meanings participants bring them (Aspers and Corte, 2019). Flick (2014:542) states that qualitative research is "engaged in analysing subjective meaning or the wider implications of issues, events, or practices through the collection of non-standardised data and the analysis of texts and images rather than numbers and statistics".

Hence, the role of the researcher in qualitative research is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants. The qualitative approach helped the researcher understand the social context in which learners' live and why they are experiencing challenges. In this study, the researcher chose to understand the world of learners from various family structures by interpreting various comments and experiences conveyed by participants. Qualitative research helped the researcher construct meaning regarding learners' experiences influenced by family structures in rural schools. Therefore, the study was embedded in the notion that family structures influence learners' well-being in a rural school, which would suit the investigation.

Furthermore, qualitative research reveals the nature of certain situations, settings, processes, relations, systems, or people. It allowed the researcher to gain insights about a particular phenomenon, develop new concepts, and discover its problems. In this study, the researcher observed and interviewed teachers and learners in their settings, which enabled the researcher to gain more insight into learners' well-being.

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is a "reflection upon a researcher's ideas" (Asenahabi 2019:80). It is also an "overall plan for connecting the conceptual research problems to the pertinent and achievable empirical research". Research design is an inquiry that provides a specific direction for research procedures (Creswell 2014). Asenahabi (2019) describes research design as a plan, structure, and investigation strategy adopted to obtain answers to research questions with optimal control of variables. Research design determines the kind of analysis that is to be done to get the desired results. In this study, the research design articulates the required data and the methods used to collect and analyse the data. This study employs a multiple-case study design.

3.5.1 Multiple case study design

Multiple case study design was used in this study. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that multiple case study design examines more than one case and aims to find the common themes and patterns between the cases. Furthermore, multiple case studies can augment contrasting results for expected reasons or augur similar results (Yin, 2017). The researcher uses multiple case study designs to understand the similarities and differences between the cases of learners from various family structures. In this study, the researcher was interested in understanding family structure's influence on

learners' well-being. By selecting a multiple case study strategy, the researcher could analyse distinctive, individual company cases in detail regarding how family structure influences learners' well-being. The multiple case study method was chosen as it facilitates the comparison of different data sets and focuses on contextual conditions pertinent to pursuing the research questions (Wilcox, Angelis, Baker, and Lawson 2014). Vohra (2014) emphasised that multiple cases strengthen the results by replicating the patterns, thereby increasing the robustness of the findings. The researcher aimed to use a multiple case study design to get accurate data. The findings were accurate since the researcher repeated the same study with different participants.

3.6 RESEARCH METHODS

According to Sugiyono (2015), the research method is the scientific way to get data to obtain certain usability data. The researcher used different methods of collecting data. The following aspects of the research methods are discussed: Data collection methods and selection of participants.

Due to this study's nature, a qualitative data collection approach was chosen. Pholotho and Mtswen (2016) highlight that qualitative research relies mostly on non-numeric data, such as interviews and observations. This study used a triangulation. Fusch and Ness (2015:1410) noted that "triangulation involves the employment of multiple external methods to collect data as well as the analysis of the data". Vohra (2014) states that triangulation involves combining data sources to study the same social phenomenon. In this study, triangulation is how the researcher explores different perspectives of the same study. Methodological triangulation ensures that the researcher gets data that is rich in depth. The researcher collected data during normal school and weekend hours (Davids, 2016).

In this study, data collection was done to understand more about teachers' and learners' experiences. The methods of collecting data applied to this study since they incorporate teachers' and learners' views, understandings, knowledge, and experiences. This study collected data to understand teachers' and learners' situations better. The researcher employs two methods of data collection in the study. Hence, methodological triangulation was used to compare the data from the two data collection methods: observation and semi-structured interviews. The motivation for

choosing the methods and how the researcher used the methods are discussed below. When collecting data, the researcher was accompanied by a school psychologist to guide the learners' well-being (See Appendix I).

3.6.1 Observation

According to Martew (2022), observation is central to an in-depth understanding of the natural unfolding of the phenomenon under investigation. Participant observation is a data collection method that involves participating in and observing a group or individuals over an extended period (Mosera and Korstjens 2018). After consulting with the Department of Education, Head of schools, High school teachers, and high school learners from senior and Further Education and Training (FET) phases, the researcher carried out classroom observations and selected high school teachers and high school learners who volunteered to participate in the research.

In this study, the researcher observed the participants at school to understand how they conducted teaching and learning throughout the day. In grades nine, ten, and eleven, observations were made during Life orientation (Physical Education Task: PET) and creative arts (Drama sessions). Each learner was observed repeatedly to identify consistency in the teaching process. The essence of these observations was to understand how teaching is done, how teachers manage discipline, how learners interact in the learning process, and how they interact with their classmates. Regarding interaction with classmates, the researcher observed during Life orientation (PET) and Creative arts (drama) sessions where learners got a chance to interact with their classmates.

The researcher further observed the class attendance register, both formal and informal exercise books, test and examination scripts, and how teachers assist those learners who are lacking due to challenges they experience at home. The researcher also observed learning materials and uniforms for learners. Furthermore, the marks on the record sheets were reviewed to determine the learners' performance. Observation was one of the researchers' tools because the researcher wanted to gather data from the natural setting, the school environment, and the classrooms. The observation was effective since the researcher, as the observer, noticed relevant things within the school environment that the participants may be taking for granted. The observation allowed the researcher to look at what is happening in the situation

rather than relying on second-hand information. The researcher used an observation guide to observe learners (See Appendix II).

3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview is “one in which the interviewer prepares a list of subjects to address and questions to ask the participants” (Hof 2016:66). Semi-structured interviews are most similar to a natural conversation that one would have with another individual. In semi-structured interviews, the order in which the questions are asked and how the questions are asked can vary (Hof, 2016). Semi-structured interviews aim to look at the participant’s views. Interviews are a data collection method in which an interviewer asks the respondents face-to-face, telephone, or online (Moser and Korstjens, 2018). The interview questions for this study ensured that each participant was asked the same questions (See Appendix iii). This allowed the researcher to build a conversation with each participant. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted through telephonic conversations (Salmons, 2015) and face-to-face interviews, where they were recorded with participants’ permission to understand participants’ perceptions better.

Questions for the interviews were open-ended, and specific probes were used since they are flexible and helpful in gaining in-depth information about peoples’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs (Salmons, 2015). Interview questions were asked, and teachers and learners were allowed to express their perspectives. The essence of the semi-structured interview was to understand better how family structure influences learners’ well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. The interview questions encourage the elaboration of important emerging themes in the interview rather than limiting the interviewer and interviewee to a fixed schedule that can reduce opportunities to enrich spoken data and gain information on how interviewees “see” and understand the world. Thus, semi-structured interviews were adopted as a data-collecting tool because it was necessary to structure the participants' responses to gain information on the required area (Mosera and Korstjens, 2018).

For this study, the researcher conducted the interviews in a mutually agreed upon location and took up to 20-30 minutes of the participant’s time to conduct the interview. The purpose of interviewing was to uncover what could not be found from observations and to understand the participant’s perspective (Hof 2016). Four high school teachers

and four learners were involved in the semi-structured interview processes. A follow-up interview was also conducted for the researcher to gather more information and persuade participants to clarify what is being observed. Regarding the clarity of questions, the researcher rephrased the questions, and similarly, the participants were asked to elaborate on answers that were not unclear.

Interviews were done during lunchtime, after school, and on weekends. The semi-structured interviews involved interaction between the researcher and the respondents, which must be documented. The interviews were tape-recorded in this study, and the researcher took notes simultaneously. The major aim of qualitative interviews was to see the world through the eyes of the participants. This helped the researcher better understand the teachers' and learners' experiences, feelings, and perspectives.

3.7 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Sampling is selecting or searching for situations, contexts and/or participants who provide rich data on the phenomenon of interest (Mosera and Korstjens, 2018). This study used non-probability sampling, often associated with multiple case studies and qualitative research designs. Regarding the latter, multiple case studies tend to focus on small samples. They are intended to examine a real-life phenomenon, not to make statistical inferences about the wider population (Taherdoost, 2016).

According to Ahmed, Faizi, and Akbar (2020:5), sampling is the "subset of the population representing the whole group, used for making inferences about population characteristics or generalising relation to existing population". Mills and Gay (2018) defined sampling as a group of relatively smaller people selected from a population for investigational purposes. This study's sample size was a subset of eight participants, including two female high school learners and two male high school learners from grades nine, ten, and eleven. Four high school teachers with three years and above of teaching experience in senior and FET phases. The choice of gender was to emphasise gender equity, and the choice of experienced teachers was to get participants who have knowledge of learners' backgrounds or have been with learners longer.

3.7.1 Sampling techniques

In terms of research techniques, this study used both purposive and convenience sampling techniques.

3.7.1.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling assumes that the researcher must purposefully select individuals, groups, and settings because they will likely be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is studying (Etikan, Musa, Rukayya, and Alkassim 2016). Patton (as quoted by Etikan 2016) noted that the purposive sampling method prioritises obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Participants were chosen using purposeful sampling, which is selecting participants based on their experiences and knowledge (Du Plessis and Mestry 2014). Furthermore, purposive sampling aimed to ensure that a few information-rich participants participated. This study's purposive sampling method helped select four high school learners and four teachers because it provided rich and in-depth information. Learners from grades nine, ten, and eleven and high school teachers were purposely selected to participate in this study. Using purposive sampling enables the researcher to be more selective about who is chosen to participate in the study. The researcher identified and selected proficient and well-informed individuals with a phenomenon of interest (Etikan et al., 2016). The method allowed the targeting of high school learners from various family structures. Learners from nuclear families, single-parent, grand-parent, and child-headed families were purposively selected from the learner's biographic information to participate in this study. The researcher approached the class managers to get a mark list of learners and their biographic information. The researcher also approached the school entertainment and sports committees to get a list of learners who usually participate in school activities. The researcher invited the participants to a briefing to inform them about this study, which was related to their background.

Furthermore, participants were also selected using data drawn from the school database, which keeps detailed learner information, such as learner medical history and parental information. Teachers were chosen using school teacher records. Therefore, the purposive sampling method was adopted to target learners from different family structures and high school teachers with more than three years of teaching experience.

3.7.2 Convenience sampling

Convenience sampling is also known as Haphazard Sampling or Accidental Sampling, which is a type of nonprobability or non-random sampling where members of the target population meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time or the willingness to participate are included for the study (Etikan et al., 2016). It is also referred to as the research subjects of the population that are easily accessible to the researcher (Etikan et al., 2016). The researcher also used convenience sampling to select readily available participants.

Convenience sampling tends to be a favoured sampling technique as it is inexpensive and an easy option compared to other sampling techniques (Taherdoost 2016). The researcher personally approached the participants who were easily accessible and readily available to participate in the study. Based on the researcher's familiarity with the district, the researcher got greater access to potential participants. The researcher selects teachers from circuits. The researchers' main objective of convenience sampling is to collect information from participants who are easily accessible to the researcher. The researcher got teachers' contact numbers and email addresses from the school principal so they could contact them if they were available and willing to participate. The researcher also designed the poster to recruit teachers and learners. (See Appendix IV).

3.8 RESEARCH SETTING

The setting is anything related to the environment in which the experience takes place, including the physical environment, the emotional/social environment, and finally, the cultural environment (Hartogsohn, 2017). The study occurred in two high schools in a deep rural area of Bergville within the uThukela district, KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. This rural area is approximately fifty km from Bergville town. The race of participants were all black, and they were Zulu culture. The community was ruled by royalty. The researcher gained greater access to potential participants based on the researcher's familiarity with the region. Trees surrounded the first school, all learners were pedestrians, and most teachers were using public transport when they went to school because the roads were not in good condition for their cars. Teachers were using mobile classrooms as additional classrooms for teaching and learning since the building was not enough to cater to all learners. The school staff consisted of ten

teachers, including the principal, and the learners were approximately three hundred overall. In grades eight and nine, there were three learners per desk.

At the other school, some learners were using transport when they went to school, and some were pedestrians. The school has five main building blocks that accommodate all the classrooms and the administrative office. The staff consists of fifteen teachers, including the school principal, and the learner's overall enrolment was approximately four hundred and fifty. The research environment was important in this study because it identified the location of the semi-structured interviews and observation.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Cohen Davidson (2017:354), "data analysis is a system of making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation". Davidson (2017) adds that the correct way to analyse and present qualitative data is to abide by the issue of fitness for purpose. After collecting data, the researcher used narrative analysis to analyse data.

3.9.1 Narrative analysis

This study employs a narrative analysis to analyse the collected data. Narrative research is a "type of qualitative method that is understood from spoken or written texts describing accounts of events which are chronologically connected" (Nasheeda 2019:1). Nasheeda (2019) further states that narrative research can be described as a methodology for studying individual lived experiences as a source of knowledge in and of itself that warrants deeper understanding. Narrative inquiry emphasises relational engagement between researcher and participant by co-creating participant's experiences. Co-creating stories with study participants allows the researcher to live alongside the participants and listen to their stories. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that stories define the lives of the individual and narrate his or her lived experiences.

Two sources of data collection were identified as the most common methods used in the narrative process for this study, namely semi-structured interviews and observation, which are referred to as primary sources of data (Nasheeda 2019). The interviews were tape-recorded for this study, and the researcher took notes simultaneously. After the interviews, the researcher reviewed the tape and notes and wrote down direct quotes that were found to be relevant. The researcher also wrote

notes based on the events during the observation. The researcher narrated stories based on the teachers' and learners' responses. Narrative analysis was useful because it allowed the participants to tell a coherent and realistic story about their lives (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

In this study, semi-structured interviews were transcribed naturally, including all verbal cues (e.g. smiles, nods), extraneous words, and utterances (e.g., hmms). The transcripts were then carefully checked against the audio recordings to ensure accurate accounts were obtained. This practice also allowed for active reflection on the interview by identifying the participants' mood, tone, and overall conversation. This is an essential process for researchers to engage in as it allows for greater familiarity with data (Davidson, 2017)

3.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Triangulation was used in this context to ensure trustworthiness and reduce the effect of investigator bias (Gunawan 2015). In this study, credibility was established by referential and interpretive adequacy. The researcher tried portraying a true picture of the presented phenomenon to establish credibility. Furthermore, information was obtained using mechanically recorded data from audio-tapes to record interviews verbatim, meaning the transcript would be more accurate because the researcher would write down notes during the interviews and observations. Qualitative researchers demonstrate that their data are accurate and appropriate through triangulation (Magwa and Magwa, 2015). The credibility of the findings was checked using informant triangulation. Two groups of participants, namely teachers and learners, were involved in the study to get their views on challenges encountered by learners from different family structures. Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other settings or groups in the population (Halloway and Wheeler, 2002). Establishing transferability was attained through purposive and convenience sampling of appropriate participants and a detailed description of the methodology used in the study.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In any study, it is good to consider all the ethical issues that might emerge, especially when dealing with human participants. After collecting the data, the researcher followed strict ethical procedures (Andersen and Corneli 2018). The researcher was

closely involved with the participants during the interviews and observation. Therefore, it was necessary to assure teachers and learners that the study had no impact on their personal lives whatsoever. The primary concern in reporting the current study was maintaining privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. The following are some of the ethical issues identified throughout the study.

3.11.1 Permission

The researcher applied for and received permission and ethical clearance from the University of the Free State to conduct the research (See Appendix V). The researcher obtained written permission from the Head of the Department of Education in the Kwa-Zulu-Natal province and the Regional Director to conduct this research to ensure it is a legal exercise (See Appendix VI). The researcher asked for permission from school's principal for teachers and learners to participate in this study. Once teachers and learners agreed to participate, the date and times were settled for when the field observations and interviews could be performed. The participants were asked to complete and sign the consent form (See Appendix III). The consent form outlined the research purpose.

3.11.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

One of the significant ethical issues apparent in this research is confidentiality. None of the information the researcher records was accessed by a third party for whatever purpose. Rather, the researcher made sure that the information was stored safely so that it did not fall into the wrong hands and then destroyed after the approval of the thesis because this is its primary purpose. The researcher ensured that the participants remained as anonymous as possible throughout the study. In this study, the learners were Learner 1, Learner 2, Learner 3, and Learner 4, as shown in Table 1. The teachers were Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, and Teacher D, refer to Table 2. However, this is usually impossible during face-to-face interviews and observation since the researcher already sees the participant. However, the participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure that only the researcher knew who participated and what their contributions were. Since the researcher used transcriptions and field notes, they were stored on the researcher's local computer with a password for protection and timely deletion of audio-visual recordings. The participants were informed that the data would be stored in a locked cupboard for five years and then destroyed with a shredder (Morgan and Hoffman, 2020). The contact details of the researcher, the

supervisor, and the ethics committee were made available to the participant in the letter for any queries the participant may have. The participants and schools remain anonymous to protect their confidentiality per ethical clearance conditions.

3.11.3 Informed consent

The respondents were given full information about the research at the beginning of the study. Before taking part, they were taken through the research topic and research questions to ensure that they understood what they were participating in. They were required to fill out a consent form before embarking on any other process (See Appendix VII). Participant letters of consent were issued with positive feedback to participate in the research. In this way, the participants understood that their participation was purely voluntary and that their refusal or withdrawal at any stage in the data generation process would be condoned. The participants were informed about the interviews being recorded. The researcher made it clear at the very outset of the research that relevant data-gathering procedures were carried out. Participants heeded that the researcher was the one conducting the interviews. Child assent form was available for children younger than 18 years (See Appendix VIII).

3.11.4 Voluntary participation, Harm, and risk

Despite the safeguards outlined above, the researcher made it apparent to the participants that the study was exclusively for academic purposes and that their participation was voluntary. Participants would not be physically or psychologically damaged due to their participation in the study. Learners may encounter emotional distress because recalling family matters and experiences they went through may trigger their emotions. The researcher involved a school councillor for learners, and they were also provided with counselling sessions (See Appendix VI).

3.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter gave an overview of the research methodology. It explains the approach to the study and the research design and methodology. The research involved a qualitative study, adopted an interpretive approach, and used a multiple case study and a purposive sampling and convenience method. Triangulation was employed to collect and validate data. Ethical issues were also addressed in this study. The following chapter organises the data collected and presents the findings collected through interviews and observations.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the research methodology. This chapter discusses findings from semi-structured interviews and observations with high school learners and teachers. The central focus of this study was to explore the influence of family structure on learner's well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. Data from learners and teachers is discussed together to gain insight into the problem of learners from different family structures. The following is a narrative from learners' perspectives conducted with the school psychologist. For semi-structured interviews, this chapter is divided into two sections. Section A contains the biographical information of high school learners and teachers participating in this study. The second section presents participants' responses. High school learners were also observed and discussed in this chapter.

BIOGRAPHIC RESULTS

This study was conducted in two high schools in the KwaZulu-Natal region under the uThukela district. The region has both urban and rural schools. In this study, schools are situated in a rural area. Four high school learners and four teachers participated in this study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the schools and the participants. Learners were identified as Learner 1, Learner 2, Learner 3, and Learner 4. Teachers were identified individually as Teachers A, B, C, and D.

Table 4.1: Biographic results of learners

Participants	Gender	Age	Race	Residential area	Grade	Number of subjects	2023 March/June results	Type of family structure	No. of family members
Learner 1	Female	17	African	Rural area	11	7	Achieved	Single parent	6
Learner 2	Male	14	African	Rural area	09	9	Achieved	Single parent	11
Learner 3	Male	17	African	Rural area	10	7	Not achieved	Grandparent	7
Learner 4	Female	15	African	Rural area	09	9	Achieved	Nuclear family	8

4.2 BIOGRAPHIC RESULTS OF LEARNERS

Learner 1

Learner 1 was a 17-year-old female in grade 11, and her face was black. She lived in a deep rural area. She was doing seven subjects at school and achieved her March results. She was from a single-parent family with six family members.

Learner 2

The learner was a 14-year-old male who was in grade 09. He was black, and he lived in a rural area. He did nine subjects at school. He got achieved his March results. He was from a single-parent family. They were eleven at home.

Learner 3

Learner 4 was a 17-year-old male in grade 10. He was black, and he lived in a rural area. The learner did seven subjects at school. He did not achieve his March results. He was from a grand-parent family with seven family members.

Learner 4

The learner was a 15-year-old female in grade 09. Her race is black, and she resides in a rural area. She did nine subjects at school. The learner achieved her March and June results. She has both parents and is from a nuclear family with eight members, including herself.

4.3 NARRATIVE RESULTS

This study presents the narrative results elicited from participants at high school in the KZN.

FROM LEARNERS

4.3.1 UNDERSTANDING OF FAMILY STRUCTURE

All the high school learners participated in semi-structured interviews, revealing that a family structure can be defined as a group of individuals connected by marriage, other relationships, or consanguinity (by recognised birth). The arrangement of relatives that make up a family is also called family structure. It can also refer to the dynamics between the people who live together and identify as a family.

4.3.1.1 Single parent

A single-parent family is a person bringing up a child or children without a partner. It can also be a person who has a child or children and does not have a spouse or live-in partner to assist in the upbringing or support of the child.

The statements from learners illustrate this finding:

“Single parent family means that there is only one available parent that supports his or her children or those children are raised by one parent” (Learner 1).

“It means that a single parent raises a child, and those children depend on one parent financially” (Learner 2).

A family headed by a single parent with children is known as a single-parent family. A person may become a single parent for a variety of reasons, such as death, divorce, separation, rape, violence, or adoption. To better support their family, one parent may move abroad for employment. A single-parent family has only one support system, and that family provides all of the care and assistance needed.

4.3.1.2 Grandparent

A grandparent family is one in which the parents have passed away, and the grandkids are the only members of the family. Grandparents are responsible for raising their grandchildren. Grandparents look after their grandchildren in these kinds of households.

The statements from learners illustrate this finding:

“Grandparent family is the type of family whereby children are raised by their grandmother or grandfather” (Learner 3).

The parents of the children in this kind of family might not be involved in their upbringing. This could be brought on by divorce, migration, or death as a result of the kids growing up with their grandparents. As grandparents age, elder children usually care for their younger siblings. They are more prevalent in areas where there is violence and where disease and desertion have murdered the parents of the children. Grandparents are in charge of their offspring.

4.2.1.3 Nuclear family

The nuclear family is a type of family whereby both parents are involved in raising their children. Both parents play an essential role in raising and supporting their children. In this type of family, children depend on their parents. The statements from learners illustrate this finding:

“A nuclear family consists of two parents and their children. They live together under the same roof” (Learner 4).

Because they share a single home and both parents are actively involved in raising their children, children in nuclear families have a solid support structure. Because both parents strive to maintain the household's financial stability, children can thrive socially and acquire high levels of intelligence. The statements from learners illustrate this finding:

“Yes, I do understand the concept, and I think family structure is the people in a household who make up a family. Those people can be related or not; I think it also refers to people who live together in one household. I can also say that it refers to how a Family is organised and how family members relate. Family is structured differently: nuclear families, grand-parent families, child-headed families, and cohabiting (Learner 1).

“Yes, I understand family structure. Family structure is how a family lives; in other words, it is how a family survives, including problems and the Way they support each other. It also means how many parents you have and who your provider is. Also, it refers to a combination of relatives that makes a family, and those people depend on each other” (Learner 2).

“In my understanding, family structure tells of what people live with or stay with at home, maybe when you live with a single parent or family without any parents. Family structure refers to the relationship structure of individuals. For instance, I grew up in a single-parent family where my father is absent, yet he is not deceased. It also refers to a group of family members and where a person belongs” (Learner 3).

“I think I do understand what family structure means. Family structure is a person who keeps an eye on you and cares about you and your dream; you live under the same roof as that person, and he/she is responsible for everything you do. It describes who you live with Grandparents, cohabiting, child-headed, single parents, and extended parents. I can also say that family structure describes and categorises the kind of relationship and members that form a given household” (Learner 4).

The individuals who are regarded as family members and those who are not are included in the family structure. Both biologically related and unrelated family members are included in the family structure. It differs among cultures and is frequently measured by demographics like age, residence, and whether a parent is single or has two. Maintaining tight ties with family members is crucial since they offer love, support, and a sense of belonging. No matter how their family is set up, loving families are especially beneficial to children.

4.3.2 FAMILY SOURCE OF INCOME

The interviews with the learners indicated that some of their parents are self-employed, some are employed, and others are not. Three learners indicated that they only rely on grants and pensions from the government. One learner said her parent is self-employed. Self-employed means they do not work for a specific employer who pays them a consistent salary or wage. On the other hand, someone employed has a job or is working for a company or another person, and that person gets an income. A grant is the amount of money a government or other institution gives to an individual or an organisation for a particular purpose, such as education or home improvements. The statements from learners illustrate this finding:

“My mother is self-employed. She owns taxis” (Learner 1).

“My family’s source of income is pension and social grant from the government” (Learner 2).

“At home, we survive with social grants and pension from the government; my grandmother receives pension grant from the government, and my siblings and I receive social grants” (Learner 3).

“My father gets his retirement pension monthly, and my mother sells sweets and snacks at school; on weekends, she works as a domestic worker for my neighbour” (Learner 4).

The total income of all family members is the family's income. A family's source of income enables parents to allocate more funds to their children's education, enabling them to receive better instruction, educational materials, and necessities. It establishes whether family members can afford necessities. While some parents of learners work for themselves, others depend on government social and pension grants.

4.3 NARRATIVE RESULTS

4.3.1 EXPLANATION OF THE SUFFICIENT SOURCE OF INCOME

Three learners indicated that their family’s source of income is not sufficient to meet their basic needs, while one of them said it does meet their basic needs. When an income is adequate, income is necessary or enough to cover all the essential expenses. A person gets everything she/ he needs. When an income is insufficient, it means a person cannot afford to buy basic needs.

The statements from learners illustrate this finding:

“Yes, it does meet my basic needs because we never have a shortage of food and clothes” (Learner 1).

Social grants are insufficient. Well, I have many basic needs. Since I was in grade 11, I had to stay near the school to pay rent and buy cosmetics and groceries, and it wasn't easy to get all I needed. I have many expenses, and this income is insufficient to meet my basic needs” (Learner 2).

“Social and pension grants are not sufficient to meet my basic needs. At home, all of us depend on these grants to survive. Sometimes our relatives buy us groceries and other basic needs, but it is hard because we are many and every one of us has his or her own basic needs” (Learner 3).

No, the income we receive at home is not enough to cover my basic needs. I can say my father is stingy, and he usually spends his money on alcohol. My mother's money from selling sweets is spent on groceries. I do not have a full uniform, and even if there is a school trip, I cannot go because my mother does not have money” (Learner 4).

The family's behaviours and dynamics inside the family are greatly influenced by the money they make. The income of each member determines the status and dynamics of a family. An inadequate income can have an impact on a family's welfare. Family members may form strong relationships if the income is sufficient. If it is insufficient, the family structure is impacted.

4.3.2 EXPLANATION REGARDING THE EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL

The interviews with learners indicated that one learner has educational material, and the other three do not. Educational material means textbooks, uniforms, tools, computers, electronic devices, or other goods related to any education, training, or experience required for participation in an educational programme.

The following statement from learners illustrates this finding:

“Yes, I have enough educational material such as stationery and textbooks” (Learner 1).

“No, because I have other siblings who also attend the school, so the money that we get from the government does not cover all costs for education and books, and I do not have full school winter uniform ”(Learner 2).

“No, I do not have educational material because I have a lot of things to do with social grants and I cannot afford to buy the required calculator for mathematics and the government only supplied us once a year with stationeries so it is difficult for me to buy them during the year” (Learner 3).

“Yes, I do have educational materials because I am attending one of the schools that are situated in a rural area, and the government manages it, so the government always gives us educational materials such as stationeries Sometimes I have a shortage of materials because the government usually gives us stationeries at the beginning of the year so I will find myself not having enough material during the year. On the other hand, it was easy for my parents

to buy me a school uniform. Government meets my parents halfway” (Learner 4).

A teacher needs the instructional materials to help their learners learn. Children require them to learn and fulfill their academic goals. A learner must have access to all required learning materials to succeed in the classroom. There is a disparity between the learners since some lack sufficient material while others have abundant material.

4.3.3 SUPPORT FROM FAMILY PERTAINING THE SCHOOL

According to the learner interviews, three learners reported receiving support from their families regarding their education, whereas the other learners claimed to have received support from a biased parent. Support is the act of assisting or motivating someone who is experiencing difficulties. It also refers to supporting and endorsing someone or something because you want them to succeed. The following statement from learners illustrates this finding:

“Yes, they give me enough support regarding school as they always encourage me to study hard to secure a better future and always motivate me. My family always ensures I get everything I want” (Learner 1).

“Yes, I get enough support because my mother and siblings always encourage me to be determined and enthusiastic in my studies so that I could succeed in life” (Learner 2).

“Yes, my grand-mother is trying to support me because she always asks me to do school work, and she usually contacts my class teacher to ask about my progress at school. She gives me all the support that I need. My family always shows care about my school work, and they also help me with homework, which gives me potential energy at school” (Learner 3).

“I normally receive support from one sided-parent. My mother always encourages me to go to school to be something better in the future. She always tells me how hard life is. My mother is my number one support structure. My father does not care about me because my teacher asked me to see him, and he said he would not go there. He does not even ask about my academic performance and whether I have enough basic needs” (Learner 4).

Their family's support significantly influences a learner's success. Learners who do not receive adequate assistance in their social or academic lives are more likely to experience difficulties in the classroom, including low academic performance and mental health issues. An encouraging family helps learners achieve well in the classroom.

4.3.4 TIME TO STUDY AT HOME/DO SCHOOLWORK

Some learners who participated in the interviews said they had adequate time to study at home, while others gave specific reasons why they felt they did not. The amount of time (measured in hours) the intended learners need to finish the study programmes' learning and evaluation tasks is known as study time. The following statement from learners illustrates these findings:

"No, because at home, each of us has specific chores to do, so when I come back from school, I have to do my designated chore and finish it later, and after I finish that, I can start doing my school work. I spend more time doing house chores" (Learner 1).

"Yes, I get enough time to study because I made my timetable and allocated time for each subject. When I return to school, I do house chores, and then later, at 19:00, I start doing my school work. I study two subjects daily, making my life easier" (Learner 2).

"No, I am always busy with domestic work at home, and sometimes I have to take care of my younger siblings because my grandmother is old. She cannot do house chores and look after my siblings" (Learner 3).

"I cannot say yes or no because it depends on the duties or responsibilities that I must attend or do, but sometimes I get enough time to study, and sometimes I do not get enough time, and sometimes I do not get even a minute of studying when I am exhausted of working. Another thing is that many of us are at home, so I find it difficult to study when there is noise" (Learner 4).

A child's time spent studying is crucial. Giving learners ample time to study helps them perform better in academic activities. Still, suppose parents do not provide enough assistance for their children. In that case, the child's academic performance may suffer, and he or she may experience mental distress due to having to handle many responsibilities.

4.3.5 PARTICIPATION OF A COMMUNITY PERTAINING THE SCHOOL FUNCTIONING

The learners' answers revealed that the school's operation is influenced by the neighbourhood in which they reside. Others said that their neighbourhood does not contribute to the school's operation. A community is a collection of individuals who share specific traits and reside in the same area. The following statements from teachers illustrate these:

“No, my community does not participate in school functioning” (Learner 1).

“Yes, other members of my community usually come to school maybe twice a year to give us sanitary pads and check those in need of school uniforms. They also give us food parcels and clothes” (Learner 2).

“Yes, the community participates in school functioning because helps us with basic needs like school uniforms when your parents cannot afford to buy them. In most cases, they help people who have emotional and physical issues. We also get donations from Non-government organisation (NGOs) that give learners full school uniforms, and they also donate sanitary pads for girls because some parents cannot afford to buy all the necessary basic needs for their children”(Learner 3).

“No, my community does not participate in school functioning. Government is the only one taking care of everything around the school” (Learner 4).

Community programmes are beneficial as they enhance the learners' well-being , particularly those unable to purchase necessities. These educational programmes foster parity among learners and support their academic success. Community programmes positively impact the learners' well-being.

4.3.6 EXPLANATION REGARDING FRIENDS AT SCHOOL

According to the learners' interviews, they have pals with whom they keep in contact. Others said that although they interact with them socially, they do not always talk to them. A friend is someone you have a mutually affectionate relationship with. It is someone who will defend you, stand by you, and be there for you no matter what.

The following statement from learners illustrates this finding:

“Yes, I do have friends, and we communicate almost every day with them. At school and through the phone on social media. On the weekend, we usually visit each other” (Learner 1).

“Yes, I have few friends, but they are few. I do not communicate with them daily. I am introverted, and I like to spend most of my time alone. We only communicate at school” (Learner 2).

“Yes, I do have friends at school, and we communicate every day, even on social media, but I do not tell them everything happening in my life. I am a secretive person” (Learner 3).

“I don’t have many friends. Yes, I am an extrovert, but I like to distance myself from many things and people I don’t involve myself with where I do not fit in. Pupils who are my age tend to take advantage of you when you are a nice person. In my entire life, I have never had a friend. I only have people who I can talk to at that particular time. I even take some as my sisters; those are the people who see potential in me and who can give me advice. I do not have friends because I cannot be open to everybody” (Learner 4).

Having friends can determine a person's personality. Some learners have friends at school, while others do not have friends due to their personal experiences. Friends play a significant role in a child's life because others use them to vent their problems at home and seek advice while others get bad influence from them.

4.3.9 FACTORS INFLUENCE FAMILY STRUCTURE ON LEARNER'S WELL-BEING DURING COVID-19

The interviews with the learners indicated some causation factors that affect learners' well-being during COVID-19. This study found COVID-19 regulations, lack of internet data, online learning, lack of smartphone, death, depression, lack of school material, lack of support and poor academic performance, insomnia, heavy workload, confusion, and frustration could be considered as learners' challenges at school during COVID-19.

4.3.9.1 COVID-19 regulations

The interviews with learners indicated that wearing a face mask and social distancing was challenging at a school during COVID-19. A face mask is a protective covering for the face or part of the face to prevent infection. Social distancing means keeping a

distance of at least 1m from each other and avoiding spending time in crowded places or groups. A learner illustrates this fact in the following extract:

“We had to keep a distance from friends and family, and it was challenging for me because I could not visit other family members and my friends to seek help in those difficult subjects for me” (Learner 1).

“There were many difficulties because we were forced to keep social distancing and wear face masks at school and home” (Learner 2).

“We were forced always to wear a mask even if it was hot, and we were suffocating because we always wore them” (Learner 3).

Learners faced numerous obstacles due to COVID-19, which also adversely affected their well-being because they were required to maintain social distance from friends and family and wear masks at home and school. Even though it was hot, the learners were suffocating since they had to wear it. COVID-19 had a detrimental effect since learners had to get used to a new way of life.

4.3.9.2 Lack of internet connection

Interviews with learners revealed that internet connectivity was one of the problems during the pandemic. If you cannot access the internet, your computer is not properly linked to the router. It also describes how individuals are connected to the internet. Learners illustrate this fact in the following extract:

“At home, there was no internet connectivity, and when I wanted to do my school work, I had to travel approximately 30 minutes for internet connectivity. Also, since my mother was in the taxi industry, COVID-19 affected her income because she was self-employed and dependent on that income. Sometimes she could not afford to buy data for me to do my school work because she has to prioritise” (Learner 2).

“My mother did not afford internet data. I was behind with school work. I do not want to lie. It was difficult for me because the money that we get from the government, we buy groceries with it” (Learner 3).

“I had to borrow my friends' cell phones to study, but it did not help because internet connectivity was poor. I live in rural areas and could not afford data” (Learner 4).

The absence of an internet connection negatively impacts learners' digital skills, homework completion, academic performance, and educational aspirations. It leads to inequalities among learners. Learners had limited access to learning resources as internet adoption is lower in rural areas.

4.3.9.3 Lack of smart phone/ Technological devices

According to the learner interviews, learners did not use smartphones for school-related tasks. A smartphone is a mobile phone with additional functionality and an integrated computer. Our smartphones enable more than just communication. With cellphones, people can study, watch entertainment shows, and play games. Two learners illustrate these facts in the following extract:

“School wanted us to shift to remote learning, which was difficult because I did not have a smartphone. Teachers formed a WhatsApp group to study. It was impossible for me since I had no smartphone. I had to use my mother’s phone, and when she was not around, I had to study independently and wait for her to return” (Learner 1).

There were many challenges that I faced. I am saying this because when the Department of Education implemented online learning, they wanted us to have a smartphone my parent could not afford”(Learner 2).

“Studying online was very difficult because I did not have a smart phone. I had to find another plan of risking my life and go to my friend’s place to study because I was left behind” (Learner 4).

Studying online affects learners because they cannot afford a smartphone for online learning since teachers have introduced another way of learning. The lack of smartphones negatively affects learner’s performance, learning styles, skills, and knowledge since online learning is the only way to learn.

4.3.9.4 Online teaching and learning

Interviews with learners revealed that they encounter difficulties when it comes to learning online. Instruction provided electronically via various multimedia and internet platforms is called online learning. A learner illustrates this fact in the following extract:

“It was challenging for me to understand online learning because I was unfamiliar with this type of learning and technology, and none of my family is familiar with it” (Learner 1).

“I could not understand online learning since I am from a rural area; we were unfamiliar with it, and it was not easy for me” (Learner 4).

Online learning affects learners mostly in rural areas as they are unfamiliar with online learning. Most learners are left behind because they are not familiar with online learning. It determines the success of teaching and learning online for learners.

4.3.9.5 Death

The interviews conducted with learners indicated death was also an issue during COVID-19 because other learners noted that their parents passed away due to COVID-19. Death means the end of life. A learner illustrates this fact in the following extract:

“Yes, I encountered difficulties at school during COVID-19 because I lost my father due to COVID-19. It was a very emotional year for me. I was emotionally and mentally disturbed at school when my father passed away (Learner 1).

“One of my parents died due to COVID-19. He was a bread winner” (Learner 3).

The parent's death affects the learners' well-being as were disturbed emotionally and mentally, resulting in poor academic performance. Some parents who died due to illness of COVID-19 were bread winners, and that created financial difficulties in some families.

4.3.9.6 Lack of learning resources

The learners who were interviewed said that during the COVID-19 , they faced difficulties at school due to a shortage of supplies. A deficiency of resources can be characterised by scarcity, inadequacy, or the absence of desired or necessary commodities. It was an essential item that was either scarce or unobtainable. It also describes how scarce a resource is compared to the seemingly endless demands. When there aren't enough resources or ways to accomplish a task, they become expensive or scarce. One learner illustrates this fact in the following extract:

“The scarcity of textbooks has become a problem. I remember in our class, we were about 45, and there were 15 to 20 texts available; as a result, we were forced to share textbooks, which is impartible with the COVID-19 's safety features. Unfortunately, some classmates refused to share their books with us and kept them to themselves” (Learner 4).

Lack of learning resources affects teaching and learning as learners were required to share textbooks for successful teaching and learning, rapidly increasing the spread of COVID-19. Sharing textbooks or other learning materials was against government law.

4.3.9.7 Poor academic performance

The learner who was interviewed revealed that one of the biggest challenges learners had during COVID-19 was their subpar academic performance. Academic performance in a learning environment is defined as not meeting predetermined performance standards in a particular assessment task, such as a test or exam. It also refers to slipping short of an anticipated level. Few learners illustrated this fact in the following extracts:

“I was very depressed in such a way that my results at school dropped” (Learner 1).

“I did encounter difficulties in my school life during COVID-19. My academic performance dropped since we were forced to study online, and it was new to us” (Learner 2).

“I encountered many difficulties during the pandemic. Well, I cannot say I was focused on my studies because I did not care. I did not attend extra classes, which resulted in poor performance” (Learner 4).

Learners encountered difficulties during COVID-19, such as losing focus at school as they were scared, and others were depressed because they were not familiar with online learning. Poor academic performance means that learners are not doing well in their studies.

4.3.9.8 Lack of parental support

A learner interviewed for this study stated that one of the problems they had at a school during COVID-19 was a lack of support. Lack of support entails not receiving aid from others or helping someone in need; it also suggests not receiving counsel from others. The following statement illustrates this finding:

“My father did not support or encourage me to study, and I was alone. They did not even ask about school work” (Learner 4).

Parental support is essential to a learner's academic performance as parents encourage their children to study. Parents not supporting their children could result in

poor academic performance and destructive behaviours towards classmates and friends.

4.3.9.9 Heavy workload

One of the issues faced by learners at a specific school during COVID-19, learners had an excessive workload. A heavy workload is an excessive quantity of work that an individual must complete in a specific time. It also describes a demanding work assignment. It means taking on more labour than is necessary. Learners illustrate this in the following statements:

“Yes, because during COVID-19, the school became hard; we did not go to school every day, making teachers rushed through the syllabus while some children were slow-minded. It became hard to adjust to the new way of living at school” (Learner 3).

“Another challenge we faced was heavy workload. We were overloaded with responsibilities. We had a lot of home-work of which we did not understand” (Learner 4).

Heavy workload affects learners as they are overloaded with responsibilities and have a lot of school work to do at home. Since learners were studying online, they had a lot of homework, and some did not understand it. Learners did not have time to rest as they had to do much school work.

4.3.9.10 Parents' illiteracy

The interviewed learner indicated that their parents are illiterate. Illiteracy could be understood as the inability to read and write.

A learner illustrates this in the following statement:

“My mother could not be able to help me with homework because she last attended grade 8” (Learner 2).

“I did not get help with my school work because my grandmother never went to school in her lifetime” (Learner 3).

Parental illiteracy was a significant problem as parents could not help their children with homework because they were illiterate, meaning they could not read and write. Some of them had last attended entry high school phase, and some never went to school in their lifetime, negatively affecting learners' well-being.

4.3.9.11 Parental conflict

According to the learner questioned, disagreements within the family could influence the learners' well-being during COVID-19. A set of opinions held by two or more individuals is called a conflict. Abuse, which can be spiritual, physical, or emotional, typically results from conflict.

A learner illustrates this in the following statement:

“At home, when my father received his retirement salary, he always came home drunk and fought with my mother because he finished all his money without even buying bread. He beat my mother and fired us.”(Learner 4)

Parental conflict hurts learners' well-being because it makes them emotionally unsettled, especially at school when they find it difficult to focus and often get angry and hateful toward their parents. Learners are distracted by parental conflict in various ways, including behaviours, academics, and health.

4.3.10 EFFECTS CAUSED BY COVID-19 IN LEARNERS' WELL-BEING

The learner indicated that insomnia, frustration, and confusion affected her at school during the COVID-19 epidemic.

4.3.10.1 Insomnia

A person with sleeplessness experiences trouble falling asleep. A feeling of insufficient or poor sleep is called insomnia. It happens when you struggle to get or stay asleep for an extended period. A common side effect of insomnia is daytime tiredness.

A participant illustrated this in the following statement:

“I was experiencing sleeplessness at night because I was always thinking how I was going to survive, and I was confused and scared at the same time because I did not understand what exactly was happening, I experienced trauma” (Learner 1).

Insomnia affects learners negatively as they cannot sleep peacefully at night because they always think about the pandemic in such a way that it leads to drowsiness during the day at school.

4.3.10.2 Frustration

Being perturbed or irritated by one's lack of power to shape events or achieve a certain objective is known as frustration. It may also allude to a feeling of unhappiness, anxiety, or hopelessness brought on by unfulfilled desires or unresolved problems. It is a typical emotional response to resistance associated with anger, disappointment, and frustration. A person's apparent incapacity to accomplish a goal gives birth to frustration, which is likely to intensify when that goal is rejected or obstructed. A participant illustrated this in the following statement:

"I felt confused and frustrated because the pandemic came unexpectedly, so we had to adapt to the new environment. I was also scared because my parent died during COVID-19, so it was difficult for me to accept that" (Learner 3).

Frustration negatively affects learners' well-being because they experience traumatic situations, as their parents died during COVID-19. Learners were confused and frustrated as they had to adapt to a new environment and learn new things.

4.3.10.3 Uncertainty

Epistemic circumstances containing incomplete or unknown information are referred to as uncertain. It can be used for the unknown and physical measurements that have already been made or for forecasts about future events. Participants illustrated this in the following statement:

"I was not okay mentally because I feared the pandemic. I have never been so confused because I thought it was the world's end" (Learner 2).

"I was scared because many people have died during COVID-19, and I thought we were going to live with it till the end of our lives" (Learner 4).

Learners were uncertain about the pandemic, as some thought it would last forever. They had no idea if there would be a vaccine for it because many people died due to COVID-19, including their parents.

4.3.11 REMEDIES IMPROVING LEARNERS' WELL-BEING

During the interviews, learners indicated that they have remedies at their school that improve their well-being. Others mentioned that implementing online learning and counselling programmes helped them improve their well-being. Others mention self-awareness as a remedy for improving learners' well-being. Programmes of study are

course sequences that prepare learners with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in their chosen careers.

4.3.11.1 Online classes

An online course is delivered on the Internet. Typically, they are carried out via a learning management system, which allows learners to interact with their subject teacher and other learners and check their academic progress and course syllabus.

The following statement from learners illustrates this finding:

“Yes, I got helped with those online learning programmes, and having extra classes helped most of us to get through and push the syllabus” (Learner 1).

Since online courses are typically self-paced, learners have more freedom in finishing their coursework. Learners have more access to a greater variety of courses and programmes. Learners lacking access to schools in rural and urban locations can benefit from online classes.

4.3.11.2 Counselling sessions

Talk therapy takes the form of counselling. It is a procedure when a family or an individual meets with a qualified professional counsellor to discuss the challenges and issues they are encountering in their lives. Expert counselling is non-judgmental and discreet. The following statement from learners illustrates this finding:

Yes, they tried to implement online learning, but unfortunately, it did not help me since I did not have a smartphone. My school also has programmes because the government brought social workers and school psychologists to help us with counselling. My principal usually brought successful individuals who once attended our school to motivate us” (Learner 2).

“Yes, but some did not help me because they implemented online learning, and I did not have the required materials to study online. The principal has been arranging meetings with people in the community about our school, and school psychologist and police officer usually come to school just to motivate us about the behavioural management and counselling” (Learner 3).

Counselling programmes significantly impact learners' well-being because they provide outside support and help them stay motivated to study. Learners who get guidance and assistance from others are likelier to perform better, produce better work, and see the world from various angles.

4.3.11.3 Self-awareness

The capacity to become aware of your emotions, thoughts, and behaviours is known as self-awareness. It is also the capacity to recognise and comprehend the characteristics of your personality, actions, emotions, and behaviours that define who you are as a person. The following statement from learners illustrates this finding:

“Yes, self-awareness programmes help us know that even though we make mistakes, we still have a chance to change and do better. They also teach us about the danger of taking drugs. They also emphasise that we should not be afraid of our home situation, and must fix it. They also teach about the importance of self-esteem, self-confidence, and hygiene” (Learner 4).

Self-awareness enables learners to enhance their well-being. Self-aware learners know their strengths and weaknesses and what supports their success. They are also aware that their perception of themselves and others' perceptions of them could differ. Following counselling, learners might be able to recognise their unique personalities and feelings.

4.3.12 FUTURE DREAMS

The learners' interviews revealed that each had unique aspirations for the future. Some expressed their desire to work as a traffic cop, pilot, farmer, pharmacist, psychologist, or businessman. Future dreams are goals one hopes to accomplish in the future. It may also be defined as a sequence of ideas, feelings, or visions that go through someone's head.

4.3.12.1 Pharmacist

A pharmacist is a licensed healthcare practitioner whose responsibilities include filling prescriptions, checking for drug interactions, giving vaccinations, and giving patients advice on how to take medications safely.

The following statement from learners illustrates this finding:

“My future dream is to become a pharmacist. I am hoping and praying to fulfill my dreams” (Learner 1).

The learners prescribe and dispense medication and provide information to patients about the medication and its use. Checking a patient's history to ensure their new medication will not interfere with the old ones.

4.3.12.2 Psychologist

A psychologist focuses on treating mental, emotional, and behavioural disorders or studying the mind and behaviours. The following statement from learners illustrates this finding:

“Is to be a psychologist because I want to work with a wide range of people from children to adults to help them to deal with the real world and manage their emotions” (Learner 2).

The learners help people cope with life, relationship issues, and mental health conditions. Psychologists study individuals’ behaviours and brain functioning by observing, interviewing, and surveying individuals.

4.3.12.3 Farmer

An individual who manages and labours on a farm is a farmer. While some farmers keep dairy cows and sell their milk, others grow various food crops. Farmers cultivate fruits, grains, and vegetables as part of their job in agriculture. The following statement from learners illustrates this finding:

“My dream is to own a big farm; I want to create more job opportunities for those who cannot buy basic needs. I want to help those who are still struggling” (Learner 3).

Learners’ future dream is to feed and check on animals or fertilise and harvest crops. It buys and sells animals to create job opportunities to assist those who cannot afford basic needs.

4.3.12.4 Pilot

A pilot is a person who uses the directional controls on an airplane to control its flight. It also refers to someone certified to operate an aircraft or spacecraft. The following statement from learners illustrates this finding:

“Well, have only one future dream. My future dream is that one day, I wish to be a pilot because many people end up quitting at school. I want to be a better example in my community so I can prove that you cannot live a comfortable life without finishing school” (Learner 4).

The learners are responsible for ensuring the safety of passengers, crew, and aircraft. Pilots must follow strict protocols and regulations to ensure a safe and efficient flight. The learners want to be a role model in the community.

Biographic results of teachers

Table 4.2: Biographic results of teachers

Participants	Gender	Age	Race	Residential area	Highest qualification obtained	Teaching experience	Teaching subjects	Teaching grades	Number of learners per grade
Teacher A	Female	37	African	Rural	Bachelor of Arts PGCE	9 years	Business Studies	10,11 and 12	Gr:10-32 Gr:11-29 Gr:12-25
Teacher B	Male	39	African	Rural	Bachelor of Education	10 years	Geography Mathematics	10 and 11	Gr: 10-46 Gr:11 38
Teacher C	Female	35	African	Rural	Bachelor of Education	7 years	English EMS	9,11 and 12	Gr:9-68 Gr:11-59 Gr:12-46
Teacher D	Female	29	African	Rural	Bachelor of Arts PGCE	5 years	Life orientation Creative arts	10,11 and 12	Gr:10-67 Gr:11-59 Gr:12-46

4.5 BIOGRAPHIC RESULTS FOR TEACHERS

Teacher A

Teacher A was a 37-year-old female who resided in a rural area. She was an African. Her highest qualification is a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). She has been teaching for nine years. She teaches business studies from grades 10 to 12. In grade 10, there were 36 learners in class, then in grade 11, there were 39, and in grade 12 there were 35 learners.

Teacher B

He was a 39-year-old male teacher who lived in a deep rural area. He was African and obtained a Bachelor of Education as his highest qualification. He has ten years of teaching experience. He is teaching geography and mathematics in grades 10 and 11. He taught 46 learners in grade 10 and 38 learners in grade 11.

Teacher C

She was a 35-year-old African female teacher who resided in a rural area. Her highest qualification was a Bachelor of education. She has seven years of teaching experience. She taught English in grade 11 with 59 learners, in grade 12 with 46 learners, and she also taught Economic and management science (EMS) and Creative Arts in grade 9 with 68 learners.

Teacher D

Teacher D was a 29-year-old female teacher who was an African. She lives in a deep rural area, and she obtained Bachelor of Arts (BA) and PGCE. She has been teaching for five years. She taught 67 learners Life Orientation in Grade 10, 59 learners in Grade 11, and 46 in Grade 12.

4.6. NARRATIVE RESULTS

This section presents the responses elicited from participants in this study.

4.6.1 PARTICIPANTS' UNDERSTANDING OF A RURAL AREA

The interviews with all the teachers showed that rural areas could be understood as a population in which people depend on agricultural activities, including villages and small towns. In rural areas, you will find homes that are far apart from each other. Rural areas also do not have a lot of vacant lands without much development. The responses from a teacher illustrate that fact:

“According to my understanding, a rural area is an open swath of land that has few homes or other buildings, and homes are far apart. I can also say that in rural areas, you will not find many people” (Teacher A).

“I can describe a rural area as an open space of a land that has few homes, and the population density of rural area is very low” (Teacher B).

“From my understanding, a rural area is located outside towns and cities, mostly where infrastructural development issues are still a huge crisis. I can also say that the population of rural areas still depends on ancient ways of living because they have livestock, vegetable gardens, and plowing fields” (Teacher C).

“According to my understanding, a rural area is a residence that lacks the resources that a person needs to survive, such as infrastructure, electricity, and water” (Teacher D).

Not many residences are far from one another in rural areas outside towns. Rural residents adhere to traditional practices and have unique cultures and traditions. Rural places have a low population density and poor service provision. The municipality and royal palace oversee the rural area. People carry out their cultural practices.

4.6.2. COMFORTABILITY OF WORKING IN RURAL SCHOOL

The interviews with teachers indicated that some were comfortable with working in a rural school, and others were not comfortable with working in a rural school for personal reasons.

4.6.2.1 Comfortable

Comfortable means feeling relaxed. It may mean feeling free from stress or worry. It is also a nice feeling that people experience when they are around other people or any space. Teachers stated the following:

“I am comfortable working in a rural school because it is where I find peace. A lot is happening in our lives, so working in a rural school is a blessing because I can plan and manage my life properly” (Teacher A).

“Yes, I am comfortable working in a rural school because learners dedicate themselves to school work, and they know where they come from and want to change their home situation. Another thing that makes me comfortable about teaching in a rural school is that learners have so much respect and support each other” (Teacher D).

Some people are comfortable staying in rural areas because it minimises the cost of living, and people can learn alternative ways of doing things. A rural area is an excellent place for relaxation and peace. It is helpful for those working hours to rest and plan properly about their life.

4.6.2.2 Uncomfortable

Some teachers indicated they were uncomfortable working in a rural school during the interviews. Being uncomfortable means experiencing a feeling of discomfort and unpleasantness. It is a bad feeling around other people or the environment. The statements from teachers expressed the following findings:

“I am not comfortable working in a rural area because there is a lack of service delivery such as roads and bridges, which results in not getting school materials on time” (Teacher B).

“No, for me, it is no longer a comfortable workplace because learners do not have respect and do whatever they want since they live in a democratic country. Also, as a teacher, it is no longer accessible to reprimand a child as most parents now support their children even if they were wrong” (Teacher C).

Some people are uncomfortable working in a rural school because service delivery is lacking. Living in a rural area requires a lot of anxiety for other people because they are not familiar with the environment. It is a close opportunity for people to learn and adapt to new things because there are few resources and technology.

4.6.3 PARTICIPANTS’ UNDERSTANDING OF A SELECTED COMMUNITY

The teacher interviews revealed that a community can be defined as a collection of individuals who share shared qualities or reside in the same area. Another definition of community is the state of having similar attitudes and interests. Those folks are

unified and supportive of one another. It is characterised as a social group with important social traits like location, norms, culture, religion, values, and identity. The statements from teachers expressed the following findings:

“A royalty runs the community I am working on because there is a king and a queen, and they all have the power to manage our community. In our community, they follow the old-fashioned way when doing things. Everything needs to be reported at royalty. This type of community affects learners’ well-being because there are rules that need to be followed where learners cannot follow them. Another thing in this community is that they practice patriarchy, whereby a mother stays at home, and a father goes to look for a job. That is where inequality starts because a mother needs to depend on her husband it also goes a long way because you will find it in class where learners treat themselves differently” (Teacher A).

“The community I am working in falls under the Zulu tribe, where there are two royals, Amazizi and Amangwane. Most people in these communities usually practice traditional culture. Even though they attend different religions according to their choices, they practice old-fashioned stuff like performing rituals. In this community, none of the learners are affected by the community because learners are free to do whatever they want to do” (Teacher B).

“I am working under a Zulu tribal community that still believes a lot in cultural practice whereby parents are allowing their young girls to get married or cohabit. In this community, Education is not fashionable and is still not considered a more important thing than marriage. They still state that women should care for their families while men should look for jobs” (Teacher C).

“The community is under a tribe/loyal. Yes, it affects the learners’ well-being because most girls believe that education is not important and that it is important to get married and take care of their in-laws” (Teacher D).

The royal palace monitors communities in rural areas. Whenever there is an issue, they contact the royal palace to solve that issue. People in the community practice different cultures and follow their rules without hesitation. Every culture has its own rules.

4.6.4 SCHOOL'S CLIMATE DURING COVID-19

All the teachers' interviews revealed that a pattern of school life that reflects norms, objectives, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning, and leadership can be described as the school environment. It can also be defined as the norm for the learning environment that learners, faculty, and other community members experience. The statements from teachers illustrate the following findings:

“During COVID-19, Learners felt uncomfortable, confused, and unsupported because the disease came unexpectedly. Teaching and learning changed from face to face to online learning, and learners were not familiar with the new way of learning” (Teacher A).

“The pandemic itself, along with the associated health risks and economic hardship, filled with anxiety and stress among teachers and learners. Learners did not get enough chances to be educated, which resulted in bad marks and bad records for the school” (Teacher B).

“The school's climate was worsened by the COVID-19 outbreak as parents from rural areas feared for both their lives and their children, leading to many learners dropping out of school. Others were repeating grades because they did not get proper education” (Teacher C).

“Most schools were forced to close down, including our school, which completely removed the culture of learning for the learners, and some learners did not return to school after COVID-19. The relationship among staff members was also affected because we were forced to stay in our office” (Teacher D).

Schools were chaotic; they had to implement online learning, which brought many challenges. COVID-19 affected many people, especially those from rural areas where people lacked information on dealing with the pandemic. COVID-19 has affected many people differently, especially those who cannot afford basic needs.

4.6.5 SCHOOL/SUBJECT AFFECTED BY COVID-19

All the teachers' interviews revealed that a subject might be considered the components into which learning can be separated. Every school lesson often covers just one subject. Every subject has academic substance, and subjects are also thought of as the lessons taught in the classroom. The statement from teachers stated the following:

“Yes, it does; most learners fail because they wrote assignments and tasks they did not understand. My subject does not have enough books, so learners need to share them, which is another problem. It was challenging to implement social distancing. They were scared to share those books, and making copies was difficult since my school did not have enough resources for photocopying. When the government implemented online learning, my learners complained about not having enough data, and they experienced poor internet connectivity since they live in a deep rural area” (Teacher A).

Yes, I could not complete the ATP (Annual teaching plan) because geography has a lot of work, everything needed to be clearly explained to the learners, and the textbooks allocated to learners in the classroom were inadequate. Some of the books are old and dirty. I need new textbooks; learners should not share textbooks during this pandemic. Some textbooks are the old version” (Teacher B).

“Yes, it was affected a lot because the books normally read in class were changed for reading at home, especially the literature part. Learners did not get to do school work because they had to balance school work and house chores” (Teacher C).

“The challenge that I faced was giving learners free marks even though some did not deserve those marks. I ended up giving them an average, which caused a lot of confusion for some learners because they knew they could do better” (Teacher D).

The social disparity in schools is exacerbated by COVID-19, which impacts teachers, learners, and schools. While some schools, particularly rural ones, lack educational resources, others are well-equipped with digital technology. Learners had rotating classes therefore, there was not enough time in class to cover the material. Learners did not fully comprehend the material.

4.6.6 CHALLENGES COURSED BY COVID-19

The interviews conducted with all the teachers showed that limitation of direct contact, shortage of teaching time, isolation, heavy workload, high rate of absenteeism, illiteracy, lack of subject content, lack of resources, and lack of discipline could be a challenge for teachers during COVID-19 .

4.6.6.1 Limitation of direct contact with people

The first major challenge of the pandemic was that direct contact with other people was significantly reduced. The lockdown forced many people to work from home and study at home, also limiting them from meeting their friends and close family. Limiting contact with other people was a big challenge for most of my respondents, especially those living alone. The statement expressed by a teacher illustrates this finding:

“Another challenge was direct contact with people. I think that because I could not meet anyone, everyone stayed home and maintained social distancing, so it was hard for me to meet up with my close friends and learners” (Teacher A).

Contact with people was a challenge during COVID-19. People avoid crowded places and do not socialise with their loved ones. Staying at least two meters away from people negatively impacts people's well-being, especially those who like socialising.

4.6.6.2 Shortage of teaching time

Another challenge a teacher faced was a shortage of teaching time, which could be understood as the number of hours spent teaching a group or class of learners according to the country's formal policy. The statement expressed by teachers illustrates this finding:

“The challenge that I have uncouned during COVID-19 was a shortage of time to teach. I did not get enough time to teach my subjects because we spent a lot of time at home during lockdown level 5” (Teacher B).

Teachers' ordinary working hours were reduced because they did not have enough time to teach learners. Teachers had to rush content to finish the syllabus, and they lacked time or situations in which there was limited time available for teaching as they spent much time during lockdown.

4.6.6.3 Heavy workload

According to the teachers interviewed, one of the issues faced by instructors at a certain school during COVID-19 was an excessive workload. A heavy workload is an excessive quantity of work that an individual must complete in a specific time. It also describes a demanding work assignment. It means taking on more labour than is necessary. The statement expressed by teachers illustrates this finding:

“Another challenge was heavy workload; there were many classes since they were divided” (Teacher B).

“As teachers, we were overloaded with responsibilities because we had to teach 6 hours without time to rest” (Teacher C).

“I had a heavy workload because the classes I had to teach in one day also increased since the number of learners was reduced to 30 learners per class. Hence, I had to teach more classes in a single day. Rotational classes and grades also pose a huge challenge, as it is hard for me to cover all the term’s work and to monitor learners as they do their homework” (Teacher D).

Work overload negatively affects teachers as the number of classes they teach increases, and they have to teach six hours without getting free time. The number of learners in class decreases due to rotational classes, which affect teaching and learning.

4.6.6.4 High rate of absenteeism

Even though the learners did not attend class every day, the teacher who conducted the interviews revealed that most learners missed class during COVID-19. Absenteeism is routinely missing school for any reason, whether legitimate or not.

The statement expressed by the teacher illustrates this finding:

“I had a high rate of absenteeism in a class due to illness” (Teacher B).

Illness and medical reasons are the most common reasons for absenteeism, and learners are scared to come to school during COVID-19. Absenteeism negatively affects teachers as learner’s academic performance drops. It decreases teachers’ morale, resulting in a negative atmosphere.

4.6.6.5 Illiteracy

The interviewed teacher indicated that most learners could not be able to read and write properly. Illiteracy could be understood as the inability to read and write. The statements from teachers illustrated the following findings:

“COVID-19 caused a lot of disruption in education because learners' marks dropped, and I had a lot of learners in my grade 9 who could not read and write. Also, most learners progressed to the next grade” (Teacher C).

“Parents could not be able to help their children with homework because some of them did not finish school” (Teacher D).

Parents and learners cannot read and write, which affects teachers as they give learners homework, whereas parents cannot help them, resulting in bad marks. Learners were given free marks to go to the next grade, which negatively affected teachers as they had learners who could not read and write.

4.6.6.6 Lack of resources

According to the interviewed teachers, teachers at a school during the COVID-19 pandemic reported difficulties due to a shortage of resources. Insufficiency, scarcity, or absence of necessary or desired items is the definition of lack of resources. It is an essential item that is either lacking or in limited supply. It also describes how scarce a resource is compared to the seemingly endless demands. When there aren't enough resources or ways to accomplish a task, they become expensive or scarce. The statements from teachers illustrate this fact in the following extract:

“The textbooks allocated to learners in the classroom were inadequate. Some of the books were old and dirty. I needed new textbooks; learners could not be able to share textbooks during the pandemic. Some textbooks were old versions” (Teacher A).

“Shortage of textbooks has become a challenge. In a class comprising 40 to 44 learners, there might only be 10 or 20 textbooks allocated to the class, so learners have to share those textbooks, which is not consistent with the safety measures instigated by the COVID-19 . Unfortunately, some learners keep the books to themselves, unwilling to share them with others. In addition, much of the teaching time is consumed by the writing of summaries rather than teaching and learning due to the scarcity of textbooks” (Teacher D).

Inadequate and out-of-date textbooks badly impact teachers since they have restricted access to knowledge. Textbooks are valuable information resources for learners to reinforce their knowledge of a subject and develop new ideas. Without textbooks, learners could not have as much access to crucial knowledge, which could impair their academic performance and learning.

4.6.6.7 Lack of discipline

One of the issues teachers encountered at a school during COVID-19 was a lack of discipline. An individual who lacks discipline is unable to control others. It entails being unable to impart discipline to others. Some teachers said these.

“Another challenge was the inability to instill learner discipline. Not all learners in my class may be well-mannered or respectful. There were learners that always want attention.” (Teacher A).

“Another challenge I faced is that since the outbreak of COVID-19, I cannot effectively manage the class because some learners are not taking school work seriously, claiming that the work is too hard for them. I also experience a challenge with learners not attending classes, who hide in the toilets” (Teacher D).

Classroom disruption is caused by improper parental discipline at home and school. Because disruptive behaviours take up a lot of the teacher's time and attention, it makes it more difficult for the teacher to deliver a lesson efficiently. It is impossible to teach successfully when a learner constantly demands attention during the teaching and learning process.

4.6.7 CONTROLLING LEARNERS' BEHAVIOURS

The interviews with all the teachers showed that learners' behaviours could be understood as learned actions that enable learners to access learning and interact with others productively in the school. The statements from teachers illustrate the following findings:

“Yes, teachers are the designated authority in any classroom where they teach. If a learner is not behaving well, then that learner should go for detention. At first, the teacher should establish clear expectations and rules. By doing that, he/she creates a safe learning environment” (Teacher A).

Yes, our school has rules that learners need to follow to maintain their behaviours” (Teacher B).

“Yes, teachers are the centre of everything at school, they have all powers to control learner’s behaviours, and if the learners are not behaving well, they are the one who calls parents meeting” (Teacher C).

“Yes, it does. Our school is using and still believes in corporal punishment. The community also believes in it, making it easier for teachers and parents to control unacceptable behaviours among learners” (Teacher D).

School rules are essential for disciplining learners and fostering a secure, nurturing atmosphere for all learners. Teachers implement rules and tactics to control learners’ behaviours and assist learners in acquiring self-management abilities. The goal of school discipline policies is to create an excellent learning environment.

4.6.8 LESSON LEARNED BY TEACHERS THROUGH COVID-19

The interviews with all the teachers showed that they learned lessons during COVID-19. A lesson could be understood as a period of teaching and learning. It is also understood as a piece of instruction. The statements from teachers illustrated the following findings:

“Yes, the lessons I have learned from the COVID-19 underscore the importance of implementing effective policies to improve the food environment, encourage physical activity, and protect the health and well-being of our learners and families” (Teacher A).

“Yes, I learned something. I was unfamiliar with the technology, so they implemented online learning, so I had to adapt and learn new things. I also learned different teaching styles since I am a teacher and how to apply them, which helped me a lot because I am still using them, and every year, I see progress in my learners' academics” (Teacher B).

“I have learned a lot during COVID-19, to care for my loved ones, improve my communication skills with my learners, and apply different teaching methods” (Teacher C).

“I realised that no matter how much time we think we have, at the end of the day, I came to appreciate that we simply do not spend enough quality time with our families” (Teacher D).

Implementing online learning helps teachers use different teaching strategies and approaches. Teachers learn self-awareness to care for themselves and their loved ones, and people must take mental health seriously. Family time is vital for each one of us to reduce stress.

4.6.9 UNDERSTANDING OF FAMILY STRUCTURE

According to the interviews with each instructor, a family is defined as any group of two or more individuals connected by blood, marriage, or adoption residing in the same home. The statements from teachers illustrate the following findings:

“Yes, I do understand this concept. Family structure refers to household members related by marriage or ancestry and is often used to refer to at least one child under 18 living in a household. It refers to the disposition of people who live together and form a family” (Teacher A).

“I think family structure refers to a combination of people who are related by blood or not” (Teacher B).

“For me, family structure is effectively known as the combination of relatives that comprise a family. It is also a way of socialising, and it provides family members with practical and emotional support, and it provides members with social identity” (Teacher C).

“I think family structure is a group of people related by either consanguinity, affinity, legal adoption or co-residence or some combination” (Teacher D).

The relationship between the children and the parent or parent figures in their home is known as the family structure. Whether they are connected or not, it comprises all those regarded as family members. There are four types of family structures: nuclear, single-parent, grandparent, and child-headed.

4.6.10 EFFECTS AFFECTING LEARNERS' WELL-BEING DURING COVID-19

The interviews with the teachers showed that learners' well-being was affected by frustration, discouragement, insomnia, and mood swings during COVID-19.

4.6.10.1 Frustration and depression

Teachers in a remote school revealed in the interviews that learners' well-being was impacted by frustration. Being upset or irritated by one's incapacity to affect circumstances or achieve a certain objective is frustrating. It may also allude to a feeling of unhappiness, anxiety, or hopelessness brought on by unfulfilled desires or unresolved problems. It is a typical emotional response to resistance associated with anger, disappointment, and frustration. A person's apparent incapacity to accomplish a goal gives birth to frustration, which is likely to intensify when that goal is rejected or obstructed. The following statements from teachers illustrate these findings:

“Learners could not focus in class. They were scared and frustrated by COVID-19” (Teacher A).

“Learners were not in a state of good health. They were depressed because some family members who had COVID-19 hit bread winners as a result of quarantine, whereby they were unable to provide for their families. Some learners' well-being was affected by this” (Teacher C).

Learners were strongly affected mentally by COVID-19 as they could not focus in class. The mental condition of learners was not good because they were depressed, and that affected their well-being. COVID-19 course frustration among learners at school and home.

4.6.10.2 Discouragement

According to the teacher interviews, the COVID-19 school's novice instructors' well-being was frequently impacted by discouragement. When someone is persuaded to feel less certain, enthusiastic, or positive about something or less willing to take action, discouragement results, additionally, it entails attempting to stop someone or something from happening, particularly by making it difficult for them to do it or expressing disapproval. The statement from a teacher illustrates this finding:

“My learners always said they will repeat their grades because they do not understand the content. They were discouraged and lost hope in their academics” (Teacher B).

Learners were discouraged by COVID-19 as they were less confident, and their self-esteem was lower, resulting in poor academic performance. Learners lost hope in their academics as they were taught online, and the content was difficult to understand.

4.6.10.3 Insomnia

Teachers reported that during the COVID-19 , learners' well-being at one school was impacted by insomnia. A person with sleeplessness experiences trouble falling asleep. A feeling of insufficient or poor sleep is called insomnia. It happens when you struggle to get or stay asleep for an extended period. A common side effect of insomnia is daytime tiredness. A participant illustrated this in the following statement:

“It was challenging to do a lesson during the day because my learners always fell asleep in class (Teacher A)

Insomnia disturbed learners because they could not sleep at night, stressing about the pandemic due to drowsiness during the day, making it difficult for teachers to teach a lesson. Insomnia harmed learners as learners lost focus during teaching and learning.

4.6.11 LEARNERS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The teacher interviews revealed that academic success can be interpreted as a measure of how well a learner has met short- or long-term learning objectives. It is determined by the final course grade received. The statements from teachers illustrate these findings:

“My learners academic performance dropped because others were always absent and scared to attend school. They did not perform well in my subject and all their subjects. Others did not have textbooks to study at home. In 2019, in grade 10, 40% got promoted; in grade 11, 55% got promoted. Their performance dropped compared to other previous years” (Teacher A).

“My learners' academic performance was deficient because they did not study properly, and I had to create a WhatsApp group to help them even though it favour some learners who have smart-phone and data” (Teacher B).

“Learners' academic performance dropped because they did not get time to study at home, and they have so many things to do, and they cannot balance social life and academics” (Teacher C).

“Their performance was inferior. I tried giving learners some work as frequently as possible to keep them busy with their school work, remove their minds from COVID-19, and focus on their school work” (Teacher D).

Not understanding the content clearly negatively affects learners as their academic performance drops. Others dropped out because of insufficient time at home to do school activities. Absenteeism negatively affected learners' performance, and not having enough textbooks to study influenced learners' poor performance.

4.6.12 LEARNERS' ENGAGING WITH SCHOOL ACTIVITY

The interviews conducted with all the teachers showed that school activity could be understood as any programmes for the benefit of pupils. It also could be described as an extracurricular club that the school offers. The extracts from participants illustrated the following:

“No, not all my learners engage in school activities. Few of them do. Others are shy and lazy, and others have problems” (Teacher A).

“No, few of my learners engage in school activity” (Teacher B).

“Some of them engage in school activities and are very talented” (Teacher C).

“Since I am teaching life orientation, there are tasks (PET) whereby learners do exercise activities, but I have noticed that some of the learners hide with others and do not want to be involved in those sessions. They skip the class and hide in toilets, and those few learners know those activities are for marks which take sessions seriously” (Teacher D).

Some learners engage in school activities such as sports that improve their well-being, and some do not engage in school activities because they are lazy and do not want to be part of it. Activities at school increase learners' morale as they participate in different activities and socialise with other learners.

4.6.13 LEVEL OF LEARNERS DROPPING-OUT DURING COVID-19

The teachers' interviews showed that dropping out of school could be understood as someone leaving the school for practical reasons. The participants' statements illustrated the following:

“There was a high level of learners dropping out during COVID-19 because others mentioned that they were scared to go to school. Others were not doing well academically since they progressed” (Teacher A).

“Close to 10% of learners dropped out during COVID-19 in my school” (Teacher B).

“Honestly, most of our learners continue with the school, but others decided not to continue” (Teacher C).

“In my school, few learners dropped out, and it was those who were struggling academically” (Teacher D).

Learners decide to drop out of school because they are not doing well in their academics and do not have a purpose of continuing with the school. COVID-19 brought anxiety to learners and resulted in a high drop-out rate at school.

4.6.14 PROGRAMMES SCHOOL THAT IMPROVE LEARNERS’ WELL-BEING

The interviews with all the teachers showed that there were programmes at their school that assist learners with improving their well-being. A programme could be understood as a plan or a task to be carried out or goals to be accomplished. The participants’ statements illustrated the following:

“Yes, there were programmes in our school. Government and local business owners developed them. Most programmes were implemented during covid-19. Yes, teachers were also part of the programmes. Business owners supported our school by giving learners a 12-week tutoring programmes that helped those left behind. Also, the government announced a programme that will be broadcast to learners. Schools implemented a programme for morning and afternoon classes for learners to catch up” (Teacher A).

“Yes, there were programmes implemented in my school in 2020. The Department of Health implemented them, and teachers were also involved in those programmes because they were the ones who ensured that learners followed COVID-19 rules and regulations by ensuring social distancing and providing them with face masks and sanitises” (Teacher B).

“In our school, the education department gave us education assistance to assist our learners with home-work. They normally do that during the morning and afternoon classes” (Teacher C).

“Yes, there were programmes at school. The Department of Education implemented broadcasting of different subjects on Ukhozi FM and other radio stations to help those learners who were left behind. The Department of Health released their nurses and doctors to visit our school to vaccinate teachers and learners with COVID-19 injection” (Teacher D).

Tutorial programme and educational assistance implemented by the education department helped those learners who were left behind with the content. They improved their well-being as they were all equal and received the same support. Self-awareness programme help learners in reducing the spread of COVID-19. Broadcast programme help learners understand more about the content.

4.6.15 TEACHERS’ CHALLENGES IN IMPROVE LEARNERS’ WELL-BEING

The teachers' interviews showed that they faced different challenges when improving learners' well-being, such as lack of support, overcrowding, heavy workload, and lack of discipline.

4.6.15.1 Lack of support

Lack of support means not getting assistance from others or supporting someone who needs help; it also implies not getting advice from others. A participant illustrated this in the following statement:

“One of the most common and pressing classroom challenges for us as teachers is that some learners are not receiving adequate support outside the classroom” (Teacher A).

Learners are not getting support from their family members of the school, and parents do not care about their learners' progress. That negatively affects learners' well-being.

4.6.15.2 Overcrowding

A classroom that is overflowing with learners is bigger than what the space is intended to hold. The teaching-learning process is hindered when more learners are in a

classroom than is advised. In an overcrowded classroom, there is always poor participation, poor class management, poor interaction, challenges with class evaluation, and resource competition. Too little space for a teacher to go about.

To that end, one teacher had this to say:

“Another one is to understand different learning styles. Approximately 70 learners constitute an overcrowded class as the teacher I could not give the learners all the attention due to overcrowding” (Teacher A).

Overcrowding is the most challenging factor, as teachers cannot go around in class and attend to all the learners. It makes teaching and learning difficult because it only benefits those few learners who master the content quickly, and the other slow learners are left behind.

4.6.15.3 Lack of discipline

Lack of discipline means an individual's inability to manage someone. It means not being able to instill discipline in other people. Some teachers said these.

“The challenge I face is that I also get affected while trying to help learners, and it was hard to maintain discipline in class” (Teacher B).

“The challenge that I faced was to monitor learners and repeat the same content every day to make sure that they follow the content and they are not left behind” (Teacher D).

Disciplining learners inside and outside the classroom is a challenge because learners do not respect teachers, and it was difficult to monitor them during COVID-19 as they were not punished.

4.6.15.4 Heavy workload

A heavy workload means excessive work an individual is expected to finish within a given period. It also refers to intensive job assignments. Precisely, it means having more than one's required workload. Some teachers illustrated the following:

“One of the challenges we are facing is heavy workload. Since the classes were split, teaching has become a big challenge. I teach from morning to afternoon and still have to mark class activities, tasks, and tests. I am suffering. I am overloaded with responsibilities, and I am too afraid to object. Since I teach

many classes, I must rest when I arrive at my place. So, preparing for the next lessons is difficult because I do not get enough time” (Teacher B).

“I have a heavy workload because the classes I have to teach in one day have also increased since the number of learners was reduced to 30 learners per class. Hence, I have to teach more classes in a single day. Rotational classes and grades also pose a huge challenge, as it is hard for me to cover all the term’s work and to monitor learners as they do their homework” (Teacher C).

Heavy workloads among teachers negatively affect teachers when they try to improve learners’ well-being as they have been teaching many classes since they were split. Teachers teach more than normal hours because they are trying to cover the syllabus.

4.6.16 INFLUENCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON LEARNERS’ WELL-BEING DURING COVID-19

The interviews conducted with all the teachers showed factors that influence family structure on learners’ well-being during COVID-19. It showed that conflict, affected by COVID-19, different parenting styles, and death impact learners’ well-being. Two participants illustrated these:

“Yes, there was an influence of a family on learners’ well-being because some parents fight with each other, which negatively influences learners’ well-being” (Teacher A).

“Their parents got affected at work and came back home to spread the disease, and others lost their jobs, which negatively impacted learners because they could not afford stationery and school materials” (Teacher B).

“Yes, family plays an important role in our learners’ lives because whatever they do impacts learners, whether good or bad” (Teacher C).

“Yes, the family has a huge impact on our learners because since learners come from different families, also there are different parenting styles. So if a parent is harsh on their children, it negatively impacts their lives” (Teacher D).

Family structure influences learners’ well-being because conflict at home negatively affects an individual’s well-being as they lose concentration at school. Parenting styles influence learners’ behaviours, and parents losing their jobs can affect learners as they cannot afford basic needs.

4.6.17 STRATEGIES USED TO OVERCOME THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON LEARNERS' WELL-BEING DURING COVID-19

The interviews with all the teachers showed that counselling programmes, extra lessons, and tutorials could be strategies to overcome the effects of family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19.

4.6.17.1 Counselling programmes

Programmes for counselling are perceived as a type of "talk." A qualified professional counsellor meets with an individual, couple, or family to discuss concerns and problems they are encountering in their lives. The participants' abstracts illustrated the following:

"I think the strategy I can use is to provide access to counselling, and psychological and social services to learners. Also, it is to get involved in the health decisions at school and ask parents to be involved in the parent organisation. I can also take time to talk to my learners and be an active listener" (Teacher A).

"I think to get counselling sessions both learners and their families because other parents' divorce which may lead to bad behaviours for learners and others lost their love ones during COVID-19" (Teacher B).

"In our school, there is an educational psychologist that deals with learners' issues, and teachers have WhatsApp groups to communicate with learners and give clarification on homework, and I advise them about their home situation" (Teacher D).

Counselling programmes help teachers and learners with difficulties in their lives. Learners are getting emotional and mental help to deal with the challenges they face at home. Professional counsellors improve learners' well-being by motivating, encouraging, and supporting them.

4.6.17.2 Extra lessons

Extra lessons refer to all teaching/learning activities outside of the normal school timetable that attempt to cover the formal school curriculum.

“I am doing extra lessons with my learners in the morning and on weekends because the time is not enough due to the rotation classes due to the COVID-19 . I had to ensure learners fully understood the content to pass end-of-year examinations (Teacher B).

“I think class teachers should appoint those few individuals who monitor the implementation of extra classes in our school” (Teacher D).

The extra lessons are essential in improving learners' well-being as they assist those learners who did not understand the content in class. By offering extra lessons, learners understand content better and achieve good grades at school.

4.6.17.3 Tutorial classes

A tutorial is a lesson delivered to one or a small group of learners. Usually, it aids slow learners or those who fall behind. In a sense, parents are responsible for their expenses. One teacher declares this:

“Other learners in my class join tutorial sessions, and their parents paid them. It helped them a lot because some struggled academically” (Teacher B).

Tutorial classes improve learners' well-being by clarifying the concepts or information learned in class that they did not understand. It is helpful because learners are taught by someone who uses different learning styles and approaches. Tutorials are essential to learning as tutors use various techniques to encourage learners to participate in the activities and discussions.

4.7 OBSERVATIONS

In this study, the researcher visited two schools in a rural area, under the uThukela district, to observe inside and outside classrooms. The purpose of the observation is that the researcher wanted to gain insights into the influence of family structure on learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. The researcher observed what was happening inside and outside the classroom through this method. In both schools, the researcher observed four selected participants in certain. As a non-participant observer, the researcher had a chance to observe the interactions in the classroom freely without influencing them. The researcher planned what would be observed (Checklist) and had a clear purpose for the observations.

When the researcher perused documents like the class register, it revealed that some learners had lost both parents, some were abandoned and left to the care of their grandmothers, and they did not even know their parents. Grandmothers are very old, and some of them have died. Some live with one parent, and others are away because of work. Moreover, the researcher viewed the mark sheets to check the children's academic performance from different family structures. The checklist for observation had nine learners' characteristics relevant to the study. The criteria follow the researchers' expectations based on what is being observed.

4.7.1 Learners' academic performance/Progressed analysis

The researcher observed learners' academic performance by asking class managers for March 2024 result analysis. Other learners achieved, and others did not achieve. Achieved means that the learner got minimum pass requirements, and not achieved means the learner did not do well in the examination. Academic performance refers to how well learners do in their educational pursuits. It is primarily measured through grades, test scores, and overall comprehension of academic material.

Table 4.3: Progressed analysis (March 2024)

Name of participant	Grade	Year	IsiZulu (HL)	English (FAL)	Mathematics	Mathematical literacy	Life orientation	Economic and management science	Creative arts	Social science	Technology	Natural science	Business studies	Life science	Agricultural science	Physical science	Results
Learner 1	11	2024	62	58		47	80						61	52	38		A
Learner 2	09	2024	55	48	44		64	38	74	51	44	49					A
Learner 3	10	2024	38	41	32		56							32	29	27	NA
Learner 4	09	2024	58	50	34		69	32	66	48	40	51					A

Key:

NB: A=Achieved, NA= Not Achieved

The progress table shown above is analysed, and the final results are written using symbols such as A=Achieved, which means learners who have passed the minimum requirements. NA = Not Achieved means that the learner is not doing well at school or fails to meet the pass requirements as he/she has failed the examination for a particular term.

4.7.2 Learner's exercise books

The researcher observed the learner's class-work and home-work by asking the learner's exercise books. The researcher observed the learners' exercises for the following subjects: mathematics, physical sciences, life sciences, social science, and IsiZulu. Collecting learners' exercise books was to see if they completed their classwork and home-work. Class-work is the part of a learner's work done in class to test if a learner understands the lesson learned. On the other hand, home-work is the part of a learner's work done at home to test if a learner understands the lesson.

The researcher found that:

Learner 1 was observed in IsiZulu and Physical sciences, and this learner does her school work because class-work and home-work were completed, corrections were there, and notes were written. Learner 2 does school work, but there were incomplete activities and homework, and in his English and EMS exercise books, there were few teachers' signatures. Learner 3 has incomplete activities for Life Sciences and IsiZulu and incomplete notes. This learner does not always correct activities; the teacher never marked his exercise book. Learner 4 exercise books have incomplete notes for Social science and EMS, but activities were there, and there were corrections.

4.7.3 School and class attendance

The researcher asked for a class attendance register from learners' class managers and observed it. The class attendance register is used to check which learners are attending the class. It helps teachers maintain the record of learners absent, present, and on leave.

Table 4.4: Attendance record for 2024 (term 1) of four participants

Name of The Participants	Grade	Total Number of Term 1(2024) School Days	Total Number of Days Present	Total Number of Days Absent
Learner 1	11	46	40	4
Learner 2	09	46	38	8
Learner 3	10	46	32	14
Learner 4	09	46	40	4

The researcher found that:

The table above shows the attendance records of the four participants in the study. The table explains the number of school days in 2024 (term 1). It identifies the number of days these participants were absent at school versus several days they were present. The names of participants categorise into the table, the grades they attend, the total number of school days, the number of days these learners were present at school, and the number of days they were absent from school. This is to clarify that there is a difference in school attendance of learners from nuclear families, grand-parent families, and single-parent families.

4.7.4 Answering oral question

The researcher observed learners during Life Sciences, IsiZulu, Life Orientation, and Mathematics sessions. Participating involves engaging with the material rather than passively listening to a teacher. It is a way of class discussion whereby learners interact with each other. It also shows if a learner understood the lesson.

The researcher found that:

Learner 1 was an active learner in class, and she participated well during the isiZulu lesson, where the teacher asked about the drama they learned. Learner 2 was observed during a life science session where the teacher revised a topic. The learner was poor in participation did not answer the teacher's questions, and he was quiet in class. Learner 3 was observed during a life orientation lesson where learners were required to answer a case study. This learner did not answer any of the questions, even those that are level 1 cognitive levels, and this learner was poor in participation. Learner 4 was observed during the mathematics session, where learners had to make

corrections on the board. Learner 4 was one of those learners who made corrections and presented them in class; in other words, this learner participated well in class.

4.7.5 Interact with other learners

The researcher observed whether learners could play or interact with each other during creative arts (Drama session) and life orientation (PET session). Play is engaging in activities for enjoyment and recreation rather than serious or practical purposes. Interaction or playing with other people shows the personality of that particular individual.

The researcher found that:

Learner 1 had a good relationship with her classmates because she could play well with them during Life orientation (PET). She was friendly towards her classmates. Learner 2 was part of the PET activity, and he was an average learner even though he was shy because he was not playing with everyone. He chose certain individuals to interact with. Learner 3 tended to isolate himself. He looked tired. Learner 4 had a little violence during a performance during the Dramatic session. He was an average learner.

4.7.6 Share learning material

The researcher observed whether learners can share learning material during Creative Arts, English, and Geography subjects, where learners have to share learning material because it is insufficient. Learners usually share textbooks in pairs. Learning material means everything a teacher can use to facilitate learning for their learners. It can be textbooks, calculators, instruments, etc.

The researcher found that:

Learner 1 was observed during the English session, and she could share material because it was her turn to carry the textbook, and they had it in class. Learner 2 was observed during the life orientation session, and they did not have a textbook because the learner had left it at home. Learner 3 had no English textbooks in front of them, meaning the learner could not share material. Learner 4 was observed during the

Mathematics session, and he could share material because they divided weeks of caring textbooks with his partner.

4.7.7 Learners' school uniform

The researcher observed whether learners had full school uniforms or not. Both schools have summer and winter uniforms. Learners were observed in autumn on different weather days. Girls usually wear skirts, shirts, short socks, and hats in summer. Then boys wear trousers, shirts, and hats. In winter, every learner is expected to wear tracksuits and blazers. School uniform is the clothing that learners are required to wear at school. Every school has its uniform that is different from the other.

The researcher found that:

Learner 1 was observed on a hot day, wearing a full school summer uniform. This learner does have a full school uniform. Learner 2 was observed on a cold day wearing a summer uniform, which means the learners do not have a full school uniform. Learner 3 was observed on a cold day wearing summer with no jersey; instead, he was wearing a short shirt with a bright long sleeve, which is against school uniform policy. This learner does not have a full school uniform. Learner 4 was observed wearing a summer uniform and a jersey on a hot day. This learner does have a full school uniform.

4.7.8 Learners' behaviours

The researcher observed learners' behaviours during Life orientation PET and Creative arts drama. Behaviour is how someone conducts oneself and how something functions or operates.

The researcher found that:

Learner 1 was hyper and active, her behaviour was good in class, but she was an attention seeker as she was always speaking in class, but her behaviours did not harm anyone. Learner 2 was not behaving well because he was going up and down and noisy. Learner 3 was also not behaving well because he was arguing with his desk mate and shouting. This learner showed no respect because there was a teacher in class. Learner 4 was an aggressive learner towards his classmates.

4.7.9 Learner's concentration in class

The researcher observed learners' concentration during Business Studies, English, and Mathematics lessons. Concentration is to direct your effort toward a particular activity, subject, or problem. It is to focus one's attention on a particular object.

The researcher found that:

Learner 1 concentrates in class because she engages in activities done in class and answers questions from the teacher very well. Learner 2 sat next to the window and always looked outside during the lesson; this learner lacked concentration. Learner 3 was not concentrating because he answered questions that were not relevant to the content. Learner 4 was concentrating because she asked for clarity regarding the topic introduced to them.

4.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents findings on the influence of family structure on learners' well-being in rural schools. The study revealed that four learners and four teachers were interviewed. Data has been collected and analysed through observation in this chapter. Family structure does have an impact on learners' well-being as they are faced with different challenges at school. Finally, the researcher gathered information by analysing school records such as class registers, progressed learners' reports, and participant interviews. The gathered information allowed the researcher to analyse the data and make recommendations. The next chapter will discuss the recommendations arising from the findings of the experiences of learners from different family structures and teachers.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 explained that the learners from two schools who participated in this study were from single-parent, grand-parent, and nuclear families. This is evidenced by the fact that all four learners face different challenges. For trustworthiness and credibility, data triangulation and authenticating findings from the eight participants purposively selected to participate in the study. A school social worker was sourced to provide guidance and moral support when needed for learners. The conclusions of the qualitative investigation are described in this chapter. It explored the main research questions guiding the study in its exploration of the problems faced by learners from their families, how family structure influences them, and the coping strategies they adopted in overcoming the challenges confronting them. This chapter summarises the study's main findings, recommendations, and conclusion.

5.2 DISCUSSION

5.2.1 How does family structure influence learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19?

The findings suggested that family structure influences learners' well-being, and learners from two-parent homes appeared to be more well-adjusted than learners from one-parent families. This is consistent with Lamb's (2012) findings, which indicate that family structure becomes significant due to the safe, nurturing physical and emotional environment these parents create, presuming that both parents are loving and caring toward their children. Lower stress levels enable parents to foster a loving and nurturing environment for their children. This is especially true for couples with good relationships who support one another by sharing parenting responsibilities (Lamb, 2012; Musick and Meier, 2010).

One important factor linked to poor results in children from both nuclear families is parental conflict. Research in this area reported that family structure could influence the outcome of learners' well-being. According to the current study, learners' well-being is impacted by parental conflict. According to Upali (2017), excessive levels of

conflict, stress brought on by the separation, and/or the ensuing poverty can all have a detrimental effect on the mental health of learners who are mothers. Whether a parent is married, separated, or divorced, their capacity to parent successfully is impacted by poor mental health, and this has an influence on the well-being of their children.

Compared to biologically intact families, the study found that single-parent households existed in all schools, and their numbers were high. Nonetheless, it has been shown that learners from these single-parent households are underprepared for higher education. Some parents' failure to supply basic requirements and sufficient learning resources was cited as one of the reasons behind this. These findings support the findings of Kiernan and Mensah (2010), who claim that children raised by grandparents and single parents have greater levels of externalising issues, poorer language skills, and academic issues. There is evidence that learners raised by single parents are more prone to feel stress and struggle with social and academic adjustment. Furthermore, prior research has indicated a negative correlation between low mental health and academic achievement among learners from single-parent and grandfathered households and that stress was a hindrance to academic success (Park and Lee, 2020). According to this study, learners with grand-parents' and single-parent' households are underperforming academically.

Furthermore, family disintegration is frequently the result of financial difficulties and a contributing factor. Children from disadvantaged homes, whether from intact or non-intact families, generally perform worse than their classmates from more advantaged backgrounds in several areas, including health and educational attainment. Families with only one parent typically have far lower financial situations than those with two parents. According to Ann and Smith (2009), financial difficulty raises the probability of additional factors linked to unfavourable outcomes, including substandard housing, health issues, inadequate nutrition, and a lack of resources for raising children.

5.2.2 What factors influence family structure on learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19?

The results demonstrate that the factors that impact learners' well-being during COVID-19 are family structure, parental conflict, illiteracy, and lack of support from

parents, as well as COVID-19, online learning, lack of resources, and poor academic performance. This result is comparable to numerous previous findings. For example, Amin (2021) conducted a study where the researcher observed that during the early phases of the lockdown, the school's subscription rates were low, and many learners could not attend lessons because they did not have a working internet connection. Nonetheless, technical and support teams provided a much greater level of assistance to access. Similarly, to adopt online learning, Kibuku (2020) discovered that internet availability was the top concern of teachers and learners.

According to several studies, a key obstacle to the deployment of online learning is the absence of technological gadgets. Although many families in the area own smartphones and have no access to the internet, over half do not own laptops. According to Sadik (2018), certain areas have inadequate internet connections, and schools have a shortage of gadgets. As a result, the absence of appropriate technology designed to support remote learning prevents professors and learners from communicating effectively outside the traditional classroom. The current study's findings are consistent with those of Shearer et al. (2020), who contend that teachers, not technology, are the ones who enable learners' learning experiences.

According to the World Bank (2020), learners who are already disadvantaged in some ways, such as being wealthy over being poor, living in an urban area as opposed to a rural one, performing well above poorly, or coming from highly educated families as opposed to less educated ones generally stand to gain disproportionately from the widespread adoption of online learning. According to Zusman, Chavez, and Gattamorta's (2020) study, spending more time with family may increase the likelihood of family conflicts. The current study also revealed a correlation between the lack of socialisation among families during COVID-19 and the rise in technology-mediated family communication patterns. According to Watson, Lupton, and Michael (2021), family environments with higher levels of conflictive interactions could be a factor in family dysfunctions and disconnections; on the other hand, family environments that foster closeness and connected interactions both within and between family members can help reduce psychological stressors.

5.2.3 What challenges did the family structure encounter in improving learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19?

The findings show that families encounter challenges in improving learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19, including lack of internet connection, classroom overcrowding, lack of resources, and heavy workload.

These results aligned with other research that showed how packed classrooms impacted teachers. According to Van Wyk (2008), cramped classrooms can worsen teaching and learning environments by limiting space, airflow, and noise levels, which can cause learners to become distracted or even stressed. Potential issues, "like overcrowding," were mentioned by teachers (Mullis et al., 2012:41). All overcrowded classrooms are one of the most common causes of didactical neglect, which is defined as the teacher's failure to give each learner's educational needs adequate attention, according to Weinstein (2012), Marais (2016), and Van Wyk (2008). These results aligned with earlier research (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Veenman, 1984), which showed that learners expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of assistance from teachers and parents who didn't seem to care about their studies.

Not all devices can access the many platforms used for online learning, which has also been a source of concern. This includes the incapacity of the devices to use Microsoft software for work, such as Teams, forms, and WhatsApp. As a result, during COVID-19, learners in rural areas cannot access Internet-connected devices like computers, phones, and other devices that could help them advance academically (Dube, 2020). This result is consistent with the World Bank's (2020) findings that advantaged pupils gain more from online learning than their less fortunate peers. Learners in the chosen place are considered disadvantaged in this context.

This study supports earlier research that found rural school learners lacked discipline, as reported by the teachers. Discipline issues were a defining feature of teachers' difficulties in managing their learners, and prior research has extensively documented these issues (Jackson, 2012). According to South Africa's rural secondary school instructors, disciplinary issues are their biggest challenge. This severely affects the teaching and learning process and results in subpar instruction in these schools (Adams, 2004). Researchers predict that various issues in education, such as subpar academic performance, have been brought on by physical distance and widespread

feelings of dread over the COVID-19 (Sintema, 2020). The results align with earlier research showing resource shortages teachers and learners face in rural institutions. According to Padayachee (2017), learners' performance may suffer if they do not have access to adequate resources, which could lower the quality of their education. The government cannot provide enough textbooks for every learner in South African schools.

5.2.4 What strategies could be used to overcome the effects of family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19?

Online learning was one of the main backup plans to escape COVID-19, despite some studies showing that the technology limitation during online learning becomes a burden for teachers and learners. The current findings show that teachers used a variety of strategies to overcome the effects of family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19. These strategies included counselling programmes, extra lessons, and tutorials. There are direct-action strategies that attempt to eliminate the source of stress. These strategies may include seeking assistance from social workers, obtaining information from friends, accessing professional development opportunities, connecting with others, reflecting, and reframing (Sharplin, O'Neill, and Chapman, 2011).

Giving learners academic support has become more critical in complying with the syllabus. According to the findings of this study, most learners participated in tutorial sessions. They preferred that the tutor actively engage, observe, assist, and discuss learning instead of just passing along the knowledge to help learners develop their analytical and critical thinking skills and learn more. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Ogina and Mampane (2013), who investigated the experiences of tutorial sessions as a source of learning help. According to the most recent research, learners saw tutorials as an advantageous support system that allowed them to interact with other learners and gain a deeper understanding of the course material. According to Hatshwayo (2013), the tutorial model is viewed as a means of assisting learners, particularly those ill-prepared for academic problems. According to Singh (2015), the tutorial sessions serve as learner support systems where learners interact with the instructor and facilitator and the course content.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Learners encountered many challenges at a selected rural school during the COVID-19 .

5.3.1 Department of Education, KwaZulu-Natal

5.3.1.1 Overcrowded classrooms

KwaZulu-Natal's Department of Education should provide mobile classrooms to ensure learners are comfortable during class, enjoy the lesson, let teachers move around, and support teaching and learning. School admission policies should be changed to prevent overpopulation. The number of learners enrolled ought to correspond with the school's size.

5.3.1.2 Heavy workload

According to the Department of Education, teachers are not required to assign excessive homework. Teachers who assign homework to their learners ought to create a roster. Learners should be required to do less work, and such professors should not be assigned difficult tasks. The teaching duties of teachers must be divided. It is advisable to permit learners to complete their homework in pairs.

5.3.1.3 Lack of resources

Teachers seem to be the most underserved group in terms of resource distribution, so they need support from the Department of Education, especially those who work in remote schools. Teachers must also be compensated adequately to inspire people and provide a happy work atmosphere. Teaching materials with digital tools like laptops and data projectors must be provided to teachers and learners. To meet the challenges, the Department of Education invested heavily in providing learners with new gadgets and ample resources, such as internet bundles. An in-depth study was carried out to identify strategies to support learners. Resources like podcasts, internet platforms, and movies all play a big part in keeping learners interested.

5.3.1.4 Lack of support

The KZN Department of Education should develop social networks like WhatsApp groups to support learners. Each teacher should have a mentor who will provide ongoing support, carry out observations, and have follow-up conversations regarding the strategies they use in the classroom. Facilitators ought to be assigned to learners

as well. On the other hand, the Department of Education should look at creating larger support networks for all teachers and learners.

3.3.1.5 Lack of discipline

Teachers require ongoing, dependable mentorship, coaching, and training in learner discipline. The education department ought to revise its stance on using physical punishment. With the right instruction and supervision, instructors can gradually gain the capacity to oversee learners' behaviours.

5.3.2 Department of social and development

5.3.2.1 Develop counselling programmes

The Department of Social and Development should supply trained school psychologists and social workers to help teachers and learners with problems. Parents should also get assistance from those psychologists. The Department of Social and Development should provide training to teachers and learners about mental and physical healthcare, which also helps in reducing the issues related to anxiety and depression while coping with the new system.

5.3.2.2 Self-awareness programmes

Programmes for raising awareness that are both effective and accessible must be made available to communities in all geographic contexts, including low-income and rural areas. To prevent rural households from feeling abandoned, the government should expand the number of programmes it offers that educate them about various recently found diseases. This can be accomplished by first transporting a small group of individuals to the venue for classes, and then coming back to instruct the entire community. They can be given food staff, clothing, and educational resources.

5.3.3 Schools

Teachers' and learners' lives seem to be significantly impacted by the department heads and the school principal. They should respond to complaints from teachers and learners and offer them help. Techniques for maintaining learners' interest include discussion boards, peer reviews, higher-order thinking questions, and class final comments.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to a lack of volunteers, the data-gathering procedure had to be postponed. The process of transcribing data from the semi-structured interviews, as well as the

process of data analysis, took a long time. Other schools did not allow data collection when learners were approaching exams, and that caused a delay in collecting data on observation. Since the participants in the interview were school learners, it was difficult to determine how much confidentiality would prevail among the eight participants, even though the researcher had promised strict confidentiality. Because this was a small case study, the results cannot be generalised to other learners from other family structures elsewhere in South Africa. Two learners chose not to continue with data collection, so the researcher had to look for another participant.

5.5 GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study investigated how family structure in rural schools affected learners' well-being throughout COVID-19 and the coping mechanisms they employed. The results show a wide range of interrelated difficulties learners encounter and the coping mechanisms they have developed to address them. Covid-19 has been complicated and has influenced all facets of life. Regarding problems, most of those mentioned by most participants had to do with a poor internet connection brought on by some shoddy gadgets they were using or the location of the devices. The study's results led the researcher to draw certain conclusions. The study concluded that different family configurations present a variety of difficulties for the learners' well-being in each of the study's participating schools. These comprised families headed by grandparents, single parents, and nuclear families. The results also led to the conclusion that, in contrast to learners from single-parent and single-parent households, learners from both families can perform well in school. Teachers used extracurricular activities, tutorial sessions, and online learning as coping mechanisms for COVID-19. Bronfenbrenner's theory was adopted in this study because learner's family history is related to their school experience. Learners ended up being aggressive towards each other at school. Further studies are necessary to confirm the conditions of learners from nuclear families, single parent families, grand-parent families and child-headed families in rural areas. It is hoped that this study will lead to further research in the field of family structure and its impact on learners as this study only focus in rural schools and it would be interesting to repeat this study by focusing in both urban and rural schools.

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EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X1657, Bergville, 3350
Bergville circuit office
Tel: 036 448 9200

Enquiries: MISS C.M. NGWENYA

Ref. SACSSP-IO-22454

Ms TA Mbhele

P.O.Box 710

Bergville

3350

LETTER FROM A SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

I, Ngwenya Cynthia Malungelo (School counsellor/social worker) Reg. no. SACSSP-IO-22454 at Bergville circuit office under uThukela District, Department of Education.

As a school counsellor, I am assisting learners who are experiencing barriers to learning with more focus on psychological issues. There are lots of challenges that are facing by our learners. However, some are easily identified as experiencing challenges since they are living in a very remote environment, opening up is not easy and be seen as weakness.

I am committing myself to assist Thobeka Mbhele with student number, 2015306604 while conducting her research on 'EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON THE WELL-BEING OF LEARNERS IN RURAL AREA DURING COVID-19'. It will also assist the department to support those learners. I will assist in case of emergencies with counselling sessions.

UTHUKELA DISTRICT


MISS C.M. NGWENYA

27 MARCH 2023

NAME OF THE OBSERVOR: THOBEKA MBHELE

DISCTRICT : UTHUKELA DISTRICT

DATE OF THE OBSERVATION: FEB 2024- JUNE 2024

**RESEARCH TITTLE: EXPORING THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON
LEARNERS' WELLBEING IN RURAL SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19**

OBSVERAVTION CHECKLIST

LEARNER'S CHARACTERISTICS	EXPECTATIONS			
	0-25	25-50	50-75	75-100
1. Academic performance				
2. Class activities (Class work/ Home-work)				
3. School and class attendance	≥ 5 per term	≥10 per term	≥15 per term	≥20 per term
	POOR	AVERAGE	GOOD	VERY GOOD
4. Participating in class by answering oral question				
5. Ability to play well with other learners				
6. Ability to share learning material				
7. Wearing school uniform				
8. Behaviour				
	SUFFICIENT		UNSUFFICIENT	
9. Learning material				

NAME OF THE INTERVIEWER: THOBEKA MBHELE

DISTRICT : UTHUKELA DISTRICT

DATE OF INTERVIEW : FEB-JUNE 2024

RESEARCH TITLE: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON LEARNERS' WELLBEING IN RURAL SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19 IN FREE-STATE PROVINCE

SECTION A: BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

EDUCATORS
1. Gender :
2. Age :
3. Teaching experience :
4. Teaching subject :
5. Number of learners in class:
6. Highest qualifications obtained :
7. Race :
8. Residential area :

SECTION B:INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teachers' questions

1. According to your understanding, what is a family structure?
2. How would you describe the school's climate during COVID-19?
What are the major challenges?
What are the major successes?
3. Are you comfortable with working in a rural school?
If no, why?
4. How are your learners doing in terms of academic performance?
What would you do to improve their academic performance?
5. How would you describe the approach toward behaviour management in this school?
How is this approach supported by the district or school?

6. Are they all engaging in school activities?
7. How would you describe high-quality teaching for learners at risk of dropping out?
8. Are there any other things you can think of in your school that may help improve learners' well-being?

[IF THE RESPONSES INDICATED ANY PROGRAMMES]

When were those programmes implemented?

Who developed them?

Were teachers involved in the development?

How were they implemented?

9. How can you describe learners' from different family structures in terms of class participation?
10. What are the main challenges you face in improving learners' well-being?
11. What strategies that could be used to overcome the effects of family structure in learners' wellbeing during COVID-19?

NAME OF THE INTERVIEWER: THOBEKA MBHELE

DISTRICT : UTHUKELA DISTRICT

DATE OF INTERVIEW : FEB - JUNE 2024

RESEARCH TITLE: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON LEARNERS' WELLBEING IN RURAL SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19 IN FREE-STATE PROVINCE

LEARNERS BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
1. Gender :
2. Age :
3. Grade :
4. Race :
5. Number of subjects :
6. Residential area :
7. Grade repetition :
8. Types of family structure :
9. The number of family members at home, including yourself. ____ People.

10. What were your March result exams?	FAIL PASS
--	-----------

Learners' question

1. Do you understand the definition of “family structure” what does it mean according to you?
2. Tell me about your family structure
3. What are the views of your community regarding your family structure?
4. What do you do to feed yourself?
5. Do you have friends?
If the answer is yes. How often do you communicate with them?
What are their views regarding your situation?
If no. Why you do not have friends?
6. Do you get enough time to study?
How do you structure you duties in order to cope with schoolwork and household chores?.
7. What are the difficulties you encounter in your school life during COVID-19?
8. How can you describe your relationship with your classmates?
9. Do you have enough learning material?
10. Does your teachers aware of your situation?
11. Please highlight your future dreams.

CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Family structure influence learner's well-being in rural schools during COVID-19

Overview

- The aim of the study is to explore how family structure can influence the learners well-being in rural schools.
- Engage in a 40 minutes semi-structured interview and classroom observations

Confidential

- Participation is voluntarily
- Participants will be anonymous

ELIGIBILITY

- High school learners from Grade 9-11
- High school teachers with 3+ teaching experience
- Must be residing at UThukela district



If you would like to learn more or participate in the project. Please contact
0789373119/ thobekaangel19996@gmail.com



Tap To
REMOVE

GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

19-Apr-2023

Dear Ms Thobeka Mbhele

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

Exploring the influence of family structure on the well-being of learners in rural schools during the COVID-19

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2022/1985/23

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

**Adri
Du
Plessis**
Digitally
signed by Adri
Du Plessis
Date:
2023.04.19
18:02:00
+02'00'

205 Nelson Mandela Drive P.O. Box 109
Park West Bloemfontein 9300
Bloemfontein 9301 Tel: +27 (0)51 481 9017
South Africa Adri.DuPlessis@ufs.ac.za
www.ufs.ac.za





Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1063

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Ref:2/4/8/41174

Ms TA Mbhele
PO Box 710
BERGVILLE
3350

Dear Ms Mbhele

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON THE WELL-BEING OF LEARNERS IN RURAL SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 21 November 2022 to 31 October 2025.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UTHUKELA DISTRICT

Mr GN Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 24 November 2022

Research study information leaflet and consent form

Date

March 2023-June 2024

Title of the research project

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON THE WELL-BEING OF LEARNERS IN RURAL SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19

Principle investigator / researcher(s) name(s) and contact number(s):

Name of student/researcher Student number Contact number

Mbhele Thobeka Angel 2015306604 0789373119

Faculty and Department:

Name of Faculty: Education

Name of Department: psychology

Study leader(s) name and contact number:

Name of Study Leader (Dr Kananga Robert Mukuna)

Contact number: 081 045 1473

What is the aim / purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to explore the influence of family structure on the learners' well-being in rural schools during the covid-19.

Who is doing the research?

This is a research project being conducted by Thobeka Mbhele at the University of the Free State. I am working for department of education, the reason why I am doing this project is because I have seen the gap in learners from different family structures.

Has the study received ethical approval?

This study has not yet received the ethical approval.

Approval number: N/A

Why are you invited to take part in this research project?

I am aiming to get 16 participants, 8 high school learners and 8 high school teachers from rural areas. I will choose participants that will fit or knowledgeable about my study. I am interested in learning more about learners' background.

What is the nature of participation in this study?

Participants will be asked to do face to face/telephonically interview. This may be done during your free time, break or after school. The interview may take 40-60 minutes, and comprises of two sections. Section A: Involves your demographic information, Section B: the questions related to your perception of the influence of family structure on the well-being

of learners in rural schools during the COVID-19. The researcher will also do a classroom observation. Observations will be done during the lesson to determine the participation of learners in class. The researcher will also observe learners attendance register and learners mark sheet.

Can the participant withdraw from the study?

Yes, the participants can withdraw from the study. The researcher will inform the participants that their participation in this research is completely voluntary. They may choose not to take part at all. If they decide to participate in this research, they may stop participating at any time.

What are the potential benefits of taking part in this study?

This research is not designed to help only families and learners, but the results may help the researcher learn more about the influence of family structure on learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. Teachers will find the findings of the study valuable since they would be able to appreciate the role of the family background in the learning of learners' and also find ways of helping the learners' from different family set ups to cope with their challenges emanating from their family structure backgrounds.

What is the anticipated inconvenience of taking part in this study?

All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. I will nevertheless minimize such risks and act promptly to get a social worker or school psychologist that will assist learners if they experience any discomfort, psychological or emotional during the process of participating in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

Will what I say be kept confidential?

The researchers undertake to protect learners and teachers identity and the nature of their contribution. To ensure anonymity, they will remain anonymously. Their information will not be distributed to third part. Since the researcher will use transcriptions and field notes, it will be locked in shelves and the recordings will be stored on the researcher's local computer with a password for protection and also timely deletion after five years.

How will the information be stored and ultimately destroyed?

Hard copies of their answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet (Office) for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer and be deleted after five years.

Will I receive payment or any incentives for participating in this study?

Participating in this study is voluntary therefore participants will not receive any compensation for being the part of this study.

How will the participant be informed of the findings / results of the study?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Thobeka Mbhele on 0789373119. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact 0789373119, 2015306604@ufs4life.ac.za. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr K Mukuna (Supervisor) at Department of Educational Foundations, tel. 0587185343. Email: MukunaKR@ufs.ac.za.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Consent to participate in this study

I, the undersigned,

(participant's full names to be included), (the "Participant") confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as the

_____ (the "Study") in relation to

and which Study is being conducted by

(Thobeka Mbhele), (the "**Researcher**").

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that–

1. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet;
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;
4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable);
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing and processing my personal information in order to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation thereto;
6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein;
7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and identified at such stage;
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Participant, agree to the recording of the semi structured interview and observation

Full Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant: _____ Date:

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s):

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date

Child Assent Template

NB! Delete this page before adapting the template to your project!

Please note:

1. Children who can understand the basic concepts of research should be allowed to assent to a research study. Generally, children aged 7 to 17 should assent to research. This is not a fixed rule and some children younger than seven may well have sufficient insight and understanding to give assent for a study.
2. If they refuse assent, then this refusal should be accepted, even if the parents have consented. There may be exceptional cases where this rule may not apply. The REC should be consulted.
3. This template is particularly for 7-12-year-olds and can be adapted to suit adolescents.
4. If you include a wide range of children in your project, you will need two different versions of assent, one for younger children and a more detailed one for adolescents.
5. You can adapt the template to suit the needs of your specific project including deleting sections which are seen as not applicable/appropriate.
6. This assent document must be used in conjunction with a parental Information Leaflet and Informed Consent form, which should cover the project in more depth and detail.

Participant Information Leaflet and Assent Form

Title of the research project: Exploring the influence of family structure on the well-being of learners in rural schools during the COVID-19

Researchers names: Thobeka Angel Mbhele

Address: Bergville 3350

Contact number: 0789373119

What is *Research*?

Research is something we do to find new knowledge about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about disease or illness. Research also helps us to find better ways of helping sick children.

What is this research project all about?

This research is about the family structure on how they influence the well-being of learners.

Why have I been invited to take part in this research project?

You have been invited to be part of this study since you fit in this study and you also experience challenges in your family. The research wants to determine how your family influence you emotional, psychological and physical.

Who is doing the research?

This is a research project being conducted by ThobekaMbhele at the University of the Free State. I am working for department of education, the reason why I am doing this project is because I have seen the gap in learners from different family structures.

What will happen to me in this study?

You will be asked to do an interview with the research which will take approximately 60 minutes and a classroom observation. The reason behind this is because the researcher wants to know how your family influence your academics or behaviour.

Can anything bad happen to me?

The possible risks that you may encounter is emotional distress. If you experience anything bad, the researcher will inform the social worker or school psychologist since they will be there during the study. The researcher will also inform your parents about your condition.

Can anything good happen to me?

This study will benefit you since the Department of Social and Development will know the impact your family may have on your academics and provide you with counselling and also teachers from the Department of Education will help you improve your marks.

Will anyone know I am in the study?

The researchers undertake to protect your identity and the nature of their contribution. To ensure anonymity, you will remain anonymously. Your information will not be distributed to third part. Nobody will know that you undertake the study.



Who can I talk to about the study?

If you would like to participate please contact ThobekaMbhele on 0789373119 or 2015306604@ufs4life.ac.za. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr K Mukuna (Supervisor) at Department of Educational Foundations, tel. 0587185343. Email: MukunaKR@ufs.ac.za.

What if I do not want to do this?

If you do not want to be part of this study, you can refuse to take part even if your parents have agreed to their participation. You can stop being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.

Do you understand this research study and are you willing to take part in it?

☐ YES☐ NO

Has the researcher answered all your questions?

☐ YES☐ NO

Do you understand that you can pull out of the study at any time?

☐ YES☐ NO

Signature of Child

Date

Thesis

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