

**THE EFFECT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MANAGEMENT OF
LEARNING AND TEACHING IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE CASE OF
KGAKOTLOU CIRCUIT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that the research entitled, “THE EFFECT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MANAGEMENT OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE CASE OF KGAKOTLOU CIRCUIT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.



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MOLEPO GRACE MABAPA

04/10/2024

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my late grandmother Ngwanamogale Maria Sedutla who raised me up and for always encouraging me to get educated despite the circumstances we lived under.

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ABSTRACT

Despite various initiatives by the Department of Education in South Africa to support remote learning during the Covid-19 lockdown, rural primary schools faced significant challenges due to inadequate access to internet and other resources. The study was focused on exploring how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the management of teaching and learning in selected rural primary schools at Kgakotlou Circuit, in the Limpopo Province. This study was informed by the theory of management as a guiding framework in this study. This study adopted a qualitative research approach and interview methods to explore the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on the management of teaching and learning in selected rural primary schools at Kgakotlou Circuit. Data were gathered from 13 key participants comprising of circuit manager, principals, departmental heads and educators from two rural primary schools. The findings from this research indicated that the national plans were put in place by the Department of Education to adapt with the new normal during the pandemic. The revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) were also established to support the continuity of education during the crisis. Schools also promoted tailored online teaching and learning platforms besides giving learners daily homework and incorporating reading materials. However, lack of adequate resources, inequities in access to technology, lack of school-level planning, and untrained staff and other problems significantly affected the adoption and implementation of remote teaching and learning during the pandemic, especially in rural settings. Another finding suggests that the DBE supplied essential learning and teaching materials, such as revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs), Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) documents, learner books, teachers' guides, DBE workbooks, and other supplementary materials. The rotation system was adopted by schools to accommodate learners while adhering to social distancing requirements, indicating a lack of infrastructural and staffing capacity to support daily attendance. The Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) was also introduced to ensure continuity of education. However, various challenges faced by teachers during transitioning to virtual systems for training, workshops, and meetings. The key challenges included lack of understanding about the virtual system and the poor connectivity. This study recommends that rural schools should be prioritised in terms of resource allocation and capacity building.

ACRONYMS

ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
BEEI	Basic Education Employment Initiative
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
DBE	Department of Basic Education
NECT	National Education Collaboration Trust
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SRPRC	Southwest Regional Primate Research Centre
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The world is faced with many challenges time after time, including economic challenges, climate change, and health challenges such as the outbreak of widespread health viruses (Wu, Zhao, Yu, Chen, 2020). Health challenges, including the outbreak of new viruses and pandemics, pose direct risks to global health systems and require coordinated international response (Davis, Assaf, McCorkell, 2020). COVID-19 is one of the health challenges that the world experienced in 2019. The outbreak, first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, quickly spread globally, leading to a WHO pandemic declaration on March 11, 2020 (Davis et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2020; Kumar, Saxena, Baber, 2021). COVID-19 spreads through respiratory droplets from coughs, sneezes, or talking, and by touching contaminated surfaces. Symptoms range from mild to severe, including fever, cough, difficulty breathing, loss of taste or smell, fatigue, and muscle aches (Kumar et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021; Rosenthal, Cao, Gundrum, Sianis, 2022). Severe cases can cause pneumonia, ARDS, and be fatal, especially in older adults and those with health conditions. The virus spreads through respiratory droplets and contaminated surfaces (Ferrer, 2021; Wang, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching impacts across multiple sectors, influencing economies, industries, and everyday life in various ways across the world. In healthcare, hospitals and healthcare facilities saw a surge in patients, especially during peak periods of the pandemic (Mashigo, Parker, Lalla, Allwood, Moolla, Lovelock, Koegelenberg, 2023). There were significant strains on medical supplies, including PPE and ventilators (Farrar, Ruchir, Gita, Richard, Peter, 2022). Additionally, there was a rapid expansion in telehealth services as in-person visits were limited (Evbuomwan, Engelbrecht, Bergman, Mokwena, Ayeni, 2022). Economically, many countries experienced slowdowns or recessions due to lockdowns and reduced consumer activity (Feuer, 2020). Job losses increased as businesses closed or reduced operations (Keshky, Sawzan, Abeer, 2020), prompting governments to implement stimulus packages to support individuals and businesses. Enhanced health and safety protocols became necessary (Broj, 2020), and many people shifted to

domestic travel due to international travel restrictions (Gursoy and Chi, 2020). In entertainment, large events, concerts, and gatherings were cancelled or postponed, while there was a rise in the consumption of digital content and streaming services as people stayed home. Film and television productions faced delays due to lockdowns and health restrictions (Nicola, Alsafi, Sohrabi, Kerwan, Ai-Jabir, Losifidis, Agaha., 2020). The pandemic also accelerated digital transformation, increased cybersecurity concerns, and spurred innovation in remote work tools and collaboration platforms (Hollander, 2020; Torous, 2020; Whitelaw et al., 2020). Manufacturing faced disruptions in production and a shift to producing essential goods like PPE and medical equipment (Robin, Paredes, Apaolaza, Fernandez, Hartman, Martinez, 2020; Burki, 2020). Financial markets experienced significant volatility, with an increase in the use of digital and mobile banking services (Renae, 2020; Elliot, 2020). In real estate, there was a decline in demand for office space as remote work became more common, while the residential market saw fluctuations due to changing living preferences (Mohamed, 2020). Overall, the impacts were widespread, prompting shifts in how businesses operate, how people work and learn, and how industries adapt to new challenges and opportunities (Rabouin, Dion, 2021).

South Africa was not spared, for the number of infected people continued to increase alarmingly; hence, the government declared a state of national disaster on the 15th of March 2020, and implemented a national lockdown on 26 March 2020. Over a million pupils and students enrolled in various educational institutions were impacted, as they were forced to stop attending lessons (Tadesse and Muluye, 2020). Kekić and Miladinović (2016) argue that the closure of institutions led to the loss of teaching and learning time and that the long periods of learning lost in schools owing to the disease outbreak can result in both temporal and long-lasting harm to the educational system. Due to the time lost as institutions physically closed their doors, a recovery of the lost time was required. Statistics South Africa pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected South African schools' attendance, as the number of children who did not attend school almost doubled from 2019 to 2021 (Deliwe, 2020). Literature also confirms that significant time for learning and teaching was lost through the pandemic period (Donnelly and Patrinos, 2022). The protracted absence of students from school, the extended winter break, and the delayed start of the academic year in 2021 had a severe long-term effect on education, particularly at the primary level in rural areas.

In education sector specifically, schools and universities transitioned to online and remote learning, exposing and sometimes widening digital divides (Huang, 2020). The pandemic caused significant disruptions in learning and academic progress for many students (Marinnoni, 2020), but there was also a rapid adaptation of educational technologies and platforms. The retail sector saw a significant shift from physical stores to online shopping, accelerating trends in e-commerce (Adibfar, 2022). However, disruptions in global supply chains led to shortages and delays, and there were changes in consumer behaviour with an increased focus on health and safety (Russolillo, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the education system in South Africa, affecting various aspects from learning continuity to educational inequality. Schools across South Africa were closed for extended periods to curb the spread of the virus, leading to significant learning losses as students missed out on crucial instructional time (Ardington et al., 2021; Kotze et al., 2022; Vander Berg et al., 2022; Mullis et al., 2023). In response to the pandemic, there was a rapid push towards online and remote learning (Angrist et al., 2022; Lichand et al., 2022). However, this transition was uneven due to disparities in access to technology and the internet. Many students, particularly in rural areas and from lower-income families, struggled to participate in online classes due to a lack of devices and reliable internet access. The pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities within the South African education system, with schools in affluent areas better equipped to handle the shift to remote learning, while those in poorer regions faced significant challenges (Kim et al., 2021). This disparity widened the educational gap between different socioeconomic groups. The uncertainty and isolation brought about by the pandemic had a significant impact on the mental health of both students and educators (Serrano et al., 2022). Stress, anxiety, and depression became more prevalent, affecting students' ability to learn and teachers' capacity to deliver education effectively (Elmer et al., 2020). Studies and assessments conducted post-pandemic revealed students had fallen behind in their learning, particularly in foundational subjects like literacy and numeracy, which are critical for future academic success (Angrist, Barros, Bhula, Chaker, 2021; Kaffenberger, 2021). Teachers faced numerous challenges, including adapting to new teaching methods, managing remote classrooms, and dealing with the health risks associated with in-person teaching. Professional development in digital skills became crucial, but not all teachers had access to adequate training and support (Ujjanti, 2021). The South African government and educational authorities

implemented various measures to address the crisis, such as providing educational materials and resources, implementing catch-up programs, and exploring hybrid learning models. However, the effectiveness of these responses varied, and some initiatives faced logistical and financial constraints (Anderson et al., 2020). The pandemic has prompted a re-evaluation of the education system, leading to discussions about integrating more technology in education, addressing digital divides, and improving resilience against future disruptions. There is a growing recognition of the need for more flexible and adaptive education systems (Forman et al., 2020).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The outbreak of COVID-19 began in Wuhan, Hubei province, China. In December 2019, cases of a pneumonia-like illness were reported, and the novel coronavirus, later named SARS-CoV-2, was identified as the causative agent. Initial reports highlighted the virus's potential for human-to-human transmission. In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30 as the virus began spreading outside China (Plato et al., 2020, Wu Y et al., 2020). The disease was named COVID-19. By mid-February 2020, outbreaks were occurring in other countries, and the virus had begun spreading in Europe and the United States. WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020, as cases surged worldwide. Nations began implementing various containment measures, including lockdowns, travel bans, and social distancing. By early 2021, COVID-19 vaccines were developed at unprecedented speed. The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines were among the first to be authorized for emergency use. Vaccination campaigns began in many countries. However, the virus continued to mutate, with notable variants including Alpha (first identified in the UK), Beta (South Africa), Gamma (Brazil), and Delta (India). These variants had different characteristics, such as increased transmissibility or partial resistance to immunity from previous infections or vaccines. During mid-2021, the Delta variant became dominant in many regions, causing renewed surges in cases. Consequently, booster doses of vaccines were introduced to enhance protection (European Council, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic had profound and multifaceted impacts on education in South Africa, affecting students, educators, and the broader educational system in several significant ways. With schools closing during lockdowns, millions of students faced interruptions in their education. The shift to online learning was challenging due to inadequate infrastructure and resources, leaving many students behind. The transition to remote learning highlighted and exacerbated existing inequalities. Many students, particularly those in rural or underprivileged areas, lacked access to necessary technology, such as computers and stable internet connections, making it difficult for them to participate in online classes (Andrew, Cattan Farquharson, Kraftman, Costa, Krutikova, Phimister, Sevilla, 2020). Prolonged school closures and inconsistent access to education led to significant learning losses. Students missed out on critical instructional time, which has had long-term effects on their academic progress and future opportunities. The pandemic created a stressful environment for students, parents, and teachers. Issues such as anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges became more prevalent, affecting students' ability to focus and perform academically (Petri et al., 2020). Economic hardships caused by the pandemic forced many families to make difficult choices, including pulling children out of school to contribute to the household income. This has led to increased dropout rates and a higher risk of educational disengagement. Teachers faced immense pressure to adapt to new teaching methods and manage virtual classrooms (Porkel and Chhetri, 2021). Many struggled with the lack of training and resources for online education, impacting their effectiveness and job satisfaction (Mseleku, 2020). The pandemic exposed and intensified existing issues related to school infrastructure and resources. Many schools lacked the necessary facilities to implement health and safety measures, such as proper sanitation and social distancing setups. The pandemic disrupted regular assessment and examination schedules, leading to delays and changes in examination formats. This affected students' progression and future academic and career plans. The need to adapt rapidly to new teaching methods resulted in gaps in the curriculum. Essential subjects were skipped or rushed, leading to incomplete learning. Resource disparity, rooted in apartheid, worsened inequalities between fee-paying and non-fee-paying schools, and between wealthy and poor learners, even before COVID-19 (Spaull, 2015; Richter, Brandi, Enete, Pallant, Fihlo, 2018). The pandemic compounded these inequalities due to lack of access to resources like

internet and online learning (Le Grange, 2020). Educators struggled with home learning, relying heavily on parents, many of whom were not sufficiently educated to assist (Hoadley, 2020; Reddy et al., 2020). The pandemic led to learning losses, widened disparities, and erased previous educational gains (Dorne, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, Viruleg, 2020). According to StatsSA (2022), in 2020 there was a rapid increase in the number of out-of-school children and youth in South Africa. Distance learning was not an effective measure as access to learning was limited. Not all parents and learners had smartphones, data packages, and internet connections; some households experienced poor internet signals, especially in rural areas. This caused delays in completing the tasks that the teachers gave learners. Another factor that affected learning in the home environment was learners' lack of motivation. Learners were often disturbed by interference from family members, which caused them not to focus on their studies.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite various initiatives by the Department of Education in South Africa to support remote learning during the Covid-19 lockdown, rural primary schools faced significant challenges due to inadequate access to internet and other resources. For instance, the DBE website was updated with recent and pertinent information, including webpages and reading materials, including radio and television lesson programmes (Cristobal, Salla, Rosell, Darie, 2020). Learners from rural areas, however, were disadvantaged by lack of resources such as access to internet, which would enable them to take advantage of e-learning and other reading materials from the websites, despite all these efforts, satisfactory educational progress was not achieved, particularly, in rural primary schools (Dube, 2020). South Africa as other parts of the world was affected by the COVID 19 Pandemic in year 2019/2020. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the education system in South Africa, leading to widespread school closures, a shift to remote learning, and significant challenges in maintaining educational continuity. This unprecedented situation has exacerbated existing inequalities and created new barriers to effective learning (Nambiar, 2020). Specifically, the shift to online education has highlighted issues related to digital divide, including lack of access to necessary technology and reliable internet connections for students from low income backgrounds. Additionally, the sudden

transition has affected the quality of education with varying level of effectiveness in virtual teaching methods, reduce student's engagement and increase mental health challenges amongst students and teachers (Munoz Najar et al., 2021). This study intends to investigate the effectiveness of these initiatives and identify how the Department of Basic Education (DBE) can improve its policies and programmes to better support rural learners during future disruptions.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of a study is a written statement that justifies its importance, highlighting its influence in the research field, its contribution to new knowledge, and its potential benefits to others (Cueva, 2022). This study is crucial in improving deep understanding about the effect of COVID-19 on the management of teaching and learning practices within public primary schools in rural context. Based on unprecedented challenges that public primary sectors globally encountered due to the pandemic, this study aims to uncover the management practices that occurred in teaching methodologies, administrative practices, and student engagement.

Exploring the effects of COVID-19, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on change management in rural public primary schools, focusing on both effective strategies and persistent challenges. The findings add insights into how public primary schools managed the change to remote learning, implemented health protocols, and adjusted curricula to ensure continuity in educational services to the rural community at large. Furthermore, this research underscores the importance of resilience and innovation in teaching and learning management practices, informing future strategies for managing similar changes in the environment.

Finally, this study aims to provide principals, educators, school governing body members, policymakers, and other stakeholders with a good understanding of the effect of the pandemic, enhancing improved management practices and promoting the overall quality of teaching and learning in public primary schools in rural areas. This is believed to assist for preparing public primary schools in rural areas to respond effectively to future crisis while ensuring that learners receive inclusive and quality education.

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to investigate how Covid-19 has impacted the management of teaching and learning in rural primary schools at Kgakotlou Circuit, Limpopo Province. The specific objectives are:

- To identify basic education strategies implemented to redress the backlog caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of basic education strategies implemented for the lost time during the Covid-19 lockdown.
- To find out strategic interventions to improve the basic education strategies to enhance teaching and learning in the public primary schools in rural areas.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary question of this study is “How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact the management of teaching and learning in rural primary schools in Kgakotlou Circuit of the Limpopo Province?” The specific questions are:

- What basic education strategies were implemented to redress the backlog caused by Covid-19 pandemic?
- How effective were the basic education strategies implemented to recover time lost during Covid-19 lockdown?
- What strategic interventions are necessary to improve the basic education strategies to enhance teaching and learning in the public primary schools in rural areas?

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Covid-19 pandemic lockdown - It is a restriction policy for people to stay where they are and to avoid movements due to the pandemic, so as to prevent contact and further infections from the virus (WHO, 2020).

Effective management - Taylor (2002) defines effective management as the art of knowing what you want to do in the cheapest way. Effective management of teaching

involves coordination between all teaching activities and stakeholders.

Remote learning - It is distance learning, hence, does not occur face-to-face. In this situation, technology is used, examples of which are live video learning and screening of pre-recorded lessons (Graham, 2006).

Blended learning - According to Hranstinski (2019), blended learning means a mix of learning methods to provide various ways of teaching; this process combines online media sessions with many traditional classroom methods.

1.8 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The outline of the five chapters of this dissertation are as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and background: This chapter covers the study's background, significance, problem statement, aims, objectives, research questions, and concept definitions.

Chapter 2: Literature review: Chapter Two gives a scientific perspective, theories and relevant literature on the topic.

Chapter 3: Research methodology: In this chapter is outlined the research design used to address the different procedures to address the research problem, as well as the rationale for the methods selected.

Chapter 4: Data analysis and interpretation: In this chapter, the research findings are stated, analysed and interpreted.

Chapter 5: Summary of the findings, conclusion and recommendations: Chapter Five presents a summary of the findings, conclusions on the findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A literature review is a scholarly work that places knowledge and comprehension of the academic literature on a particular subject in perspective. The process also involves giving the material a critical appraisal. According to Kumar et al., (2019), it is a process of summarising, synthesising and/ or critiquing the information found as a result of a literature research. According to Paul and Criad (2020) the merit of any systematic review is determined not just on the basis of 'what was done and what was found', but also on how clearly the review is reported. The absence of a coherent synthesis, analysis or structure can be grounds for rejection. A thorough synthesis of previous findings, organised in a structured manner, can help integrate the widely fragmented literature (Basu et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2022). Reviews grounded in a specific framework provide the highest levels of clarity, comprehensiveness, and transparency (Paul, Lim et al., 2021). Kraus et al., (2021) states that literature review allows researchers to pinpoint relevant research gaps and adequately fit future conceptual or empirical studies into the state of academic discussion. A literature review focuses on an analysis of various available literature, such as journal articles, books and official documents. During the review, theories and empirical studies in relation to how the Covid-19 epidemic has affected management of learning and teaching in rural primary schools, will be discussed. Furthermore, the review will contextualise the topic of this study within global and national perspectives. This review starts by providing global perspectives on various notions of relevance to the research topic.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING MANAGEMENT

Management, as defined by Kaehler and Grundei (2019), involves coordinating individuals' efforts to attain specific goals and objectives by utilising resources effectively and efficiently. This process includes key functions such as planning, organising, staffing, leading, and controlling to reach the desired outcomes. Various authors have reported on the characteristics, personality traits, and qualities of leaders and managers (Bajaba et al., 2021), as well as the types of leadership (Mustajab et al., 2020; Suprpti et al., 2020; Garretsen et al., 2022). According to Catano et al.,

(2019), certain characteristics are associated with better performance. Competence is defined as measurable attributes or behaviours that distinguish outstanding performers from others in a defined job context. Holge-Hazelton et al., (2021) argue that, in response to the advent of the COVID-19 crisis in healthcare settings, managers had to restructure their organizational practices. This included abandoning less urgent medical procedures and other unit operations, establishing a safe environment, and offering infected patients the best care possible. On the other hand, although healthcare managers are accustomed to frequent and continuous changes in their daily lives, the pandemic forced them to go beyond their ordinary workloads, testing their roles, skills, and values (Rakowsky et al., 2020; Saltman, 2020). Furthermore, Bajaba et al., (2021) argue that managers with an adaptive personality exhibit a higher level of self-efficacy, resulting in increased motivation to lead in times of crisis.

2.3 MANAGEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT PUBLIC SCHOOL

One of the key responsibilities of principals and school management teams (SMTs) is managing teaching and learning. Principals play a vital role in schools by establishing and implementing departmental policies. The Department of Education differentiates principals from SMTs, highlighting that the primary focus of principals is to enhance school performance. To foster continual improvement, it is essential to consistently evaluate the quality of educational activities. Bingham (2021) notes that effective leadership practices and policy recommendations involve clarifying roles and empowering staff and teachers to emphasize equity, engage in all aspects of learning, and promote health and wellbeing. Monitoring entails visiting classrooms, observing teachers, and providing constructive feedback. Strong leaders develop and implement effective strategies for monitoring and evaluating classroom activities, thereby raising educational standards for educators (Bingham, 2021).

Department heads and deputy principals are also tasked with overseeing specific subjects or departments, which varies based on the size of the school and their responsibilities (Tapala et al., 2020). They are responsible for ensuring positive performance among both learners and teachers in those areas. As part of their curriculum leadership duties, they must also monitor and assess the work of teachers and students. The necessity to integrate new practices requiring a range of

competencies across educational systems underscores the significance of professional development for principals and school leaders (Huber and Helm, 2020). This professional growth is essential for adapting to the changing educational environment and equipping leaders to effectively meet the demands of their roles.

2.4 INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON MANAGEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDAMIC

Coronavirus disease, which is also referred to 'Covid-19 pandemic', is severe and acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-COV 2). Medical research demonstrated that a Covid-19 infection could cause severe symptoms in a person, depending on his/her immune system. According to reports, the illness' signs and symptoms include a dry cough, headaches, and generalized weakness (Zhong et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic was first discovered in Wuhan, China, in 2019, from where it spread to every continent. The World Health Organization declared it a pandemic on March 11, 2020, based on the speed at which it was spreading and claiming lives all around the globe. In several nations, including South Africa, this resulted in lockdown, which also caused schools to close,(Kamanga, 2020). In 2023, it was anticipated that the term dates will settle and revert to normal.

The impact on educational service was immense. According to Brom et.al.,(2020), a novel phenomenon was the sudden global move towards remote teaching. Joshi et al., (2018), state that these kinds of events are unplanned and necessitate the ability to teach remotely via technology. In South Africa, new teaching strategies were adopted that made use of a variety of technology, including online learning tools and using broadcasting techniques, like TV and radio. Another example, over 180 000 schools in Brazil were shut down, and 47 million pupils had to adjust to a new methodology of distant learning. The pandemic affected low-income families' children more; these are children who were already more likely to drop out of school, are difficult for teachers to control and educate due to their unequal access to computers and digital resources. Brazil is in this unheard-of predicament in a region without a culture of digital, remote, or distance education, according to Maria Helena Guimaraes de Castro (2020), the counsellor to the National Council of Education. For those who worked with basic education in public and private schools, this was a novel

and challenging situation. OECD (2021) claims that the availability of information and communication technology (ICT) in Japan enabled education and learning to continue even when face-to-face interactions were no longer feasible, however, for these technologies to be effective, both teachers and students needed to be intimately familiar with them, and how to use them. Examining how frequently these tools were used in classrooms prior to the crisis is a useful way to gauge how well-prepared instructors and their pupils were for school closures. In Japan, parents became a crucial component of the school system by encouraging and facilitating student engagement.

The following are some of the experiences from other countries to demonstrate how the pandemic affected the educational system:

- In Kenya, the government reported its first COVID-19 case on March 13, 2020, and by April 28, 2020, had 374 confirmed cases, with 124 recoveries and 14 deaths. The majority of cases were in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kilifi, Kwale, and Mandera counties. To curb the virus's spread, the government closed all educational institutions between March 16 and March 20, 2020 (Hauck, Stanglin, 2020). The Ministry of Health implemented social distancing measures, leading to a shift to digital learning (Abidjan, 2020). However, students from underprivileged families and rural areas faced challenges due to lack of technology and reliable internet access (ICDE 2020). The pandemic significantly impacted the Kenyan education system, altering academic calendars with expectations to stabilize by 2023 (Nereah, 2021). The government adopted a three-pronged approach to remote learning, producing online content accessible through various platforms (MoE, 2020; UNESCO, 2020c). However, this highlighted disparities, as wealthier students could continue learning with better resources, while disadvantaged students struggled with access to education, exacerbating existing inequalities (Baker, 2020).
- In India, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on its educational system, forcing a rapid shift from traditional classroom learning to online platforms. This transition exposed significant disparities in digital access,

particularly affecting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who struggled with inadequate devices and limited internet connectivity (Nair, 2020; Singh, 2021). The disruption also led to increased mental health issues among students due to routine interruptions, isolation from peers, and concerns over academic performance (Reddy, 2021; Sharma, 2022). Educators faced difficulties as they quickly had to adopt new digital tools and teaching methods, with varying success depending on the availability of training and resources (Patel, 2021). In response, the Indian government launched initiatives such as the Digital India program and the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to enhance digital infrastructure and promote Open and Distance Learning (ODL) (Gupta, 2022). However, challenges in equitable access remain, particularly for students from rural areas and economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Kumar, 2021). International organizations like UNESCO also supported education systems during the pandemic by focusing on teacher support, connectivity, and gender equity through initiatives like the Global Education Coalition (UNESCO, 2022). As the pandemic subsides, the crisis presents an opportunity to innovate and build more resilient and inclusive educational systems (Mishra, 2023).

- In Nigeria also the COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on its education system, leading to extended school closures and unprecedented challenges. The initial lockdown, lasting over six months, exacerbated existing problems in the education sector, such as a high teacher attrition rate and a sharp rise in student dropout rates, as many students were reluctant to return to school due to the uncertainty of the virus's effects (Alhat, 2020, Lee, Malcei, and Kim, 2021). School administrators faced difficulties reuniting teachers and students, and the lack of alternative instructional methods during the lockdown further worsened the situation (Jowsey et al., 2020). Financial difficulties, as well as inadequate support for digital learning, contributed to both teachers' and students' reluctance to resume education (Amir et al., 2020). Furthermore, disparities in digital access became apparent, with many students unable to participate in online learning due to poverty, lack of internet connectivity, digital literacy, and insufficient access to ICT tools (Adefuye et al., 2021). The psychological and emotional toll on students, who were kept in lockdown for over six months, added to the challenges. However, the pandemic also

triggered a transformation in Nigeria's education system, spurring technological advancements and reshaping how information is delivered, paving the way for future educational reforms (Singh and Thurman, 2019, Parmigiani et al., 2021).

The above experiences from different countries regarding COVID-19 pandemic highlighted lessons that should be learned from their education systems. Generally, there was the rapid shift to digital learning, with Kenya implementing a multi-platform approach, India launching the Digital India initiative, and Nigeria embracing technological reforms. These efforts demonstrated resilience and adaptability, supported by international bodies like UNESCO, which promoted teacher training and digital infrastructure improvements. However, a significant concern observed in all three countries was the deepening of educational inequalities. Disadvantaged students in rural and low-income areas struggled with access to technology and reliable internet, while wealthier students could continue learning, exacerbating pre-existing disparities. In Nigeria, financial challenges and a lack of digital literacy further hindered students' return to education. These limitations suggest for further improvement in the areas that governments should focus on equitable access to technology, digital literacy programs, and stronger infrastructure to build more resilient education systems for future unexpected crises.

2.5 SOUTH AFRICA'S PRACTICE ON MANAGEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDAMIC

2.5.1 Impact of Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa

In South Africa, the outbreak was reported in March 2020, which prompted the president to declare a State of National disaster on the of 15th of March 2020. According to research, the coronavirus is spread via droplets from an infected person. People become infected with the virus when such droplets fall on surfaces and they encountered them, usually with their hands, mouth or nose (Wu F et al., 2020). Medical professionals determined that face masks and social seclusion were the most effective ways to stop the disease from spreading (UNICEF, 2020).

Sheikh et al., (2020) explained that a shutdown was considered one of the strategies to preserve social distance and reduce illnesses, globally, therefore, except for vital

services, businesses and schools were closed because of the lockdown. Educational institutions in South Africa were closed, as the teachers' and students' safety was the primary concern. The rapid spread of Covid-19 throughout the world has had an impact on economic growth, social and psychological well-being, and educational outcomes (Hoadley, 2020).

2.5.2 The impact of lockdown on the effective management of teaching and learning in South Africa

Millions of students lost a significant amount of instructional and learning time as a result of the countrywide lockdown (Ardington et al., Kotze et al., Van der Berg et al., 2022, Mullis et al., 2023, Spaul, 2023). As the disruption of the curriculum may take some time to recover from, schools missing important learning opportunities as a result of the outbreak may cause both short-term and long-term harm to the educational system. According to Bozkurt and Sharma (2020), Pacheco, Morgado, Sousa and Maia, (2021), the adoption of remote emergency learning as a measure for a pressing issue, led to an educational disbanding. The potential for some kids to never return to the classroom even after the outbreak has been managed is another aspect of the long-term harm (Wills & Van der Berg, 2022). According to Patrinos et al., (2022); Betthausen et al., (2023) greater learning loss is found among schools with lower socio-economic status. Spaul (2020), states that there had never been and still aren't any national-funded plans for making up for learning losses. For every week schools were closed on average, learning declined by 0.01 standard deviations (Patrinos et al., 2022).

For the learners to catch up with the schoolwork during the lockdown, the Department of Education introduced blended learning. The traditional face-to-face learning approach was combined / blended with online learning methods (Dziuban et al., 2018). Blended learning is "a system that mixes in-person instruction with computer-mediated instruction". According to Hrastinski (2019), learning that is computer-based or online can be considered as learning that necessitates the use of online services in schools; as such, it cannot be implemented successfully without computers.

Online teaching and learning were recommended by the Department of Education for learners to catch up with their schoolwork and curriculum during the lockdown (DBE,

2020). The Covid-19 pandemic drove everyone to move swiftly into digital sphere, and schools had to quickly update their online and digital platforms to safeguard the academic project and human lives, (Alzheimer, Duda-Banwar and Schreck, 2020 and Seepe, 2021). It seems, however, that blended learning only provided dynamic learning experiences for learners from advantaged backgrounds who attend private schools and well-resourced schools in cities and urban areas; in this setup teachers were able to provide teaching virtually and through social media platforms. Such programmes were not possible for learners from poor rural communities and schools which lack computers, electronic gadgets, mobile data, and internet connection. This demonstrates the stark disparities in educational contexts of students from various socioeconomic backgrounds and the possible differences in their performance. Online education is typically less accessible to rural populations than to metropolitan ones. Poor communities are at risk for having no access to technology, other necessities of life, and critical information, since these are luxuries that they cannot afford. According to Petri, Aladin, Ranjan, Javangwe, Gilliland, Tuominen and Lasse (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic led instructors to suffer emotionally and psychologically, due to teaching responsibilities brought on by the abrupt switch from traditional face to face instruction to online instruction. Manyane (2020) asserts that the Covid-19 pandemic's resultant high unemployment rates in South Africa had pushed many people to rely on food assistance from the government and other organizations.

2.5.3 Covid-19 pandemic's effects on students in remote places

Rural areas are home to a great number of students in South Africa. According to Plecher (2020), around 66% of South Africa's population lived in rural areas by 2019; provinces like Limpopo, the Eastern Cape, and Mpumalanga are typically considered rural. The South African government has been trying to provide high-quality teaching and learning in the rural schools, even before the Covid-19 outbreak (Plessis and Mestry, 2019). According to Dube (2020), "During the Covid-19 lockdown, there was lack of attention to rural education and online learning which has magnified the challenges faced by rural learners and teachers"; this has subsequently marginalised them, even more. Two-thirds of students from lower-class families received very little information from teachers during school closures, (SADTU, 2021).

In South Africa, the government cooperated with a number of non-governmental organizations to derive ways to continue with curriculum delivery. Many educational projects based on the web, mobile gadgets, and other platforms have been designed. Several other initiatives have emerged, including lockdown digital schools, using Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and WhatsApp groups, however, despite these efforts, South Africa's education system remained ill-prepared and still could not benefit learners from rural schools (Dube, 2020). According to Alexa and Baciu (2020), there were issues with online learning, which include disparities brought about by the internet access, digital competences, and online portals, lacking accessible capabilities to meet the demands of students with a range of needs. Just 10% of homes had internet connectivity, while 22% of households had access to computers, (Spaull and Van der Berg, 2021:8).

2.5.4 Re-opening of schools after lockdown

The return of learners to schools was done in phases. In primary schools all students and instructors in Grade 7 were scheduled to return to class on August 11, 2020; by August 24, learners in Grades R, 1,2,3,4 and 6 returned while Grade 5 learners returned on August 31. According to DBE's Standard Operating Procedure (2020), schools were given mandates to decide on the rotational attendance that will suit their needs. Schools in the rural areas continued to experience challenges with a shortage of classrooms and poor infrastructure (Arashi et al., 2020, Sokhulu 2021). The social distancing of 1 meter to 1 and a half meters became a challenge as classrooms had to accommodate not more than 20 learners. The rotational attendance meant that some grades would attend once or twice a week, and the timetables had to be adjusted (DBE, 2020). This led to some learners dropping out of school, especially in the countryside (Patrinos et al., 2022; Gustafsson, 2022) The amendment of the curriculum by the Department of Education had some topics in different subjects removed and others reduced in scope, hence, the annual teaching plans were revised to suit the situation, meaning, that learners were still losing according to the amended curriculum (DBE 2020b:5).

2.6 BASIC EDUCATION POLICIES AND PLANS IMPLEMENTED DURING COVID

The DBE and teachers' unions held numerous discussions to address challenges that

arose during the lockdown period. Around 100 education specialists participated in two national forums organized by the DBE to develop strategies and gather input regarding the lockdowns. In June 2020, the DBE (2020b) introduced its second medium-term plan, the School Recovery Strategy in Response to COVID-19 (SRPRC). This strategy involved a phased return of students and implemented a rotational system. The rotation schedule allowed only specific grades to attend on designated days of the week, reducing the risk of overcrowding. Schools were provided with various rotation options to suit their needs (DBE 2020c). Some of the curriculum plans and policies are:

- ***Develop Standard Operating Procedures to Guide the Basic Education Sector to Manage and contain the spread of infection:*** A varied approach was adopted for reopening schools in South Africa, guided by protocols aimed at preventing and managing the spread of COVID-19 within the Basic Education Sector (DBE, 2020b:5). Administrators were provided with standard operating procedures to safeguard students' health and safety. The curriculum recovery plan focused on addressing lost instructional time, adjusting evaluations, and reviewing curricula to ensure key content was covered within the limited remaining school days. Schools could potentially recover between 29 and 33 days of instruction, though this still fell short of the number of days lost, requiring restructuring across all grades except Grade 12 (DBE, 2020b:6, 14). The recovery plan emphasized principles of equity and inclusion, ensuring that all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, could participate. Plans were adaptable to the specific needs of individual schools, considering enrolment numbers and school size. The focus was not just on content coverage but also on maintaining learning quality and emphasizing values, knowledge, and skills. Throughout, health and safety remained top priorities in the implementation of these recovery programs (DBE, 2020b:14).
- ***A plan for the recovery of teaching and learning time:*** There was discussion on the length of the school day, the length of the school term, and the reduction in the amount of time allocated for assessments and exams (Soudien et al., 2022). The June exam, which was finished by every student in the system, was discarded by the DBE. The exit level test would typically be given at the end of the school year, in late October or early November, and would be written in

November and early December (DBE 2020c).

- **Learner and teacher attendance:** The education sector used a phased-in approach for returning students. Schools had to choose a personalized schedule that met their specific requirements. The majority of schools choose the daily rotation model, whereas high enrolment schools used weekly, platooning, hybrid, and traditional models (DBE 2020a).
- **Curriculum Coverage:** For grades lower than 12, the curriculum was rearranged and condensed in accordance with the Annual Teaching Plan (2020 recovery plan for post COVID-19, (DBE 2020b). After schools reopened, Senior Managers and Subject Advisors provided guidance on the curriculum. Teachers attended workshops and training via Zoom, Team, Google Meet and blended forms in line with the environment of the schools (Trcano, 2020). Longer school days and hours were also proposed, resulting in an hourly increase for the Senior Phase, a thirty-minute increase for the Intermediate Phase, and a two-hour increase for the Further Education and Training Phase. The additional days were subtracted from the planned holidays, which included December's school break (Sunday Tribune, 2020a).
- **Learner Support Programs:** Through in-person and online learning programs, the DBE and Provincial Education Department provided services to children in grades R–12, including those with special education needs. Furthermore, the DBE provided support through various initiatives across the provinces, such as digital internet resources, radio and TV broadcasts, additional classes and camps, and training for 12th graders. These systems were used to monitor the behaviour and attitudes of the kids.
- **Teacher-assistants to help in recovery plan:** Basic education in the schools hired 300,000 youth assistants to assist with the reconstruction plan. This was a part of President Cyril Ramaphosa's Presidential Employment Stimulus Program, which was intended to create 100,000 employments for general school assistants and 200 000 positions for education assistants. This was accomplished through the utilization of the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) (SAnews.gov.za, 2022). Apart from tackling some of the enduring systemic problems, the BEEI sought to mitigate the disruptions to education brought about by Covid-19. Education aides will support teachers in

the classroom and offer extra help to kids. General school helpers will ensure that education takes place in a clean, safe, and secure environment in addition to helping schools comply with COVID-19 standards (SAnews.gov.za,2023).

- **Updated school calendar:** The revised 2021 school calendar for South African schools was issued by the Department of Basic Education. The reopening of public schools was delayed by several weeks due to the impact of a second wave of infections that affected the entire country. The revised schedule was implemented on February 15th. Under the new calendar, the school year was supposed to end on December 15, 2021, with 192 actual school days (rather than the prior 195 days).

The above strategies imply that education sector in South Africa implemented Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to manage COVID-19 in schools, prioritising health and safety. Despite recovery plans to regain lost instructional time, gaps remained, particularly in lower grades, necessitating curriculum adjustments. Equity and inclusion were emphasized, ensuring disadvantaged students could participate. Learner support programs and teacher-assistants through the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) helped mitigate disruptions. Phased attendance models and a revised school calendar offered flexibility, although reduced school days reflected the ongoing challenges in maintaining consistent education amid the pandemic.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed theoretical background on management practices of learning and teaching in public schools. It further discussed about international perspectives from different countries point of view to draw lessons from global experience. The above experiences from different countries regarding COVID-19 pandemic highlighted lessons that should be learned from their education systems. Generally, the international experience implies there was the rapid shift to digital learning, with Kenya implementing a multi-platform approach, India launching the Digital India initiative, and Nigeria embracing technological reforms. However, a significant concern observed in all three countries was the deepening of educational inequalities. Disadvantaged

students in rural and low-income areas struggled with access to technology and reliable internet, while wealthier students could continue learning, exacerbating pre-existing disparities. In Nigeria, financial challenges and a lack of digital literacy further hindered students' return to education. In South Africa, government implemented Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to manage COVID-19 in schools, prioritising health and safety. Despite recovery plans to regain lost instructional time, gaps remained, particularly in lower grades, necessitating curriculum adjustments. Equity and inclusion were emphasized, ensuring disadvantaged students could participate. Learner support programs and teacher-assistants through the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) helped mitigate disruptions. Phased attendance models and a revised school calendar offered flexibility, although reduced school days reflected the ongoing challenges in maintaining consistent education amid the pandemic. The next chapter will discuss in detail about the methodology followed in this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive review of the literature concerning the effects of COVID-19 on the management of teaching and learning in public schools, with a particular emphasis on the principles of management, international perspectives, and the specific context of South Africa. This provided contextual understanding regarding theoretical perspectives on strategies and challenges encountered by educational sector during the pandemic. Linking with the previous chapter, this current chapter provides a detailed discussion of the research methodology employed in the investigation of the effects of COVID-19 on the management of teaching and learning within public schools to address the objectives of the study.

This chapter is subdivided into different sections. First, the research design section that describes the overall strategy adopted for the study, in particular the qualitative approach. Secondly, the study area specifies the geographic and socio-economic context of the study setting. The population clarifies the target groups involved in the study and the sampling section also provides clarity on the techniques used to select participants. Thirdly, the data collection section outlines the methods employed to gather data from the selected participants of the study. The data analysis subsection also provides techniques used to interpret the collected data, detailing the thematic analysis approaches that was used to uncover patterns and themes emerged from the data. Furthermore, the chapter also discusses the trustworthiness of the research, emphasizing the measures taken to ensure the quality of the qualitative data. Finally, the ethical considerations section discusses the ethical protocols followed throughout the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the voluntary participation of participants, which are crucial elements for ensuring the integrity of the study.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design entails an overall plan that guides a study (Mwita, 2022; Asenahabi, 2019; Bostley, 2019; Asnahabi, 2019; Vogt et al., 2012). It can be broadly classified as quantitative, qualitative and mixed method (Cresswell, 2021). A quantitative study employs numerical data to describe a phenomenon or analyse the relationship between two variables, whereas a qualitative study utilises words and textual data to enhance the understanding of that phenomenon; in contrast, a mixed-method approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies within a single study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Maree, 2020). Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the effect of COVID-19 on the management of teaching and learning in public rural schools. By employing qualitative methods, the study intends to gather in-depth insights from school principals, educators, administrators, and parents regarding their experiences and perceptions during the pandemic. The qualitative approach assists for in-depth-understanding (Creswell, 2018; Coombs, 2022; Scotland 2019) of the management strategies used and their effectiveness in teaching and learning process during the crisis. The qualitative approach also helps to unravel the challenges faced by the schools, as well as the strategies implemented to adapt to remote learning and maintain educational continuity. Thus, the qualitative approach is very crucial in this study not only to gather data regarding the experiences of those directly involved in the educational process but also get deeper understanding on the effectiveness and challenges of strategies implemented during the pandemic crisis. Finally, the qualitative study helps to find out critical insights to suggest strategic interventions for future educational policies and practices.

3.3 STUDY AREA

A study area is the geographical area where the research is taking place. According to Lee (1999), a study area is the relevant area directly concerned with your study. The study was conducted in two primary schools located within the Kgakotlou Circuit, situated on the premises of Christ the King Private School in Nobody Village, part of the Mankweng area in Polokwane, Limpopo Province. Within this circuit, there are a total of ten staff members, including a Circuit Manager, a Deputy Manager in

Governance, and eight support staff responsible for various departments such as Human Resources, Wellness, School Nutrition, Examinations, and Finance. The first school, Tjatjaneng Primary School, is located in Ga-Mothapo Village under Chief Moremadi Mothapo and has both old and dilapidated buildings alongside a more recently constructed structure. The school has an enrolment of 502 learners and employs 15 staff members, consisting of one principal, one deputy principal, two departmental heads, and eleven post-level one educators. Additionally, the School Governing Body (SGB) comprises six members, including four parents and two teachers. The second school, Phuti 2 Primary School, is also situated in Ga-Mothapo Village under Chief Moremadi Mothapo and features two old, dilapidated buildings and one new block. This school employs ten staff members, which includes one principal, one departmental head, and eight post-level one educators, with a similar SGB structure of six members, consisting of four parents and two teachers. Both schools operate in a region characterized by poor socio-economic conditions, where unemployment rates are high and many families rely on government social grants, resulting in a significant portion of the population living below the poverty line. The governance structure of these schools is hierarchical, extending from the national head offices to the provincial head offices, the Capricorn South district office, the Kgakotlou Circuit office, and finally, the individual schools.

3.4 POPULATION

A population of a study, also known as the 'target population' refers to people, events, situations that are drawn from the broader picture and who have similar traits, such as similar ages, sexes, or physical conditions. Bhandari (2022) explains that a population is typically a sizable group of people or things that are the subject of a scientific inquiry. The total target population was 26 staff for this study who represented the following groups: Circuit manager, School Principals, Educators and Departmental heads in the two primary schools, namely Tjatjaneng and Phuti primary school.

3.5 SAMPLING METHODS

Sampling Process

As Turner (2020) notes, sampling not only conserves resources but also facilitates efficient data collection and analysis, making it an essential tool for studies with limited budgets and time constraints. For the purpose of this study on the impact of COVID-19 on the management of teaching and learning in public schools, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed. This technique was chosen because it allows the researcher to deliberately select participants who are most relevant to the study objectives. Purposive sampling is particularly useful in qualitative research, where the goal is to gather in-depth insights from individuals who have specific knowledge or experience related to the phenomenon being studied, in this case, the management of teaching and learning practices in the public schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, the purposive sampling technique used to target key informants such as school principals, educators and support staff, from two primary schools in the Kgakotlou Circuit. These participants were selected based on their experience, as they possess in-depth knowledge into the challenges and strategies employed in response to the pandemic.

Sample Size

The total sample size includes 13 key informants based on the data saturation. This includes the following: 1 Circuit Manager, 2 Principals, 3 Departmental Heads, and 7 educators involved in this study.

Table 3.1: Study Population and Sample Size

UNIT	POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE
Circuit Manager	1	1
Principals	3	2
Department Heads	3	3
Educators	19	7
Total	26	13

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The primary data was gathered using interview. Interviews are defined by Rizk and Elragal (2020) as the sharing of opinions on a subject of mutual interest by two or more persons. Rizk highlights the importance of human contact in the process of

producing knowledge and the social context of research findings. Interviews are predicted to increase the breadth of knowledge on the topics under investigation. Gathering the backstory of a participant's experience is a particularly valuable use of interviews. It is a two-way process that enables the sharing of concepts and data (Meenu, 2019) a semi-structured interviews which were conducted with school principals, educators, and circuit manager and departmental heads from the two primary schools in the Kgakotlou Circuit. It was one-on one interview conducted with the key informants. The total of 13 key informants involved including, 1 Circuit Manager, 2 Principals, 3 Departmental Heads, and 7 educators. The interview was designed to explore participants perception on: the school catch-up plans and strategies; challenges with regard to the online remote learning platforms that were implemented as tangible measures for teaching and learning during the Covid-19 lockdown; how effective was parental involvement during covid-19 and challenges thereof; the viability of the revised annual teaching plans which were implemented as the interim measure to resolve the curriculum delivery backlog; provision of tangible plans for recovery plans for lost time, that were put in place to ensure effective teaching and learning when schools re-opened after lockdown; the effectiveness of the policies and recovery plans during Covid-19 lockdown are reviewed to highlight how challenging and efficient those plans were.

On the other hand, secondary data refers to data collected using literature review, Olabode et al., (2019). Different sources such as journals and scholastic articles were applied in order to gather data on the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the management of teaching and learning in rural primary schools. The review was firstly focusing on the global impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the socio-economic aspects. The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on schooling globally was reviewed which mainly focused on Kenya, India and Nigeria. Different articles regarding the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on learning and teaching in South Africa were intensively reviewed so as to identify the measures that the government had in place during and after the nation lockdown in order to mitigate the damages caused by the pandemic in the education sector, particularly in the rural areas.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

In this study, thematic analysis was employed to analyse and interpret the interview data collected during fieldwork. The process began with the transcription of the fieldwork data into digital written text. After the transcription was complete, the next phase involved thorough reading and re-reading of the data for a deep understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives on how COVID-19 affected the management of teaching and learning in their schools. Following this, the researcher engaged in coding the data, where key phrases, concepts, or segments of the text that were relevant to the research questions were coded. After the coding phase, related codes were grouped into broader themes, which represented patterns. Finally, interpreting the themes in relation to the study objectives and the literature on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical considerations refer to a set of principles and steps that guide researchers on how scientific research should be morally conducted and disseminated. They are moral standards that direct researchers on what to do and how to disclose research accurately and ensuring that no harm is inflicted on study participants or members of the society (Baljinder, 2019). Principles to be applied include:

- **Voluntary participation** which signifies that participants are free to decide whether to participate in the study or not, at any moment. Participants were notified that if they choose not to engage, there would not be any negative effects or ramifications. If they choose to stop participating even without a reason, they will be respected for doing so.
- **Informed consent** means that before they decide whether to participate, participants are aware of the study's goals, advantages, risks, and funding sources. The participants were given an informed consent form together with all the details they need to decide whether they wish to participate or not. The consent form included information about the institutional approval for the researcher to conduct this study.
- **Anonymity** is an assurance that the participants' identities are unknown to the general public, only the researcher or any assigned research assistants. No

personally identifiable information was gathered. Participants have a right to privacy; therefore, their personal data are protected; this research recognised this ethical principle.

- **Confidentiality** is based on the fact that although researchers are aware of the participants' identities, they keep that knowledge to themselves. In order to prevent others from recognising personally-identifiable information from the data, researchers anonymize it, thereby, confidential personal information was not shared with anyone. The participants were assured that the information was only for research purposes.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Reliability and validity are ways of demonstrating and communicating the accuracy of research process and the trustworthiness of the findings (Roberts, 2006). According to Perakyla (1997), the issue of reliability and validity are essential because the objectivity of findings is at stake. Roberts (2006) describes reliability as how far a test or procedure will produce similar results when tested or used in different circumstances. In this study, trustworthiness was achieved by focusing on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings (Maree, 2020) detailed as follow:

- Credibility was ensured by using triangulation sources of data collection, such as primary and secondary sources of data.
- Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the study context, including the specific challenges faced by the schools in the Kgakotlou Circuit, the socio-economic background of the community, and the structural conditions of the schools.
- Dependability was addressed by documenting the research process, including the steps taken in data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

3.10 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Study limitations refer to aspects of the methodology or design that could affect how data is collected, analysed, and how the results are interpreted. In this research, it is

important to acknowledge certain anticipated limitations. Since the study focuses on rural primary schools in the Kgakotlou Circuit, located in the Mankweng area of Limpopo Province, the findings may not be applicable to other rural primary schools in different provinces.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided detailed information on the methodological procedures of the study. As indicated on the previous chapter, data for this study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. For the semi-structured interviews, five sets of questions, organised under different themes, were posed to participants. Secondary data was collected through an extensive literature review. Various sources, such as journals and academic articles, were used to access information on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of teaching and learning in rural primary schools. The study is structured around six key themes. These explore: the school catch-up plans developed by the Department of Basic Education to ensure continuity of teaching and learning during the lockdown; the challenges of implementing online remote learning platforms as an alternative method for delivering education; the effectiveness and challenges of parental involvement during the pandemic; the viability of the revised annual teaching plans designed to address the curriculum delivery backlog; the tangible recovery plans aimed at compensating for lost instructional time once schools reopened; the overall effectiveness of policies and recovery strategies during the lockdown, highlighting their strengths and challenges in ensuring that teaching and learning continued under difficult circumstances.

Building further on the foundation of the previous chapter, this current chapter presents data analysis, interpretation and findings of this study. Data was collected from 13 key informants. The following is biographic profile of the respondents:

- Out of the 13 participants, there were 6 males and 7 females. Majority of the participants (12) were between the age group of 41-60 years.
- These participants were drawn from various roles, such as 1 Circuit Manager, 2 Principals, 3 Departmental Heads, and 7 post-level 1 educators.
- The 13 participants' qualifications vary as follows: 1 PhD, 1 Master's Degree, 3 Honour's Degree, 1 BTech, 2 BEd, 4 post-graduate diploma/ certificate, and 1 teacher's diploma.

- In terms of work experience, most participants (9) have more than 22 years of experience.

For analysing the qualitative data collected from the interview, thematic data analysis method was applied to examine and identify common ideas and patterns of meaning that had come up repeatedly (Caulfield, 2022). The findings were presented using themes in line with the study objectives as detailed below.

Objective #1. To identify basic education strategies implemented to redress the backlog caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.2 The School Catch-up Plans during Covid-19 Lockdown

The finding shows that in Kgakotlou circuit, there was lack of plans for curriculum catch-up during Covid-19 lockdown due to limited resources, and the socio-economic background hindered the adoption and implementation of educational strategies. One of the participants indicated that:

“The DBE had plans in place for learners and teachers to catch up with schoolwork during lock-down such as radio and television lessons but the school did not have any plans in place because of the socio-economic background of the learners and the lack of the necessary gadgets.” (Participant 3. Date of Interview: 22 JUNE 2023).

Another finding shows that schools made efforts to facilitate learning through various digital platforms. However, these efforts only benefited learners having access to technology, such as smartphones or internet connectivity, suggesting the digital divide that affected many students. This is echoed by two participants:

“There was WhatsApp group for teachers and parents to send schoolwork to learners. Some learners were able to follow the radio and television lesson broadcasts” (Participant 2. Date of Interview: 22 JUNE 2023).

“Some learners were doing online learning activities. Those who had smart phones were able to download lessons and to watch educational videos on YouTube”. (Participant 13. Date of Interview: 21 JULY 2023).

Furthermore, the finding shows that lack of preparedness and lack of teachers training in virtual teaching methods, leaving them ill-equipped to deliver lessons online or remotely. This is supported by:

“The closing of schools was urgent, so the school did not have plans in place. Teachers were not trained on how to present lessons virtually”. (Participant 8. Date of interview: 21 July 2023).

The finding indicates that that while national plans were in place, socio-economic difficulty, lack of adequate resources, inequities in access to technology, lack of school-level planning, and untrained staff significantly affected the adoption and implementation of remote teaching and learning during the pandemic, especially in rural settings. This finding is consistent with literature that indicates the adoption of emergency remote learning as a stopgap measure for a pressing issue led to an educational disbanding (Bozkurt and Sharma, 2020; Pacheco, Morgado, Sousa and Maia, 2021). This is because it compelled educators and learners to embrace and adjust to the usage of digital tools and resources for teaching, including online platforms (Zoom, Teams, Chat among others) web-connected PCs, tablets, and smartphones. For students in all grades, several provinces had prepared online lesson plans and disseminated support materials to encourage learning during lockdown. The DBE website was updated with current and relevant content, including webpages and reading materials, including radio and television programs (Cristobal et al., 2020). Based on the participants’ responses above, it is evident that schools did not have plans in place to prepare for provision of teaching and learning during Covid-19 lockdown as the situation was never anticipated as it was sudden. For the learners to catch up with the schoolwork during the lockdown, blended learning was implemented by the Department of Education.

4.3 Online remote learning platforms during covid-19 lockdown

The finding highlight several key challenges faced by rural primary schools in adapting to the shift towards online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Significant challenges that were mentioned were lack of resources, as well as training of educators and learners on ICT. Most educators were not competent in using online learning platforms, and they had not been adequately trained in the use of ICT for

remote teaching. This suggests a lack of preparedness in terms of technical skills among educators. The following is an extract from participants' responses:

"It was difficult, almost dysfunctional because some educators were not ICT competent. Lack of resources such as smart phones and laptops from learners, network connection, lack of data and wi-fi were also big challenges." (Participant 1: Date of Interview: 17 JULY 2023).

"It was difficult because teachers were not trained on how to use online learning and teaching platforms. There were challenges regarding the online connection as most parents did not have smart phones, tablets and laptops that they could use to assist the learners with schoolwork." (Participant 4. Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

The rural and disadvantaged context further worsened the problem, as many parents could not afford to buy smartphones or tablets for their children, nor could they afford data or internet services. This highlights the financial strain on parents, making online learning inaccessible for many students.

"The school is in the remote area and most learners are from poor families, so parents could not afford to buy smart phones and tablets for learners to catch-up with schoolwork. They could also not afford to buy data." (Participant 2. Date of Interview: 22 JUNE 2023).

"It was not easy because most learners do not have smart phones and data. There were radio and television lessons, but learners and their parents did not have programs for the lesson broadcasts on those platforms." (Participant 8. Date of Interview: 21 JULY 2023).

"In our case, online learning was not possible because parents could not afford smart phones, tablets or even data. Teachers did not have clear understanding of how the online lessons operates as they were not exposed to them before." (Participant 10. Date of Interview: 20 JUNE 2023).

The above finding indicates that the spontaneous shift towards online teaching and learning was largely ineffective in rural primary schools due to technological, financial, and training deficiencies, along with broader socioeconomic disparities. This implies the need to address these challenges to ensure equitable access to education. This is consistent with the literature that, due to the nationwide lockdown, all schools were

forced to close, which made it difficult to provide learner support to institutions and students with a range of requirements (Kamanga, 2020). The Covid-19 drove everyone to move swiftly into the digital sphere, and schools had to quickly update their online and digital platforms to safeguard the academic project and human lives, according to Altheimer, Duda-Banwar and Schreck (2020) and Seepe (2021). Additionally, the introduction of online learning aimed to guarantee the implementation of teaching, learning, and support initiatives such curriculum differentiation in schools. However, there were issues with online learning, including disparities brought about by internet access, digital competences, and online portals lacking accessible capabilities to meet the demands of students with a range of needs, (Alexa and Baciuc, 2020). These challenges lead the education system to compromise on providing ideal school support services.

As stated by Hoadley (2020), hundreds of millions of students have not benefited from online education. Ninety percent of homes lack internet connectivity, while about seventy-eight percent lack computers. Due to teaching responsibilities brought on by the abrupt switch from traditional face-to-face instruction to online instruction, the Covid-19 pandemic led instructors to suffer emotionally and psychologically (Petrie, Aladin, Ranjan, Javangwe, Gilliland, Tuominen and Lasse, 2020). Teachers now face even more obstacles as a result of COVID-19, which is reducing their effectiveness in fulfilling their support duties (Karmer, 2020). Furthermore, the need that all students receive high-quality support on a new platform caused teachers to become demotivated and uneasy because some of them had the necessary information technology skills, which were perceived as an alternative answer (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021).

The findings highlights that learners and teachers particularly from public rural schools were never exposed to online learning platforms prior to Covid-19 lockdown, so it became more difficult to utilize these during the lockdown. During the Covid-19 lockdown, there was lack of attention to rural education; thus, online learning has magnified the challenges faced by rural learners and teachers, which has subsequently marginalized them. In order to find ways to carry on with curriculum delivery, the South African government has collaborated with several non-governmental groups. Many educational projects based on the web, mobile gadgets,

and other platforms have arisen. Several other initiatives have emerged, including lockdown digital schools, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and WhatsApp groups, however, despite these efforts, South Africa's education system was ill-prepared and still could not benefit learners from rural schools. It is generally agreed that the online remote learning platforms posed some challenges for effective curriculum delivery during lockdown. Teachers were not ICT competent enough to utilize the internet resources throughout the COVID-19 lockdown, although, rural schools have always had shortage of resources and poor infrastructure.

4.4 Parental involvements during Covid-19 lockdown

The involvement of parents was limited during the lockdown because illiteracy and the fact that many learners were not living with their immediate parents but with grandparents or guardians who were less equipped to assist academically. The limited parental engagement contributed to a decline in learners reading and writing skills' The followings are excerpts from participants' response:

“Parents were not involved in the education of the learners because most of the learners are staying with their grandparents and guardians who are illiterate. Some parents have not been assisting their kids even before Covid-19.” (Participant 3: Date of Interview: 22 JUNE 2023).

“Parents were not fully involved in the education of their children. The school has parents and teachers WhatsApp group but only few parents were interacting with the teachers during lockdown.” (Participant 2. Date of Interview: 21 JULY 2023).

“Some parents were assisting learners to read but it was difficult for some of them because they could not understand the lessons. They could not communicate with the educators.” (Participant 10. Date of Interview: 20 JUNE 2023).

The above findings show that despite efforts by schools to use platforms like WhatsApp to facilitate communication, many parents could not engage with the system which resulted in limited interactions between teachers and parents, further aggravating the complexities of remote learning. There were two options available to

continue studying during the March 2020 level 5 lockdown: online learning or self-learning with parental assistance. Teachers and students were abruptly thrown into an unfamiliar educational paradigm (Doukakis and Alexopoulos, 2020). Richer families and schools were able to maintain their learning practices, although this came with work and difficulties for parents and teachers alike. For this set of students, education persisted throughout Lockdown on COVID-19. Many children from low-income families lacked a quiet workspace, desk, computer, internet access, or parents who could devote the necessary time to homes schooling, according to Stats SA, 2019:63. Just 10% of homes had internet connectivity, while 22% of households had access to computers, according to Spaul and Van der Berg, (2020:8). According to a South African Democratic Teacher Union (SADTU, 2021) survey of its members, two-thirds of students from lower-class families received very little information from their teachers during school closures. According to Spaul and Van der Berg (2020:9), 18% of all children in the school-age group lived in households without an adult caretaker during the day during the period that students were at home.

As per the South African Schools Act NO. 84 of 1996 (SASA, 1996:16), parents or guardians bear the primary responsibility for their child's education. They also have the right to participate in the governance of education and to be consulted by state authorities regarding the appropriate form of education. During the lockdown, 2 million South African youngsters were left at home without any kind of educational instruction. Since they still had to take care of their everyday responsibilities, many parents found it very challenging to assume the position of educator. Parents struggled to balance their roles as devoted parents and responsible workers. Consequently, it was discovered that numerous parents held disparate expectations. While education was still necessary, students lost out on valuable teacher-student time. This caused difficulties for many students, as some parents were able to help their children with their online studies while others were unable to. Because students needed to make up for the educational gap created by the national lockdown, it became imperative that communities, parents, and schools collaborate to ensure that effective learning continued to take place at home. The study's findings show that because some parents did not completely participate in their children's education, students missed out on learning opportunities during the COVID-19 lockdown. This was in some instances,

due to lack of time because of their day-to-day duties, but for some it was due to lack of skills and knowledge of the curriculum.

4.5 The viability and challenges of the revised annual teaching plans

The findings indicate that the Revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) were important measures in addressing the crisis posed by the pandemic in schools. Participants emphasised the necessity and efficiency of the changing of curriculum by revising the ATPs. The following are some of the excerpts from responses:

“They were effective because they were a temporal solution to the Covid-19 challenges in schools. Some topics were removed, and others were trimmed, so it made it possible for educators to teach the most important topics and to assess learners on time. There were limited challenges as the educators were provided with the Revised ATPs on time and they were clear and easy to understand and follow.” (Participant 1. Date of Interview: 17 JULY 2023).

“They helped a lot, as teachers were able to understand and deliver the subject content to be taught. The ATPs were easily and readily accessible. There were limited challenges about the ATPs and the implementation because there were regular TEAMS meetings and workshops with the subject advisors.” (Participant 3. Date of Interview: 22 JUNE 2023).

“The removal of some topics in the revised ATP was necessary because of the limited time. Priority had to be given to the most important and crucial topics as well as the lessons on Covid-19, which were beneficial to the learners. The rotational learners’ attendance model was also taken into consideration.” (Participant 13. Date of Interview: 21 JULY 2023).

“Challenges were that some educators were unable to attend virtual workshops organized by the curriculum advisors, so, they ended up teaching the topics that were removed and that led to them not completing the topics in the revised ATPs on time. Some topics in other subjects were not enough to equip the learners with the necessary knowledge and skills.” (Participant 2. Date of Interview: 22 JUNE 2023).

The findings show that the revised ATPs allowed educators to focus on the most critical content, ensuring timely assessments and smoother curriculum delivery

despite limited teaching time. Educators appreciated the clear guidelines and support provided through workshops and virtual meetings, which facilitated effective implementation. However, challenges related to time constraints due to inconsistent attendance were noted, as some educators struggled to cover all the necessary material. In reaction to the first lockdown in South Africa, the Department of Basic Education started reducing the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) in order to get them ready for when the schools reopened. The Department of Basic Education published National Assessment Circular 02, which contained the guiding principles and objectives of the curriculum reorganization and pruning (Department of Basic Education, 2020c). The paper made it very evident that the updated annual teaching plans were created with issues of diversity, coherence, and curricular continuity in varied educational environments in mind. As to Hoadley's (2020) findings, in several instances, the modifications were reorganization and reduction of evaluation and practice opportunities, instead of true downsizing. To avoid any future delays in school reopening or potential closures in July 2020, the updated annual teaching plans were completed on schedule. They were never changed back. This indicates that the Revised Annual Teaching Plans were necessary and viable in order to redress the Covid-19 challenges that the education system was facing in the country. There was a need for curriculum change to allocate enough time for the key subjects and essential subject contents, as well as to conduct formal assessment tasks. The DBE started the process of reducing the ATPs in advance of the June 2020 reopening of the schools following the initial shutdown. Curriculum progression, coherence, and sensitivity to the unique characteristics of various school contexts served as the guiding concepts for this initial step. According to Hoadley et al., (2020), the reduction was anticipated to be a temporary remedy for 2020 and a return to normal in 2021. A set of mediation documents was released together with the updated ATPs (on the DBE website). In order to address learning backlogs, the DBE published the Recovery ATPs for 2021 via Circular S13 in December 2020. This was a temporary departure from the original CAPS curriculum.

4.6 Provision of tangible plans for recovery of lost time

The finding highlight the implementation of various plans and programs. The participants highlighted the measures that were taken by schools to recover curriculum content and to improve learner's reading skills. One of the participants said:

" There were plans and programmes in place which were in line with the trimmed curriculum. Documents were developed by the DBE, schools were not allowed to buy because of the budget deviation." (Participant 1. Date of interview: 17 July 2023).

Despite the restrictions, some schools developed their own plans to maximise learning time. For example, one school increased contact time by organizing extra lessons in the afternoons from Monday to Thursday, focusing on critical subjects such as reading, science, and mathematics. Schools also implemented strategies like giving learners daily homework and incorporating reading sessions at the beginning of each class period to enhance literacy, as highlighted by the educator. The following are some of the responses in support of these views:

"The school had its own plans. Contact time was increased therefore, there were extra lessons in the afternoon from Monday to Thursday. These included reading practice as well as, Science and Math's clubs." (Participant 2. Date of interview: 22 June 2023).

"The school had arrangements for extra lessons in the afternoon and learners were given homework daily. Reading was done daily for 5 minutes at the start of the periods for all the subjects." (Participant 5. Date of interview: 21 July 2023).

The above finding shows these initiatives reflect a proactive approach to support student learning despite the challenges posed by the pandemic-adjusted curriculum. The Learning Recovery Program (LRP) was created, according to Hoadley (2023), to address the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 issue. The LRP's standards, however, did not provide extra time or funding for major modifications beyond "business as usual" instruction; instead, they placed a greater emphasis on learning recovery planning and gave instructors more authority to make decisions. This could have long-term effects on the development of human capital since it is expected to force significant reforms in schools to overcome learning gaps. This presents a strategic issue for South Africa's pandemic response (Kafferberger,

2021). As part of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI), South African schools employed 320 000 teacher assistants to assist in the implementation of a massive remediation program. By using teaching assistants in a Funda Wande program, this method could be used for remediation and build on the notable advances in early grade learning that were discovered during the pandemic (Ardington and Henry, 2021). As per Hoadley's (2023) account, the CAPS curriculum papers underwent pedagogical modifications in 2020, which included content cutting, identification of "fundamental" information, and subject content revision. The emphasis on maintaining the curriculum but granting coverage flexibility by loosening restrictions on requirements for promotion, moderation, and assessment. The length of the school day, the length of the school term, and the reduction of the time allotted for tests and evaluations were discussed (Soudien et al., 2022).

Based on the findings from the statements above, it is evident that the Department of Basic Education did not have tangible plans for the schools to recover lost time for curriculum delivery and funds were also not readily available in this regard, hence the schools had to devise plans to offer extra classes. After examining the Department of Basic Education's pronouncements and intentions, as well as its reports to the Parliamentary Monitoring committee, Spaul (2022) concluded that there had never been and still aren't any national-funded plans for making up for learning losses. The DBE's Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement did not include any funding for plans to make up for lost time and education between 2020 and 2023. Certain programs have advocated for extending the school day or school year, while others have made advantage of holidays as extra time for learning.

Objective #2. To evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of basic education strategies implemented for the lost time during the Covid-19 lockdown.

4.7 The Rotational learner attendance models

Rotational attendance for learners for post-Covid-19 lockdown was one of the recovery plans that was initiated by the DBE as a contingency measure to ensure the safety of teachers and learners when they returned to schools after lockdown, as well as

resolving the issue of shortage of classrooms in the rural schools. The findings show different strategies implemented by various schools to manage attendance, mainly in response to the need for social distancing. Participants indicated that their school enforced to adopt a weekly rotation system for different grades due to resource constraints, including inadequate classrooms, furniture, and educators. This rotation system was necessary to accommodate learners while adhering to social distancing requirements, indicating a lack of infrastructural and staffing capacity to support daily attendance. The following are excerpts from responses:

“The school opted for the weekly-grade attendance because of shortage of classrooms and learners’ furniture. The rotation was necessary to be able to observe social distancing.” (Participant 7. Date of Interview: 20 JUNE 2023).

“The school chose the weekly rotation attendance according to grades because of shortage of classrooms and educators”. (Participant 3. Date of Interview: 22 JUNE 2023).

Other participants, however, reported contrasting views where their schools had sufficient classrooms and smaller student enrollments, enabling them to maintain daily attendance. However, learners were divided into small groups to ensure compliance with social distancing measures. The following are excerpts from responses:

“The school had enough classrooms, so learners were attending classes daily but were divided in small groups per class”. (Participant 2. Date of Interview: 22 JUNE 2023).

“The school had daily learners’ attendance because of the small enrolment, which enabled teachers to accommodate learners in small groups of 20 per class”. (Participant 5. Date of Interview: 21 JULY 2023).

The findings show that schools with shortage resources encountered difficulties in maintaining their operations and had to rely on rotational attendance schedules, which may have disrupted learning continuity. In contrast, schools with better infrastructure and smaller enrolments were able to manage daily attendance, ensuring more consistent learning opportunities. The rotational strategy and gradient phasing were the foundations of the plan. Grades 7 and 12 were restored initially, followed gradually by the remaining grades, starting with students in examination classes. In order to reduce the risk of overcrowding, the rotational design also allowed for the attendance

of specific grades on specific days of the week. There were alternatives for school rotation provided. These answers brought to light the inadequate facilities and inadequate infrastructure that South African rural schools faced during the pandemic; these issues impacted student attendance and could recur after outbreaks and natural disasters.

4.8 Challenges regarding TEAMS meeting, workshops and training for teachers

The findings show various challenges faced by teachers during transitioning to virtual systems for training, workshops, and meetings. The key challenges included lack of understanding about the virtual system and the poor connectivity, which significantly influenced the effectiveness of the virtual system for school management. Participants pointed out that teachers were not trained on how to use digital platforms. The following are excerpts from responses:

- *“The login details were a struggle for majority of teachers as the system was new to them. Poor connection also became a major challenge. Most of the important training and workshops were not effective because the presentations were disrupted by poor connections and network.” (Participant 7. Date of interview: 20 JUNE 2023).*
- *“At the beginning, there were challenges as teachers were struggling to login because the system was new to them. They struggled to connect and sometimes when they eventually manage to connect, then the presenters were not audible, and the information was not clear. The presentations would later be sent to the teachers electronically.” (Participant 8. Date of interview: 21 JULY 2023).*

Other participants indicated that weak Wi-Fi connections in their area made it difficult to stay connected during virtual meetings, often disrupting sessions. and hindered the effectiveness of the workshops and presentations. The following are excerpts from responses:

“Teachers were not familiar with the virtual system, so they took time to understand how it operates. There were challenges with connectivity due to poor network in the area.” (Participant 10. Date of interview: 20 JUNE 2023).

“The school experienced poor Wi-Fi connection, so it was sometimes difficult to connect. Teachers were used to the traditional workshops and meetings procedures, so the virtual attendance was a new experience which came with connection and log in challenges.” (Participant 13. Date of interview: 21 JULY 2023).

Literature reveals that all parties involved in the education sector were burdened by the emphasis on digital teaching. A novel phenomenon was the sudden global move toward remote teaching (Brom et al., 2020), Joshi et al., (2018) state that these kinds of events are unplanned and necessitate the ability to teach remotely via technology. Different researchers agree that a lot of teachers were not exposed to digital educational facilities before Covid -19 pandemic outbreak. During the epidemic, adjusting to the new normal became extremely difficult. That led to frustrations and inability to embrace the changes.

4.9 Teacher support resources and materials provided for lockdown

The findings revealed the importance support materials provided by the DBE in facilitating teaching and learning. Participants emphasised the availability and usefulness of these resources, which helped schools navigate educational challenges during remote teaching. Participants indicated that the DBE supplied essential learning and teaching materials, such as revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs), Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) documents, learner books, teachers’ guides, DBE workbooks, and other supplementary materials. Furthermore, the DBE provided online links for downloading resources, in some cases, physical copies of documents were also delivered to circuit offices and schools, ensuring that educators in areas with limited internet access were still equipped with the necessary tools. The following are excerpts from responses:

“Teacher/learners support materials were provided by the schools by the DBE, and they were helpful and user-friendly. Educators were able to download additional resources online.” (Participant 10. Date of interview: 20 JUNE 2023).

“The revised ATPs were very useful as well as the CAPS documents, learners’ books, teachers’ guides, DBE workbooks and also online additional resources that teachers could download.” (Participant 11. Date of interview: 20 JUNE 2023)

“The DBE made provision for learning and teaching materials as well as guidelines. Additional resources could also be downloaded from the links provided.” (Participant 12. Date of interview: 20 JUNE 2023).

“The DBE provided for the links to download resources such as NECT documents, learning and teaching aids, CAPS documents, teacher’s guides etc. Some documents were physically delivered to the circuit office and schools.” (Participant 1. Date of interview: 21 JULY 2023).

The concurrence of the responses highlights the important roles that the DBE has played in supplying and providing teacher and learner materials for curriculum coverage. The collaboration of business sectors and DBE was necessary, particularly for the core subjects and to improve learners reading skills, Science and mathematics literacy. Literature indicates the critical role that the DBE played in supporting educators with useful information and resources as well as directives regarding curriculum for post-Covid 19 lockdown (DBE 2020). Study guides for every grade were uploaded on the DBE's redesigned website, www.education.gov.za. Workbooks for the Intermediate Phase, study guides and revision booklets for the Senior Phase (Grades 10–12), and extra materials for special needs groups and grade repeaters were all included in these materials (DBE 2020). In order to create a Competency-Infused Curriculum Task Team (CICTT) with the mandate to develop and offer a set of policy and implementation recommendations for a reduced curriculum, the Directorate of Basic Education collaborated with the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) (Eadie et al., 2021).

4.10 The feasibility of the removal of some topics in the Revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs)

Due to time constraints when the schools re-opened after Covid-19 lockdown, Basic Education Department had to re-structure the curriculum and to prioritize certain aspects. The findings indicated that the revision of the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) during the COVID-19 pandemic had both positive and negative effects on educators and learners, with some topics removed or modified to accommodate pandemic-related content. Educators initially struggled to adapt to the revised ATPs due to changes in content structure, particularly in subjects like Life Skills, where pandemic lessons replaced regular topics. This caused confusion in lesson planning and disrupted subject continuity. However, curriculum advisors played a key role in helping educators adjust to the new plans, highlighting the importance of external support and professional development during curriculum changes. The following are excerpts from responses:

“It was difficult for some educators to link the topics in the ATP with the next topics to be taught. In Life Skills, some topics were removed and replaced with Covid-19 pandemic lessons which enabled both the educators and learners to have a clear understanding of the pandemic.” (Participant 2. Date of interview: 22 JUNE 2023).

“Educators struggle to understand the revised ATPs as it was different from the previous ones, but with the assistance of the curriculum advisors, they were able to unpack and teach the specified topics and not the removed ones.” (Participant 3. Date of interview: 22 JUNE 2023).

The finding also revealed that the revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) helped teachers manage assessments and adapt to time constraints, others saw the reduction in topics as creating learning gaps. Lessons on COVID-19 replaced some content, raising pandemic awareness but narrowing the curriculum. The rotational attendance model further limited teaching time, emphasizing the prioritization of essential subjects amid public health challenges and time pressures. The following are excerpts from responses:

“The removal of physical activities in Life Skills and sports was important so as to avoid physical contact. Learners were no more allowed to do group work or role play, so it became a challenge because some learners were unable to learn from others or to imitate them.” (Participant 5. Date of interview: 21 JULY 2023).

“There were advantages and disadvantages of the removal of some topics. It allowed teachers to be able to teach and assess the learners on time, the process was assessment-based, but some important topics were removed or reduced which was disadvantageous to the learners.” (Participant 10. Date of interview: 20 JUNE 2023).

“Some topics were removed because of lost time. More focus was on the most important crucial subjects and the time allocated for their formal assessment tasks. Life Skills and Life Orientation subjects had to include lessons on Covid-19.” (Participant 12. Date of interview: 20 JUNE 2023).

“The removal of some topics in the revised ATP was necessary because of the limited time. Priority was given to the most important subjects and topics, as well as the lessons on Covid-19 which were beneficial to the learners. The rotational learners’ attendance model was also taken into consideration.” (Participant 13. Date of interview: 21 JULY 2023).

The findings indicate that while the revised ATPs were necessary during the pandemic, they created challenges for educators, particularly by reducing learning opportunities for students. Teachers faced initial confusion, emphasizing the importance of ongoing support and guidance when implementing curriculum changes in crisis situations. According to Jansen (2020), steps had to be taken for the recovery of lost time which included removing some the curriculum year, even if the curriculum was trimmed down. For students returning to school in 2020, the curriculum had to be trimmed (reduced) and reorganized due to the loss of contact learning time. 58% of school principals stated in January 2021 that they have finished most subjects (SADTU, 2021). Researcher argues that there was a need for the DBE to initiate tangible plans to recover lost time. There was limited time for curriculum delivery when schools reopened after 2020 lockdown, so the curriculum content and topics had to be reduced to create time for the most crucial ones.

Objective 3. To examine the extent to which the pandemic has affected the management of instruction and learning in rural schools

4.11. How the closure of schools affected teaching and learning

The participants highlighted the severe impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on learners' academic performance, particularly in literacy skills. Many learners already struggled with reading and writing prior to the pandemic, and the abrupt closure of schools worsened this situation. According to the responses, the lockdown created significant disruptions in teaching and learning, leaving both educators and students unprepared. Learners not only forgot much of what they had previously been taught but also treated the lockdown as an extended holiday, neglecting their schoolwork. Furthermore, the lockdown contributed to a noticeable increase in disengagement, with some learners losing interest in education entirely, leading to higher rates of absenteeism and dropouts. Even after schools reopened, many learners faced challenges in regaining their academic footing, reflecting the prolonged effects of the lockdown on their educational progress. The following are some of the responses:

“The majority of learners could not read and write, so the closure of schools made the situation worse than it was before. Covid-19 lockdown was like holidays to some learners, so they neglected their schoolwork”. (Participant 7, Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

“It was sudden, and everyone was confused. Teaching and learning was badly affected. Learners forgot everything they have learnt and some of them can't read and write well”. (Participant 9, Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

“The 2020 lockdown regulations had a noticeable effect on the number of out-school children. The disruptions created by the closure of schools resulted in lots of learners losing interest in school. The level of reading and writing skills on learners dropped”. (Participant 12. Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

“The normal operation of the school was abruptly put on hold so teaching and learning was negatively affected. When schools re-opened, majority of learners forgot what they were taught prior to lockdown”. (Participant 13, Date of Interview: 21 July 2023).

According to Kekic et al. (2016), schools missing significant learning opportunities due to the outbreak may cause both temporary and long-term harm to educational system. According to UNICEF (2021), learners in South Africa are already up to one school year behind where they should be. Bratten,(2020) and De Vany (2020) noticed that the impact of Covid-19 on the global education system has been deep and impacted all areas of teaching, research and service. Suitra and Roshan (2021), identified that Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in loss of instructional time delivery and negatively affected the academic performance of students. There is an agreement between the researchers and the findings in the study that Covid-19 pandemic lockdown had

negative effects on teaching and learning as the normal instructional method was disrupted. Some learners lost interest and motivation in learning. Learners were used to traditional teaching and learning methods, so they did not see a need to study on their own during lockdown, so their standard of reading and writing dropped significantly.

4.12 The effect on the school management plans

The participants emphasized how the COVID-19 lockdown and associated safety protocols severely disrupted school management and operational plans. Circuit management plans, as well as those developed by school principals and School Management Teams (SMTs), were halted due to the abrupt closure of schools. Pre-planned yearly activities and programmes, which schools typically prepared in advance, were derailed as they awaited directives from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to guide their next steps. Additionally, group activities, sports, and other physical-contact events were suspended to comply with COVID-19 safety regulations. Regular meetings and communication within the schools were also affected, further complicating the management of school operations. Assessment tasks and extra-curricular activities, essential to holistic education, were either delayed or cancelled entirely, forcing schools to amend their plans to align with the new protocols. The following are some of the responses:

“It disrupted the circuit management plans that the schools had to follow and implement. The school principals and the SMT also had their management plans in place, but they were halted by the closure of schools due to Covid-19 lockdown. We could not finish the programme”. (Participant 1: Date of Interview: 17 July 2023).

“The school has always planned the activities and programmes for the whole year in advance, so all those plans were disrupted because they had to get directives from the DBE on what to do and what not to do. The group activities, sporting activities and other physical contact activities were suspended”. (Participant 7: Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

“Due to the Covid-19 safety measures and protocols, some of the activities had to be suspended. Meetings were not held regularly like before. Physical activities and sports were also put on hold. The school year plans were amended to comply with the new regulations”. (Participant 10: Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

“All the planned activities by the SMT and teachers were affected, including the extra-curriculum activities. The planned assessment tasks could not be administered. The school had to wait for the DBE with the way forward”. (Participant 11: Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

Heifetz et al. (2020) posited that there are two phases in a crisis: emergency and adaptive. While in the emergency phase, the leader’s goal would be to stabilize the situation and to ‘buy time’. In the adaptive phase, the leader would recognize the need to build the capacity to thrive in a new reality. According to Smith and Riley (2012), a crisis would signal the urgency of a situation with ensuing immediate actions a leader must take. The researchers above agree with the findings in the study that the school managers and leaders had to prioritize the safety of learners, teachers and workers, by putting some of their plans on hold so as to adhere to the Covid-19 protocols and safety measures in order to curb the spread of the virus in the schools.

4.13 Covid-19 Financial constraints on learning and teaching

The participants highlighted the significant financial challenges schools faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. School budgets, initially allocated for workshops, training, and other planned activities, were redirected to address the urgent needs of managing the pandemic. Following directives from the Department of Basic Education (DBE), schools were required to review their financial plans to ensure sufficient funds were available to purchase COVID-19-related equipment, such as sanitizers, face masks, and water dispensers. Additional costs were incurred to prepare classrooms for small groups of learners, including purchasing extra tables and chairs to maintain social distancing protocols. These adjustments significantly disrupted the intended use of school funds, forcing schools to prioritize health and safety measures over their original financial plans. This redirection of resources underscores the financial strain imposed on schools during the pandemic, as they struggled to balance educational needs with compliance to safety regulations. The following are some of the responses:

“The budget of the schools was derailed and directed to Covid-19, there were no longer workshops and trainings. Most of the money was channeled to Covid-19”. (Participant 1: Date of Interview: 17 July 2023).

“The DBE gave a directive on how the school finances should be utilized for the management of Covid-19. The school budget had to be reviewed so that there

was enough money to purchase the necessary equipment for Covid-19". (Participant 8: Date of Interview: 21 July 2023).

"A lot of money was needed to purchase Covid-19 equipment and to prepare the classrooms to accommodate learners in their small groups of 20 and also to purchase tables and chairs so that social distance could be maintained". (Participant 9: Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

"The school fund was not utilized as planned because a big portion of the money had to be used to buy sanitizers, face masks, water dispensers and other Covid-19 equipment". (Participant 11: Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

School principals and SGBs need to prioritize spending scale down on that which cannot be afforded, luxuries should be cut in schools' budgets (Deacon,2020). According to Karberg (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic has put so much pressure on the school finances. Added to this, one can expect cuts to funding education, and other sectors, during the 2020/2021 financial year, which will forever affect the lives of learners. Burgess and Sievertsen,(2020) states that, with our nation's attention fixed on Covid-19 health crisis, leaders are warning of a financial meltdown that could devastate education and set back an entire generation of learners. There is common understanding between the researchers and the findings in this study on how Covid-19 pandemic resulted in financial constraints in the public schools which affected the normal operation of the schools, which ultimately resulted in learners not improving in the reading and writing skills as money to buy more learning and teaching resources was channeled to Covid-19.

4.14 The impact of the school infrastructure on the observation of Covid-19 protocols

The participants identified several infrastructural and resource-related challenges that schools faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing measures were difficult to implement due to a shortage of classrooms and furniture, compounded by old and dilapidated buildings that were unsafe for use. The lack of sufficient ablution facilities, coupled with water shortages and the need for water purification, further strained schools' efforts to comply with safety protocols. Roads leading to schools were in poor condition, particularly during the rainy season, hindering accessibility for staff and learners. Frequent electricity cuts, often caused by cable vandalism, disrupted connectivity and essential school operations. Participants also noted delays in the delivery of face masks by the government, which increased the risk of disease

transmission. Additionally, schools experienced security challenges, such as break-ins where food supplies were stolen, linked to unemployment within local communities. These challenges collectively highlight the significant infrastructural and logistical barriers schools faced in providing a safe and conducive learning environment during the pandemic. The following are some of the responses:

“Social distance was difficult because of shortage of classrooms and desks. There was shortage of water, and the ablution area was not up to good standard. Roads leading to the school are not tarred and in bad conditions. There is regular electricity cut which pose a problem to the network and wi-fi connections”. (Participant 3: Date of Interview: 22 June 2023).

“Some of the classrooms are old and dilapidated so that posed a challenge in terms of shortage of classrooms because learners could not utilize them. The kitchen area is also not in good condition as the food is cooked on open fire. The roads leading up to the school is in bad condition”. (Participant 4, Date of Interview: 22 June 2023).

The ablution area was not in good condition and needed to be upgraded. The school has borehole, but the water needed to be purified. The learners face masks that were supposed to be provided by the government took time to be delivered and that posed a risk of transmission of the disease. The road leading to the school is in bad condition especially during rainy season. (Participant 5, Date of Interview: 21 July 2023).

“The main road leading to the school is in bad condition. There was regular electricity cut due to cable vandalism which made things difficult. Regular break-ins at the school was rife as thieves stole learner’s food, this was because of lack of employment amongst the youth in the community. Shortage of classrooms and learners’ furniture was also a problem”. (Participant 10: Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

“Our school has some blocks that are old and dilapidated, so that led to shortage of classrooms. The available classrooms were not enough to accommodate learners in small groups of 20 which was one of the safety regulations of the Covid-19, hence the rotational model of attendance. Toilets were also not enough”. (Participant 12: Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

Rural areas are home to a great number of students in South Africa. According to Plecher (2020), around 66% of South Africa’s population lived in rural areas by 2019, therefore, provinces like Limpopo, the Eastern Cape, and Mpumalanga are typically considered rural. According to Pillay (2021), the primary, secondary and tertiary system in South Africa has always had to deal with major challenges such as large numbers of learners in the classrooms, inadequate learner support materials, lack of clean water, insufficient and unhygienic ‘bathroom’ facilities, poor quality of teaching

and inadequate support, especially in disadvantaged communities. Researchers and the participants in this study share the same information that the poor infrastructure in the South African public schools have a negative impact in learning and teaching those results in poor academic performance. Shortage of classrooms, dilapidated buildings, shortage of clean water, lack of proper ablution areas, shortage of tables and chairs are major challenges in rural public schools.

4.15 The implementation of Covid-19 safety measures at the school

The participants highlighted the comprehensive measures implemented in schools to ensure compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols as guided by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Schools adhered to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), which included daily health screenings at the entrance, temperature checks, and the mandatory use of face masks under a strict "no mask, no entry" policy. Sanitization measures were robust, with sanitizer stands in every classroom, regular fumigation of school facilities, and enforcement of hygiene practices among learners, educators, and staff. Temporary workers, such as screeners and cleaners, were provided by the DBE to support these efforts. Social distancing was maintained, with learners seated 1.5 meters apart, and sharing of stationery or physical contact was strictly prohibited. Additionally, water from boreholes ensured hygiene compliance, and guards were stationed at gates to enforce safety protocols. These measures reflect the commitment to creating a safe learning environment during the pandemic. The following are some of the responses:

"Schools were using the SOP (Standard Operating Procedures) from the Department of Basic Education. The Department of Education provided the temporary workers that is the screeners and cleaners. Classrooms were fumigated, learners, educators and workers were sanitized, wore face masks regularly and thermometers were used to check body temperatures daily".
"Participant 1: Date of Interview: 17 July 2023".

"Classrooms were fumigated regularly. Every classroom had a stand to place sanitizers. There is water from the borehole. Learners were seated at 1.5 meters apart. Every learner had a face mask. Screening was done daily by filling in the screening forms by the gate to every person entering the school gate as well as sanitizing and checking of body temperatures using thermometer". (Participant 2: Date of Interview: 22 June 2023).

"A guard was placed at the gate to ensure that everyone entering the school premises was taken temperature, screened and sanitized. No mask no entry

policy was strictly applied. The SMT and educators ensured that the 1.5-meter distance was adhered to. Learners were taught not to share their stationery, no playing during break and no touching the other person". (Participant 9: Date of Interview: 20 June 2023).

Brandon et al. (2020) indicates that after the suspension of schooling for months, countries in the world started re-opening their schools by setting three major models which were aimed at Safe learning and teaching process. The first model was grade model which is also termed as adjusting physical arrangement. In this model, students are stratified based on their grade levels or divided in the way that classrooms can accommodate smaller sizes and allow the setting of expanded infrastructure like desks and tables. The second model was adjusting class schedules, alternating shifts and school days predominantly practiced with the aim of accommodating smaller class sizes and ensuring greater social distancing. The third model according to Brandon et al. (2020) was the implementation of transmission control such as class size reduction, physical distancing, face masks, hand washing, temperature checks, and viral or antibody testing. There is an agreement between the other researchers and the findings in this study that the whole world ensured that the safety of the learners and staff, was not compromised when the schools re-opened after Covid-19 lockdown. The Covid-19 protocols and safety measures such as screening, maintaining social distancing, sanitizing, hand washing, fumigating of classrooms, checking of body temperature were always adhered to in all schools.

4.16 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed analysis of the findings from the qualitative interviews, applying thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes. The study is structured around six key themes. These explore: the school catch-up plans developed by the Department of Basic Education to ensure continuity of teaching and learning during the lockdown; the challenges of implementing online remote learning platforms as an alternative method for delivering education; the effectiveness and challenges of parental involvement during the pandemic; the viability of the revised annual teaching plans designed to address the curriculum delivery backlog; the tangible recovery plans aimed at compensating for lost instructional time once schools reopened; the overall

effectiveness of policies and recovery strategies during the lockdown, highlighting their strengths and challenges in ensuring that teaching and learning continued under difficult circumstances. Through this approach, the chapter demonstrated how the findings contributed to answering the research questions. The following chapter will present a summary of the key findings, draw conclusions based on the analysis, and offer practical recommendations for future actions or further research.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided information on data analysis and presentation of findings based on the qualitative approach adopted to conduct this research. The profiles of the participants were outlined. The participants' responses were captured, analysed and supported by the relevant literature review. This investigation is one of the studies on topical issues regarding the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the management of learning and teaching in rural primary schools of Limpopo Province, targeting Kgakotlou Circuit in particular. The aim of this study is to investigate how COVID-19 has impacted the management of teaching and learning in rural primary schools at Kgakotlou circuit, Limpopo Province. The objectives of study are: to identify basic education strategies implemented to redress the backlog caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of basic education strategies implemented for the time lost during the COVID-19 lockdown, to recommend a strategic intervention to improve the basic education strategies to implement. The specific questions are:

- What basic education strategies were implemented to redress the backlog caused by Covid-19 pandemic?
- How effective were the basic education strategies implemented to recover time lost during Covid-19 lockdown?
- What strategic interventions are necessary to improve the basic education strategies to enhance teaching and learning in the public primary schools in rural areas?

This chapter consists of sub-sections such as summary of key findings, conclusions and recommendations. Summary of key findings section provides the summary of chapters and summary of findings obtained from the research. Conclusions section provides the implications of the key findings, linking them back to the research objectives and questions. This section also provides the contributions of findings in terms of crisis management in education sector. Recommendations section provides strategic interventions which are based on the conclusions drawn, this section also offers practical suggestions for future research or actions.

5.2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

5.2.1 Summary of Chapters

This mini-dissertation is organised into five chapters. Chapter One provided an introduction and background to the study, outlining its purpose, significance, problem statement, and aims and objectives. The problem statement clarified the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of teaching and learning in rural primary schools in South Africa. The study was designed to assess the effectiveness of the Department of Basic Education's systems, curriculum programs, and policies during the national lockdown, with a particular focus on learner support initiatives. The study aimed to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the management of teaching and learning in rural primary schools within the Kgakotlou Circuit, Limpopo Province. The three specific objectives were to: (1) identify strategies implemented by the Department of Basic Education to address the educational backlog caused by the pandemic, (2) evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies during the COVID-19 lockdown, and (3) recommend a strategic intervention for improving the implementation of Basic Education strategies.

Chapter Two provided the theoretical background and a global perspective on the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on its impact in South Africa. It also reviewed empirical studies on how the pandemic and lockdown affected the management of teaching and learning, particularly in remote areas. This chapter further discussed the reopening of schools, post-lockdown. The literature review and findings demonstrated that COVID-19 had a substantial negative impact on schooling worldwide, especially on learners from under-resourced rural schools.

Chapter Three outlined the methodological approach of the study, which employed a qualitative research design. Stakeholders from two local primary schools were interviewed, and quotations from participants were used to support the findings. Chapter Four presented a detailed analysis of the study's results, starting with the demographic profiles of participants, including their gender, age, educational background, position, and work experience. Following the participant profiles, the

chapter provided a comprehensive discussion of the study's main findings and conclusions.

5.3 Key Findings

The presentation of the key findings was directly related to the study objectives.

5.3.1 Objective 1: To identify basic education strategies implemented to redress the backlog caused by the covid-19 pandemic

The finding indicates that:

- While national plans were in place, socio-economic difficulty, lack of adequate resources, inequities in access to technology, lack of school-level planning, and untrained staff significantly affected the adoption and implementation of remote teaching and learning during the pandemic, especially in rural settings.
- The spontaneous shift towards online teaching and learning was largely ineffective in rural primary schools due to technological, financial, and training deficiencies, along with broader socioeconomic disparities. This implies the need to address these challenges to ensure equitable access to education.
- Despite efforts by schools to use platforms like WhatsApp to facilitate communication, many parents could not engage with the system which resulted in limited interactions between teachers and parents, further aggravating the complexities of remote learning.
- The revised ATPs allowed educators to focus on the most critical content, ensuring timely assessments and smoother curriculum delivery despite limited teaching time. Educators appreciated the clear guidelines and support provided through workshops and virtual meetings, which facilitated effective implementation. However, challenges related to time constraints due to inconsistent attendance were noted, as some educators struggled to cover all the necessary material. In reaction to the first lockdown in South Africa, the Department of Basic Education started reducing the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) to get them ready for when the schools reopened.
- Despite the restrictions, some schools developed their own plans to maximise learning time. For example, one school increased contact time by organizing

extra lessons in the afternoons from Monday to Thursday, focusing on critical subjects such as reading, science, and mathematics. Schools also implemented strategies like giving learners daily homework and incorporating reading sessions at the beginning of each class period to enhance literacy, as highlighted by the educator

5.3.2 Objective 2: to Evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of basic education strategies implemented for lost time during lockdown pandemic

The findings highlight that:

- Various challenges faced by teachers during transitioning to virtual systems for training, workshops, and meetings. The key challenges included lack of understanding about the virtual system and the poor connectivity, which significantly influenced the effectiveness of the virtual system for school management. Participants pointed out that teachers were not trained on how to use digital platforms.
- Different strategies implemented by various schools to manage attendance, mainly in response to the need for social distancing. Participants indicated that their school enforced to adopt a weekly rotation system for different grades due to resource constraints, including inadequate classrooms, furniture, and educators. This rotation system was necessary to accommodate learners while adhering to social distancing requirements, indicating a lack of infrastructural and staffing capacity to support daily attendance.
- The importance support materials provided by the DBE in facilitating teaching and learning. Participants emphasised the availability and usefulness of these resources, which helped schools navigate educational challenges during remote teaching. Participants indicated that the DBE supplied essential learning and teaching materials, such as revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs), Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) documents, learner books, teachers' guides, DBE workbooks, and other supplementary materials. Furthermore, the DBE provided online links for downloading resources, in some cases, physical copies of documents were also delivered to circuit offices and

schools, ensuring that educators in areas with limited internet access were still equipped with the necessary tools.

- Due to time constraints when the schools re-opened after Covid-19 lockdown, Basic Education Department had to re-structure the curriculum and to prioritise certain aspects. The findings indicated that the revision of the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) during the COVID-19 pandemic had both positive and negative effects on educators and learners, with some topics removed or modified to accommodate pandemic-related content. Educators initially struggled to adapt to the revised ATPs due to changes in content structure, particularly in subjects like Life Skills, where pandemic lessons replaced regular topics.

Objective 3. To examine the extent to which the pandemic has affected the management of instruction and learning in rural schools

- The lockdown created significant disruptions in teaching and learning, leaving both educators and students unprepared. Learners not only forgot much of what they had previously been taught but also treated the lockdown as an extended holiday, neglecting their schoolwork. Furthermore, the lockdown contributed to a noticeable increase in disengagement, with some learners losing interest in education entirely, leading to higher rates of absenteeism and dropouts.
- The COVID-19 lockdown and safety protocols severely disrupted school operations, halting management plans, derailing pre-planned activities, suspending group events, and delaying or cancelling assessments and extra-curricular activities, leaving schools dependent on directives from the Department of Basic Education to adapt to the new protocols.
- The COVID-19 pandemic imposed significant financial strain on schools, forcing them to redirect budgets from planned activities to pandemic-related expenses, including sanitizers, masks, water dispensers, and additional classroom furniture for social distancing, prioritizing health and safety over original financial plans.
- Schools faced significant infrastructural and resource challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, including insufficient classrooms and furniture for social distancing, unsafe buildings, inadequate ablution facilities, water shortages, poor road conditions, frequent electricity cuts, delayed delivery of masks, and

security issues such as theft, all of which hindered their ability to maintain a safe and effective learning environment.

- Schools implemented comprehensive COVID-19 safety measures guided by the DBE, including daily health screenings, temperature checks, mandatory mask-wearing, sanitization protocols, social distancing, restricted sharing of materials, and enhanced hygiene practices, supported by temporary staff and water from boreholes, ensuring a safe learning environment.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Based on the research questions the study concludes as follow. The aim of this study was to explore how the Covid-19 epidemic affected teaching and learning in rural primary schools. The first research question was “what basic education strategies were implemented to redress the backlog caused by Covid-19 pandemic?” The study concludes that the national plans were put in place by the Department of Education to adapt with the new normal during the pandemic. The revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) were also established to support the continuity of education during the crisis. Schools also promoted tailored online teaching and learning platforms besides giving learners daily homework and incorporating reading materials. However, lack of adequate resources, inequities in access to technology, lack of school-level planning, and untrained staff and other problems significantly affected the adoption and implementation of remote teaching and learning during the pandemic, especially in rural settings. Another research question was “how effective were the basic education strategies implemented to recover time lost during Covid-19 lockdown?” this study concludes that the DBE supplied essential learning and teaching materials, such as revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs), Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) documents, learner books, teachers’ guides, DBE workbooks, and other supplementary materials. The rotation system was adopted by schools to accommodate learners while adhering to social distancing requirements, indicating a lack of infrastructural and staffing capacity to support daily attendance. The Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) was also introduced to ensure continuity of education. However, various challenges faced by teachers during transitioning to virtual systems for training, workshops, and meetings. The key challenges included lack of understanding about the virtual system and the poor connectivity

Covid-19 has exposed the inequalities in education in South Africa. Lack of resources in the underprivileged schools was exposed amid the Covid-19 outbreak. The inequality between the rich and poor has been highlighted in this study. Lack of parental involvement and support are still major challenges, hence, there is need to assist and encourage parents to support and give their kids' education top priority. Limpopo Province is one of the provinces which is predominantly rural and the poorest in South Africa. Lack of resources and poor infrastructure were identified by all role players as the main challenges that are faced by learners in the rural schools. Unemployment and poverty amongst community members also have a negative impact on rural schools' learners. Rural schools were not fully supported but were neglected by the Department of Education. This eventually led to poor learner performance and high learner drop-outs rates during the Covid -19 era. The provision of ICT resources and online facilities and resources in rural schools, and training of teachers and learners in digital pedagogic practices will assist a great deal. The outbreak of the pandemic worsened the challenges that were already faced by schools in the rural areas, hence, if all these challenges can be addressed, the constitutional basic rights to learning for all learners in South Africa will be achieved.

5.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate the extensive damage and the negative effect of Covid-19 in the education sector. The outcomes further exposed the resource disparities in rural and urban schools, hence, the challenges this had on the implementation of the DBE policies and plans, such as online remote learning platforms, school catch-up plans, recovery plans and overall curriculum delivery, before and after the national lockdown. Based on the findings the following recommendations are suggested:

- Lack of resources in rural schools is one of the key issues affecting the management of teaching and learning. It is recommended that the Department of Basic Education give greater consideration to the predicament of students in remote primary schools by allocating additional funds for infrastructural upgrades and the provision of instructional resources like computer labs, libraries, and teacher and student ICT training. Smart whiteboards and easy access to PCs, laptops, and other technology should also be provided in

classrooms. Radio and television-lesson broadcasts should be on the common channels that all households can have access to so that learners can get additional lessons, easily.

- The poor implementation of strategies towards promoting the management of teaching and learning is another challenge facing rural primary public schools in the study area. Thus, it is recommended that Department of Basic Education should put in place viable plans and policies which will be efficient for future similar pandemic outbreaks and occurrences that will enable all learners in South Africa to continue with learning and teaching and to avoid loss of learning time.
- Lack of competency in terms of crisis and change management is also critical issue regarding rural public primary schools. It is recommended that the school management team should be provided with a short learning programmes related to management development and senior management to build their capacity.
- Lack of skills on the use of technological and digital platforms is perceived to be the biggest challenge facing rural schools. It is recommended that educators and principals be exposed to skills development workshop in this regard. This study also suggests that all public schools, especially those in rural areas, should immediately hold capacity development workshops to give teachers the computer and ICT skills, knowledge, and strategies they need to deliver instruction online. Additionally, all public schools should provide more adequate space for learning and teaching. Well-stocked libraries should be a part of these plans. Functional kitchens, water, ablution blocks, laptops and PCs, Wi-Fi and enough connectivity, online and digital learning.
- It is also recommended that more bridge programmes ought to be created and adapted to meet the requirements for student students who are more vulnerable. On the future of teaching and learning in general and e-strategies and intervention methods specifically, policy makers at the national level should promote collaboration and idea sharing among stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, researchers, scholars, professional bodies, labour unions, and provincial education departments.

- The responses indicate a critical need to address infrastructural shortcomings, such as the shortage of classrooms and furniture, inadequate ablution facilities, and limited access to clean water. These deficiencies hindered the effective implementation of social distancing and hygiene protocols. Investing in the construction and renovation of classrooms, upgrading ablution facilities, and ensuring a consistent supply of clean water would significantly improve schools' ability to comply with health and safety measures. Additionally, better-maintained roads leading to schools, particularly in rural areas, would enhance accessibility and minimize disruptions caused by poor infrastructure.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE AREAS FOR RESEARCH

The study is geographically based on two schools that are in the rural area, and it is also based on only qualitative research, so the findings cannot be generalised on other school. It is recommended that similar studies should be conducted in other areas such as the special public schools for learners with learning barriers, as well as rural secondary schools and TVET colleges within Limpopo Province as well as the circuit and district offices. Areas for further research include: The DBE policies on the school feeding programmes for vulnerable learners during the pandemic and lockdown; and reviewing policies on the allocation of Norms and Standards on the no-fee public schools that will cater for improvement of the infrastructure.

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ANNEXURE A: Consent Form

My name is Molepo Grace Mabapa, student number 202176616. I am currently studying towards Master of Public Administration and Management at Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership, University of Limpopo.

- 1) I hereby request you to take part in this research study.
- 2) The topic of my research is: **THE EFFECT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MANAGEMENT OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE CASE OF KGAKOTLOU CIRCUIT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE.**
- 3) Your participation in this study is voluntary. However, should you agree to participate, you will be required to partake in an approximately one-hour interview.
- 4) The interview will be based around your experience or/and knowledge in relation to the study as mentioned above.
- 5) You are free to decline the request now or at any stage of the study. If you feel you want to withdraw your participation, you are welcome to do so.
- 6) There will be no monetary gain from participating.
- 7) The findings of the study are solely for academic purposes, and any information collected from you will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous.

- 8) If you require more information, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher (Molepo Grace Mabapa, cell phone number: 0729851260) and my supervisor Dr A.A Asha at 0152684257.

Participant:

Name of the participant: _____

Signature of the participant: _____

Date: _____

Researcher:

Name of the researcher: _____

Signature of the researcher: _____

Date: _____

ANNEXURE B: Interview schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Title of the study: **The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the management of learning and teaching in rural primary school: The case of Kgakotlou Circuit, Limpopo Province**

Participants: Members of School Management Team and Educators

Place of interview: _____

Date of Interview: _____

SECTION 1: Biological details of respondents

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Education (Highest qualification obtained): _____

Position: _____

Work experience (Years in service) _____

SECTION 2: Identify the Basic Education strategies implemented to redress the backlog caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1) Did the school have plans in place for learners and teachers to catch-up with school work during lockdown? Please elaborate.

2) How easy was it for teachers and learners to use the distance or remote learning technology (online platforms) during lockdown? What were the biggest concerns about online teaching during lockdown?

3) Was there adequate evidence of parental involvement in the education of learners during lockdown?

4) How effective are the Revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) from the Department of Basic Education. Are there challenges encountered in this regard?

5) Did the school have tangible plans for recovery of lost time or was there provision from the DBE?

SECTION 3: Evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the basic education strategies implemented for the lost time during the COVID-19 lockdown.

1) Which rotational learner-attendance model did your school opt for and what were the reasons for choosing that particular model?

2) Were there any encountered challenges with regard to TEAMS meetings, workshops and training organised by the DBE for teachers? Please elaborate.

3) Was there adequate and useful teacher support resources and materials provided for post-Covid-19 lockdown?

4) Can you briefly elaborate on the feasibility of the removal of some topics in the Revised ATPs by the DBE?

SECTION 4: Strategic interventions to improve the basic education strategies to enhance teaching and learning in the public primary schools in rural areas.

1) In what way did the closure of schools during Covid-19 lockdown affect teaching and learning?

2) How did Covid-19 affect the school management plans that were put in place at the beginning of the year in 2020?

3) What were the financial constraints that Covid-19 had on the operations of learning and teaching when schools reopened?

4) Your school is located in a remote area. How did the school infrastructure affect the observation of Covid-19 protocols and teaching and learning post-lockdown?

5) Which safety measures did the school have to ensure the safety of the school community?

THANK YOU

ANNEXURE C: TREC CLEARANCE Certificate



University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 4713, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: moore.hutamo@ul.ac.za

TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING: 22 May 2023
PROJECT NUMBER: TREC/140/2023: PG
PROJECT:

Title: The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of learning and teaching in rural primary schools: The case of Kgakotlou Circuit, Limpopo Province.
Researcher: MG Mabapa
Supervisor: Dr AA Asha
Co-Supervisor/s: N/A
School: Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership
Degree: Master of Public Administration and Management

PROF D MAPOSA
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**

Note:

- i) This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period.
- ii) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form.
- iii) PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

ANNEXURE:D



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
CONFIDENTIAL

Ref: 2/2/2

Enq: Makola MC

Tel No: 015 290 9448

E-mail: MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za

Mabapa MG
P.O Box 09
Tholongwe
0734

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: **"THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MANAGEMENT OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE CASE OF KGAKOTLOU CIRCUIT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE"**
3. The following conditions should be considered:
 - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
 - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the School concerned.
 - 3.3 The conduct of research should not in anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.
 - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.
 - 3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).
 - 3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH : MABAPA MG Page 1

Cnr 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X 9489, Polokwane, 0700
Tel: 015 290 7600/ 7702 Fax 086 218 0560

The heartland of Southern Africa-development is about people

- 4 Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.
- 5 The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.



Mashaba KM

DDG: CORPORATE SERVICES

14/06/2023

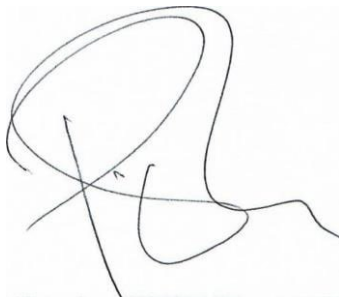
Date

ANNEXURE E: Language Editors Reports

PROOF OF EDITING

30 January, 2024

This is to certify that I, Dr P Kaburise, have proofread the dissertation titled-**THE EFFECT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MANAGEMENT OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE CASE OF KGAKOTLOU CIRCUIT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE** - by Molepo Grace Mabapa (student number: 202176616). I have indicated some amendments which the student has undertaken to effect before the final dissertation is submitted.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Kaburise', with a large, stylized initial 'P'.

Dr P Kaburise (0794927451/ 0637348805; email: phyllis.kaburise@gmail.com)

Dr P Kaburise: BA (Hons) University of Ghana (Legon, Ghana); MEd University of East Anglia (Cambridge/East Anglia, United Kingdom); Cert. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (Cambridge University, United Kingdom); Cert. English Second Language Teaching, (Wellington, New Zealand); PhD University of Pretoria (South Africa).



Stand 507 Caledon Village, Cell +27794848449, Email: kubayjoe@gmail.com

21 October 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

SUBJECT: EDITING OF MINI-DISSERTATION

This is to certify that the mini-dissertation entitled 'The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the management of learning and teaching in rural primary schools: The case of Kgakotlou Circuit, Limpopo Province' by Molepo Grace Mabapa has been copy-edited. Unless further tampered with, I am satisfied that the dissertation adheres to editorial principles of consistency, cohesion, clarity of thought and precision.

Kind regards

Prof SJ Kubayi