

**EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON LEARNERS' WELLBEING IN A RURAL HIGH SCHOOL
DISTRICT**

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DECLARATION

I, Mofokeng Sentle Patricia, declare that the treatise entitled exploring the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in a rural high school, submitted for the qualification of B.Ed. (Masters) in Psychology at the University of the Free State is my independent work.

All the references I have used have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

A Turnitin Report on the work produced is included in Annexure A

SIGNED

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ETHICAL STATEMENT



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Application Approved

Research Project Title:

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 ON LEARNERS' WELL-BEING IN A RURAL HIGH SCHOOL

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Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

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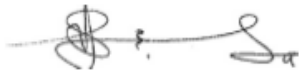
Exploring the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in a rural high school

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Yours faithfully,



Kemist Shumba (PhD)

ABSTRACT

In December 2019, COVID-19 appeared in Wuhan, China. As it quickly spread across various regions, its devastating effects had global political and socioeconomic repercussions. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in a rural high school. It sought to establish the effects of COVID-19, challenges encountered and strategies that the learners think could be helpful in the context of COVID-19. The well-being of learners has been linked to various aspects of their lives, such as their satisfaction, mental health and academic performance. Drawing from John Rawls' (1971) Classical Liberalism of Equal Opportunities, every learner possesses certain abilities and can learn and better their lives if everyone could be afforded the same equal opportunities. Using the qualitative approach and phenomenology research design, the study was conducted within the confines of the interpretive paradigm. Data were generated using in-depth interviews, and the WhatsApp social media platform was used to conduct interviews to safeguard the participants from the virus. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Six learners and two teachers from one high school in the rural area of Kestell in the Thabo Mofutsanyane District of the Free State province constituted the study sample. The findings revealed that the learners encountered many challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The effects include poor academic performance, loss of loved ones, learners developing mental health issues, and the new normal. The challenges revealed are food scarcity, lack of resources as the COVID-19 pandemic mandated a new mode of teaching and learning and lockdown (confinement). The participants suggested strategies that include providing resources such as laptops, smartphones, and data and equipping learners with skills to learn using online platforms. Recommendations based on the findings were made to train teachers and learners to gain the digital skills and knowledge needed for successful teaching and learning on online platforms in cases such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEYWORDS: Psychological and academic wellbeing, Rural School, COVID-19 era, online learning, social inequality, Face to Face learning

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

B. Ed. Bachelor of Education

BA Bachelor of Arts Degree

DoE Department of Education

HOD Head of Department

Hons.Ed. Honors degree in Education

PGCE Post Graduate Certificate in Education

SASA South African School Act

SGB School Governing Body

SMT School Management Team

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study presents the results of investigating the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on learner wellbeing in a rural high school. From the learners' and teachers' perspectives in a rural high school in Thabo Mofutsanyane District in Free State, the study also explored the strategies that can be implemented to aid the school in cases such as the COVID-19 pandemic. That requires certain provisions for teaching and learning to continue without endangering learners' and teachers' lives. Central to this phenomenon is the fairness and equality in acquiring education amongst the learners within South Africa, regardless of their background. All must be offered the same opportunities as others to gain the necessary skills and training to better their lives without restrictions due to high-cost implications or social status. Therefore, this chapter presents a background to the study, followed by the statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, the significance this study may demonstrate, a brief definition of the key concepts used, and limitations. Towards the end of the chapter, the structure of the entire study is presented, and a chapter summary is provided.

1.2 Background of the study

The world has been challenged and writhed with brutal and harsh viruses that halted human movements and caused social and economic disruption before, such as “the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) between 2002 and 2004, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014 and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018” (Shumba, Nyamaruze, Nyambuya & Meyer-Weitz, 2020: 271). Not overlooking the Zika virus (ZIKV), as indicated by Gorshkov et al. (2019) was similarly declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by World Health. However, the Coronavirus, which broke out in 2019, which is the latest virus to be reported, seemed to have the worst and most severe socioeconomic and health ramifications on the human race on a global scale compared to recent pandemics experienced (Buck, Arnold, Chazan & Cookson, 2020). Owing to its devastating effects, the eruption of COVID-19 has been referred to as a black swan event, and it has severely affected the various aspects of human life globally

(Sohrabi et al., 2020). This pandemic has killed more than 290,000 individuals globally in less than two years and instigated over 4.3 million infection cases (UNESCO, 2021). According to Hallgarten (2021), its impact on the global scale raised fear of a recession and a financial crisis out of all recent endemics. Additionally, due to travel restrictions, social distancing, and self-isolation, many jobs have been lost in attempts by various governments to curb its spread.

As many human spheres halted, countries worldwide, including South Africa, had to close schools suspending face-to-face classes ‘to flatten the curve’, affecting almost 95 % of the student’s population worldwide (Giannini, 2020). This act raised concerns about the consequences of this action on learners’ academic performance and their holistic wellbeing (Engzell, Frey & Verhagen, 2021). The pandemic has transformed society in many ways and has exacerbated economic and social inequality (UNESCO, 2020a). Due to the nationwide lockdown initiated by over 100 countries to mitigate the spread of the virus meant the closure of the normal face-to-face teaching platforms that learners are used to and transitioning to online learning (Kwok et al., 2020). The impact of that conversion on learners’ lives becomes significant, particularly the ones from disadvantaged households and rural areas. This is mainly because this epidemic necessitated that for schooling to continue, there are now certain resources, such as laptops and data, that learners must possess, widening the gap between the haves and have not (Dube, 2020). Some learners at home have limited access to connectivity; some do not have adequate IT equipment to attend online classes, and others cannot afford the extra cost of data (UNESCO, 2020). In their study, Kohls et al. (2020) have reported that due to the lockdown and economic crisis, learners have faced unprecedented challenges that include psychological breakdowns, social isolation, and suicidal ideation ever recorded, affecting almost every aspect of their wellbeing.

In an Innocenti Report, OECD (2007:1) declares that “the true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends to its children’s health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born”. Moreover, Richardson et al. (2018) claim that for every living being to function optimally and efficiently, it must be in the right mind; this is especially true for human beings. They further exert that for human beings to be able to do what is needed or necessary, they must be at their peak. In other words, they must be at their best and their finest self. This enables them to push hard, excel, and give their best. However, they lose momentum when discouraged,

anxious, or terrified. The outbreak of COVID-19 was and still is strenuous and arduous for learners as they are among the people most affected by the pandemic (Higbee et al., 2021). This disease does not discriminate based on race, creed, financial position, religion, gender, or class. It has adversely affected most of the human population and ushered in a new order, christened ‘the new normal’ (Dube, 2020).

However, its prerequisites and restrictions have created a distinction between unemployed and employed, rich and poor. People with destitute and low socioeconomic status are left in worse and more severe conditions (Gross, 2015). One can only imagine its impact on people in rural areas, as most people in those settings rely on piece jobs, most are unemployed, and many families rely on social grants and food-feeding schemes (Maringe, Masinire & Nkambule, 2015). Myende and Chikoko (2014) maintain that rural areas are regions coupled with economic instability. COVID-19 precipitated several constraints, which required people to change their way of living and conducting business. The standard and natural learning and teaching had to be adjusted and altered to meet COVID-19 infection control requirements. Learners needed to return to school after the lockdown and continue learning (Department of Education, 2020). Before the outbreak of COVID-19, learners had access to all the tools needed for a successful education, namely the school itself, its facilities and resources, and, most important, teachers. To promote social distancing, as it is one of the strategies implemented to guarantee safety from the virus, it became clear that learners needed laptops, smartphones, and the skills to use these electronic gadgets to navigate and keep up-to-date with their schoolwork. However, owing to the state of affairs in rural areas, the lack of such provisions affects learners’ wellbeing (Cao et al., 2020). It affects them academically because they cannot perform to their maximum potential. Learners attended school for half the usual time allocation, which caused a problem if they did not have the resources at home to compensate for the other half lost. They were also affected socially due to the social distancing they had to maintain, something that was imposed on them (Dube, 2020).

Wellbeing is one of the constructs studied thoroughly and extensively in different fields, with each discipline holding its competing definition of the term (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). It is a broad and multidimensional concept that often refers to the positive emotions of an individual (Copper et al., 2011). For this study, the concept is applied to learners. “Learner wellbeing is a complex psychological state that can broadly be understood as how learners feel and function in

education” (Rees & Dinisman, 2015: 4). It fundamentally refers to learners’ satisfaction with their academic performance. Learner wellbeing is affected by the capability to bounce back from adversities caused by COVID-19, both educationally and socially, which is their resilience. Learners’ emotional vigor to stand the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and overall happiness and contentment with their lives are essential.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were a refuge for many learners, particularly those in rural areas (UNESCO-UIS, 2016). A place they could go to escape their everyday tussle and acquire skills that would impact their lives positively. The pandemic has been, in several ways, impactful on their wellbeing. It threatens learners’ lives and those of their loved ones. The continued closure of schools due to COVID-19 cases and the shift to online learning are essential concerns for learners. All these factors have put immense pressure on the wellbeing of learners psychologically, socially, and academically (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic remains a compelling issue disrupting the economy and basic education in most parts of the world, especially in less economically developed countries (Krishnakumar & Rana, 2020). Most countries suffered economic losses, and schools lost valuable teaching time (Zirima, Nyambuya & Shumba, 2020). After restrictions were eased, activities resumed with certain safety precautions in place (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2020). Most schools were forced to shift to online learning and teaching. The move to online learning instead of the traditional face-to-face classroom teaching model was inevitable and seen as the most viable solution given the nature of this virus spread. Learners in rural areas were left out of schooling due to a lack of infrastructure, such as information and communication technology (ICT) gadgets and access to the Internet (Dube, 2020). All these new factors determining their acquisition of education negatively affected their wellbeing (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005).

1.3 Research problem of the study

COVID-19 affected all aspects of the livelihood of people around the world, and the education sector is not an exception. This novel Coronavirus gravely concerned schools in rural areas in South Africa. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) states that humankind might live with this disease for quite some time. Therefore, countries had to devise strategies to co-exist with the virus. The education sector had to devise approaches and strategies to return learners to school without endangering their lives. One of the preventive measures against this disease is non-

pharmacological intervention using social distancing (WHO, 2020). As a result, the Department of Basic Education (2020) proposed that schools should focus on online learning. This way, teaching, and learning could continue while keeping teachers and learners safe from COVID-19. The Department of Basic Education is accused of failing to recognize that not all learners can afford online learning (Dube, 2020). This is especially true for learners in rural areas and other resource-constrained settings.

Not only is lack of resources and affordability a problem, but also the skills and knowledge to operate ICT gadgets. Online teaching and learning present several challenges to learners, leaving many questions unanswered (William et al., 2020). For example, questions on how they will acquire knowledge for passing remain difficult to answer. For learner utilizing online platforms as a means to acquire decent and quality education, that aforesaid person will need every tool required for successful online learning. However, for most learners in South Africa mainly ones in rural areas, places plagued with highest poverty and unemployment acquiring education should not be one of daily intricacies they have to deal with. Section 28 of the National Education Policy Act (1996) states that every child has the right to basic education and all the necessary means for effective education. Rural learners face unprecedented challenges in their daily lives. Adjusting to a new mode of life and learning added to the daily obstacles they must meet (Lawrence et al., 2019; Prime, Wade & Browne, 2020).

Online learning excludes many rural learners from teaching and learning due to the lack of resources, which gravely affects their academic success. All these factors disrupt learners' wellbeing academically, psychologically, and economically.

1.4 Aim of the study

The study aims to explore how COVID-19 affects learner wellbeing in a rural high school.

1.5 Research questions

The main research question of this study is:

What are the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in a rural high school?

The secondary research questions are:

- a. What are the challenges encountered by learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 period?
- b. What are the strategies to overcome COVID-19-induced challenges at a rural high school?

1.6 Objectives of the study

- a. To explore learners' challenges in the COVID-19 era at a rural high school.
- b. To explore the strategies to overcome COVID-19-induced challenges at a rural high school.

1.7 Significance of the study

COVID-19 has ushered in what is understood as a 'new normal' for most states' socioeconomic aspects worldwide. It has brought many changes in a short space of time, regulating how people live. The education sector also had to adjust and change several policy elements. The knowledge of those changes brought on by the pandemic and how schools are affected, especially in geographically secluded regions like rural areas, would be helpful to the Department of Education. This study is expected to contribute information on the pandemic's effects and challenges on learners in rural areas.

This study is critical because it will shed light on the nature of the newly developed challenges and obstacles that this pandemic has brought onto the rural schools, particularly the ones in Maluti a Phofung District, Free State. It is no secret that most people in rural areas deal with several daily challenges, and this pandemic has added to the encounters they must face. The study's findings might be helpful to the Department of Basic Education Free State on how to better aid their schools and every stakeholder within them.

This research is vital, as it may assist the Department of Basic Education in understanding the challenges faced by learners in rural areas due to COVID-19 and how they can be assisted in this pandemic. It could also benefit all rural school stakeholders because teachers will be empowered with the necessary technical skills. Learners might receive the resources they require to learn effectively, and parents will experience less anxiety knowing that their children are afforded the resources and skills they require to learn. It may also help assist all the stakeholders within the education system in how to best deal with similar issues that may occur in the future. It may

contribute essential data on the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in rural areas to the research field.

1.8 Clarification of terms

This section explains the concepts used in this study and clarifies how these concepts relate to the subject matter.

(i) Learner wellbeing

There are many definitions of the term "learner wellbeing," but it is generally agreed that it refers to subjective attitudes and feelings about school (Hascher, 2012). According to Hascher (2012), besides being satisfied with the school environment, overall academic enjoyment is also concerned with learner's thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. Learner wellbeing focuses on developing learners' psychological and physical health and is strongly linked to their learning (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). In this study, learner wellbeing refers to learners' welfare and overall satisfaction with COVID-19.

(ii) COVID-19 era

The COVID-19 era signals the epoch in which the corona viruses rampaged the world, causing a global health and socioeconomic crisis that accelerated the developments towards the fourth industrial revolution (Serafini et al., 2020). In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, most people around the world were exposed to unprecedented levels of social isolation and economic harm (Cullen et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2020; Serafini et al., 2020; Sher, 2020). This study focuses on the COVID-19 era as a period that had devastating effects on the holistic wellbeing of learners in a rural school in South Africa.

(iii) Rural school

Ranscombe (2020) asserts that rural school is a school in the context of resource-constrained settings and remains unchanged despite initiatives by the government. According to a study by Cristobal, Montegut, and Ferrer (2020), rural areas in South Africa are often disadvantaged regarding technological development due to the lack of economic and social viability. Maringe, Masinire, and Nkambule (2015) state that rural areas usually face multiple deprivations, including income, material, education, employment, living environment, and health deprivation. When rural

communities suffer these deprivations, the schools in them also suffer. Rural communities' challenges, such as geographic isolation, often restrict schools within the rural context from requesting and receiving necessary resources for their learners, such as computer laboratories, due to the geographical seclusion of rural areas, as well as obtaining young skilled teachers that are technologically savvy (Moore, 2011). Furthermore, the poverty and illiteracy of many limits parents' ability to boost and supplement their children's education at home, just as the pandemic has necessitated for learners to continue learning at home. In this study, rural school refers to schools lacking service delivery and poverty.

(iv) Academic performance

According to Korhonen et al. (2014), academic wellbeing has been known to consist of academic self-concept, perceived learning difficulties, and school burnout. Furthermore, Huppert and So (2013) highlighted that academic wellbeing could be a multidimensional construct covering both negatives, such as school burnout and positives, including education engagement and participation in extramural activities. In this study, academic wellbeing refers to how well the learners cope with schoolwork during COVID-19.

(v) Psychological effects

Mason (2016) maintains that the psychological wellbeing of learners is concerned with being content with life and understanding an abundance of positive emotions. This happens when combined with the absence of psychopathology and is linked with academic performance, social skills, support, and physical health. He argues that positive psychological wellbeing lays a foundation for a learner's personality and development as a human. In this report, psychological wellbeing refers to the ability of rural learners to maintain healthy mental states of mind regardless of the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

(vi) Online learning

These concepts of "e-learning, distance education, online learning, and web-based education" have been used in extant literature to indicate learning that is not traditional face-to-face, one that most people are not familiar with, especially those in poor, remote settings (Rodrigues et al., 2019). According to Rodrigues et al. (2019), online learning is a teaching platform usually conducted in various ways, such as at different times and places, and involves using various materials. Online

learning uses educational technologies to facilitate access to teaching and learning materials (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). Consequently, the use and significance of online learning in our schools in the 21st century are slowly becoming undeniable, and the pandemic has sped its use. In this study, online learning refers to teaching and learning at home and requires learners to have certain resources they did not need before to acquire education.

1.9 Outline of the study

This study comprises five chapters. These are briefly described below.

Chapter 1: This chapter introduced the study. Here the researcher has discussed the background and problem statement, the critical research question, and the aim and objectives. This was then followed by the significance of the study and clarification of terms that are used repeatedly.

Chapter 2: This section presents the debates from the literature on the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in rural schools. Firstly, the researcher gave a brief overview of the historical background of the virus and a thorough discussion of learner wellbeing and its relationship with the disease. Secondly, the researcher discussed the amended South African policies due to COVID-19 and how this virus affected learners locally and globally. This was followed by a discussion of the factors influencing effective teaching and learning in rural areas during COVID-19. Lastly, the study discussed strategies to ensure learning and teaching continue in the context of COVID-19. A theoretical framework will conclude this chapter based on John Rawls's (1971) Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities.

Chapter 3: This chapter discusses the study's research paradigm, approach, and methodology to achieve the research objectives. It then discussed how the participants were selected and the data generation and analysis methods used. The researcher further explained how they deliberated on the concept of trustworthiness. Toward the end, ethical considerations are reviewed in more detail.

Chapter 4: This chapter presented the findings of the study. Generally, the findings discussed the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in rural contexts, the challenges they encountered during this pandemic, and the strategies that can be used to ensure teaching and learning are not disrupted in the context of COVID-19. In line with the aim of the study, the findings are presented according to themes that emerged from the data. Therefore, this chapter concluded with data

presented on the effects of COVID-19 and the wellbeing of learners in a rural high school in South Africa.

Chapter 5: This chapter summarized the study's findings, recommendations from the objectives and findings, limitations, and implications for further research.

1.10 Chapter summary

Chapter 1 dealt with the background and orientation of the study. The following aspects mentioned are a statement of the problem; aims and objectives of the study; the significance of the study; research question and sub-questions; ethical consideration; and research design that will be ensued. As indicated in the outline of the study, chapter 2 provides literature on the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in rural high schools and the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore and obtain insights into the effects of corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on learner well-being in a rural high school. The previous chapter discussed key fundamental concepts addressing this research study's topic. However, some important theories and concepts are deliberated on in this section too. These are the history and background of COVID-19, the relation of learner well-being to the pandemic, South African school policies that were amended to accommodate this pandemic, and the effects of this virus locally and globally on rural learners. This chapter also offers factors influencing teaching and learning in rural areas in the context of COVID-19; strategies that may be used to combat the lack of teaching and learning in rural areas during this pandemic to ensure all learners across the country are afforded the same treatment and provisions to learn in the context of COVID-19. Lastly, the theoretical framework underpinning this study and its relevancy to thereof.

2.2 Historical background of COVID-19

This section aims to shed light on the history and background of COVID-19. It also examines when this virus was discovered in South Africa and its impact.

Coronaviruses are viruses originating from a large and significant family of diseases varying from the common cold to harsher and more severe diseases such as Middle Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV) (WHO, 2019). The World Health Organization [WHO] (2020) maintains that this virus is a newly developed strain that had not been acknowledged in humans before late December 2019. This virus was declared an outbreak, which was unknown at the time, and had similar characteristics to the pneumonia disease that erupted in Wuhan, Hubei province in China. During the early days of the pandemic, it spread rapidly and killed and affected more people in the whole of China, quickly disseminating to 19 other countries in just a month (WHO, 2019). Due to its rapid spread and fatality, WHO (2020) later identified its contributing agent to this inexplicable pneumonia-like classified as coronavirus. This contributing agent has temporarily named a severe acute respiratory syndrome, coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), and its relevant and significant viruses named coronavirus disease 2019, leading

to a famously known term COVID-19 (WHO, 2020). According to the daily report by WHO (2020), this virus spread to 46 other countries within a month, thereby being declared a global health threat.

On the 5th of March 2020, the former minister of health Dr. Zweli Mkhize released a statement that the first positive case of COVID-19 had been identified. He confirmed that a 38-year-old male who returned from his trip to Italy on the 1st of March 2020 had tested positive. Therefore, on the 15th of March 2020, the President of South Africa declared the virus a national disaster. Some of the constraints were immediately enacted, together with the urgent closure of schools. These restrictions were implemented as a plan for mitigating the spread and impact of the virus. The National Corona virus Command Counsel was formed on the 17 of March 2020 by the president to be responsible for contemplating and putting in place plans on how to deal better and combat the newly detected virus in the country.

On the 23rd of March, the President of the country declared the first national lockdown, which was planned to start on the 27th of March for 21 days, where only the essential workers such as nurses, doctors, and pharmacists were allowed to work. The country recorded its first death due to the virus on the same day the lockdown was scheduled to commence. The schools and other businesses, excluding food retailers, closed for over two months. Thousands of people lost their jobs due to the restrictions put in place to defend and preserve the lives of South Africans (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). By the end of April 2020, more than 5000 people had tested positive, with over 100 people being killed by the virus. The number of people that tested positive in the country continued to rise rapidly, resulting in more deaths. South Africa was the number one country in the continent affected by this pandemic. As infections began to decline, the President continued reducing the restrictions from level 5 when it was first detected to lower levels. On the 17th of December 2020, the country was put back to level 3, and immediate closure of non-essential businesses was sanctioned due to the newly found strain of COVID-19 named Delta (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). On the 17 of February 2021, South Africa started its national vaccination course against COVID-19 (Department of Health, 2021). This programme was planned to be implemented in phases, prioritizing healthcare, frontline workers, and the elderly above 60 (Stats SA, 2021).

2.3 Learner well-being

Well-being is a multifaceted concept that consists of both internal and external contributors. It focuses on the relationships one has and their personal development (Graham, Powell, & Truscott, 2016). Learners' level of satisfaction and contentment with their lives, engagement with activities they regard as being positive and fulfilling, and a positive outlook on life with a lack of negativity are elements of well-being. There are several definitions of the concept, but they all hold the consensus that well-being involves positive feelings. According to Beaumont (2011), the underpinning discussion of well-being is embedded in the WHO's early definition that health "is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

Seligman (2011) stated that well-being originates from two historical traditions in Greek philosophy. These are *hedonia* and *eudaimonia*. On the one hand, hedonic well-being refers to the overall feeling of oneself (Seligman, 2011). Further, it is abstracted as a combination of an individual's overall satisfaction with their life, their experience of positive feelings, and the absence of negative feelings (Diener & Lucas, 1999). On the other hand, eudaimonia well-being is believed to be concerned with how individual functions. Ryff and Singer (1998) posited that eudemonic well-being could also be described as flourishing and self-actualisation; these are nurtured through the commitment to develop oneself, engage in meaningful activities, and maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Together, the two concepts of well-being characterise an individual's overall holistic well-being. Learner well-being in the context of education can therefore be understood as a holistic and complete state of being that is a combined product of these two different aspects (Rees & Dinisman, 2015). Different cultures across the world apprehend the construct of well-being of children in the same way. International organisations (OECD and United Nations) developed a programme for measuring learner well-being about their academics: Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA). This programme focuses on the sub-construct of learner well-being, which is cognitive, social, physical, and psychological well-being (OECD & United Nations, 2019).

Several theoretical frameworks are used to explore learner well-being in education. The Theory of Human Motivation (Maslow, 1943), which suggests that different stages characterise individual

growth, is a typical example. Each stage focuses on a certain well-being needed. Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs theorises that individuals require what he termed 'lower-order or deficiency' needs, which include being physically well, feeling safe, and being loved to be met first so that they may strive to fulfill their 'higher-order or growth' needs, which comprise achievements and self-actualisation. Noltemeyer et al. (2012) argued that Maslow's theory has important implications for education because research has associated a relationship between learners whose lower-order needs are successfully met and their ability to achieve academically. Further, they assert that since achievement is a higher-order need, learners' lower-order needs must be met first. This has proven useful for teachers because they can explain learner behaviour and educational outcomes.

Over a hundred countries implemented lock-down measures at least once during COVID-19. These actions resulted in transition from face-to-face courses to online learning (Kwok et al., 2020). The effects of COVID-19 on learner well-being became significant. For instance, learners experienced more workload or were forced to stay at home like everyone else due to the fear of the pandemic or the uncertainty of the future. Furthermore, the UNESCO (2020) indicated that the effects of COVID-19 on different learners' well-being varied depending on their situation. For instance, some students may not have access to sufficient connectivity, while others may not have the necessary equipment to attend online classes

Learners across South Africa and other African countries have been impacted negatively by their well-being by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly girls who assume a more significant burden of domestic chores in households when they are not attending school (UNESCO, 2021). Girls' preoccupation with domestic chores made them unable to attend to their schoolwork at home. Regrettably, this has resulted in many school dropouts in the history of education. There has been increased psycho-emotional duress and stress, sexual harassment, exploitation of children, and sexual-related violence from family members in COVID-19 (Kohls et al., 2020). These acts are common in marginalised and remote areas and communities such as rural areas because learners now spend excessive time at home.

2.4 Policy Framework: South African amended school policies during COVID-19

This section focuses on the South African school policies and the newly amended ones to accommodate the prerequisite of COVID-19.

Section 28 of the National Education Policy Act (1996) states that every child has the right to basic education and all the necessary means for effective education. Therefore, despite the rampage of the virus on the entire planet, the world must go on. Learners must continue to acquire an education; businesses must resume for the sake of the economies and ensure the human race's stability (WHO, 2022). The Department of Basic Education (2020) implemented various strategies to return learners to school. These strategies did not disregard the requirements for keeping the virus at bay. They put strategies in place to ensure that teaching and learning continue while adhering to the COVID-19 protocols. One of the strategies was the shift to online learning, where learners continued schooling in the safety of their homes. Secondly, after the spread of the virus lessened, learners had to go to school at alternating times, half today and the other half tomorrow. Some schools are alternating using different weeks for learners to attend. However, this alternating in attendance affected only public-school learners, those lacking resources at school to ensure that they can maintain social distancing. Other learners from privileged schools have been attending school normally on top of having all the resources required by the pandemic that afforded them opportunities to continue schooling without attending.

The Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga had to review the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement to accommodate the teaching time lost because of the national state of disaster and the adjustment of timetables, the curriculum, as detailed in the policy by section 3(4)(1) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act No.27 of 1996). The Act also empowers the Minister to determine national policy for curriculum frameworks, core syllabuses, and education programmes. The Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) were released through Circular S13 of 2021, which were designed and meant to support the recovery of learning and guarantee authentic learning (Department of Education, 2020). These recovery plans are utilised instead of the normal pace setter and remain the official teaching devices for all grades (R-12).

Other rules by the Department of Education (2020), by the regulations put by the government to safeguard all the stakeholders within the school from COVID-19, is that they should be easily

accessible, sufficient quantities of hand sanitizers, based on the number of learners, educators or officials or other persons who access the school, school hostel or office, at the entrance of, and in, the workplace or sleeping quarters, which the persons are required to use and facilities for washing of hands with soap and clean water. According to United Nations (2021), that is not always the case, due to rife corruption, especially in rural areas, because of a lack of monitoring from the Department and accountability by the management of schools. Additionally, classrooms are not cleaned regularly in rural areas due to a lack of resources and water shortages. Learners are not always monitored and supervised to ensure they do not misuse their little sanitizers.

Section (4) (a) of the newly amended policy of Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (2020) further states that

“A school must send out a notice to all parents informing them that they must not send learners to school if the learners have any of the observable symptoms associated with COVID-19, including fever, cough, sore throat, redness of eyes and shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, body aches, loss of smell or loss of taste, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue or weakness”.

As much as protecting others from contracting COVID-19 and self-isolating is vital, where would these learners acquire resources to continue schooling while adhering to rules and regulations for keeping safe from the virus? Section (4) (c) extends that “there must be facilities for washing hands with soap and water; all windows and doors must remain open to ensure adequate ventilation.” Social distancing was implemented in rural schools as in any other school. However, overcrowding is still a huge factor in these schools to such an extent that even alternating learners on different days do not make a difference (OECD, 2020). The classes are still full, and ventilation is sometimes difficult, so rural school learners remain vulnerable to COVID-19 compared to other learners in towns and cities.

2.5 Effects of COVID-19 on learners in South Africa and globally

COVID-19 was a disease not restricted to certain countries or continents, spreading and rampaging worldwide. Many people across the globe are affected by this pandemic, with a considerable percentage of the human population being infected by this virus, and the numbers kept rising while this virus developed into different and more harmful strains in other countries (WHO, 2021). Like many human spheres affected by this virus, education was no exception. There are a diverse number of effects of COVID-19 on learner well-being. Scholarly debates suggest grouping these factors into effects of COVID-19 on learners' academic performance and high dropout rates, psychological implications of the pandemic on learners' well-being and increased child abuse, and lastly, socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on learners. From the reviewed literature, the researcher presents and discusses the following debates.

2.5.1 Effects of COVID-19 on learners' education and high dropout rates

According to the United Nations (2020), education is one of the sectors severely affected by the pandemic. The report indicates that schools were temporarily closed in over 180 countries due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The report suggests that over 1.6 billion learners across the world were compelled to stay out of schools as social distancing was enforced and imposed locally and regionally around the world; in an attempt to curb the rapid spread of this disease. The pandemic required drastic measures to limit the spread of the virus (WHO, 2020). A study by Pandit (2020) revealed that only 13 percent of schools in Bhutan could provide online classes. In contrast, 35 percent of the country's schools do not have internet connectivity. He further argues that the lack of connectivity in other schools has led to shared inequalities in the population of Bhutan.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the closures of schools in Nepal affected the students' skills and knowledge development (Sievertsen & Burgess, 2020). According to Sievertsen and Burgess (2020), attending school is an excellent public policy tool that can help raise social awareness and improve a child's academic performance. They also add that it is essential to note that school time can be enjoyable and raise various social skills. In comparison, skipping school for a short period can harm a child's skills development. According to Bergman et al. (2020), the pandemic affected education institutions in Nigeria. Besides the lockdown of schools, other factors, such as the cancellation of international conferences and the reduction of the academic calendar, caused a

teaching and learning gap and decreased human resources. In their study impacts of COVID-19 on learner well-being Buckler et al. (2020) report that in countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, the drop-out rate increased significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They further state that the longer schools were closed, the higher the rate of dropouts. The longer learners suspend their learning programmes, and the harder it will be for them to re-learn and become more engaged (Krishnakumar & Rana, 2020), thus resulting in high school dropout rates.

Digital devices and internet access are now a requirement for efficient and effortless learning in online programmes (Hodges et al., 2020.). Unfortunately, Ranscombe (2020) posits that underprivileged learners and those in resource-constrained settings lack these important tools. He further states that learners with adequate infrastructure at home may also experience challenges with home learning because distance learning is not part of the learning culture yet, and it is not something that learners are prepared for nor equipped to deal with. According to studies, teachers play a vital role in students' success by providing the necessary support and resources to develop their learning (Hanushek, 1971; Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 2005; Chetty et al., 2014). However, with the new teaching method, most learners were supposed to be self-reliant and independent, again discriminating against learners with low-performing achievements (Andrew et al., 2020). According to Heckman and Cunha (2013), students with low initial achievement may not have the necessary skills to succeed in their studies. Low-performing students are more likely to spend less time participating in school-related activities if the returns on their independent learning are low. They might also substitute other, more rewarding activities (Heckman & Cunha, 2013).

South Africa and many other governments worldwide took measures to prohibit public gatherings, enact social distancing regulations, and close schools, which necessitated a shift to online teaching and learning (Dube, 2020). David, Pellini, Jordan, and Phillips (2020) argue that while the shift to online teaching and learning, as opposed to the traditional approach to education, was inevitable, many learners in rural areas now find themselves excluded from schooling. According to a study conducted by the World Bank (2021), around 33% of South Africa's population is considered rural. The government has difficulty providing adequate service delivery, including education provisions in these settings (World Bank, 2021). Since the pandemic necessitated that learners and teachers have digital devices for teaching and learning, this newly implemented teaching strategy did not favor those from underprivileged and destitute families (Mahboob, 2020). Disadvantaged and

underprivileged learners who, in most cases, are from rural settings cannot access online resources due to the lack of infrastructure, the unavailability of electricity and electronic gadgets, and the lack of qualified teachers who can assist with this method of teaching and learning (Dube, 2020). Online learning favours urban and privileged learners, thus widening the gap between the poor and the rich instead of uniting the nation in the fight against COVID-19 (David, Pellini, Jordan & Phillips, 2020).

The statistics gathered by UNESCO (2020), South Africa, had the fourth largest number of learners affected by COVID-19 in Africa. Due to the first countrywide lockdown implemented in South Africa at midnight on Thursday, 26 March 2020, over 14 million learners were temporarily out of school; that act triggered the highest dropping out of school ever recorded (UNESCO, 2020). In South Africa, many schools are still not ready to fully embrace new technology, which will allow them to deliver more effective online learning programs. Even though some have already been equipped with equipment, they can still not thoroughly teach their students how to use it.

Most schooling depends heavily on face-to-face teaching, with some blended learning in more advanced schools (Kiamanesh, 2019). Their study postulates that learners are used to being in school to interact socially and physically and meet with friends (Ress & Dinisman, 2015; Bjorklund & Salvanes, 2011). This contributes to the holistic educational growth of the learner. Waghid (2018) maintains that face-to-face learning provides real-time contact with resources and quick and early feedback to learners, which most rural pupils rely on as some do not have the privilege of opening their books at home due to lots of responsibility. Face-to-face learning is irreplaceable and the cornerstone of every learning institution, even if the current discourse and technological revolution demand e-learning (Kiamanesh, 2019). Mgqwashu (2017) argued that learners have always depended on face-to-face learning since the beginning of education, including the time of colonisation leading to an era of decolonisation. Face-to-face learning is traditional and demarcates learners' status and affordability because it is teacher-centered and utilizes traditional resources like textbooks, chats, chalkboards, and others (Jansen, 2011). According to a study by Leavy (2017), face-to-face learning time significantly improves students' achievement. The data he collected through the study from various countries revealed that prolonged school closures could significantly impact the students' test and assessment scores as most return to school demotivated.

2.5.2 Psychological implications of the pandemic on learners' well-being

The research conducted by Ncube and Motalenyane (2020) suggests that learners are among the people most affected psychologically by the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its prerequisites and restrictions set by different governments to co-exist with the virus. The rapid emergence and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the introduction of social distancing and staying-at-home orders to reduce the spread of the virus. This strategy could have detrimental effects on learners' mental health. Due to the national lockdown implemented by different states, many children's activities were temporarily suspended. This could negatively affect their psychosocial development and confidence due to changing their routines (Hau Yan Ho, 2020). In the qualitative study by Ranscombe (2020), learners feel as if they were forced to shift to home learning without adequate facilities and infrastructure. The lack of resources in their homes resulted in psychological discomfort, unnecessary pressure, and anxiety.

A study conducted in China and a similar one in Zimbabwe revealed that anxiety and depression among adolescent learners increased during the pandemic (Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020; Hawke et al., 2020). It also found that suicidal ideation and plans increased significantly between pre and post-COVID-19. Other studies in the United Kingdom revealed that implementing social distancing affected adolescents' positive well-being (Serafini et al., 2020). The prevalence of loneliness among young adults during the pandemic was higher than before stay-at-home orders were implemented (UNESCO, 2020). According to Ho, Borschel, and Chui (2017), social development can occur mainly within the family, but as children age, their peer group becomes more critical. This suggests that social distancing and lockdown measures could have a significant impact on the development of children. Research conducted by Van Lancker and Parolin (2020) on the effects of COVID-19 on education in South America during the pandemic revealed that learners were not coping with the changes brought about by the outbreak, such as school closures and the implementation of quarantines at home. Some issues that intensify anxiety among learners include food insecurity and the lack of literacy skills and internet access (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Studies show that children and youth might experience increased anxiety and stress due to the effects of the outbreak (Orgiles et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2019).

The study conducted by Hawke et al. (2020) explored the mental health of young people with and without physical health problems during the early stages of contagious respiratory illness. They found that those with pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes, asthma, and high blood pressure were more prone to experiencing mental health issues than those without such problems. The study results revealed that those more likely to experience common cold symptoms were more prone to experiencing mental health issues. These included anxiety and depression, substance use, and behavioral and attention concerns. Another study by Craig et al. (2020) investigated the prevalence of mental health issues in Canadian youth. They found that females were more likely to have these issues than men. The prevalence of COVID-19 in vulnerable populations, such as individuals with lower socioeconomic status and racial and ethnic minority groups, is often associated with mental health issues and stress (UNESCO, 2020). This is brought by the state and condition the pandemic has put everyone in and without proper plans and strategies to live indoors without employment, resulting in increased risks of mental health issues to morbidity than mortality. They were leaving a massive number of children orphaned and abandoned. The study conducted by American Academy Pediatrics (2020), posits that getting active helps improve one's health and prevents various chronic diseases. During the 42-day lockdown, people were allowed to exercise outside for an hour a day. Those who exercised with one additional person had to maintain a distance of 1.5 meters between them. Individuals who wanted to exercise had to bring their passports, identity cards, or confirmation SMS to prove their intent to be outside (UNESCO, 2020). The results of the study revealed that students did not avail of the opportunity to engage in daily physical activity, which negatively affected their mental health. The outbreak of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the psychological well-being of young people. More research is needed to understand how this pandemic affected learners' mental health.

2.5.3 Socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on learners and increased child abuse

COVID-19 is the first global health crisis to have impacted people's livelihoods worldwide in a long while. Many countries ceased human movements to halt it from dispersing further (United Nations, 2021). Globally, many countries have implemented a wide range of strategies to halt its impacts and control the economic fallout incurred as a result. Rural areas in developing countries face difficulties developing and implementing effective responses because they have underdeveloped health infrastructure, uneven state capacity for infection control, and poverty

(Hall, 2019; Phillipson et al., 2020). In a qualitative study on education during COVID-19, Alipio (2020) highlights that most countries' economic crises have worsened, and many people have lost their jobs. This means they may be unable to send their children to school. Second, many students in this setting may also need to work to support their families. According to a study by Tiruneh (2020), the drop-out rate in rural areas is likely to rise. This is because parents there may be unable to afford to send their children to school. Additionally, learners may also prefer to support livestock herding and farming instead.

Moreover, COVID-19 has been linked to reduced social mobility and free school meals for low-income families (United Nations, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Economic hardship brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has increased food insecurity (Rosenbaum, 2021). In his research conducted in United States, Rosenbaum (2020) indicates that food insecurity is still an issue among low-income households, 45% of those not experiencing a job loss reported food insecurity during the first months of the pandemic. Workers in these households may have lost hours or income even if they continued to be employed or may struggle to purchase foods as school meals become less available. Which only indicate that, those households were workers have been laid off or were unemployed their situation has worsened due to the unavailability of food from school offered to their children. He suggested that meals that would otherwise have been provided in schools, could be more effective at reducing food insecurity among households with children. According to Smith (2017) shifting the responsibility of feeding children from school to parents may lead to negative health outcomes because school meals have been shown to improve the diets of children from homes with poor food environments.

In their study Food Insecurity during COVID-19 pandemic Fang, Thomsen, Nayga & Yang (2022) argue that the pandemic significantly increased food insecurity despite emergency legislation that put more resources into food assistance programs, increased unemployment benefits, and provided stimulus payments. The survey they conducted in Canada on food insecurity among low-income Americans during the early months of the pandemic indicate that those who lost jobs due to the pandemic reported the highest level of food insecurity. Their data highlight the importance of school meal programs during normal times. Those learners who took advantage of school meals before the outbreak are more likely to have experienced food insecurity during the pandemic-related school closures. This has also affected the childcare costs of families with young children

(Kobia & Gitaka, 2020). There is a wide disparity between the populations with higher income and those with low income, as well as those who can use technology to ensure that their education continues digitally (Muzungu, 2020). In Dubai, over 13,900 individuals have signed a petition calling for reducing independent school fees by 30% due to the high cost of living and the recent pay cuts (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). Implementing social distancing and lockdown measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has raised concerns about increased child abuse (Kawuki, Sserwanja, & Kim, 2021). One of the UK's leading domestic abuse charities, Refuge, reported a 25% increase in calls following the lockdown (Romanou & Belton, 2020). The research by Sserwanja et al. (2020) in Uganda report that before the outbreak of COVID-19, the hotline received around a hundred calls a day, reporting various forms of violence against children. Following the lockdown measures implemented on April 10, 2020, the number of calls received by the helpline increased by over 13 times. Save the Children's recent report indicated a 60% increase in sexual violence against children since the lockdown (Sserwanja et al., 2020).

2.6 Factors influencing effective teaching and learning in rural areas in the context of COVID-19

Many factors affect effective teaching and learning in rural areas during COVID-19. However, the literature the researcher reviewed emphasises that these three factors take precedence. These factors are lack of resources, teachers' lack of technical skills, and lack of support from other stakeholders, which are discussed in detail below.

2.6.1 Lack of resources

Countries worldwide, including the South African government, promoted online learning as an alternative to COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2020). However, due to a lack of resources, this mode excludes disadvantaged and rural learners from teaching and learning (United Nations, 2020). According to the World Bank (2020), the move to large-scale online learning typically benefits learners already advantaged in various ways, for example, rich over poor, urban over rural, high-performing over low-performing, and learners in highly educated families over their counterparts from less well-educated families.

The COVID-19 pandemic came with many constraints and prerequisites, requiring people to change their normal way of living (UNICEF, 2020). The common and natural way of teaching and

learning needed to be adjusted and altered to meet its requirements. According to the research conducted in Uganda by Sserwanja, Kawuki, and Kim (2020), due to the large number of populations falling under a low economic status margin, numerous learners have been left behind educationally since the inception of the online learning method. In their exploratory study, Buck et al. (2020) argue that in the context of COVID-19, learners were abruptly and unexpectedly required to have ICT gadgets at their disposal, disregarding the socioeconomic status of others. The move to online learning was sudden and unexpected, resulting in gaps within the education system of disadvantaged schools (Buck et al., 2020).

Adopting online learning was undeniably the most appropriate and undisputable strategy in the fight against the pandemic. However, this method favours fortunate and privileged communities widening the gap between the poor and rich (Dube, 2020; David, Pellini, Jordan, & Phillips, 2020). The World Bank (2020) also noted that students already equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to use technology would be more successful in their online learning. Aside from having the essential equipment and resources to support their learning and a good internet connection, they also have support from their families. However, despite the noble nature of the COVID-19 arrangement, it is still clear that it excludes many students from disadvantaged communities (World Bank, 2020).

Many schools in rural communities barely have enough resources, for instance, not enough textbooks for learners, which they usually share (Rahman, 2020). Suddenly, they must have ICT gadgets to continue schooling, whereas these settings are synonymous with high unemployment rates and abject poverty. According to Dube (2020), learners in rural areas face unprecedented challenges every day, from living in overcrowded families and lack of electricity to lack of data due to their parents' unemployment status to afford access to the internet for school purposes. Online learning appeared to be one of the best ways of learning during COVID-19; however, many parents lost their jobs due to the lockdown, which rendered them incapable of providing the resources needed to partake on online platforms.

2.6.2 Teachers' lack of technical skills

Teachers form a critical element of learners' education and are part of school stakeholders (Meier & Lemmer, 2015). Due to the virus outbreak, they were suddenly plundered by the conditions of

COVID-19, as a new requirement for being an educator was abruptly added (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2020). Before the eruption of the pandemic, many teachers had everything at their disposal to ensure quality learning and teaching of learners (Beaumont, 2011). The sudden shift from face-to-face to online learning forced teachers to use technology (World Bank, 2020). Many had to acquire the required technology quickly to respond to online learning needs (David, Pellini, Jordan & Phillips, 2020). In their qualitative study, David, Pellini, Jordan, and Phillips (2020) identified that many senior teachers struggled more with using technology than their younger teachers. In addition, they maintain that most rural schools have many elderly teachers, and most are not technologically savvy as opposed to their younger counterparts.

2.6.3 Lack of support from other stakeholders

The role of every person within the education system is of utmost importance for the effortless, efficient training and grooming of learners (Duma, 2014). COVID-19 brought a plethora of challenges to the education system, especially for those schools in rural settlements (UNESCO, 2020). However, due to the lack of good relations between schools and parents in rural communities, it became difficult to strategies effective resolutions to assist learners outside school (Dieltiens, 2014). In South Africa, SASA 84 of 1996 lawfully and officially positioned parents for governing the schools for transparency and participation in school governance. The structure of the SGB is composed in a way that parents would form the majority of the members. Sserwanja, Kawuki, and Kim's (2020) study in the rural outskirts of Uganda on the collaboration of parents with schools in the fight against the pandemic found that schools do have SCB committees, but they are not active. Secondly, most parents believe that the education of their learners rests solely on the teacher and their involvement is unnecessary. And that other principals' schools deliberately do not involve parents in governing schools. If there is a lack of collaboration among the stakeholders in the school, the people that suffer the most are the learners.

2.7 Strategies to ensure that learning and teaching continue in the context of COVID-19

The pandemic had and still bears detrimental consequences on the socioeconomic status of people worldwide and their health (WHO, 2022). The literature not only highlights the problem brought on by the pandemic but also presents possible solutions to mitigate the impacts of the virus on

education. Thus, in this section, the researcher discusses possible strategies that could be employed in COVID-19.

2.7.1 Training teachers to run online classes

According to World Bank (2020) study, the Department of Basic Education should stop assuming that all teachers can successfully implement online learning. It should instead conduct workshops to help teachers learn how to use online learning effectively. According to Dube (2020), employing teachers that are well-trained technologically is important. For those with no training on how to utilise ICT gadgets in their classes, programmes training and short courses should be offered to such educators because it is evident that the use of technology in schools is inevitable (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). The research study conducted by Quyen and Khairani (2020) suggests that teachers should be empowered in ways that are not threatening as the education system always transforms and evolve. Requiring teachers to progress and develop their knowledge to meet the conditions of the ever-evolving education. Moreover, in their qualitative study opportunities and constraints, David, Pellini, Jordan, and Phillips (2020) contend that education system managers should know their teachers' abilities and set expectations accordingly.

2.7.2 Equipping public schools with technological resources

It is clear and evident that virtual learning is undeniable (UNESCO, 2020). The world has been preparing for when schools will mostly occur online, just like most universities have initiated (UNICEF, 2018; OECD, 2020). It was just a matter of time, as it is what the forth-industrial revolution (4IR) was all about (Quyen & Khairani, 2017). The eruption of COVID-19 sped the use of virtual learning even though most developing countries, including South Africa, were not yet prepared for this mode of teaching and learning for schools (Krishnakumar & Rana, 2020). Du Plessis and Mestry (2020) suggest that the government should ensure that every school has working computer laboratories that can accommodate most of the learners within the school premises as it is known that most public schools have a high roll of learners. Ensuring that these laboratories have all the necessary equipment the learners will need to learn virtually and equipping them with technical skills after they finish their matric. In their study David, Pellini, Jordan, and Phillips (2020) claim that it would be quite challenging to furnish all learners with digital devices in rural areas. But if the department ensures that every school has the most necessary equipment

that teachers could employ with the traditional methods, it would be helpful as it would give learners an idea of using technology.

2.7.3 Engaging with parents

The importance of families in education is acknowledged by many people, as they play a vital role in the development of their children (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). It is also believed that parents, regardless of their educational level and economic background, can play a significant role in their children's education (Basol & Zabun, 2014; Dawadi, 2019b; He et al., 2014). Several studies have shown that parental involvement in their children's education is one of the most important factors that can help improve their academic performance (Lemon, 2020). According to a study by Goodall and Vorhaus (2011), the more engaged parents are in their children's education, the more likely they are to succeed in the school system. A positive correlation has been established between children's academic performance and parents' school involvement (Richards, 2003; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013). They all agree that the more engaged parents are in their children's education, the more likely they are to succeed in the school system. According to Sabates (2020), one of the possible strategies that can help compensate for the loss of learning that learners might experience due to the pandemic is maintaining a high level of collaboration with parents. He states that to compensate for the loss of learning that learners might experience due to the pandemic, schools might need to implement various parental engagement strategies. For instance, they can hold workshops to inform parents about their curriculum, teaching methods, and homework assignments and encourage them to volunteer in school activities.

2.7.4 Using trained facilitators and peer support

According to the literature, one of the most effective ways to support students' learning is through peer and trained facilitators. This is very important for schools and local governments as they can work together with the communities (Sabates, 2020). According to Sabates (2020), some volunteers can help support learning. In addition to trained facilitators, schools can also ask knowledgeable people about the learners' language and culture to help them with their studies (Hall, 2019). These individuals can guide helping the children. Out-of-school children can also benefit from the training of local facilitators (UNESCO, 2020).

2.8 Theoretical framework

This section looks at the theory underpinning this study, the Classical Liberal theory of Equal Opportunities. The researcher discusses the historical background, the assumptions and objectives of this theory, and its relevancy to this study.

According to Lassa and Enoh (2000:2), a theoretical framework is an “evidence that has been put together to give a guideline and parameters for particular views, explanations, and understanding of any phenomenon”. A theoretical framework directs the whole research activity, from an idea to the finale. They further posited that the theoretical framework limits the scale of the research, postulating an explanation of information gathered or meanings that emerge from the collected data and themes; and understandably put pieces.

2.8.1 Historical background of the theory

Classical liberalism is a theory that predominantly focuses on the belief in freedom, equality, democracy, and human rights (Smith, 2016). The early ancestors are traced back to the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, who advocated for restraint in leadership in his era. Another liberal thinker that encouraged economic freedom and political tolerance during the 6th century was Indian Emperor Ashoka, but these are distant precursors of modern classical liberalism. According to Hannan (1971), the more direct line is Anglo-Saxon England. This island stood steadfast against the invaders and enjoyed stability, resulting in a proper tenure and justice system. Without the European style of outdated and medieval authority, what ensued in this association was the *common law* which was “the law of the land that evolved through the interactions of individuals, rather than the law of princes laid down by the powerful” (Hannan, 1971: 201).

But that alliance suddenly ended in the 1066s with the Norman invasion and military occupation. England was now ruled by the European elite, whose authoritarian way separated them from the English population by inflicting feudalism, social division, vassalage, and straight-up law-making, which was the complete opposite of the limited government the Anglo-Saxons had grown to know. After a few generations, between 1166 and 1216, the Norman landowners progressively acknowledged and identified with the locals, starting to classify with the law of liberalism altogether (Smith, 2016).

Classical liberalism is one of the theories that traces its origins back to the beginning of civilisation. Many philosophers stood by their principles by encouraging individual freedom, equality, and rights to this date (Simon, 2016). But one influential thinker and philosopher regarded as the father of classical liberalism is John Locke (1632-1703). John Locke is a theorist responsible for drawing together the older characteristics of classical liberalism to what we recognize today as the modern body of classical liberal thinking. His reason for this endeavor was to show how James II lost his throne by disrespecting the contract he held and made with the people. He maintained that all power and authority come from the people, who must submit freely to that rule to boost their security and develop general freedom, and when that contract made is broken, individuals have every right to revolt against the supreme (Blazejewski et al., 2018; Renwick et al., 2013).

According to Butler (2015:77), the 1776 Declaration of Independence of the United States of America founded the promising and increasing republic on liberal principles without the impediment of hereditary and traditional aristocracy. It stated that “all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among this life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. Though like any theory, classical liberalism faced many criticisms and was challenged throughout the years; there were still those liberals that advocated for personal freedom, civil rights, and limited government in the eras of cultural and religious revolutions, to a political revolution in 1614-1657, to the civil wars in the era on the monarch which Charles 1 was the reigning King and to glorious revolution under the dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell in years between 1649 to 1660.

The eighteen century gave rise to other influential classical liberalism philosophers who once again revived its principles and belief. That era was known as the *enlightenment*. In France, Montesquieu (1689- 1755) established ideas that resonate with classical liberalism principles, asserting that in a free society and economy, individuals can conduct and supervise themselves in ways that maintain peaceful collaboration without help from the government. He, therefore, suggested that there should be a system of checks and balances on government power (Simon, 2005).

In the 19th century, liberal governments were established in nations across Europe, South America, and North America in this period, in which the dominant ideological opponent of classical liberalism was conservatism. Still, it survived those challenges from new opponents, such as

fascism and communism (Kirton & Greene, 2015). The liberal government frequently took the economic belief supported by Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and others, which generally emphasized the importance of free markets and laissez-faire governance, with less interference in trade. Smith (2016) states that during the 19th and early 20th centuries in the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East, liberalism motivated eras of reform such as the Tanzimat and Nahda, and that gave upsurge in secularism, constitutionalism, and nationalism. He further claims that these changes and other factors helped intensify the crisis within Islam, which is still alive today, leading to Islamic revivalism. Later waves of modern liberal thought and struggle were strongly influenced by the need to expand civil rights. Liberals have advocated for gender, marriage, and racial equality, and a global social movement for civil rights achieved several objectives toward those goals.

But this study is specifically underpinned by John Rawls' (1971) Classical liberalism of Equal Opportunities, which advocates the same principles of Liberalism but emphasizes equal opportunities to be provided to the entire society. The liberal approach to equal opportunities originated from the political principles of classical liberalism and ideals and constructed all its views around the individual's rights (Jewson & Mason, 1986). This model emphasized the philosophy of sameness that every person must be given access to and be assessed in the workplace as an individual, irrespective of that person's social category. The ideals of the liberalist perspective argue that equal opportunity occurs when all individuals are empowered and aided freely and equally to compete for social rewards (Rawls, 1971). Policymakers must guarantee that the competition rules are unbiased and fairly enforced.

2.8.2 Assumptions and objectives of the theory

This perspective assumes that if collective barriers may be removed, for instance, the challenges faced by the rural school learners of lack of resources in their school, then individual talent will allow the best person to succeed, regardless of their social category, to be the most successful and

thereby enabling all individuals to make the best of themselves (Jewson & Mason, 1992). Butler (2015) lays down ten principles based on this theory. Each principle is explained below.

2.8.2.1 Presumption of freedom

Classical liberals have a presumption in favour of individual freedom or liberty. This principle supposes that they want to extend the freedom of individuals in our political, social, and economic life. Butler (2015) states that liberalists argue psychologically that people always prefer being free to be coerced when given a choice. He further asserts that many liberals suggest that freedom is essential for progress. And other liberals that look at freedom from a humanist perspective argue that freedom is an essential part of what it means to be human: someone controlled by others is not a whole person but a mere cipher. And lastly, utilitarian classical liberals merit freedom as the paramount way to augment and enlarge the welfare of society.

2.8.2.2 Importance of the individual

From a classical point of view, an individual is an important commodity than the collective. They would not sacrifice an individual's freedom for collective benefit without a good justification. They have several different reasons for this.

2.8.2.3 Minimising coercion

Classical liberals want to minimise coercion. They desire a world in which all persons get along peacefully, not where others impose their will, exploit, or threaten the livelihood of others. They reckon that the use of force is a move that would be employed by government and judicial authorities. Nevertheless, they seek to minimise that issue because they believe it to be an abuse of power.

2.8.2.4 Toleration

Classical liberals believe that one can only interfere with another's freedom if that person threatens the lives of others.

2.8.2.5 Limited and representative government

Classical liberals do not take away the fact that some force may be needed to prevent people from harming others and concur that authorities may be needed in these instances. However, they recognise that this power cannot be handled by a detached person but by an actual human being who fails like any other person. They exert that power can corrupt, and those politicians tend to announce that they work for the public's interest when they look out for their interests.

2.8.2.6 The rule of law

According to the principles of liberalist, another critical factor that ensures restraint of power and creates greater security for the public is the rule of law. This presupposes that we should be governed by known laws, not the random decisions of government officials.

2.8.2.7 Spontaneous order

Classical liberals do not believe a big society needs the government to run it. They contend that government is not the basis of social order. They state that the complex social institutions around us are not planned; they are merely the result of human action, not human design.

2.8.2.8 Property, trade, and market

According to classical liberalism, wealth is not made by governments but by individuals' cooperation in the marketplace's free order. Prosperity is the invention of freely working individuals who create, save, and, ultimately, exchange goods and services for mutual gain – the spontaneous order of the free-market economy.

2.8.2.9 Civil society

Liberalist also believe that voluntary associations are better at providing individuals' needs than that authorities. They stand for individualism but also recognise that people do not live in isolation and as self-centered beings. But instead, they are social animals and live in families, groups, and communities that partly shape their way of life and all the other institutions that we call civil society.

2.8.2.10 Common human values

Liberalists require to make use of human kindness for mutual benefit. They advocate and support principles of life, liberty, and property under the law. They believe those principles are the basis of a thriving, free social order based on mutual respect, toleration, non-aggression, cooperation, and voluntary exchange between free people.

2.8.3 Relevancy to the study

According to the Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities, every learner is born possessing certain abilities, which can be generic and inherited and therefore cannot be effectively altered (Sherman & Wood, 1982). Thus, the structure of education systems should be designed and organised in a manner that opposes and challenges the existence of any form of socioeconomic status of a learner, which prevents clever and creative learners from poor backgrounds from taking full advantage of their potential, which will advance them to social promotion.

The Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities implies that social movements would be encouraged and promoted if there were equal opportunities in educational structures (Smith, 2016). According to this theory, the whole system of education and its structures must be arranged with an understanding to eradicate barriers and hindrances of any form. For instance, the socio-cultural, socioeconomic, and organisational dynamics and any other challenges that constrain and restrict learners from expanding their innate abilities must be mitigated. Further, education provided to learners with poor backgrounds would quicken them to social promotion as education is one of the greatest equalisers within society, elevating the poor to the standard of the privileged (Butler, 2015). The outbreak of COVID-19, resulted in sudden prolonged school closures creating many challenges for poor and marginalised learners, and in most instances, these are learners in rural areas (Dube, 2020). While learners from middle-class economic statuses can afford the requirements for online learning necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the parents of poor learners struggle to make ends meet (UNESCO, 2020). For example, on the one hand, they battle to bring food to the table, and on the other hand, they must stress about the gadget their children must have to continue schooling. That gravely affects the complete well-being of learners negatively (Kohl et al., 2020). This can be mitigated by ensuring equality among learners, despite their social status. This can be achieved by guaranteeing that learners from low-economic status

are provided by the Department of Education or other relevant stakeholders with the necessary resources to bridge the gap when they are not attending school to keep up with schoolwork at home.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the history of COVID-19, which is the subject matter of this report, how it started, and its impact. Definitions of wellbeing and learner wellbeing were discussed thoroughly, setting clear and distinct illumination on the kind of wellbeing this study focuses on. The South African educational policies amended to occupy the conditions set by the pandemic are also considered. Followed by the effect of this epidemic on South African learners and those worldwide, drawing on other research similar to this one to build literature. Then the factors affecting effective teaching and learning in the context of COVID-19 were also discussed. As well as the strategies that could be employed to ease teaching and learning during COVID-19 and the theoretical framework underpinning this study, including its history, principles, and relevancy to this report. The next chapter will present the design and methodology for this research study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter deliberated on the literature on the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in a rural context and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The reader can understand the entire study process through the research design and methodology. This chapter discusses the research approach, the research design, the research site, and the methodology employed by the study. It then discusses the participants, how participants were selected and how data were generated and analysed. Furthermore, this study explains how the concept of trustworthiness was considered as guided by Guba, Lynham, and Lincoln (2011). The ethical considerations incorporated in this study and its limitations will be concluded with in this chapter.

3.2 Research approach

A research approach is a process that describes the steps involved in carrying out a study (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), it is a procedure that involves developing a set of plans and procedures that are designed to guide the study.

3.2.1 Qualitative approach

Qualitative research approaches do not use numbers or involve mathematical calculations (Slevitch, 2011). Their methods relate to words, sounds, emotions, colour, and other non-quantifiable elements (Mkandawire, 2019). This study adopted a qualitative approach. This approach is used to understand participant's reasons, opinions, and motivations. Its advantage is that it provides insights into the phenomenon of interest and helps develop ideas about it (Slevitch, 2011). This research approach is relevant for this study because the study's main objective was to inquire about participants' opinions, experiences, and insights about the phenomenon of interest (COVID-19).

Through a qualitative approach, individuals can better understand a social phenomenon (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2009). Employing this approach, the researcher becomes the constituent of the researched world (Cohen et al., 2007). In this study, the researcher became immersed in the study as she tried

to understand the social situation of the participants. They provided various responses on COVID-19 and learner wellbeing according to their perspective. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2017) argued that the evidence generated in qualitative research is not always objective. The participants' information is subjective because their interpretations of the phenomenon influence it. The data also has an inter-subjective dimension (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). The researcher interviewed participants to establish a more objective view of the phenomenon. Through the interviews, the researcher showed that the participants' interpretations of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing could sometimes be contradictory because of their mixed realities.

Lincoln and Denzin (2005) state that qualitative research is about data representation. In this study, the participants described the data in thick descriptions. This is in line with the philosophy of the qualitative approach, which is that studies are conducted as they unfold. Humans are the research instruments in these types of studies (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). The study aimed to gather detailed information about the effects of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of rural high school learners. According to Babbie and Mouton (2007), qualitative research participants are knowledgeable about their surroundings and can come up with their explanations of a situation. The study focused on the teachers and learners who were most affected educationally by the pandemic outbreak. They were also the individuals who could provide the most meaningful perspectives on the issue. Guest, Bunce & Johnson (2012) defined the data collected from qualitative research participants as insider accounts, which are experiences shared by individuals directly affected by the pandemic. These individuals were able to provide their perspectives on the situation.

3.3 Research paradigm

A paradigm is a worldview that presents a definition of the social world linked to the related sources of information and appropriate ways to tap these sources (Ulin, Robinson & Tolley, 2004). This study used interpretivism as a paradigm.

3.3.1 Interpretivism paradigm

According to Burke and Christensen (2015), the interpretive approach is a paradigm that opposes the positivist paradigm. It is a reaction against the domination of positivism. This paradigm describes a phenomenon of interest in detail through understanding others (McMillan &

Schumacher, 2010). This paradigm helped researchers understand the subjective world of people's experiences (Manion, Morrison, and Cohen, 2017). In this study, the learners and teachers at the selected school provided a personal account of their experiences as to what they thought were the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing. Interpretivists highlighted that researchers are more likely to rely on the participants' views when assessing their research's effects (Yin, 2009). In this study, the researcher relied on the views of teachers and learners with whom she worked, as they provided their experiences and different circumstances with the phenomenon of interest. According to Cohen et al. (2017), the interpretive paradigm is grounded on an individual's interest. The researcher used in-depth interviews to make every attempt possible to discover from each learner and teacher the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing at a school in a rural context. As the researcher interviewed the learners and teachers, new knowledge about the effects and challenges they encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies that could be employed to assist in such cases emerged as they created their explanations and descriptions attached their meanings to their representations. Hammersley (2013, p. 26) noted that interpretivists can make their findings more valid by utilizing qualitative methods. This method can help them clarify certain concepts they may have missed out on, and it allows them to look for hidden facts.

3.4 Research design

Research design is described as the procedures for conducting research, including when to conduct it, from whom, and under what conditions the data will be obtained (McMillan & Schumacher, 2012). According to Leavy (2017), the research design is a plan to answer your research question. A qualitative study focuses on the why and how questions of the phenomenon being studied. As thoroughly specified earlier, this study is qualitative; qualitative studies may use case studies, ethnographic case studies, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry as the research design (Thomas, 2011). Phenomenology which falls under a case study is one of the designs of a qualitative study (Cohen et al., 2007) and was therefore chosen and used in this study. The researcher opted for this design because one of the advantages of using design is mainly due to the fact that phenomenology is a study that aims to understand a certain phenomenon in detail and reach the essence of the experience that the participants had with it. This concept is based on the idea that every experience has both a material and an ideal component (McMillan & Schumacher, 2012).

3.4.1 Phenomenological design

According to Giorgio and Giorgio (2003), the researcher's aim in using phenomenology as a design is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework but remaining true to the facts. Creswell (2013) maintains that phenomenologists should only be concerned about understanding social and psychological phenomena from the assessment and view of the people involved. The focus of the researcher applying phenomenology is pre-occupation with the lived experiences of the people involved or those who were previously involved with the issue under study. It is a descriptive scientific method because its point of departure consists of concrete descriptions of experienced events from the participants' perspectives of everyday life (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher describes the structure of the phenomenon as closely as possible to how the participants illustrate and depict it (Howell, 2013). This method is based fundamentally on "seeking realities not pursuing truth in the form of manifestation of phenomena as it is in the form of life world made on interconnected, lived experiences subjectively (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Phenomenology is about the perspectives of the participants and the multiple realities of a lived experience; this process is carried out through interviews designed to provide the researchers with a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher conducted extended telephonic dialogical interviews (WhatsApp social media) with the learners and teachers to understand their perspectives and views about the effects of COVID-19 on their wellbeing. A phenomenological approach is relevant in this study because it explores the lived experience of learners, how they were affected, the challenges they encountered due to the virus, and the strategies they think would aid them if implemented. In phenomenology, the researcher disregards all the prejudgments and then collects data on how the participants experienced a particular issue (McMillan & Schumacher, 2012). To improve the quality of the research, the researchers often hold presuppositions and assumptions in suspension, which is a process called bracketing (Creswell, 2013). This process allows them to explore their biases and prejudices without interfering with the participants' information.

As a teacher in rural areas, the researcher identified her preconceived ideas about the effects of COVID-19 on learners' wellbeing and suspended any knowledge she might have to prevent this

information from interfering with the recovery of a pure description of the phenomenon. The researcher aimed to gather from the learners in rural contexts the impact the pandemic had on their entire wellbeing from their perspectives as truthfully as possible without any judgments and generate data from participants exclusively. McMillan and Schumacher (2012) state that phenomenology aims to change a lived experience into a description or an explanation. The teachers described and explained in detail their understanding of COVID-19 on learners' wellbeing and the challenges they believe learners faced and devised strategies to aid them. Van Manen (2009) posits that a phenomenological study must not have more than 10 participants. Hence the researcher interviewed 8 participants, and their responses were used for data generation for this study. According to Guba, Lynham, and Lincoln (2011), phenomenological studies should be carried out in the context of their natural settings because of their true-to-life characteristics. To avoid disrupting their study time and inconveniencing them, the participants, comprised of learners and teachers, were interviewed on WhatsApp at times that suited them. These sessions were conducted to ensure they could talk freely and without intimidation. As argued above, qualitative phenomenological studies are characterised by multiple truths and realities and the social construction of knowledge around the phenomenon. The accuracy of the final report is one of the most critical elements of a qualitative study, as it shows the participants' perceptions of reality and truth (McMillan & Schumacher, 2012).

3.5 Research site

This study was conducted at a high school in Kestell, a rural area of Maluti, a Phofung District, in the Free State province, South Africa. This involved high school falls under quintile 1. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), site selection depends mainly on the research design and research problem. The school's location was determined by the rural settings wrecked by poverty and a high rate of lack of service delivery. The school management team (SMT) comprises one principal, two deputy principals, and four heads of department (HODs). The active teaching educators are twenty-nine in total with 984 roll of learners. The administration has two staff members, four cleaning crew members, and seven women in charge of cooking for the learners. The school is a secondary school, starting from grades 7 to 12. The school infrastructure is fairly old, but the premises of the school are clean. The classes are well kept despite the large number of learners they accommodate. However, some of the furniture is damaged, including a few windows.

The school has no computer laboratory, but the library is available, although it is not furnished and functioning.

3.5.1 Procedure for recruitment of participants

The researcher first obtained permission from the Department of Education Free State, the University of Free State Ethics Committee, and the school principal. The researcher made an appointment to meet with the school principal to give a brief presentation of the contents of the research proposal. After the meeting, the principal contacted the researcher to meet again after he met with his staff members, where he attained two volunteer teachers. The researcher met with the two teachers and explained the research's purpose and the ethics considered and adhered to. The teachers organised a meeting between the researcher and grade 12 learners for the researcher to explain the research, including how learners' input would be helpful to add the literature and to the Department of Education policymakers. The researcher instructed the two teachers to randomly choose learners that would participate in the study. However, they had to emphasize that those willing to take part, had a choice to withdraw from the study whenever they wanted, to guarantee that those chosen are willing to speak openly and freely about the impacts of the phenomenon of interest in their lives. They therefore went ahead and chose only eight learners since the study was small even though most of the grade 12s wanted to take part. The principal alerted the parents of the selected learners about their participation in the research, and learners were given consent forms to take home, whereby they gave consent for their children to partake in the study. The language used by all the participants was English, as it is a school instruction medium. The grade 12 learners were the most appropriate participants as they were most affected during the year they were in grade 11 because the alternating classes resulted in them missing some study time. The teachers who taught grade 12 were most appropriate because they worked directly with the learners and better understood the daily challenges the learners encountered. Both learners and teachers were information-rich participants who could give detailed data to answer the critical questions and resolve the research problem.

3.6 Research methodology

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2012), research methods are techniques one utilizes to collect and analyses data.

3.6.1 Sampling technique

Sampling is the selection of individuals from within a population to estimate the characteristics of the whole population (Rossouw, 2010). According to Cohen et al. (2017), the concept of purposive participant selection is a method that involves recruiting individuals who are capable of providing useful and detailed information. In this case, the researcher could choose the individuals most relevant to the study and the sample was selected purposively. According to Rahi (2017), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy where participants are selected based on specific characteristics aligned with the study's objective. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular population characteristics that are of interest, enabling the researcher to answer the research question. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Rossouw, 2010).

Rahi (2017) argued that a qualitative research design could involve multiple phases; in some cases, different sampling techniques are required at each phase. This is why purposive sampling is often beneficial in these types of studies. Additionally, this method is usually less expensive and time-consuming than other methods (Rahi, 2017). However, due to the nature of the sampling process, it can be hard to defend the sample's representation due to the selection process's subjectivity (Cohen et al., 2017). Nonetheless, in qualitative research designs, the absence of representativeness by the selected sample for the population is not considered a weakness (Patton, 2002). The researcher selected this sampling method because the goal of a purposive sampling process is to identify the communities and cases that are most suited to solving your research question. Therefore, since the study had small participants, this method proved best.

In this study, the participants were selected from one rural high school. The sample is grade 12 learners and teachers. The participants were chosen based on teaching and attending school in a rural area. They were also selected because they have information on the phenomenon that is discussed and can clearly express themselves concerning the influences of the subject matter. Purposive sampling is used in this study because the researcher did not focus on everyone within the school context. Still, the people mostly affected by this phenomenon are grade 12 learners and their teachers.

3.6.2 Sample size

This study selected eight participants from a high school in Kestell, Maluti, a Phofung District, Free State province. All participants were willing to participate in the study. They resided in a rural area, were in Basotho culture, and were fluent in Sesotho as their home language. They could freely communicate via social media (WhatsApp) after classes and during their free time.

(i) Learners

Six of the participants were learners, such as three males and three females. They were enrolled in grade 12, and their ages ranged from 17 to 18.

(ii) Teachers

The two other participants were teachers such as one male and one female. There are ages ranging from 29 to 37. They were responsible for teaching Accounting, Business, and Geography subjects in grade 12.

3.7 Data generation method

Data generation refers to the “how” part or the manner in which material for the research was collected (Flick, 2010). Three primary methods are used in qualitative research: observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussion (Ulin, Robinson, and Tolley, 2005). In this study, data were collected using in-depth interviews. This data collection method was chosen in this study for its characteristics that enable the researcher to continue data collection via social media platforms with participants being in the comfort of their home as Covid-19 necessitated less contact between people.

3.7.1 In-depth interviews

An in-depth interview is a type of qualitative data generation method that involves conducting rigorous interviews with a few individuals (McMillan & Schumacher, 2012). It allows researchers to explore participants' perspectives on a particular idea or situation. In-depth interviews are open-ended techniques that allow researchers to collect detailed information about a topic (Rossouw, 2010). The goal of in-depth interviews is to explore the perspectives and experiences of the

respondents. The type of in-depth interview that the researcher utilised is an individual interview (Rahi, 2017), which were the most suitable, as rural school learners face many challenges in their daily lives, and one-on-one sessions are appropriate to enable them to speak freely without fear and embarrassment. COVID-19 came with some devastating effects, including the loss of life; in such cases, the researcher had to stand by a psychologist to assist the learners who might need assistance (see APPENDIX F). Due to the COVID-19 regulations, interviews were conducted on the telephonic platform WhatsApp social media which is described by Forbes (2015) as a cross-platform app that allows users to send and receive free media files and text messages

The advantages of in-depth interviews include ascertaining rapport with the participants (Rahi, 2017). Interviewers can achieve this by making participants feel more comfortable and generating more insightful responses. In this study, the researcher kept in touch with the participants before an actual interview began. She spoke with the learners about their studies and life in general. She also explained to the learners that she was a student, still furthering her studies, and what level of her studies she is in, including the purpose of doing the study. That excited the learners, and they became comfortable engaging with the researcher, especially after knowing she was too a student like them. With the teachers, the rapport was established easily as they were pleased that the researcher wished to conduct her research in their school, and they were hopeful that the research might bear fruitful results, especially regarding the rural areas' circumstances. According to Babbie and Mouton (2007), using this method, interviewers can also gain a deeper understanding of the participants' attitudes and motivations as they can additionally ask follow-up questions to gather further information. In this study, since the rapport was established, the participants were more enthusiastic to express themselves. Thereby encouraging the researcher to probe more follow-up questions to acquire clearly understanding of the participants' views. Furthermore, this method can help interviewers identify tone and word choice changes to obtain a deeper understanding and monitor body language (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). However, observation of body language and facial expressions was not accomplished in this study because of the telephonic platform used. And that became a limitation when analyzing the data. And this type of method can be quite time-consuming, as interviews must be transcribed, organized, analyzed, and reported (McMillin & Schumacher, 2012).

Using this method, the researcher guides a conversational partner through an extended discussion (Flick, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). They lead the way with well-prepared questions and follow the interviewee through active listening. Typically, the interview's questions are composed of semi-structured questions (Flick, 2010). These are the questions that the researcher has formulated for each interviewee. Howell (2013) posits that the in-depth interview may take various twists and turns depending on the interviewee's answers. This is also beneficial for the researcher, allowing them to follow up on the interviewee's related themes (Howell, 2013). After following a new path, the researcher returns to the prepared questions.

The researcher collected more data from the teachers and learners through the interview schedule. The interviews were conducted in a conducive atmosphere, allowing the participants to feel comfortable talking. Fortunately, all eight participants availed themselves of interviews conducted via WhatsApp social media to protect both the researcher and participants from COVID-19. The researcher used an audio recorder for the interviews and took notes as they progressed, allowing her to probe for further clarity. The researcher spent almost an hour interviewing each of the 8 participants. Participants were reminded of their right to participate or withdraw at any time without repercussions.

(i) Interviews with learners

The researcher arranged with each learner a convenient time for her to contact them. All the learners stated the times they would be available for the interview. The researcher commenced the interviews with the learners at the beginning of August. The interview of each learner ranged from 30 minutes to 45 as others had a lot to share. The whole interviews with the learners took almost a week to conclude.

(ii) Interviews with Teachers

The teacher interviews were simple and easy, as the teacher were available to do it any time. The researcher took one day to interview the teachers and spent plus or minus 30 minutes with each teacher.

3.8 Data analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is not a process that occurs immediately after the data has been gathered (Nowell et al. 2017). Instead, it is an ongoing process that occurs throughout the entire research. According to Clarke and Braun (2013), qualitative analysis starts with data immersion, which involves looking through transcripts until one is "soaked" in them. They further argue that this immersion ensues in knowledge and acquaintance with information. In this study, thematic data analysis was employed. Thematic analysis is a process utilized in qualitative research to identify and report on repeated patterns (Cullen, Gulati & Kelly, 2013; Joffe, 2011). It involves searching an extensive data set to find and analyze various information pieces. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), thematic analysis is encouraging because it allows one to identify emerging themes and concepts in the interview. In this study, the transcripts were analyzed multiple times to develop analyzable themes. The researcher opted for this kind of data analysis because of the nature of the study, that requires participants to be articulate with regards to the phenomenon of interest. Thus, the researcher is able identify recurring theme from all the participants and make meaning.

The interpretations of the transcripts were carried out through an analytic framework known as the CCA (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). According to Young and Ewing (2020). this framework is part of a wider family of analytical methods known as qualitative content analysis or thematic analysis. These approaches look for similarities and differences in the data and then focus on the relationships between them to come up with descriptive or explanatory conclusions (Young & Ewing, 2020). Therefore, the learners' and teachers' perspectives on COVID-19 are viewed from a CCA framework.

The findings of the study are also related to the appraised literature. To ensure study trustworthiness, direct quotes from the interviews are presented to comprehensively analyze the interviews and findings. To ensure that the information is protected, the author uses pseudonyms. The analysis in this study began with listening and transcribing the interview recordings. The recordings were not transcribed as accurately and precisely because of certain aspects, such as pauses, intonation, and repetitions that were excluded. To present the views of the participants in a more readable and correct manner, some statements were modified. These were also condensed to capture certain aspects of interest to the study (Lubombo, 2014). The study's objective was to find out what effects COVID-19 had on the wellbeing of rural learners. Although only the materials

that were deemed important were transcribed, the resulting transcripts were still as close to audio recordings as possible. As previously stated, thematic analysis was used to sort data into meaningful themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

This study's findings could benefit the wider society and other researchers who might study similar phenomena. The participants were also told their contributions were important, as the findings could help policymakers develop educational policies.

3.9 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure that the quality of the study is acceptable (Pilot & Beck, 2014). When a researcher needs to ensure trustworthiness within a study, he or she must consider these four criteria: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. These four are the equivalency of validity and reliability in quantitative research.

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility concerns the researcher's confidence in the truth of his or her study's findings (Pilot & Beck, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (2011) argued that guaranteeing credibility is one of the most crucial factors in ascertaining trustworthiness, it deals with the question, "How congruent are the findings with reality?". Guba and Lincoln (2011) stated that member checking is the most crucial technique to establish credibility. Schumacher and McMillan (2010) refer to it as verification by the participants through their feedback. The researcher was tasked with establishing the study's credibility by developing a strong rapport with its participants and by visiting the field site regularly to gather information about the participating organization. In addition, triangulation was also used to strengthen the study's credibility by revisiting the collected data and interviewing the individuals. The credibility of the study was also established by giving the individuals who were approached the opportunity to decline to participate. This ensures that the data collected were only those who were genuinely interested in contributing and giving the information freely.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to how the qualitative researcher proves that the research study's findings are related to other contexts (Kyngas, 2020). According to Guba and Lincoln (2011), other contexts can signify similar situations and conditions, the same populations, and phenomena. The researcher conducted detailed data analysis to ensure the reader had the necessary information. The researcher selected participants from Maluti a Phofung district, to participate. The results of this study are expected to represent the views of teachers and learners regarding COVID-19 on the wellbeing of learners. However, it is important to note that contextual factors are considered when transferring information. Nonetheless, the researcher believes that the findings of the study would be transferrable given that context of the study has similiary conditions for instance, Covid-19 pandemic, participants living in rural areas plagues with poverty and stagnation.

3.9.3 Confirmability

Confirmability is focused on neutrality in the research study's findings (Rossouw, 2010). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2012), all the findings a researcher establishes are based on participants' responses and not the researcher's potential bias or personal motivations. They further argue that this includes ascertaining that researcher bias does not twist the interpretation of what the research participants said to fit a certain narrative. To establish confirmability in this study, the researcher recorded every participant's response highlighting every step taken to provide a rationale for the decisions made. Confirmability was achieved through maintaining and reviewing recorded audio and to enable realigning with the original focus of the study. The use of triangulation helped reduce the effect of researcher bias. This was done by listening to the recordings several times and going back to the participants when there were unclear data.

3.9.4 Dependability

According to Lincoln and Guba (2009), dependability is the degree that other researchers could repeat the study and that the findings would be consistent. If another researcher wanted to replicate your study, they should have sufficient information from your research report to do so and acquire similar findings as your study did (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). The data and procedures in this study were thoroughly described so that the reader could easily understand the findings and apply them

to other settings. This study clearly describes the steps involved in carrying out the research, including the design and implementation of the project, the details of the data gathering process, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the investigation.

3.10 Ethical considerations

According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016), when conducting research, the most important thing that must guide a researcher is ethics. Ethics are the engine of scientific research inquiry, as they inform the whole research project and give the direction one must follow (Mpya, 2007). The definition of ethical is "conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group" (Babbie & Mouton 2007:520). Babbie and Mouton (2007) posit that ethical considerations in research are critical, as they are norms and standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong. They act as a barrier against the fabrication or falsification of data and promote the pursuit of knowledge and truth, which is the primary goal of research. Ethical behaviour is also critical in collaborative work because it encourages trust, accountability, and mutual respect among researchers (Burgess & Greaves, 2009).

Some of the ethical considerations of research mentioned by Babbie and Mouton (2007) and that are considered for this study are as follows:

For purposes of this study, informed consent was acknowledged on the document regarding the nature of the research. In adherence with the ethical considerations of the study, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of Free State Ethics Committee (UFS-HSD2021/1318/22) to conduct the study researcher also obtained gatekeeper permission from the Free State Department of Education and the principal. The participants were given informed consent forms with details that their participation was voluntary, without material benefits, monetary or otherwise, attached to their participation, that they could withdraw at any time, and that no physical or psychological harm would be inflicted on them by the study in any way. The use of pseudonyms instead of real names was implemented to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The interview took place on a social media platform, WhatsApp, to adhere to COVID-19 regulations and ensure the participants' safety. The researcher also asked for assistance from Manapo Regional Hospital Clinical Psychology in case some questions affected them negatively. The researcher stored hard copies of the participants' answers for a period of five years

in a locked filing cabinet at the University of the Free State for future research or academic purposes; electronic information was stored on a password-protected computer. After a period of five years, the hard copies will be shredded, and the electronic copy deleted thoroughly.

3.11 Limitations

The study was limited because it focused on one school in only one district in Free State and so could not be generalised to schools in other districts. The use of WhatsApp social media made it difficult for the researcher to see the participants' facial expressions during the interviews, which the researcher believes also caused a limitation on the report.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter meticulously detailed the research design, methodology, procedure, and techniques to achieve this study. Firstly, the research approach was discussed, the design and methodology that underpins this study, followed by the research participants, then how data was generated and analyzed. The chapter also discussed the trustworthiness issues, ethical considerations, and study limitations. The next chapter will provide an in-depth presentation of the discussions and findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focused on the presentation and discussion of the findings. The chapter presented the data gathered during in-depth interviews with the learners and teachers at the school, who constituted research participants. The findings were presented and discussed according to the following themes: effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in rural high schools, challenges encountered by learners in a rural high school during COVID-19, and strategies implemented to ease learner's schooling in the context of COVID-19. As indicated in chapter 3, the participants' school and participants' names were withheld in this research for confidentiality. Thus, the researcher used pseudonyms to refer to the participants in presenting the data. The chapter presented the participants' profiles first and then presented and discussed the findings thematically in line with the aim and objectives of the study.

4.2 Biographic information of the participants

This section presented the biographic details of the research participants.

4.2.1. Results from teachers

Table 4.1 shows the profiles of the two teachers who constituted research participants. It illustrates the experience, qualifications, age, years of teaching experience, culture, marital status, residential area, and the subjects they were teaching.

Table 4.1: Results from teachers

Participants	Teacher 1 (HOD)	Teacher 2
Pseudonyms	Zulu	Ramorapedi
Gender	Male	Female
Age	37	29
Culture	Sesotho culture	IsiZulu culture
Marital status	Single	Single

Year of Teaching experience	12	5
Qualifications	B. Ed, Hon.Ed	B. A, PGCE, Hon.Ed
Teaching subject	Accounting and Business	Geography
Residential area	Makwane Witsieshoek	Phuthaditjhaba

***Qwaqwa** is a place in the central part of South Africa, Free State province. It is also called Basotho Qwaqwa, the home of Sesotho-speaking people, and was formerly known as Witsieshoek thus. Many still use the name. Qwaqwa encompasses many villages and towns, including Phuthaditjhaba and Makwane. Phuthaditjhaba is the number one town in Qwaqwa, where many businesses and stores are.

Teacher 1 (HOD): Mr. Zulu was a single 37-year-old male who was the Head of the Department in the school for commercial subjects. He had a Bachelor of Education and Honors degree and had 12 years of teaching experience in Accounting and Business Studies at the school. He followed the Sesotho culture and was from QwaQwa.

Teacher 2: Ramorapedi was a single 29-year-old female teacher who taught Geography at the school. She had five years of teaching experience, a Bachelor of Arts Degree, a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, and an Honors degree. She followed the Zulu culture and was from the neighboring Phuthaditjhaba in QwaQwa.

Table 4.2.2. Results from learners

Table 4.2. Depicts the profiles of the learners who constituted research participants. Similarly, pseudonyms were used instead of their real names. Their sample consisted of three boys and three girls.

Table 4.2: Learners' profile

Participants	Learner 1	Learner 2	Learner 3	Learner 4	Learner 5	Learner 6
Pseudonyms	Lefa	Morena	Modiehi	Sbonga	Puseletso	Pinkie
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female
Age	18	17	17	18	18	17
Grade Level	12	12	12	12	12	12

Residential area	Kestell	Kestell	Kestell	Kestell	Kestell	Kestell
Culture	Sesotho	Sesotho	Sesotho	isiZulu	Sesotho	Sesotho
Guardians	Mother	Grandmother	Aunt	Grandmother and uncle	Aunt	Aunt
Years in phase	4	3	3	4	4	3

*Kestell is a small maize farming settlement in Free State province South Africa

Learner 1: Lefa was an 18-year-old male from Kestell who was doing grade 12 in the school and had four years in phase. He lived with his mother and followed the Sesotho culture. He traveled to school on foot.

Learner 2: Morena was a 17-year-old male in grade 12 and had three years in phase. He was from Kestell and lived with his grandmother. He followed the Sesotho culture. He lived near the school, therefore, did not use transport to get to school.

Learner 3: This girl was named Modiehi. She was 17 years old and was doing grade 12. She had three years in phase and lived with her aunt. She was also from Kestell and followed the Sesotho culture. Modiehi is one of the groups of learners brought to school by transport organised by the Department. They live a few kilometers outside Kestell.

Learner 4: The fourth learner was named Sbonga, an 18-year-old male doing matric. He had four years in a FET phase as well. He was Zulu and followed the isiZulu culture. He stayed with his grandmother and uncle. Sbonga went to school on foot.

Learner 5: Puseletso was a 17-year-old female in grade 12 and had three years in a phase. She followed the Sesotho culture and lived with her aunt. She did not live far from school, thereby, went to school on foot.

Learner 6: Pinkie was the last learner. She was a 17-year-old girl in grade 12 and had three years in a phase. She stayed with her aunt, who spoke Sotho and followed the Sesotho culture. Pinkie lives in town and comes to school using one of the local learner transports.

4.3 Thematic results

The themes from the data set were organized following the research objectives. Therefore, the main themes are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on learner wellbeing in a rural high school, the challenges encountered by learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 period, and the strategies developed by the school to overcome COVID-19-induced challenges. Also, emerging themes from the data set were presented and constituted the research findings. The subsequent section presented the data gathered from the research participants.

4.3.1 Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on learner wellbeing in a rural high school

There were several effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on learner wellbeing in a rural high school. These effects include poor academic performance due to the practice of alternating classes, loss of loved ones, learners developing mental health issues, and the new normal that everybody had to get used to, including learners.

4.3.1.1 Poor academic performance due to the practice of alternating classes

The results showed that poor academic performance due to alternating classes was a major effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on learner wellbeing in a rural high school. The findings revealed that the academic performance of most learners was severely affected by this pandemic. The participant learners intimated that they struggled to familiarise themselves with the new school routine that they were introduced to. The alternating days or weeks that the department came up with to protect learners and teachers from getting infected were new to the learners and the teachers. The teachers had to repeat the lessons twice because learners came in small groups of 25 or fewer to reduce overcrowding in public schools, which caused emotional exhaustion leading to differences in how a teacher delivered his or her lessons in different groups. Most learners implied this when they intimated that their teachers were no longer covering certain topics. This affected their academic performance because there was no assistance at home since most learners in rural areas live with people without formal education. The participant learners intimated that they had to deal with lots of work, most of which they did not understand thoroughly. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“Covid-19 affected my academic performance a lot because we were alternating classes at school. That put much pressure because teachers would give us ‘tons of work’ with limited face-to-face interaction. Working under that kind of pressure was not easy because teachers too struggled to finish topics due to limited time, pushing us to finish the topics independently. Moreover, it was tough to work alone at home, especially because I had been used to depending on the teacher’s expositions. Now I had no help at home because no one knew what I was doing. In addition, lack of interaction with my classmates or friends made things more difficult because study groups help a lot, but studying alone is difficult” (Modiehi).

“We were under severe pressure because we were given many tasks to complete and submit in such a short space” (Lefa).

“My academic performance was negatively affected during lockdown due to the practice of alternating classes. Our studies were badly affected since we had to study independently, and teachers could not go the extra mile because of COVID-19 restrictions. They could not thoroughly explain topics due to limited time, and they overloaded us with many tasks. I could not get any help at home because no one studied to the level I was doing. That affected me badly, and my performance dropped dismally” (Pinkie).

“In terms of academic performance, I always relied on teacher’s exposition, and when we were made to stay at home, I struggled with my studies because there was no one who could assist me with schoolwork, which frustrated me a lot. When we returned to school after lockdown, we no longer went to school daily but alternated” (Sbonga).

“Not good, because I failed grade 11, which I was doing in 2020” (Morena).

The interviewed teachers concurred with the sentiments of the learners and intimated that the practice of alternating between reducing overcrowding in public schools also affected their performance. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“The challenges they encountered in their learning were exacerbated by the practice of alternating classes to facilitate social distancing in classrooms. The learners had to rotate, leading to loss of learning time” (Zulu).

“...the loss of teaching and learning time due to rotations, problems of social distancing due to overcrowding” (Ramorapedi).

Therefore, the learners' academic performance was affected when they were forced to stay home during the COVID-19-induced lockdown as the world at large, including South Africa, attempted to find ways to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, strategies for getting learners back to school while keeping them safe from the virus were implemented, as life had to continue amid the COVID-19 pandemic. However, like most aspects of human lives affected, the learners' academic circle was affected as well, as they had to stay at home for quite some time, and after returning, things were no longer the same.

4.3.1.2 Death of loved ones

The death of loved ones is another major effect of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in a rural high school. This greatly impacts learner wellbeing because many issues arise in the death of a loved one, especially a parent or a guardian. Learners end up dropping out of school to help care for their younger siblings or due to a lack of certain resources to continue with education. Furthermore, the sudden death of a family member on its own induces emotional and psychological effects on the learner. Most public schools in South Africa do not have resident school therapists or professional counsellors to help in such cases, so the learners face these hardships without assistance. This negatively affects their psychological, social, or physical wellbeing. The findings from in-depth interviews have also revealed that the virus instilled fear and panic in participants due to the pace at which it infected people and its nature. Some learners were badly affected because of this, as they had lost their guardians due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“COVID-19 threatened my health, as well as my family. My aunty died because of it, so we lived in the fear that someone else in the family might contract it again” (Puseletso).

“We relied on my sister, who was the breadwinner working in the factory, but due to this pandemic, she contracted a high fever and unfortunately died” (Morena).

“During the lockdown, my mother lost her job. That made things difficult for us at home. We had to rely on my child's grant and my grandmothers'. Life started changing for the

worse, and that affected us badly. While trying to adjust to such a lifestyle, my grandmother died due to COVID-19; the very same person we depended on” (Modiehi).

4.3.1.3 Developing mental health problems

Another significant effect of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of learners in a rural high school is the prevalence of mental health problems. Most participants found it hard to deal with the impact of COVID-19 in their lives. The pandemic halted businesses for an extended period due to the COVID-19-induced lockdown. As a result, many people lost their jobs. The learners, too, were traumatised as the COVID-19 pandemic led to mental health problems, especially in rural schools; they also had to contend with the challenges of living in rural areas. Learners and adults had to worry about what they would eat now that schools were closed, family members were dying or losing their jobs, and unreliable employment opportunities. The participant learners intimated that the COVID-19 pandemic indeed affected their mental wellness. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“I started developing depression and anxiety, always asking myself who will die next, my mother or me” (Modiehi).

“I was always worried and wondering what would happen to our education, which developed into anxiety. I also experienced stress due to the fear of the virus, and the loneliness I felt as I could not see my friends like before” (Puseletso).

“My mother lost her job due to COVID-19 induced lockdown, which worsened things. We were now relying only on child support grant, which engendered stress, leading to depression” (Pinkie).

“I was in grade 11 when COVID-19 first hit the nation, and I was busy thinking that I would be doing my matric the following year, but suddenly everything changed. Now I find myself dealing with anxiety, stress, and depression because of the problems brought on by this virus. I realized there was no way I would succeed” (Sbonga).

“I experienced depression and stress, as mentioned earlier, because of finances at home” (Morena).

Therefore, in-depth interviews revealed that the learners were mentally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most learners lost their close relatives, and their family members lost their jobs. Most people in rural areas had to depend on piecework or temporary jobs. Thus, losing their jobs due to the COVID-19-induced lockdown meant that breadwinners were no longer receiving payment.

4.3.1.3 The new normal

Another major effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the wellbeing of learners in a rural high school was the *new normal* that everyone adopted for their safety. This new order came with many prerequisites and requirements that people had to abide by to guarantee their safety and that of their loved ones. The pandemic forced people to live and behave in a certain way, and no one had a right to violate those conditions because of the COVID-19 laws set by the South African government. This *new normal* negatively affected people's lives because of COVID-19 restrictions, including curfews, masking up, sanitising, and social distancing. All these sudden changes were difficult for people to understand and follow, and for most people, they were unbearable. Learners, too, struggled as they could no longer see their friends. Moreover, they now had to contend with domestic chores they previously managed to escape through school. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“COVID-19 has brought havoc in our lives, especially for us learners. It caused a lot of stress, especially after the re-opening of schools in 2020” (Lefa).

“Ok, when covid-19 arrived, it changed my life. I had to adjust to the fact that it is here. It first brought lockdown, where people had to stay home, no school, or work” (Modiehi).

“...when COVID-19 arrived, it changed our mindset. To adjust our mind to the conditions of covid-19” (Pinkie).

“COVID-19 has affected my entire being badly. Because it hit us when we least expected, it came with lots of challenges” (Morena).

The interviewed teachers echoed the same sentiments as learners that the *new normal* everyone had to get used to was also challenging. The participants shared the following:

“...leaners had to adapt to a new normal and a new way of doing things. For instance, having to wear a mask daily and to keep on sanitising after every few minutes” (Zulu).

Therefore, the new order negatively affected everyone, and most struggled to get used to it. The findings have revealed these learners, too, were severely affected by this change for several reasons. Learners worked to obtain decent meals, as they were used to getting food from school; others felt stuck at home with no way out because school played as their haven, while others who relied upon the help they got from school found the COVID-19 restrictions a formidable challenge.

4.3.2 Challenges encountered by the learners in rural high schools during the COVID-19 period

There are diverse challenges that learners encountered during the COVID-19 period, which include food scarcity, lack of resources, a new mode of teaching and learning, and COVID-19 restrictions such as a lockdown. These subthemes were discussed in detail in subsequent subsections.

4.3.2.1 Food scarcity

The results revealed that food scarcity was one of the challenges encountered by learners during the COVID-19 period in a rural school. The Department of Education had initially introduced feeding schemes in schools to fight and win the battle of lack of food that many learners across the country faced at home. Most learners in South Africa rely heavily on feeding schemes offered at their schools, especially those living in rural areas with unreliable areas and scant job opportunities. The findings revealed that most learners relied on feeding schemes at their respective schools. Most rural learners live in families without breadwinners or with parents who are not gainfully employed, so these learners rely on food from the school. Thus, learners were left without unreliable food supplies during the Covid-19 induced lockdown. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“...some of us depended on meals we received at school and had the stress of supper meals, but that also changed because of the COVID-19 lockdown regulations. Now I became stressed at home because there were limited meals, and we ran out of food reserves. That caused me stress” (Modiehi).

“Another thing that affected us badly was that we would no longer get food from the school anymore, which helped us a lot since we were struggling at home. We would not bother about food before because we would have eaten at school, but the COVID-19 pandemic changed this pattern” (Pinkie).

The teachers also perceived the lack of food as one of the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic had on the learners. One participant shared the following:

“When they had to quarantine during level five, they had food challenges since most depended on the school feeding schemes”.

4.3.2.2 Lack of resources

Lack of resources was another major challenge encountered by learners during the COVID-19 period in a rural high school. After the lockdown, the Department of Education devised plans to return learners to school while keeping them safe from the virus, guaranteeing that all learners, irrespective of their social status, would benefit equally. These plans included using online platforms that required pupils and teachers to own a laptop or smartphone and the capability and skills to operate such a device regarding teaching and learning. Lack of resources impacted teaching and learning because most learners lacked digital devices at home, such as smartphones, computers, or laptops, to practice online schooling. The following responses from in-depth interviews help support this point:

“...the challenge for me is that I have no laptop or data for internet access. I have nothing with me that I can use to access materials that can guide me through my studies. I had no one to rely on except to work independently and read my textbooks” (Lefa).

“I have a resource that helps me with my schoolwork: my smartphone. I usually use pdf documents that have notes I need to study. I use my phone to research google to get the information I need. I also download videos on YouTube relating to the topic we are studying at school” (Modiehi).

“I have a phone; I sometimes use it to help me with my schoolwork when I have data” (Puseletso).

“I do have a resource, and that is my smartphone. I can use it to download PDFs and previous question papers on topics we are studying at school, which helps with clarity. I can also go on YouTube and watch videos of the information I need” (Pinkie).

“I have no laptop; I only have an old phone, and utilizing it to complete schoolwork is a hustle. The teachers send previous question papers in the WhatsApp group, but it is difficult to access them because of the model of the phone I am using, and lack of data and airtime” (Sbonga).

“Yes, I have my smartphone, which is very helpful when I have data because I can download some notes on the internet” (Morena).

Therefore, the findings from the in-depth interview have revealed that most learners have smartphones at home, which they can utilise for school purposes but cannot afford to purchase internet data. Therefore, not much learning can take place through an old phone with no data for the internet. Therefore lack of resources significantly affected learners during the COVID-19 period.

4.3.2.3 A new mode of teaching and learning

Another major challenge learners encounter during the COVID-19 period in a rural school is introducing a new mode of teaching and learning. Online learning was the only sustainable solution when COVID-19 first hit the nation and at a time when the infection rates were high. As a result, most schools employ online platforms for teaching and learning. However, most schools used this method before, with the physical interaction method, particularly for schools with resources and learners whose parents could afford to pay for the devices and data needed for online education. However, in rural high schools where stakeholders lacked the skills, capabilities, and resources to utilise online education, this strategy guaranteed widened the gap between the rich and the poor, thus rendering education an expensive luxury. Thus, the method failed to provide every learner an equal chance to acquire education regardless of their social and economic status. The findings from in-depth interviews have revealed that this method did not aid learners as hoped because of the level of expertise needed, the skills both learners and teachers lacked to utilise this method, and the absence of resources. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“Schools did not help as such to ensure we catch up on missed schoolwork when at home since there is nothing they did to ensure we study at home, except for the notes they send through group chats. Also, we had to study those notes on our own. The group chats did not help all of us, as others had no phones or could not afford to buy data to access social media” (Modiehi).

“Social media study groups have been implemented to ensure that we received information which could assist us” (Puseletso).

“I think our school was not helpful. The school did not ensure that we had help when at home. They only created a WhatsApp group, which I think was not helpful because some of us do not have smartphones and data to access those groups. They could not even make copies of books we could use to study since we share books at school. Even the notes they sent via social media needed explaining, so I did not take them as useful because I did not understand some of the things in there without the help of the teachers” (Pinkie).

“We had no help because some of us do not have phones. Yes, they created WhatsApp groups, but what about us, who do not have phones or data to access such information? We only relied on other learners by asking them what was discussed and sent in the groups by the teacher, and that is not enough because they cannot explain everything well to your satisfaction” (Sbonga).

“Some teachers created WhatsApp groups to share information, explain concepts, and give us tasks. But it was still not enough because they did not explain concepts thoroughly as they would in class, and I was struggling with internet data because now my sister was buying it for me. So, no work meant she could no longer buy me data daily” (Morena).

Therefore, the findings have revealed that the learners' only resource was mobile phones. Some participants said they could not access study material online using their mobile phones. This is due to a lack of internet data since virtually all of them concurred that WhatsApp was the only social media platform used by the teachers to disseminate the study materials. Thus, one would wonder how much learning could take place on WhatsApp. The participants also intimated that even the information they got through this media platform was insufficient since the teachers only sent the study materials and did not explain the content thoroughly. The teachers concurred with these

learners' views that online lessons did not become as helpful as they had initially thought. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“...some learners did not have devices to use so that we can send information via digital platforms. Those who had smartphones were experiencing coverage loss issues. At some point, they experienced load-shedding and blackouts, which were some of the things that made learners not receive the full lessons” (Zulu).

4.3.2.4 Bringing lockdown

Another major challenge the learners encountered during COVID-19 was the COVID-19-induced lockdown. Many people were confined to their homesteads as their freedom of movement was withdrawn to contain the virus's spread. Thus, for many, this meant losing opportunities and chances to put food on their table. This, in turn, caused stress and depression, negatively affecting one's mental and psychological health. This issue also had undesirable effects on learners' wellbeing, as most participant learners revealed how much they struggled to come to terms with the fact that they had to stay at home and not leave unless in serious conditions. The findings revealed that the learners struggled with their studies because they had no physical interaction with their friends and were stressed out by the sudden and abrupt changes. In addition, some participant learners intimated that they were not used to staying at home with their family members. Still, the COVID-19-induced lockdown forced them to stay with abusive relatives or guardians. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“...when COVID-19 broke out, it changed my life. I had to adjust to the fact that it was here. It first brought lockdown, where people had to stay home, no school or work. It caused stress because I used to go to school every day and be with other students” (Modiehi).

“Going to school served as a way to exercise not only my mind but my body as well, but because of COVID-19, I felt stuck at home. And the challenge of mental health crises rose because I became stressed with the situation at home...” (Puseletso).

“...when COVID-19 arrived, it changed our mindset. We were forced to adjust our minds to the conditions of COVID-19” (Pinkie).

“First, because it hit us when we least expected it, it came with many challenges. At home, we relied on my sister, who was the breadwinner and worked in the factory, but due to this pandemic where people were not allowed to work, her factory closed down, and she lost her job” (Morena).

4.3.3 Strategies to improve teaching and Learning in the COVID-19 period

The COVID-19 pandemic came with many restrictions and prerequisites that mandated and determined people’s behaviour to contain the spread of the virus. Strategies and mitigation measures were devised to minimise loss of life and carry on with business during COVID-19. In the education sector, these strategies are discussed in the subsequent section, including providing resources and equipping learners with learning on online platforms.

4.3.3.1 Provisions of resources

(a) Laptops, smartphones, and data

Virtually all participant learners concurred that laptops, smartphones, and data are helpful and enhance teaching and learning during COVID-19. The findings have revealed that if rural high schools are furnished with digital devices like smartphones and laptops that learners can take home overnight, teaching and learning would be enhanced. They also intimated that rural high schools should have an internet connection and regulate it to ensure it is used for school purposes. Hence, this requirement is critical since most rural high school learners live with people who are not gainfully employed. They cannot afford online education devices and data. Moreover, some experienced financial home losses because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“I think the school should find a way to give learners learning materials such as computers, laptops, or iPads” (Lefa).

“I think schools should ensure that every learner has data so that they can use it to communicate with their teachers at home” (Modiehi).

“I think the school or the Department of Education should ensure digital equity between us, the learners in rural areas, and those in towns and cities. We do not have a working computer laboratory in our school, where we can at least practice learning using them like

having online classes and accessing study materials because we do not have laptops at home” (Puseletso).

“Schools should help needy learners with smartphones so that when we encounter something like this again, they too can continue schooling at home” (Pinkie).

“The strategies I think they could use is to give us laptops or smartphones with monitored data” (Sbonga).

“Give us smartphones to use at home and data that the school would manage to ensure we only download school-related content” (Morena).

Therefore, providing resources that include data would go a long way in ensuring the success of online learning, especially for rural learners.

(b) Equipping learners with learning on online platforms

All participant learners concurred that they must be equipped with information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) skills for online learning to enhance teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, this is critical in the fourth industrial revolution era, where technical skills matter most. The participants concur that it would be for their benefit even after school if they were to be furnished with necessary online learning skills. And also, the move to online learning is inevitable, as most, if not all, high-learning institutions have moved or introduced this teaching platform to their students. So, schools mixing this method with face-to-face one, especially for the grade 12s, as they are one foot out of the school, would not be a bad idea to prepare them for future endeavours.

Moreover, the participants concurred that ICTs solve the problem of equitable access to education since no learner would feel discriminated against. Rather, equal opportunities would be granted to all learners in terms of education, regardless of their social status. The following responses from in-depth interviews support this:

“They can also start online classes. For instance, if we did not attend school on a certain day, a teacher should arrange for us to have an online class to cover the topics meant to be covered that day and be on schedule” (Modiehi).

“They should implement online classes even if COVID-19 end because I found it useful as these days it is very important to be technologically inclined” (Pinkie).

“They could create online classes using those phones or laptops. I say this because most of us understand better when teachers talk and explain things rather than studying for ourselves without any clarification. Therefore, if this virus gets out of hand again, at least we would know we have resources and can continue our studies even at home” (Sbonga).

“Give us the necessary skills to learn online, so that if this pandemic broke out again and becomes worse like in 2020, we would not have a problem with online learning” (Morena).

4.4 Conclusion

Chapter four focused on presenting and discussing findings from the grade 12 participants and two participant teachers. The findings were presented in themes that emerged from the data set by the research objectives. The chapter presented the views of the learners on the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic had on their mental wellbeing. The findings have revealed that the challenges encountered by learners in the context of COVID-19 include food scarcity, lack of resources, new modes of teaching and learning, and COVID-19 restrictions such as lockdown (confinement). The findings have also revealed that possible strategies to assist in combating this incident in the future were providing resources and equipping learners with learning on online platforms. The next chapter focused on the conclusions generated from the findings discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The study investigated the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in a rural high school. It explored the challenges encountered by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. And the different strategies could be employed to guarantee the continuation of schooling, even in cases such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter presented findings and recommendations from the study conducted. In addition to the recommendations and presentation, it highlighted the study's limitations and implications for the school.

5.2 Research questions

- a. What are the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in a rural high school?
- b. What challenges were encountered by learners in a rural high school during COVID-19?
- c. What strategies to overcome COVID-19-induced challenges at a rural high school?

5.3 Summary of the Findings

The summary of the findings is presented based on the main aim and objectives in the form of questions that the study sought to answer. These questions are referred to as research questions 1 to 3. The literature and the data appraise these findings. This ensures that the summary, recommendations, and implications are assessed thoroughly based on the findings and informed by the literature.

5.3.1 Research Question 1: What are the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in a rural high school?

The literature reflected on the several effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on learner wellbeing. That includes its impact on learners' education and the highest school dropout rate ever recorded. The psychological implications on learners' wellbeing since its inception. Lastly, socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on learners and increased child abuse. Many learners develop mental health issues because of the state of affairs at their homes, the absence of resources, teachers' lack of technical skills, and inadequate assistance from other stakeholders. From the reviewed literature, in the study conducted in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, the dropout rate increased due to the

COVID-19 pandemic (David, Pellini, Jordan, & Phillips, 2020). According to Buckler et al. (2020), the longer schools are closed, the higher the rate of dropouts.

It further suggests that the longer people suspend their learning programmes, the harder it is for them to re-learn and become more engaged. Several studies piloted by Witte and Sheridan (2011), Msila (2012), and Maringe, Masinire, and Nkambule (2015) maintained that rural areas seem to battle quite a lot of factors that work against their development, which include unemployment, underdevelopment, poverty, segregation, and minimal political power. Dube (2020) posits that rural school learners face unprecedented challenges, including harsh contextual factors, yet COVID-19 supplemented the daily difficulties that these learners must deal with. As stated above, most of them did not fare well academically.

The findings revealed that poor academic performance, loss of loved ones, and developing mental health issues as the new normal could be the effects of COVID-19 on learner wellbeing in a rural high school. There was an indication that poor academic performance could affect COVID-19. Drawing from the work of Dube (2020), many learners performed poorly academically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several reasons that Dube (2020) and David, Pellini, Jordan, and Phillips (2020) associated with poor performance, which include lack of resources, high dropout rate, and mostly the fear that had stricken many people because of the outbreak of the novel virus. Another effect identified by the learners that this pandemic had on their wellbeing that is also consistent with literature is the loss of loved ones. Research conducted by Rees and Dinisman (2015) states that the death of a child's parent is a strong predictor of poor schooling outcomes. He further argued that orphans are significantly less likely to be enrolled in school and have completed fewer years of schooling than children whose parents are alive. The United States Center for Disease Control (2020) report suggested that higher COVID-19 morbidity and mortality rates among minority and low socioeconomic status populations have magnified stress and mental health risks in these groups. Further, many families face economic insecurity as unemployment rates increase, and these groups in rural settings are already experiencing financial stress, which the economic downturn may further impact. These disturbances could negatively affect adolescent mental health, particularly among disadvantaged populations.

The findings revealed that this pandemic badly affects rural learners in almost every aspect of their lives. This is mostly due to some of the strategies implemented by the Department of Education,

including social distancing, which compelled learners to own some digital devices to continue schooling at home. Given that most rural areas are plagued with the abovementioned challenges, many learners faced yet another challenge that negatively impacted their lives. Most concurred that they were negatively affected psychologically, academically, and socially. Regarding the psychological effects, all participants agreed that the school provided no psychological support to ensure they kept up with schoolwork at home or counselled them for any difficulties they might have faced during the lockdown or when the infection rates were still high.

Consequently, some learners developed serious mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and stress. According to David, Pellini, Jordan, and Phillips (2020), this novel virus widened the gap between the haves and have-nots, i.e., the rich and the poor. Learners in more privileged settings continued with schooling reasonably. Yet in rural contexts, many people who are the parents or guardians of the poor learners work the crop fields, sell food at the roadside, and are house helpers that lost their jobs as their jobs are often not permanent. Owing to unstable health infrastructure and services, many learners found themselves orphans, yet no help was offered to ease their pain (Higbee et al., 2021).

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that the teachers identified were the new normal the learners suddenly faced. Another impact they endured was that they could no longer benefit from the help offered by the teachers and other assistance they usually got during weekends and school holidays, as social distancing had to be observed and maintained. Unlike the learners from advantaged schools, the learners in rural areas were alternating school attendance to observe social distancing as there are few schools and many learners, which leads to overcrowding of classes (Quyên & Khairani, 2017; Gross, 2015).

5.3.2 Research question 2: What challenges are encountered by learners in a rural high school during COVID-19?

According to the literature, learners in rural areas encountered various challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study conducted by the World Bank (2021) revealed that about 33% of South Africa's population lives in rural areas. This suggests that governments have a hard time providing adequate education in these regions. According to the literature and the findings, the pandemic has made it harder for students to access education, especially in rural areas. It has also affected the parents of these students, who lost their jobs. These individuals had to drop out of

school to look for work. Individuals who did not drop out struggled with their schoolwork. They would typically only attend certain days or weeks due to the lack of funds to purchase study materials or tutors (Duan et al., 2020). The findings of the study did not contradict the literature as they indicated that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of students in various countries such as Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone were significant (Buckler et al., 2020). According to Rana and Krishnakumar (2020) the longer schools remained closed, the more likely it was that learners would drop out. This could be because they would have a harder time re-engaging in their studies.

The study's findings did not contradict available literature because the participants indicated that the learners faced various challenges such as food scarcity, lack of resources, a new mode of teaching and learning, and bringing lockdown. It is no secret that rural areas are plagued with poverty, unemployment, no education, many diseases, backwardness, and high crime (Beaumont, 2011). As a result, most learners in rural settings find themselves relying heavily on provisions from school such as food, study materials, and for some learners, even uniforms due to the conditions of living in rural areas. Research conducted by Koopman (2013) indicates that the absence of food provisions at home impacted learners badly because no one can fully concentrate on an empty stomach. Additionally, many learners dropped out of school in search of employment to aid their families. *No Hungry Learner Campaigns* were introduced to mitigate the effects and impacts the lack of food had on the holistic wellbeing of learners. Current findings revealed that learners depend on the food provided by the school.

The results further indicated that not attending school during the national lockdown and the alternating of classes introduced after level 5 was lifted caused a strain on them and the people at home. Concerns about food insecurity increased. The findings also reflected that the teachers believed the pandemic badly impacted learners. They indicated that most of the learners in the rural setting, if not all, depended on the feeding schemes offered by the school. Therefore, being unable to go to school regularly was a cause for concern as they could not receive the usual food packs they got during school days. The National School Nutrition Programme was implemented by the Department of Education (2002) in response to the high number of hungry learners.

The lack of resources was a challenge for learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the absence of resources that seemed a challenge, a new mode of teaching and learning emerged,

making it yet another challenge these learners had to face. This outbreak compelled teaching and learning to take place online to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. However, due to the state of affairs in rural areas where grandparents or unemployed people head most households, learners found themselves in difficult situations because they could not afford the necessary resources to continue schooling. All learners mentioned that they possessed mobile phones, but most did not have the skills to use these gadgets for teaching and learning. Others complained about the unaffordability of data needed when using digital devices to learn, as most learners live with people that are either unemployed, too old to work, or do not earn enough to enable them to buy devices such as laptops, smartphones, and even data.

Teacher participants raised concern that to make up for the time lost; they would send study materials via WhatsApp, a social media platform. This begs the question of whether children have equal rights to education as stated by SASA's (1996) policy. There is no equality if education becomes a luxury, where a selected few can acquire it due to their social and economic status, whereas the rest suffer. The teachers add that due to the unchecked state of affairs by the officials, there is a lot of depravity and exploitation of funds that also contribute to their lack of resources. They alluded to the lack of running water and the shortage of hand sanitisers and soaps.

Socially, they indicated that they suffered as well. Like every person in South Africa and other countries that initiated lockdown protocols when this virus first hit, many people found it hard to abide by the regulations, which included lockdowns where they had to stay at home and limit discretionary movement. The learners emphasised how miserable they became, not having their friends around to take their minds off the things they were struggling with at home and conflicted about what they would do regarding the study materials they had to share. Most public schools in South Africa cannot afford study materials for each learner within the school due to overcrowding; hence learners share study materials. As they had to stay home and not leave for whatever reason besides when seeking essentials, confinement became a challenge.

The findings did not contradict extant literature as the views of the learners and teachers reiterate the impact of COVID-19 on rural learners (Dube, 2020). The participants confirmed that the effects this virus had on their wellbeing were negative due to the lack of resources and minimal aid from various stakeholders.

5.3.3 Research question 3: What strategies can be implemented to ensure teaching and learning occur in the context of COVID-19?

The findings have shown that providing resources, such as laptops, smartphones, and data, to promote online learning can improve learner's schooling during COVID-19. The literature also supported the learners' strategies that could assist during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mbatha (2016) stated that providing data is expected to address people's lived realities, especially those in rural areas, offer solutions, and facilitate the improvement of human lives. Additionally, the reports indicate that private and privileged city schools were either buying or lending learners devices to ensure that learning continues during COVID-19 (Parliament Monitoring Group, 2020).

Therefore, the literature and findings are also consistent. The data reveals that the strategies these learners consider can be helpful if the school could furnish them with digital devices like smartphones and laptops even at home. Rural school learners deserve the same benefits as their city counterparts. The learners also suggested that they should be provided with data that the school could regulate to ensure it is used for school purposes. Lastly, the findings highlighted that learners wish to be equipped with the requisite digital skills to enable blended learning. This is to ascertain that they have alternatives in the case of hard lockdowns necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.4 Recommendations

The researcher makes recommendations based on the findings and conclusions in this section. The researcher recommends providing resources such as digital devices and data to enable the learners to surf the internet and receive study materials from educators. There is also a need for the teachers to acquire digital skills because many schools in rural contexts have teachers who do not know how to deliver a lesson using digital devices and utilising online platforms such as Blackboard and Google Meets. For a person to understand different learning styles and how to handle them in an online environment, developing strategies for teaching and learning online is required (Lewis, 2015). The Department of Education should ensure that schools hire competent and knowledgeable teachers in all methods and strategies to teach learners, including those in rural areas. Many teachers choose to work in towns and cities rather than the rural areas because of the state of the schools in those contexts. Teachers in this regard have a choice of choosing conducive environments, fostering growth, and ensuring proper school management. However, the learners

did not choose to live in areas without development, hindering the delivery of quality teaching and learning. If the department had invested in the teachers, most challenges faced by the learners during this pandemic could have been avoided. Suppose the teachers were educated, knowledgeable, and held appropriate degrees such as those possessed by the ones in towns and cities. They could have even mitigated the learners' psychological and academic challenges in that case.

5.5 Limitations of the study

The research study was limited to a single school in one rural district in Free State. The findings could not be generalised to other rural schools and districts on a broader scale. Due to the number of participants used, the study did not provide all the answers regarding the research topic, and the findings cannot be generalised to all the rural high schools of the country since only one school was sampled. A vast and extensive study that would be generalised to all the rural high schools would need a longer period as well as a reasonable sample size; another issue that would need to be considered is a larger budget to cover matters like travel costs as well as material needed to conduct the research. However, based on the aptness of the purpose, the study findings can be generalised to the population involved, which in this case is all the school's matriculants.

5.6 Implications for further research

Based on the findings in Chapter Five and the data presentation in Chapter Four, implications are discussed below.

Even though the participants were six grade 12 learners and two teachers, the researcher realised that the learners in the school face several challenges that impact their wellbeing. The findings revealed that these learners have one or more challenges they are battling daily, either at home or school. All the stakeholders within the school should devote themselves to ensuring that learners get the best education comparable to the one received by any learner within the country. The background and living conditions should not matter. Ultimately, the researcher concluded that while it is essential and inevitable to migrate teaching and learning online in cases of pandemics such as COVID-19. It is quite perilous to consider the views made by Stabback (2011) that the Department of Basic Education in South Africa needs to take into account where the country is, in terms of the current extent of the curriculum; learners' attainment levels in rural areas; the quality

of teachers and their experience in ICT. In short, in the context of COVID-19 and learning, as Shibeshi (2006) proposes, whichever solutions are implemented should cater to the needs of rural people and where they are progress-wise and should consider their diversity, socioeconomic status, and culture.

5.7 Conclusion of the study

This study investigated the effects COVID-19 had on learner wellbeing in a rural school. To achieve this aim, the study posed questions on the challenges the learners encountered during the COVID-19 period and the strategies that could be implemented to improve learners' schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher used qualitative phenomenology to realize the study's objectives, with eight purposively selected participants: six learners and two teachers from one rural high school. In-depth interviews were used to generate data, which was qualitatively analysed through thematic analysis. The findings demonstrated that learners encountered many challenges in the context of COVID-19. The learners indicated that their entire wellbeing was badly affected because of the outbreak of COVID-19, which culminated in many restrictions and mandated a new way of life. Many people were not ready for the new way of life, thus having some enduring negative effects on wellbeing. The participants were also asked about the strategies they thought would be helpful during the pandemic, and all of them stated that if they could be furnished with the same resources their urban counterparts have, that would suffice. The study concluded with recommendations that schools in rural contexts should be afforded the same opportunities as other schools in towns and cities to close the gap between the haves and have-nots. The researcher believes that if every learner could be given an equal chance as anyone, regardless of their social, economic, and geographic status, the learners in rural areas would be able to show their capabilities and maximize their chance to change their living conditions. The SASA (1996) policy concurs that every child has a right to equal and free education.

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APPENDIX A: TEACHERS' CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

DATE

August 2022

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Exploring the influences of Covid-19 of on learners' wellbeing in a rural school

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR / RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):

Mofokeng Sentle Patricia *2011161318* *0785187993*

FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

Education

Psychology

STUDY LEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

Dr Mukuna KR

0810451473

WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

To explore the effects of Covid-19 on learners' wellbeing

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

Mofokeng Sentle Patricia, under the supervision of Dr Mukuna KR at the University of the Free state

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: UFS-HSD2021/1318/22

WHY ARE YOU INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

You were chosen to participate in the study because the researcher intend to find out the influences of Covid-19 on learners' wellbeing. And since you are a learner and in grade 12 you are most suitable to answer how has the pandemic affected your whole life.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Your role is to answer questions related to the effects of Covid-19 on your wellbeing as a learner. The questions will be open-ended and you have to describe them to the best of your knowledge and will not be forced to a certain direction in terms of answering the questions

CAN THE PARTICIPANT WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

As a participant you can withdraw at any time you want and there will be no punishment from withdrawing

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This research is vital and necessary, as it might shed light on the challenges faced by rural school learners. It may assist the Department of Basic Education to understand the challenges faced by learners in rural areas due to COVID-19, and how they can be assisted in the context of this pandemic. It could also be beneficial to all stakeholders within the context of rural schools because teachers will also be empowered with the necessary technical skills. Learners might receive the resources they require to learn effectively, and parents will experience less anxiety knowing that their children are afforded the resources and skills they require to learn.

WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There may be some emotional distress due to the nature of the questions that will be asked. In such cases, there is an on call clinical psychologist who will help deal with the stress endured during the interview and the services will be free of charge. You can also decide to withdraw from the study if you no longer feel comfortable at any time without consequences. The psychologist is Dr Mphikeleli A Khumalo Practice Number: 086001 0250872 (BHF), his contact number is 083 478 5499 and his email address khumaloma1@fshealth.gov.za. The doctor will be available to help at any given time

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your name will not be recorded, anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a fictitious code number or a pseudonym, and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Committee. And you have the right to refuse to take part even if your parents have agreed to participation. You can stop being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

The researcher will store hard copies of your answers for a period of five years in a locked cupboard or filing cabinet at the University of the Free State for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After a period of five years, the hard copies will be shredded, and the electronic copy deleted thoroughly.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any incentive or payment to take part in the study, but you will be volunteering to take part for academic purposes.

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 Mofokeng Sentle on 0785187993. The findings are accessible for five years.

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

APPENDIX B: 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

(*insert the name of the researcher*), (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 deidentified 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 _____

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND ASSENT FORM



TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: *Exploring the influences of Covid-19 of the on learners' wellbeing in a rural school*

RESEARCHERS NAME(S): Mofokeng Sentle Patricia

ADDRESS: 2769 mota street phuthaditjhaba 9866

CONTACT NUMBER: 0785187993

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, or treating sick children.

What is this research project all about?

To explore the effects of Covid-19 on learners' wellbeing

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

You were chosen to participate in the study because the researcher intend to find out the influences of Covid-19 on learners' wellbeing. And since you are a learner and in grade 12 you are most suitable to answer how has the pandemic affected your whole life.

Who is doing the research?

Mofokeng Sentle Patricia, under the supervision of Dr Mukuna KR at the University of the Free state

What will happen to me in this study?

Nothing will happen to you, you are only expected to answer the questions to the best of your ability

Can anything bad happen to me?

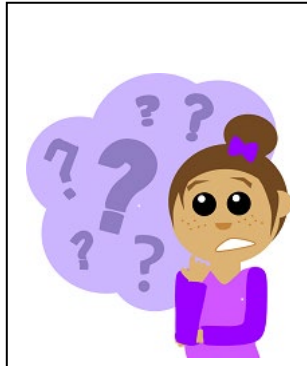
*There may be some emotional distress due to the nature of the questions that will be asked. In such cases, there is an on call clinical psychologist who will help you deal with the stress endured during the interview and the services will be free of charge. You can also decide to withdraw from the study if you no longer feel comfortable at any time without consequences. The psychologist is Dr Mphikeleli A Khumalo **Practice Number: 086001 0250872 (BHF)**, his contact number is **083 478 5499** and his email address khumaloma1@fshealth.gov.za. The doctor will be available to help at any given time*

Can anything good happen to me?

Yes, because you will be contributing the study that may be beneficial to everyone within the education system. And you can be proud that you were part of the study that brought good change in education. This research is vital and necessary, as it might shed light on the challenges faced by rural school learners. It may assist the Department of Basic Education to understand the challenges faced by learners in rural areas due to COVID-19, and how they can be assisted in the context of this pandemic. It could also be beneficial to all stakeholders within the context of rural schools because teachers will also be empowered with the necessary technical skills. Learners might receive the resources they require to learn effectively, and parents will experience less anxiety knowing that their children are afforded the resources and skills they require to learn

Will anyone know I am in the study?

No one will know you are part of the study. Everything you say will be kept confidential and the researcher will use pseudonyms instead of using your real names.



Who can I talk to about the study? *The supervisor from the University of the Free State Dr Mukuna on 0587185343*

What if I do not want to do this?

You as a participant can refuse to take part even if your parents have agreed for you to participate. 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

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: Exploring the influences of Covid-19 on learners' wellbeing in a rural school

REFERENCE NUMBER: UFS-HSD2021/1318/22

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mofokeng Sentle Patricia

ADDRESS: 2769 mota street Phuthaditjhaba 9866

CONTACT NUMBER: 0785187993

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the study staff or doctor any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary**, and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Free State and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki, South African Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice and the Medical Research Council (MRC) Ethical Guidelines for Research.

What is this research study all about?

- *The study will take place wherever you are, because we will be using social media platforms as a tool to conduct research. This study will consist of 8 participants who will be expressing to their best ability on their wellbeing*
- *This project aims to find out the effects of Covid-19 on learner wellbeing as whole*
- *The semi-structure interviews will be use, where each participant will be answering open ended question from their own perspectives on the influences of Covid-19 on their wellbeing as whole*

Why have you been invited to participate?

- *You have been invited because the study is focused on learner wellbeing and you are an appropriate candidate since you are a learner and have been affected by this pandemic.*

What will your responsibilities be?

- *To answer the questions asked from the interviews to the best of your ability without been directed to a certain way of answering*

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- *This will be beneficial to the future learners on how they could be best assisted if this virus does not cease or if we encounter a new one*

Are there in risks involved in your taking part in this research?

- *Emotional distress may result due to the nature of the questions that will be asked. In such cases, there is an on call clinical psychologist who will help you deal with the stress endured during the interview and the services are free of charge. You can also decide to withdraw from the study if you no longer feel comfortable at any time without consequences. The psychologist is Dr Mphikeleli a Khumalo **Practice Number: 086001 0250872 (BHF)**, you can also contact him on **083 478 5499** or on his email khumaloma1@fshealth.gov.za. The doctor is available to help at any time.*

If you do not agree to take part, what alternatives do you have?

- *You are allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without getting in trouble*

Who will have access to your medical records?

- *No medical records will be needed*

What will happen in the unlikely event of some form of injury occurring as a direct result of your taking part in this research study?

- ***Nothing like that will take place because the interviews will be conducted on the comfort on your home under supervision of your parents***

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

No, you will not be paid to take part in the study, but your transport and meal costs will be covered for each study visit. There will be no costs involved for you if you do take part.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You should inform your family practitioner or usual doctor that you are taking part in a research study. *(Include if applicable)*
- You should also notify your medical insurance company that you are participating in a research study. *(Include if applicable)*
- You can contact Dr ...Mukuna KR..... at tel ...0587185343..... if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the Research Ethics Office at 051 4019398 if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by your study doctor.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your records.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study entitled (_____).

I declare that:

- I have read or had read to me this information and consent form, and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions, and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurized to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalized or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished if the study doctor or researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 2022.

.....

Signature of Participant

Signature of witness

Declaration by investigator

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter. (*If an interpreter is used then the interpreter must sign the declaration below.*)

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 2022.

.....
Signature of investigator

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by interpreter

I (*name*) declare that:

- I assisted the investigator (*name*) to explain the information in this document to (*name of participant*) Using the language medium of Afrikaans/Sotho.
- We encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I conveyed a factually correct version of what was related to me.
- I am satisfied that the participant fully understands the content of this informed consent document and has had all his/her question satisfactorily answered.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*)

.....
Signature of interpreter

.....
Signature of witness

APPENDIX C: PARENTS OR GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION LEAFLET AND PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

DATE

August 2022

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Exploring the influence of covid-19 on learners' wellbeing in a rural high school

RESEARCHERS NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER:

Mofokeng Sentle Patricia 2011161318 0785187993

FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

Education

Psychology

STUDYLEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

Mukuna KR

0810451473

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH PROJECT ALL ABOUT?

The project intend to find out how has the Covid-19 affected your life in general

WHY HAVE YOUR CHILD BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

To determine the effects of Covid-19 on them as learners

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

I will be conducting the research, under the supervision of Dr Mukuna at the University of the Free State

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: UFS-HSD2021/1318/22

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO YOUR CHILD IN THIS STUDY?

The participants will be explaining from their own perspectives the effects of Covid-19 on their lives, which includes their academics, social and psychological lives

CAN ANYTHING BAD HAPPEN TO YOUR CHILD?

There may be some emotional distress due to the nature of the questions that will be asked. In such cases, there is an on call clinical psychologist who will help your child deal with the stress endured during the interview and the services will be free of charge. They can also decide to withdraw from the study if they no longer feel comfortable at any time without consequences. The psychologist is Dr Mphikeleli a Khumalo Practice Number: 086001 0250872 (BHF), his contact number is 083 478 5499 and his email address khumaloma1@fshealth.gov.za. The doctor will be available to help any given time.

CAN ANYTHING GOOD HAPPEN TO YOUR CHILD?

This research is vital and necessary, as it might shed light on the challenges faced by rural school learners. It may assist the Department of Basic Education to understand the challenges faced by learners in rural areas due to COVID-19, and how they can be assisted in the context of this pandemic. It could also be beneficial to all stakeholders within the context of rural schools because teachers will also be empowered with the necessary technical skills. Learners might receive the resources they require to learn effectively, and you as parents may experience less anxiety knowing that your children are afforded the resources and skills they require to learn.

WILL ANYONE KNOW YOUR CHILD IS PART OF THE STUDY?

No one will know about your child's part in the study. I will use pseudonyms to protect their information. Which are fakes names a researcher implement to protect the identification of their participants.

WHO CAN YOU TALK TO ABOUT THE STUDY?

My supervisor from the University of the Free state Dr Mukuna on 0810451473

WHAT IF YOU DO NOT WANT YOUR CHILD TO DO THIS?

You as a parent must give a consent before your child can take part in the study since they are still young and under your care therefore, we need your permission before allowing your child to be a participant. So, if you do not wish for your child to be part of this, then they will not be.

PLEASE RETURN

Name of child: _____

Name of Parent: _____

- Do you understand this research study and are you willing to let your child take part in it? Yes No
- Has the researcher answered all your questions? Yes No
- Do you understand that you can withdraw from the study at any time? Yes No
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my child's participation Yes No

Signature of Parent

Date

I, the undersigned Parent, further confirm that–

9. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;
10. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet;
11. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;
12. 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);

13. 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;
14. 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;
15. 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 deidentified at such stage;
16. 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 Parent, agree to the recording of the insert specific data collection method.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: PRINCIPAL PERMISSION FORM

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dear Principal

I am *Mofokeng Sentle Patricia* doing research at the University of the Free state would like to request permission to conduct research at Nkarabeng Secondary School.

DATE

August 2022

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Exploring the influences of Covid-19 of on learners' wellbeing in a rural school

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR / RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):

Mofokeng Sentle Patricia *2011161318* *0785187993*

FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

Education

Psychology

STUDY LEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

Dr Mukuna KR

0810451473

WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

To explore the effects of Covid-19 on learners' wellbeing

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

Mofokeng Sentle Patricia, under the supervision of Dr Mukuna KR at the University of the Free state

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has applied for ethical clearance approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher once approved.

Approval number: UFS-HSD2021/1318/22

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for giving permission for this study to take place.

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I, the undersigned,

_____ (*principal's full names to be included*),

confirm that I give permission for research study referred to as the

_____ (the "**Study**") in relation to

and which Study is being conducted by

(*insert the name of the researcher*), (the "**Researcher**") to be carried out in my school.

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that–

17. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;
18. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet;
19. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;
20. 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);
21. 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;
22. 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;
23. 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 deidentified at such stage;
24. 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 Principal, agree to the conducting of the research in my school

Full Name of Principal: _____

Signature of Principal: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDICE E: INTERVIRW INSTRUMENT

INTERVIEW FORM

Demographic information: Age _____ Gender _____ Residential area _____ Home Language _____ Grade _____ Culture _____

Interview questions: Learners

1. What are the effects of the COVID-19 on learner well-being in a rural high school?
2. How has Covid-19 affected you academically?
3. Do the school have other means to ensure that you catch up on schoolwork during days where you are not going to school?
4. Do you have the resources at home to help you with schoolwork, like laptop, smartphones and computers?
5. Which other psychological challenges have you faced due to Covid-19 besides your academics?
6. What do you think can be done to ease your schooling in the context of Covid-19?

INTERVIEW FORM

Demographic information: Age _____ Gender _____ Residential area _____ Home Language _____ Grade _____ Culture _____ Teaching experience _____ Status _____ Subject taught _____ Highest Qualification _____ _____

Interviews questions: Teachers

1. What are the effects of the COVID-19 on learner well-being in a rural high school?
2. What are the challenges encountered by learners in a rural high school during the Covid-19 period?
3. Do the school provide psychological support to learners while at home to encourage them to keep studying?
4. Has the school gotten any help from other stakeholders to ease learning for learners in the midst of the virus?
5. What are strategies implemented by the school to ensure that teaching and learning take place in the context of Covid-19?

Enquiries: MZ Thango
Ref: Research Permission: S.P. Mofokeng
Tel. 082 537 2654
Email: MZ.Thango@fseducation.gov.za



education

Department of
Education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

2769 Mota Street
Phuthaditjhaba
9866

Dear Ms. S.P. Mofokeng

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: THABO MOFUTSANYANA DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that you have been granted permission to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education within the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District. The details in relation to your research project with the University of the Free State are as follows:

Topic: Exploring the influence of Covid-19 on learners' wellbeing in a rural high school.

1. **List of schools involved:** Nkarabeng Secondary School.
2. **Target Population:** Six learners doing grade 12 and two educators teaching grade 12 at the selected school.
3. **Period of research:** From the second week of February 2022 until 30 September 2022. Please note that the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year. Should you fall behind your schedule by three months to complete your research project in the approved period, you will need to apply for an extension. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
4. The approval is subject to the following conditions:
 - 4.1 The collection of data should not interfere with the normal tuition time or teaching process.
 - 4.2 A bound copy of the research document should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education, Room 101, 1st Floor, Thuto House, St. Andrew Street, Bloemfontein or can be emailed to the above-mentioned email address.
 - 4.3 You will be expected, on completion of your research study to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.
 - 4.4 The ethics documents must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.
5. Please note that costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. MZAMO W. JACOBS
DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE, M&E AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

DATE: 13/12/2021



education

Department of
Education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

Enquiries: MZ Thango
Ref: Notification of research: S.P. Mofokeng
Tel. 082 537 2654
Email: MZ.Thango@fseducation.gov.za

District Director
Thabo Mofutsanyana District

Dear Ms. Mabaso

NOTIFICATION OF RESEARCH: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT IN THABO MOFUTSANYANA DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that Ms. S.P. Mofokeng has been granted permission to conduct research in the Thabo Mofutsanyana District under the auspices of the University of the Free State. The details in relation to the research project are as follows:

Topic: Exploring the influence of Covid-19 on learners' wellbeing in a rural high school.

- 1. List of schools involved:** Nkarabeng Secondary School.
- 2. Target Population:** Six learners doing grade 12 and two educators teaching grade 12 at the selected school.
- 3. Period of research:** From the second week of February 2022 until 30 September 2022. Please note the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year nor during normal school hours. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
- 4. Research benefits:** This research is vital and necessary, as it might shed light on the challenges faced by rural school learners. It may assist the Department of Basic Education to understand the challenges faced by learners in rural areas due to COVID-19, and how they can be assisted in the context of this pandemic. It could also be beneficial to all stakeholders within the context of rural schools because teachers will also be empowered with the necessary technical skills. Learners might receive the resources they require to learn effectively, and parents will experience less anxiety knowing that their children are afforded the resources and skills they require to learn.
- 5. Strategic Planning, Policy and Research Directorate** will make the necessary arrangements for the researchers to present the findings and recommendations to the relevant officials in the Department.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. MZAMO W. JACOBS
DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE, M&E AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

DATE: 13/12/2021

APPENDICE F: LETTER FROM THE PSYCHOLOGIST

MA PSYCHOLOGICAL **SERVICES**

MPHIKELELI A. KHUMALO

B.A., B.A (Hons Psychology), M.A. (Dissertation), HED, [UNIN],
3350 M. Psych (Clinical Psychology) [RAU]
5499

P.O. BOX 7891

BERGVILLE,
Tel: 083 478

Fax: 086 506 3203

khumaloma1@fshealth.gov.zanogimba@gmail.com

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

Practice Number: 086001 0250872 (BHF)

Registration Number: PS 0093467 (HPCSA)

I **Mphikeleli Amos Khumalo** (*Clinical Psychologist*) hereby confirm that I will be able to provide any psychological services as requested. All the services rendered will be guided by the ethical code of the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

Thank You

