MANAGING STUDENT RESIDENCES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PERSPECTIVE AT A SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN TERTIARY INSTITUTION

by

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[redacted]

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DECLARATION

I declare that the mini-dissertation hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of Master of Public Administration and Management has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Mailula PA 28 March 2025

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my late cousin, **Thabo Michael Mailula**. May his soul continue resting in peace and his spirit has kept me going throughout the years of my academic, achievements and social life.

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I would like to give great thanks to my Creator for giving me the opportunity, strength, wisdom, and knowledge to further my studies.

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges worldwide, impacting various aspects of society, including students living in university residences. This abstract focuses on exploring the experiences of students residing in a selected tertiary institution in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative study uses interviews and surveys to gather data on how students in their university residence have been affected by the pandemic. Factors such as sudden transition to online learning, social isolation, mental health concerns, and financial pressures are examined to understand the multifaceted impacts of the pandemic on students' daily lives. Through thematic analysis, common themes emerge that highlight the struggles, resilience, and coping mechanisms of students facing the challenges of the pandemic. The findings shed light on the unique experiences and perspectives of students living in university residences, providing insight for institutions to tailor support services and interventions effectively.

The study aims to contribute to the existing literature on the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on tertiary students, with a specific focus on those residing in university accommodations. Recommendations based on the findings seek to guide policy makers, universities, and support services in the implementation of strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic on student general well-being and academic success.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data according to the aim and objectives of the study. Since the research is qualitative in nature, data analysis was conducted through inductive thematic analysis. The study found that in fact, the Student Residences had been significantly transformed by the Covid19 pandemic. The operations of the student residences had been forced to change in order to comply with Covid-19 regulations, so that student learning was shifted from face-to-face learning to online learning. This meant more time spent indoors, stricter measures now in place, and student residence policies having been broadened to ensure that they also monitor compliance. The study also noted that even after the pandemic, things will still take time to return to normal. The researcher can conclude that the Covid19 pandemic has had a

huge effect on student residences at the selected university and that student should play their roles effectively to ensure that everyone remains safe.

Keywords: Students, Covid-19 pandemic, Student Residences, the *New Normal*, Residence life

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UL	University of Limpopo
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DH	Department of Health
WHO	World Health Organization
TA	Thematic analysis
COVID	Coronavirus Disease

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

The study deals with the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in the Student Residences at a selected tertiary institution, South Africa. According to Lasalle (2016), due to growing enrolment, there is a need for increased student housing in sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, most students choose to stay in the institution's housing, whether insourced or outsourced. Student housing, often known as residences, is a living space offered by institutions (DHET, 2015). Most South African universities regard student housing to be living and learning spaces. This idea is also used to integrate the academic and accommodation aspects of student development.

Gopal & Van Niekerk (2018) argue that the demand for student housing in South Africa is high and is due to a shortage of student housing in higher education institutions, as well as unconducive learning conditions at home. Sikhwari, Dama, Gadise, & Matodzi (2020) argue that students who live in university housing generally perform better than those who do not. According to a Eurostudent (2011) survey, students who live in university housing are more likely to regard studying as their primary occupation, and this is thought to be the case, may have a positive effect on their duration of study and grades.

Therefore, the researcher’s desire is to determine the challenges and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in students in the Residence Administration, which is the motivation for conducting this study. The selected tertiary institution Student Affairs is a division in the institution which has its own departments, namely; student residences administration, student sports, and recreational and student Health centre which each has its own structures (organogram), respectively. The research only focused on the Student Residence Administration Department. The main role of the Residence Administration Department is to provide a safe and conducive environment for all students in the University’s residences.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Sawahel (2020) has indicated that across the continent, university students face a shortage of student accommodation, a situation exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic containment measures that require fewer students in the living space. Sawahel (2020) again argues that at universities in Kenya and South Africa, students face shortages of more than 600,000 and 300,000 university beds, respectively. According to Morad (2020), African students living in dormitories will need to adhere to strict hygiene and social distancing measures, as under such conditions, a single case of COVID-19 can lead to uncontrolled outbreaks.

In March 2020, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a nationwide lockdown due to an increase in cases of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, higher education institutions have closed their functions at level 5 lockdowns, and strategies had to be developed to adapt to the new normal. DHET (2020) concluded that to minimize the spread of the virus, everyone should follow the prescribed hygiene procedures. Therefore, it is quite interesting to note that the students in the living and studying spaces actually adhere to the protocols. However, changing your hygiene behaviour means that even after the pandemic, good hygiene behavior will still be maintained.

Student housing operations had been forced to modify to comply with COVID-19 requirements, so student learning has migrated from face-to-face to online learning. This meant more time spent indoors, stronger procedures in place, and the functions of Residence Administration workers expanded to ensure compliance Morad (2020). COVID19 has had a huge effect on student residences and students not only at the university under study but also in all universities across the country and has also led to the fact that both students and staff should play their roles effectively to ensure that everyone remains safe at DHET (2020). Therefore, the problem the study envisages investigating is the students' experiences towards the *new normal* caused by COVID-19 in the Residence Administration at the selected tertiary institution.

1.3 MOTIVATION/RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY.

Research is argued to be motivated by the intention to solve the problem, the desire for personal intellectual gratification, and also for reasons of career advancement

(Wuriga, 2022). This study is imperative to understand the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in students in Residence Administration, specifically at the university under study. The researcher focused on the student experience of COVID-19 in the Student Residence Administration Department under Student Affairs at the selected tertiary institution.

The study identified the challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic in the student residence administration with the possible solutions to the identified challenges. The study also determined the aspects that were put in place or used to improve residence administration in order to comply with the COVID-19 rules and regulations to curb the spread of the virus.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aims to explore the experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic on students in Residence Administration of the selected tertiary institution.

1.5 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study serve as a guide for the investigation and are summarized as follows:

- Determine the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic on students in Residence Administration,
- To establish challenges faced by students in the Residence Administration during the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- To assess the effect of the *new normal* on students in Residence Administration due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions for this study were formulated as follows:

- What are the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in residence administration students?
- What are the COVID-19 challenges faced by students in Residence Administration?
- What effect does the *new normal* have on students in the Residence Administration due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.7 DEFINITION OF THE KEY CONCEPTS

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined to clarify the context in which they are used in the study:

1.7.1 COVID-19 pandemic

According to WHO (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic is a global pandemic caused by coronavirus, an infectious disease caused by the virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and the new withdrawal was first identified during an outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019.

1.7.2 New normal

According to Publico, (2022) the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) defines the new normal as emerging behaviors, situations, and minimum public standards that will be institutionalized in common or routine practices that will persist after quarantine and until COVID-19 is completely eradicated. These publicity rules include policies that ban mass gatherings, require masks, encourage social distancing, and more.

1.7.3 Student Residence Administration

Student Residence Administration consists of the Placement Section, which is responsible for residence applications, subsequent placement of students at residence, student residence administration also deals with physical infrastructure, services, maintenance, assets, and related administration which includes fees (UWC, 2015).

1.7.4 Residence life

According to Vandeyar & Mohale (2016), Residence Life is the comprehensive program that surrounds the experience of living on and off campus in a residence hall at a university or college. Residence Life is usually structured with planned events, a code of conduct and ethics, and a relatively large array of staff.

1.7.5 Living and learning spaces

The living and learning space characterize the concept of learning while living in a university hostel. This is also a notion employed in merging accommodation and academic aspects of student development (Gopal & Van Niekerk, 2018).

1.7.6 Students' repatriation

Student repatriation is an act or process of restoring or returning students or personnel to the university on different dates and times to avoid congestion in the spaces of the university (Roll, 2022).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a general overview of the study. This chapter provide information on the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in the student residences, which has resulted in serious measures to be taken into place to curb the spread of the virus, and discusses issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in the student residences. The main purpose of this research is to present the results of a review of the literature on the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic with a greater focus on students in the Student Residence Administration. The reader of this research will be familiarized with the present stage regarding the research problem. And this can be obtained through the desk study of a multi-range of journals, articles, government documents, academic books, and the internet. The goal of conducting a literature review is to bring the reader up-to-date with current literature on a topic and form the basis for another goal, such as the justification for future research in the area (Cronin, Ryan, & Coughlan, **2020).**

2.2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITARATURE

According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport (2011), literature reviews help researchers make assumptions about the expected results or outcomes of ongoing research. The purpose of a literature review is to keep the reader up to date with the current literature on the topic and to provide a basis for other purposes (Berisha, Kutllovci, & Shiroka, 2017). Gopal & Van Niekerk (2018) argue that the demand for student accommodation in South Africa is very high, mainly due to the limited number of universities and the less favorable study environment at home. Therefore, this section provides information on the implications and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic on students in residences, which has resulted in serious measures being taken to curb the spread of the virus. The following section reviews the literature in line with the objectives of the study.

2.3 EXPERIENCES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN STUDENT RESIDENCE ADMINISTRATION

Precarious student residence conditions are on the rise in many developing economies, which has resulted in increasing segmentation between population groups with different socioeconomic backgrounds, and in differentiated access to life chances. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent lockdowns, the relationship between learning and student residence conditions has become crucial to understanding the student's learning experience and well-being. However, knowledge about this relation is limited.

The following are COVID-19 pandemic experiences in student residence administration:

2.3.1 Introduction of online learning

There was a huge transformation among students, as they were not used to relying solely on online learning, which was introduced to the COVID-19 pandemic to minimize the spread of the virus. As a result of the national lockdown and Covid19, the selected tertiary institution introduced blended learning which is defined by Ibrahim & Nat (2019) define as an "effective approach to passive knowledge participation of a massive number of students, which also increases learning outside of the traditional face-to-face learning environment". One major effect of the Covid19 pandemic was a change from face-to-face lectures to online lectures, which meant that even when they are in their homes, they have to attend classes that require great commitment and dedication.

2.3.2 Improved hygienic behavior

Students in student residences are more conscious about their hygiene due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sang & Dewi (2020) state that hand hygiene is extremely crucial to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Additionally, most of the students in the student residences were aware of the importance of being clean and that everyone is playing their part to ensure that all areas are clean and sanitized.

WHO (2020) concluded that, to minimize the spread of the virus, everyone should adhere to the stipulated hygiene protocols. Therefore, it is quite interesting to note that students in the living and learning spaces are actually adhering to the protocols.

Therefore, the change in hygienic behavior would mean that even after the pandemic good hygienic behavior will still be maintained.

2.3.3 Increased stress levels

According to WHO (2020), it is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared, or angry during a crisis. Most of the participants indicated that after a month on national lockdown they had been stressed and bored. Khosravi (2020) posits that pandemics impose a spectrum of psychological impacts, and at the individual level, these adverse effects can cause new psychiatric symptoms and intensify pre-existing mental illnesses. Khosravi (2020) further notes that in such a condition, society members may undergo some negative experiences, such as fear and anxiety about falling ill or dying and feelings of helplessness. In South Africa, students started returning to campus residence under lockdown level 3 and only 33% were the first cohort.

It is crucial to note that under normal circumstances programs were implemented in residences to facilitate the living and learning aspect. Due to Covid19 and social distancing, no social or educational programs have been implemented and previous studies have shown that living and learning programs improve student well-being. Therefore, without those programs, students will not be developed or assisted in how to deal with stress during a pandemic. Wahl (2013) concurs that living and learning programs improve student learning, development, and success at higher education level. Consequently, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, contact programs were halted, thus disadvantaging students**.**

2.4 COVID-19 PANDEMIC CHALLENGES IN STUDENT RESIDENCE ADMINISTRATION

As students slowly returned to campus in a phased manner, most of the residence administrators were experiencing challenges with adapting to the new normal way of living with students as they state that there are so many new rules and regulations that they need to ensure they themselves and students adhere to. The transformation is mainly observed on a communication basis, as well as on an interaction basis between students and the residence administration. Before the pandemic and the lockdown, all residences had programs running to ensure students engage in residences they are assigned to, but since they have been phased during the pandemic, that engagement

was no longer there. COVID-19 challenges for student residence administration are discussed below:

2.4.1 Insufficient resources and issue of accessing PPEs

DHET (2015) notes that there is a huge increase in the number of students who are accepted to study at universities in South Africa, hence the increase in demand for student accommodation. Most of the student residences faced challenges with accessing things like masks and sanitizers, and this is students' life in the residences. This becomes difficult when such is not regularly provided in the student residences. Also, the masks are an issue as some students do not wear them and have to be constantly reminded, then residence administrators end up feeling like they are on students back, but knowing how significant it is to ensure to limit the spread of the virus.

Ntshingila (2020) states that since institutions started implementing the on-line learning protocols it was noted the living circumstances and finances of all students vary and some are not pleasurable, and the students from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer the most during this time. With the incorporation of Van de Laar's conceptual framework (2020) of e-resilience in higher education, it has been shown that the shift to the use of technologies in the selected institution had a great impact, as 90% of the students come from marginalized backgrounds. Therefore, this was a huge transformation for the students as they are expected to be resilient despite the challenges faced.

2.4.2 Internet connectivity issues and studying in the residences

Students in residence now have online and venue-based lectures that they attend in their rooms, as well as some of their tests and exams, and for this to be progressive and effective, they require adequate internet connectivity. Most residence administrators stated that there is a problem with connectivity in most residences, with weak Wi-Fi signals. Due to this problem, most students struggle to study in their residences and, as a result, most students end up outside the residence to find facilities like municipal libraries to connect, making them more susceptible to the virus and increasing their chances of exposure in the residence.

According to Badrick (2017), on Internet connectivity concerns, it cannot be denied that what attracts and retains students is the strength of Wi-Fi connectivity in that location. Badrick (2017) further states that university Internet users demand consistent connectivity that will not fail them. Ntshingila (2020) states that since institutions began introducing online learning protocols, it has been seen that all students' living situations and budgets differ, and some are not pleasurable, with students from underprivileged families suffering the most during this period.

2.5 THE NEW NORMAL

It is crucial to note that under normal circumstances programs were implemented in residences to facilitate the living and learning aspect. Due to Covid19 and social distancing, no social or educational programs have been implemented and previous studies have shown that living and learning programs improve student well-being. Therefore, without those programs, students will not be developed or assisted in how to deal with stress during a pandemic. Wahl (2013) concurs that Living and Learning programs improve student learning, development, and success at higher education level. Consequently, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, contact programs were halted, thus disadvantaging students.

Student residence administration had to think of ways for students in the residences to have some of the programs online as the way they are living is a new normal and they should adapt. Additionally, it is believed that most things will take a while to return to normal. Hence, the institutions should devise strategies that can last for a long time. Students in the student residences are more likely to persist and graduate since most tutors live in the same spaces, making it easier to oversee their development and learning. Student residences also facilitate better psychological development for students, thus reducing the rates of suicidal thoughts and mental health challenges experienced by students. It is of paramount importance to also note that in student residences there are living and learning programs that are implemented to improve the integration of cultural, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual growth of students in a way that complements each other. Ultimately, students will attach more importance to intellectual values, liberalism, secularism, and aesthetics.

2.6 THE TRANSFORMATION OF STUDENT RESIDENCE ADMINISTRATION DUE TO COVID19

COVID19 has left no student residence administration in South African universities unaffected. Most universities are still trying to develop or strengthen their living and learning systems and ensure that students are always exposed to as much knowledge as possible. According to Mohamedbhai (2020), in order to stop the spread of the virus and also ensure compliance with containment measures, African countries have no choice but to close their higher education institutions (HEIs). Mohamedbhai (2020) further states that higher education institutions have had to ensure that their programs are offered remotely to all their students using information and communication technologies (ITS).

One of the major transformations that have occurred in student administration is that as COVID-19 has accelerated the digital transformation of higher education, universities have been forced to develop different hybrid cultures. Classes have been moved to online learning, and universities forced to shut down physical activities (Martin-Barbero, 2020). As a result, higher education institutions have had to ensure that learning continues, leading to disruption in many people's lives (Martin- Barbero, 2020). Martin-Berbero (2020) states that this transformation has led to inequalities between students with resources and those without access to resources.

According to Makhanya (2020), South African universities relied on contact teaching prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This made teaching appear equitable to everyone. However, students come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and no student should be marginalized; therefore, universities must ensure that all their students are cared for (Makhanya, 2020). A transformation in student residences has been observed. According to Mzileni (2020), there is a shortage of infrastructure in South African townships and communities that is essential for students to function properly. Furthermore, in terms of the learning experience, it is generally recognized that many communities and households are non-conducive for students, and hence universities were conceptualized as residential institutions for the use of face-to-face contact learning (Mzileni, 2020).

Universities are aware that, despite technological breakthroughs and innovations, undergraduate students still need to be physically housed in on-campus housing to concentrate successfully on their studies (Mzileni, 2020). However, the reality is that not all students live in on-campus housing and have high concentration levels in general. Mzileni (2020) further states that it has been difficult to facilitate seamless teaching for students with lower concentration levels, and as a result, universities have had to use their own resources every day to transport students (who, under normal circumstances, reside in residences on campus) from campus" and provide Wi-Fi connectivity to all students who live off campus (Mzileni, 2020).

Some institutions cannot give all the necessary resources to all their students. As a result, the transition brought about by COVID-19 in student living has had a substantial impact on students, as indicated by the need to change the regular learning process from lecture venues to online learning. Students are also required to follow health regulations, most of which are unfamiliar to them, which strains institutional resources and exacerbates the fault lines, and the poor and destitute students suffer the most.

2.7 FACTORS SUSTAINING REASONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS IN THE RESIDENCES

There are several aspects that can support the reasons for student achievement while living in student housing. Causes could be the social and educational programs provided in student housing and that encourage student development in all areas. Swartz (2010) contends that student living and learning communities are strategically important because they are ideal locations for both learning and teaching as well as recreational and social activities, resulting in a sense of community, *a home away from home*.

Swartz (2010:25) argues that students in student residences should have four crucial functions, namely:

- A leadership function - student residences are a training ground for student leadership;
- A social function - student residences are a place where students have fun which is crucial to student life and engagement; and
- A cultural function – societies and clubs are strongest in student residences

Each of the preceding is a crucial component in each student's growth and therefore speaks to the richness of the student homes in encouraging a developmental agenda.

2.8 THE EFFECT OF STUDENTS RESIDING IN THE RESIDENCES

According to Gopal & Van Niekerk (2018), student housing fosters unity and a sense of purpose. As a result, first-year students look up to their seniors and benefit from the support and encouragement that comes with belonging to the Student Residences. Residences provide a key link for students from remote regions to the complexities and uncertainties of a large institution. Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) attest that research suggests that living in an on-campus residence while pursuing a four-year university degree improves student performance, adaptability, and retention. As a result, with the emergence of a pandemic such as COVID-19, which requires social separation, research must be undertaken to see whether staying on campus still has a favourable impact on student performance. Residence students are exposed to a variety of extracurricular activities that promote self-growth and, as a result, higher performance.

A study by Pascarella & Terenzini (2018:101) further revealed that “living in university residences from the first year of study increases the chances of completion on time by 12%, and students regarded ‘at risk students’ are well nurtured due to increased social interaction. There are numerous advantages to living in university hostels for students, including that student interact more frequently and informally with academic peers and staff. As a result, they can communicate with students informally, making it easier for students to approach them anytime they need assistance or support. Students who live in university student residences are more likely to participate in on-campus activities than those who do not. In particular, on-campus events are made possible in student housing, and students who live on campus have better access.

2.9 SUMMARY

The chapter presented a limited discussion on published information on the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in students in the student residence administration and the discussion further explored the various effects that Covid19 has had on the administration of student residences which include students and residence administrators. It was also indicated that the main issues that students faced since

they were returned in a phased manner back into the student residence environments were the introduction of online learning, which most struggled with at first, and the fact that hygiene was improved and increased, which is a positive development. Some students' stress levels were elevated in relation to coping with the transformation that was taking place at the student residences.

The issue of insufficient resources was also noted, where most of the students did not have sufficient or relevant resources, making it difficult for them to cope with the transformation that is taking place. With residence administrators, it was noted that the main issues were around the phased-in return of students into residences, where there was no clear system of doing this. And this was a very clear indication that it was all due to the transformation from what was regarded as normal previously, which is now regarded as a new normal of doing things within the student residences. The other issue raised was the issue of accessing PPEs, as most had not received proper directives on this matter. Internet connectivity issues and studying in residences were the other major concern that was prominent among students and residence administrators. All these issues were due to the great transformation in student residences due to the Covid19 pandemic.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLODY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A research methodology is the structure used to initiate the procedures used during the investigation. Brynard & Hanekom (1997) state that research methodology requires thoughtful planning, structuring, and conducting of research to meet demands for truth, objectivity, and validity. A research methodology is a systematic way of solving a problem. It is an academic field that studies how research should be done.

This chapter presents the methodology that has been used in the study. The design, the population of the study, and the sampling procedure that has been used to select the participants was discussed. The instruments that were used to collect the data was indicated together with the method that has been used to collect the data. The chapter also detailed on how the collected data were analyzed. The trustworthiness of the study was discussed and how the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study were achieved. The ethical considerations that the researcher followed when conducting the study were depicted, particularly regarding informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality. Finally, the limitations of the study were discussed. The chapter also presented a methodological overview on how the objectives of the study were achieved.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher used a qualitative approach to address the research objectives. According to Creswell (2012), research design is the core specific procedure involved in research, data collection, data analysis and reporting. The study used a qualitative method to determine the results of the research throughout the research. Qualitative research deals with qualitative phenomena related to quality. According to Cresswell (2007) qualitative research begins with a survey of research questions asking about expectations, worldviews, the potential use of theoretical lenses, and the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to social or human issues. It refers to an approach that seeks to describe and analyze human behavior from the perspective of the

research subject. The aim was to capture the meaning, emotion, and explanation of a situation (Sam, 2012). The research was qualitative to give students in the Student Residence Administration at the selected tertiary institution a platform to express their views and experiences regarding the researched problem.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from students in student residences at the university under study. This design was used to explore the views and feelings of participants about the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic they encounter within the student residences, while considering their privacy and anonymity (Creswell, 2011). The design allowed the researcher to describe, analyze and contrast the phenomena under study with the responses of the participants. It is noted that the semi-structured interview approach allows for the issue under study to be explored through many lenses, which thus allows for a better understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Using this design, the researcher was able to understand the in-depth challenges and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic among students in student residences. Zainal (2007) states that the semi-structured interview approach enables deeper exploration because it allows for in-depth investigations.

3.2.1 Sampling method

A sample is a subset of the target population that researchers want to study to generalize about the target population. In social research, sampling refers to systematic selection of target groups that represent the population under study (Mouton, 2019). The study adopted the nonprobability sampling method. Ames, Glenton, and Lewin (2019) define purposive sampling as a nonprobability sampling aimed at producing the sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which best enabled the researcher to answer research questions. This sampling method was used for the study as the students are the representative of the entire population and they were chosen from various postgraduate residences.

A quota sampling was used to select participants, allowing 25 postgraduate (senior students - honors to PhDs) students per Residence Block were chosen based on the

researcher's judgement of their ability to interact with the experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic in student residences. Since the study was focusing on only one case study, which is students in Residences at the selected tertiary institution, which resulted in a small number of participants, it means its sample size was particularly small.

According to Cooper & Schindler (2003), purposive sampling allows researchers to choose who or where they can best contribute to understanding a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Participant participation is based on the participant's ability to inform the study (Quinlan, 2011). The members who were sampled were the key informants on the topic under investigation as they gave their opinions and opinions on the strategic management that is chosen for the operation of the department. The advantage of sampling methods is that participants are knowledgeable about the topic and can provide reliable information to help achieve research objectives.

3.2.2 Research instrument

The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule to collect data from students in students' residences at the institution under study. The interview schedule was designed to meet the objectives of the study. Semi-structured interview schedules are usually organized around the area of interest, while at the same time allowing flexibility regarding the scope and depth of the interview (De Vos et al., 2011). The interview schedule consists mainly of open-ended questions to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic among students in the student residences at the selected tertiary institution. This instrument allowed participants to provide more in-depth responses and for the researcher to probe aspects of certain responses for clarity.

3.2.3 Data collection

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with an individual to explore the issue under study. Monette et al. (2011) defined in-depth interviews as being informal in nature with the purpose of exploring a wide range of topics over a certain period. Semi-structured interviews are regarded as the most commonly used method of collecting information in qualitative research (De Vos et al., 2011). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students in Residence Administration at the selected tertiary institution to seek their views and opinions on the subject under study. The

interviews were face-to-face questions and the interviewer was trying to get the respondents to talk freely about the topic of interest. An advantage of gathering information through interviews is that the researcher can ask follow-up questions. Additionally, researchers were able to interact verbally with participants, providing a platform for participants to express their feelings about the problem studied (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews was used to collect data tailored to the research objectives. Interviews were held to hear information and opinions from participants, and the information and recommendations obtained from the participants can be used for the future improvement of Student Residence Administration at University under study. As interviews were conducted face-to-face, an audio recorder and researcher notes were used during the data collection process.

Oltmann (2016) notes the importance of selecting an appropriate location to conduct interviews with participants. The researcher made every effort to select a secure location for the interview to ensure that the information shared is kept confidential. Furthermore, in the current research, a tape recorder was used in the interviews to ensure that the responses of the participants were completely captured. Gill et al. (2008) note that interviews should be recorded to allow the researcher to concentrate on the task at hand and to ensure that permanent records of the interviews are obtained. However, prior to each interview, informed consent was obtained from each participant to record the interview.

3.2.4 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically retrieving interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials, organizing them, and accumulating them for better understanding so that researchers can present their findings to others (Creswell, 2012). According to Sarantakos (2005), the characteristic of qualitative analysis is the work with verbal data. Include minimal quantitative measurements, standardization, and statistical techniques. As the research is qualitative in nature, data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques to explore the effect and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the administration of students in Residence Administration at the University under study. Thematic analysis is a method of

analyzing qualitative data and involves searching datasets to identify, analyze, and report recurring patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To analyze the data collected, the researcher adhered to the six steps of thematic analysis by taking the transcribed data and arranging them into themes guided by the objectives of the study. Participant's responses were written down in order to identify differences and similarities in their responses through coding. This allowed the researcher to identify common responses for each objective. Therefore, the researcher was able to identify patterns in the responses of the participants, which helped to understand the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic among students in the residences of the students at the selected tertiary institution.

The steps of the thematic analysis that were followed in the current study are according to Monette et al. (2011):

Step 1: The researcher read the transcripts of the interviews.

Step 2: The researcher labels relevant pieces, which is called coding.

Step 3: The researcher decides which codes will be the most important and creates themes by bringing the codes together.

Step 4: The themes were labelled, and the researcher decided which were the most relevant and how they were connected to each other.

Step 5: The researcher recorded the results describing the themes and how they were connected to each other.

Step 6: The researcher interpreted and discussed the results.

After the themes were identified and the participants' responses were filtered into the set themes, the researcher was able to present the research findings.

3.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research studies is challenging but very important. Creswell (2011) argues that proposal developers should clarify the measures they intend to take to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings of the study. In the realm of qualitative research, maintaining trustworthiness is

paramount to ensuring the credibility and reliability of the study findings. The study was reinforced through four key criteria: credibility, prolonged engagement, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and each played a pivotal role in increasing the accuracy and validity of the collected data. The following sections indicate the actions that the researcher taken to improve the trustworthiness of the study.

3.3.1 Credibility

Credibility ensures that the information collected from the participants is a true reflection of the original views of the participants (Anney, 2014). To ensure the credibility of the study, the researcher went through the gathered data and the transcripts to confirm that the gathered data have been interpreted correctly. Additionally, the researcher used peer debriefing was used by the researcher; research drafts were sent to the researcher's supervisor for further analysis of the collected data. The credibility of the study was checked to correct errors that may have occurred when interpreting the data, to obtain more information from the participants and to make the necessary adjustments (Babbie & Mouton, 2011).

3.3.2 Prolonged Engagement

The researcher had a long-term relationship with the participants. During the interview session, the researcher spent enough time with the participants. The researcher had face-to-face sessions with the participants. The researcher was able to ask questions and the participants were able to answer the questions, giving examples and follow-up questions.

3.3.3 Transferability

A comprehensive avenue to ensure trustworthiness lies in improving the transferability of the study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2011), transferability refers to whether the findings of the study may be applied to other environments and with different participants. A detailed and transparent description of the research process and methodology was provided, facilitating future research endeavors with a similar focus (Mkhonto, 2022). Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the researcher cannot claim that the data gathered at Student Residences at selected tertiary institution can be applied to other contexts or in the same context of Student Residences at University

under study but in a different period. This is because in qualitative research, findings are deduced from a small number of participants, and, therefore, it is difficult to ensure that the findings of a research study are applicable to other participants in a different setting (Shenton, 2004). Research findings can be used by Student Residence Administration at the University under study and other higher learning institutions.

3.3.3 Dependability and Confirmability

According to Babbie & Mouton (2011), dependability confirms that if data collection were repeated using the same instruments with similar participants in the same (similar) context, the findings would be the same. Anney (2014) describes audit trials as the examination of the research process in order to validate data that are collected, recorded, and analyzed. To validate the dependability of the study, the researcher has re-send the gathered data to the supervisor to re-analyze using similar data collection methods and data analysis methods.

Conformability ensures that the influence of the researcher's judgement is minimized and data interpretations are not imaginings (Cameron, 2011). To enhance the conformability of the study, correspondence checking was used, in which the researcher sent the supervisor transcripts of the interviews so that the supervisor could check whether the categorization of themes corresponds to those of the researcher (Cameron, 2011). Additionally, to comply with confirmability, the research depended on the use of the audit trial technique, by which raw data (participants' voice recordings) and transcripts will be made available. Audit trials are said to offer visible evidence of process and product, and evidence that the researcher did not simply encounter what he/she set out to find (Anney, 2014).

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Qualitative research tends to raise various ethical concerns, such as participants' privacy rights and avoidance of misunderstanding of collected data (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi & Cheraghi, 2014). Therefore, ethical concerns such as anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent were addressed when conducting qualitative research (Sandjari et al., 2014). Anney (2014) argues that sound research is a moral and ethical endeavor, and care must be taken to ensure that the interests of research participants are not adversely affected by the research being conducted.

According to Layder (2004), research ethics emphasizes the humane and sensitive treatment of research participants who may be exposed to various risks because of research procedures. Mouton (2019) pointed out that morality is standards or principles of practice that guide moral decisions about practices and relationships with others. The moral basis in research is not to harm anyone or experience adverse effects (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2020). According to Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2020), participants should be able to withdraw from the survey at any time. The researcher adhered to the following ethical considerations according to the selected tertiary institution requirements to protect all respondents and their institutions;

3.4.1 Permission to conduct the study

Ethics committees assessed whether research is harmful to participants and whether consent obtained from participants to participate in the research (Garrard & Dawson, 2004). The researcher has obtained an approved clearance certificate from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) of the University under study. Furthermore, the researcher was granted permission to conduct the research by the University Registrar. For additional ethical compliance, the researcher submitted research proposal with established research objectives to the Student Residence Administration at the selected tertiary institution and request permission to conduct research.

The information obtained from the participants was not used against them for personal or academic purposes. To maintain the anonymity of research participants, all identifying information were removed, and only pseudonyms were used. The information shared by each participant were not shared with anyone other than the researcher's supervisor. This information was destroyed after the research is completed.

3.4.2 Informed consent

The purpose of the study was explained before the researcher can conduct interviews or hand out questionnaires. While it is not possible to identify all possible ethical issues arising from a research project, challenges can be minimized (Bailey, 2007). Any questions the respondent had were answered to ensure that the respondents make an informed decision before agreeing to participate in the study and signing the

informed consent form. According to Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong (2011) informed consent includes informing participants about all aspects of the research process that can influence their decision to participate in research. As Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2011:47) state, the standard components of consent are (a) provision of adequate information, (b) competence and understanding of participants, and (c) participation. (d) formal consent, usually in writing.

3.4.3 Voluntary participation

The principle of voluntariness is to show respect to participants so that they are not coerced into participating in research. This is achieved by providing all the information about the study so that participants can decide for themselves whether or not to participate in the study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Therefore, participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were allowed withdraw at any time during the study for any reason. By providing them with all the information about the research, participants were able to decide for themselves whether they want to participate or not (Anney, 2014). Participants were not given monetary compensation; nevertheless, the study findings and recommendations can be brought to the attention of the Student Residence Administration for consideration in order to improve residence conditions at the workplace.

3.4.4 Anonymity and confidentiality

Monette et al. (2011) note that privacy issues may arise when collecting data from attendees. In such situations, it is important to ensure anonymity and confidentiality (Babbie, 1992). Babbie (1992) emphasizes that although these two terms are often used interchangeably, they are distinguishable. Anonymity refers to the fact that no one can associate the collected information with the participant (Monette et al., 2011). Confidentiality refers to participants who know the participant and are aware of their responses, but with the promise that the researcher was not disclose them (Babbie, 1992). The researcher asked each participant to sign an informed consent form to be drafted. Informed consent means that the researcher has the guarantee of confidentiality.

The names and details of the participants were not mentioned in the study or used during data analysis or reporting. In addition, information provided by participants was

not shared by researchers without the participant's consent. All participants were treated with fairness, respect, and dignity. At all times, confidentiality was protected. Only the researcher and the supervisor had access to the interview notes and recordings, and the researcher explained to the respondents how their information was used and handled securely.

3.4.5 Do no harm

Barbie and Mouton (2012:123-126) argue that human beings are not guinea pigs to experiment with. Accordingly, therefore, when people are used for research purposes, their dignity, integrity, and safety should be protected. If the researcher notices that some questions asked during the interview elicit specific emotions, the researcher was willing to refer those respondents to a psychologist at the nearest hospital or health center for further management to ensure that the respondent's well-being is taken care of, and the researcher was willing to refrain from asking sensitive questions to the respondents.

3.4.6 Respect, dignity and standard of care

According to Barbie and Mouton (2012:123-126), all participants should be treated with fairness, respect, and dignity. To preserve the anonymity of the research participants, all identifying details were removed, and pseudonyms was used. The names and details of the participants were not mentioned in the research or used during data analysis and reporting. Furthermore, the information provided by the participants was not disclosed to the researcher without their permission. The information shared by each participant were not shared with any other person except the research supervisor. This information was discarded upon completion of the study.

3.4.7 Psychological risks and harm

Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2010) assert that interview sessions should not inflict any mental harm on participating members. In a situation where the participant is overwhelmed by feelings, the interview session was to stop immediately (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). If there is psychological damage or emotional harm to a participant, the researcher was willing to refer the participant to a psychologist and counsellor for professional help.

3.4.8 Research Findings and feedback

Should respondents wish to have a copy of the research findings after the completion of the project, such information was made available to those respondents. Student Residence Administration can also have the copy of the research finding if they wish to have for future references and for the improvement of the Student Residences.

3.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is imperative to understand and determine the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic on Students in the administration of Student Residence Administration at the University under study. The study determined the aspects and measures in which the students in the Student Residence Administration considered in the response to the pandemic and to curb the spread of the virus. The study was allowed to contribute to other academic researchers, which means that other researchers can be able to use the research study as their reference and the study can contribute to the practice of discipline for example, to help improve the practical environment of the public administration. Student Residence Administration can also use the study as reference for future improvement of the Student Residence Administration.

3.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was limited to the study area which is Student Residence Administration at the selected tertiary institution, and for further references the study can be made outside the study area which obviously similar to the study. This study was limited to qualitative methods, future studies may repeat the study using mixed methods, and the scope of the study was limited to one tertiary institution.

3.6.1 Structural

Due to the bureaucratic structure of the administration of student residences, participants could be reluctant to share the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in student residences. To minimize this weakness of the study, the researcher informed the participants that confidentiality can be ensured and that no identifiable details would be included anywhere in the final report. Therefore, any shared information would only be known by the researcher and the supervisor. Moreover, their true identities were not revealed.

3.6.2 Research instrumentation

The use of a semi-structured interview schedule was presented as a limitation. Interviews consumed more time because the responses of participants were extensive and in-depth, which required the researcher to invest considerable time with each participant. Additionally, English was used as it is a medium of communication in the selected tertiary institution. The researcher was required to check the importance of selecting an appropriate location to conduct interviews with participants, and the researcher made every effort in selecting a secure location for the interview to ensure that the information shared was kept confidential.

3.6.3 Ethnicity

Most of the students in Student Residence Administration at the university under study were African, which was founded to be a limitation of the study. The study had no have any white or Indian ethnic groups, as most of the students staying in the student residences at selected tertiary institution are African.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the research design and the methods that were used to carry out the study. The qualitative approach was used to address the objectives of the investigation. Nonprobability sampling and its purposive sampling method were used to recruit participants for the study. To gather information from the participants', semi- structured interviews were conducted. The trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study were also discussed in addition to the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the research design and methodology of the study. The purpose of this chapter is to present research findings, analysis, and interpretations of the study. Data were collected using a qualitative method in the form of semi-structured interviews posed to post-graduate students from the University under study. The data collected were to explore the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in Student Residences at the selected tertiary institution. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts.

The interview schedule contained 9 interview questions that were posed to the 30 post-graduate students at the Student Residences. This chapter discusses the demographic information of the participants, the identified themes and subthemes of the study, and the analysis of the data collected using inductive thematic analysis (ITA). The identified themes are presented according to the main objectives of the study, which are as follows:

- Determine the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic on students in Residence Administration
- To establish challenges faced by students in the Residence Administration during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Assess the effect of the *new normal* on students in Residence Administration due to COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study investigated the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in the Student Residences at the selected tertiary institution. Data collected were analyzed using semi-structured interviews. The 9 interview questions were responded to by postgraduate students. The nature of the questions was structured according to the study objectives relevant to the population group. This chapter provided analyzed data collected through interview questions. While a thematic analysis was used to

analyze the data collected. In this regard, the following steps were used to analyze the collected data and are discussed below.

4.2.1 Organizing data

Firstly, the researcher labelled the answer sheets used during the interview to ensure the grouping of students from different levels of postgraduate study into categories. The purpose of the study, the different participants and the themes provided were used to guide the researcher on the coding and alignment of systematic procedures. Furthermore, based on the nature of the themes, the data were also organized according to gender. This allowed the researcher to easily access a set of data required as per theme or sub-theme.

4.2.2 Data coding

Coding data is a crucial method for selectively grouping a set of data collected into meaningful patterns and subjects. The researcher used the advantage of organizing data to search and understand the underlying pattern of the results. To give meaning to the results, the researcher implemented the method of coding to determine the similarities and differences outlined by the participants. Practically, through focusing on one subtheme per findings; similarities were highlighted with red, while differences were highlighted in blue. To ensure that there is no divergence towards the systematic patterns. Codes were developed by naming the narrative of participants. This enabled the researcher to note down and categorize the codes which was achieved manually by writing down the code with similar answer sheet designed with all set of interview questions.

4.2.3 Development of themes

The development of themes emanated from the availability of the set of codes. To achieve the development of themes, the researcher identified direct coordination between sets of themes to group interrelated themes. The critical aspect used to fulfill the set of themes clustered was the identification of consistency within the descriptions of the participants. Furthermore, clustering the different sets of themes allowed the researcher to identify the relevance of themes and codes to the question investigated. Furthermore, enabling the identification of any deviation thereof.

4.2.4 Data analysis conclusion

Lastly, the implementation of the mentioned steps resulted in the development of manageable findings. The drafted results were used to provide a final presentation of the findings that are directly related to the research study objectives and the research aim.

4.3 DATA COLLECTED THROUGH INTERVIEWS

Data collection was carried out by interviewing students in Student Residences at the University under study. Participants were asked questions to comment on based on their experience with the COVID-19 pandemic in the Student Residences. The researcher used semi-structured interview questions which sought to address the research objectives. A qualitative method was used to obtain in-depth data. The target number of 30 student participants was purposefully reached, and all 30 students participated within the Student Residences at the selected tertiary institution. The questionnaires were designed to cover the following themes: biographic information, the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic on students in Student Residences, challenges faced by students in Student Residences during COVID-19, and the effect of the *new normal* on students in Student Residences.

4.4 BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS

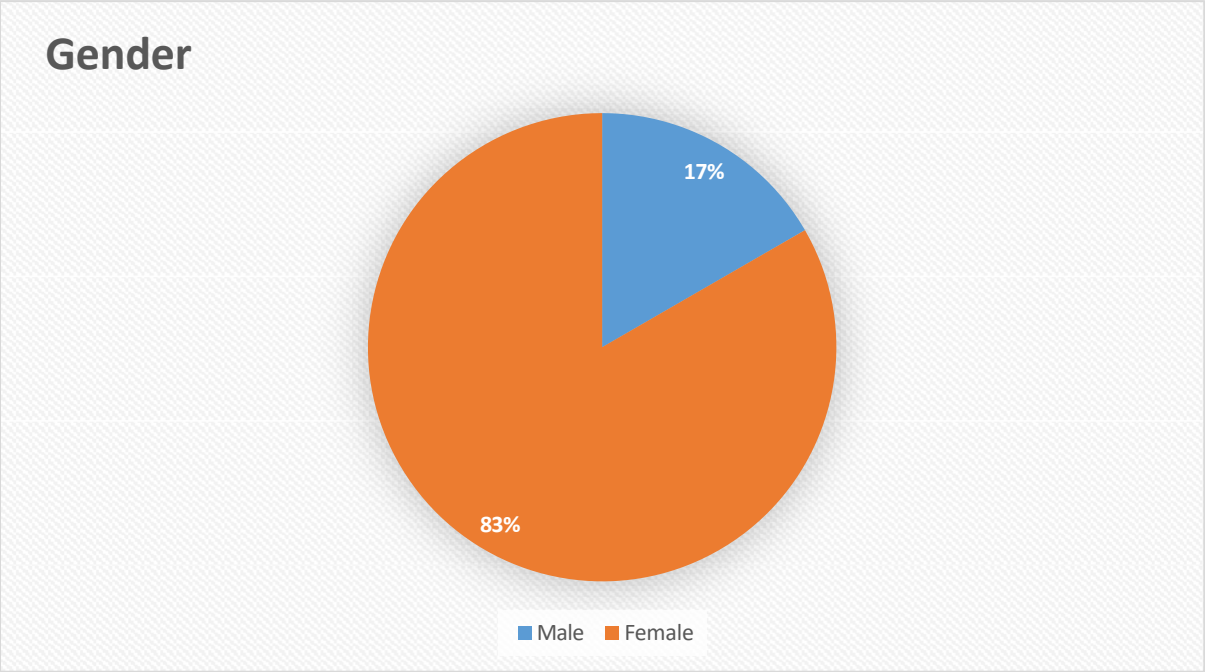
Demographic information provides clarity on the type of respondent that a researcher is dealing with. For the purpose of this study, demographic information included gender, age group, race, language, and level of study for students.

4.4.1 Section A: Biographical information for students

4.4.1.1 Gender of the respondents

The underlying experiences of COVID-19 pandemic on students in the Student Residences affected both males and females; this is why the researcher collected data from both genders for the purpose of accurate and less biased results. All 30 participants responded to the interview questions and were postgraduate students from Honors to PhDs.

Figure 1



The figure above presents the proportion of gender respondents for the study. Gender remains an important aspect for the researcher to conclude the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in student residences by participants in terms of gender. The pie chart above indicates that more females participated (83%) than males (17%). This indicates that females are more vocal on the experiences of COVID-19 pandemic challenges in the Student Residences, which seem to be causing a negative impact to both genders; however, the male counterpart were less vocal and fearful on participating on issues which impose negative effect on them.

4.4.1.2 Age group of participants

Only participants over 18 years of age participated in the study. The age group of the respondents ranged from 18 to 35 years and there was no participant under 35 years of age. In this case, participants were provided an age group to indicate in which age range they are part of.

Figure 2

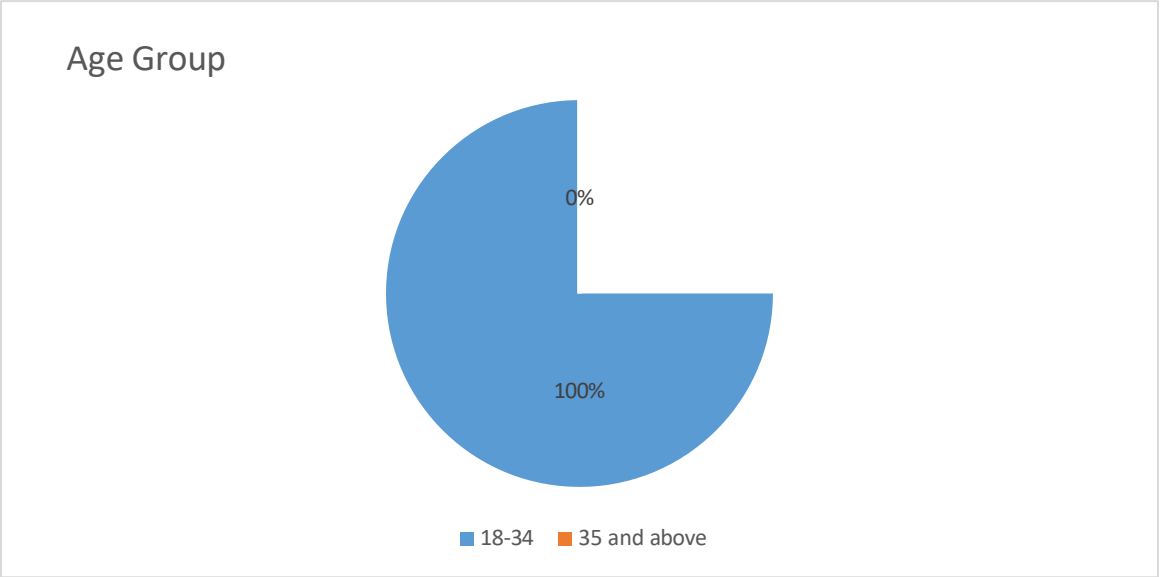
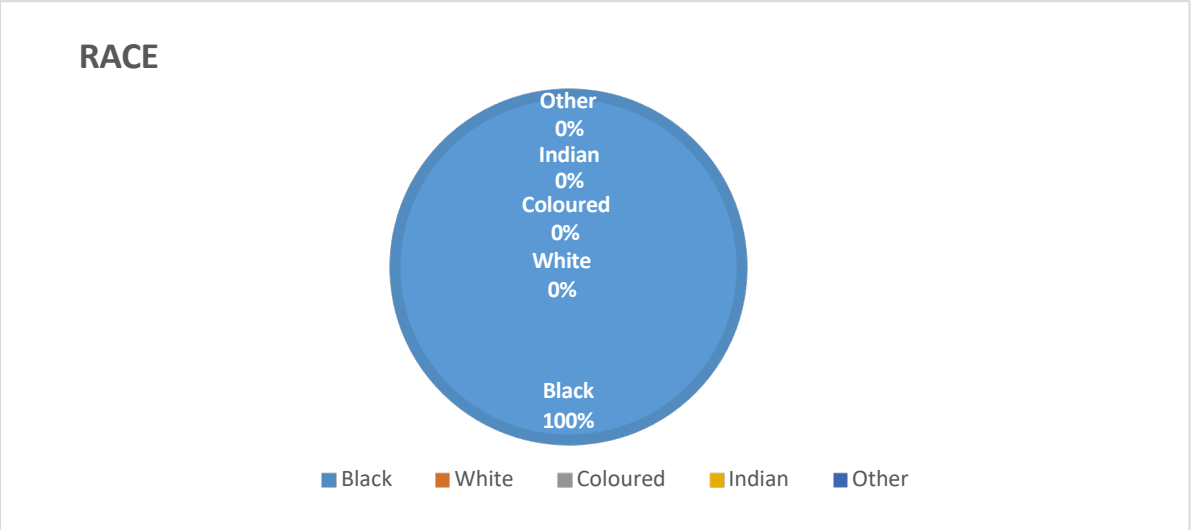


Figure 2 above indicates that the highest age group participated falls under the age of 35 and below, however, all students indicated under the age group of 18-35, which account to 100%. The age group concluded that all the post-graduate students who participated provided their experiences are not over 35 years of age.

4.4.1.3 Race of participants

South Africa is a country populated with a variety of racial groups which include Black, White, Colored, and Indian. Although that is the case, the University under study is dominated by black people, noting that the tertiary institution was developed to cater for previously disadvantaged groups. The university under study is located in a rural area. Therefore, this explains the dominance of the black race.

Figure 3

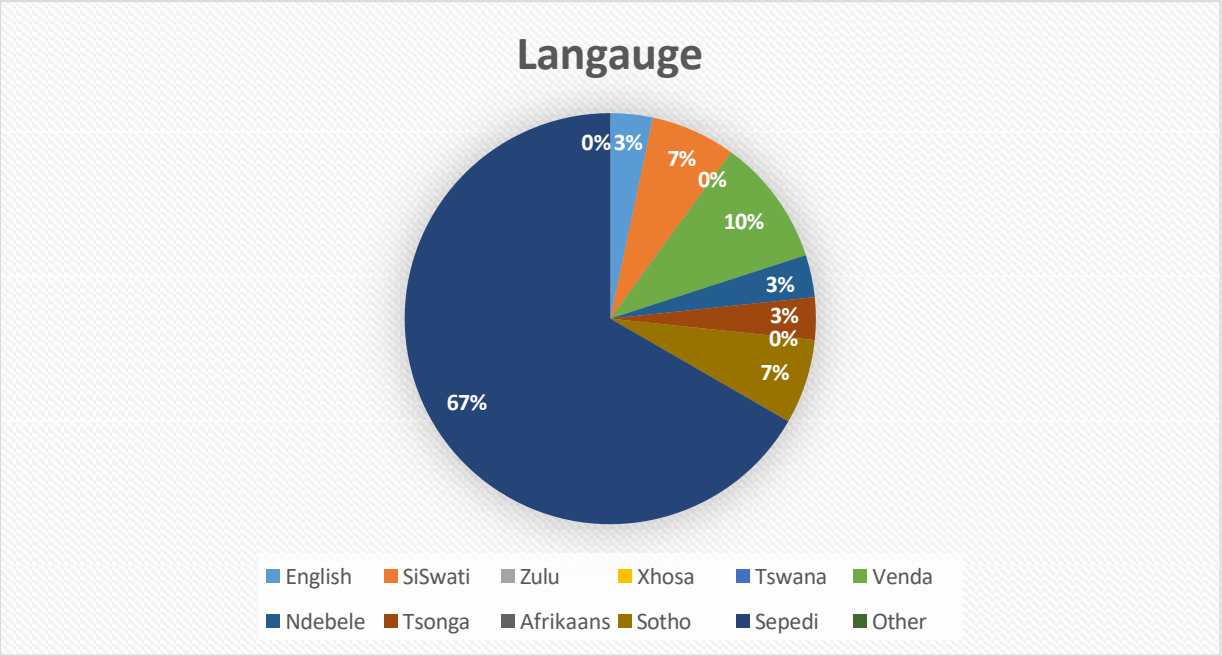


The biographic information collected indicated that all participants fall into the Black racial group which was 100% and none are of White, Colored, Indian or any other race as indicated in the figure above. Regardless of race, it is important to note that the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic affect all races.

4.4.1.4 Language of the participants

Every province in South Africa has dominant language groups. Despite the reasons for other foreign languages which are a result of people moving from one province to another for educational purposes. Although identifying the language has no impact on how experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Student Residences have an impact on participants and how information is provided. The researcher sought to record the dominating languages within the University based in Limpopo.

Figure 4

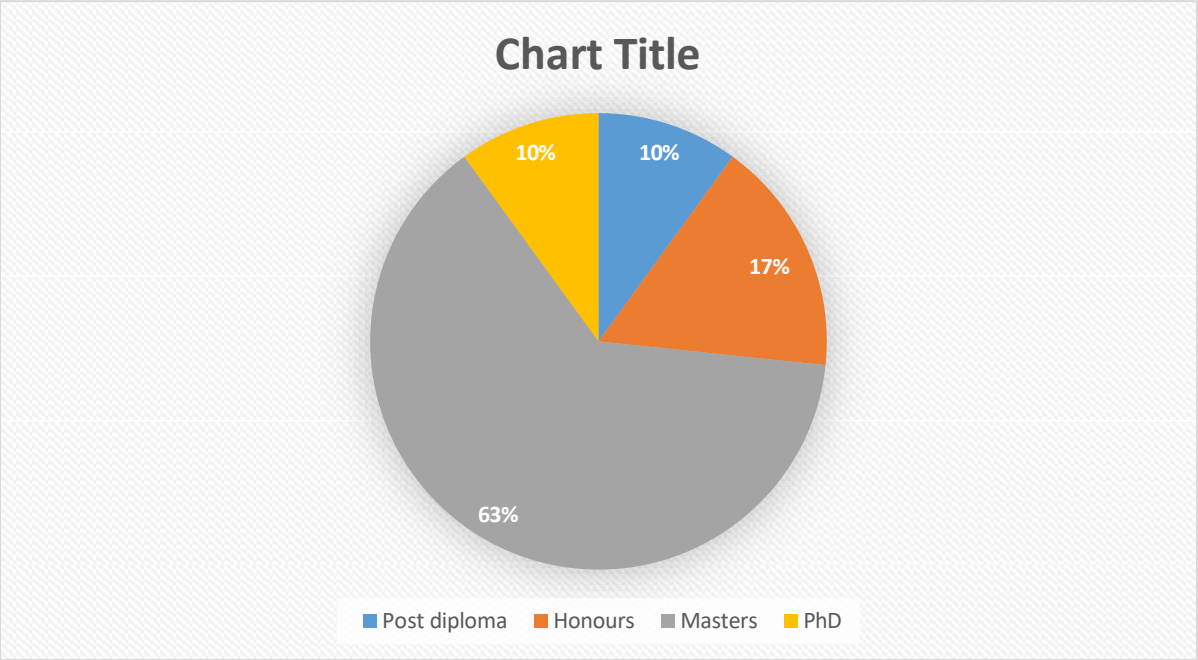


The University under study is an area dominated by northern Sotho-speaking people that is also known as Sepedi. The figure above indicates that the majority of participants (students) accounted for 67%; followed by Venda speaking with a percentage of 10%; then equal percentage of Sotho 7%, and SiSwati 7% and also followed by another equal percentage of English 3%, Tsonga 3% and Ndebele 3%.

4.4.1.5 Level of postgraduate study

The University under study was introduced to the *new normal* brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic that led to the implementation of online learning which was supposed to take place in the Student Residences inside student rooms and the target group was postgraduate students as they have experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in the University Student Residences. Although the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Student Residences may be similar, experiences may differ from one residence to another.

Figure 5



The figure above indicates that only postgraduate students participated in this study, as they were the targeted group and were selected because they believe to have full experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in Student Residences. The proportion of post-graduate students amounted to Masters 63%, while Honors is 17% and an equal percentage for post-Diploma 10%, and PhD 10%. The researcher concludes that the nature of study attracted Masters Students more than Post-diploma, Honors, and Ph.D. students/candidates. Although that is not the case, postgraduate students/candidates indicated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Student Residences since the repatriation process began.

4.5 RESPONSE FROM PARTICIPANTS

4.5.1 The experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in the Student Residences at the selected tertiary institution.

A conducive environment remains a right of everyone; however, the *New Normal* has brought new implementations to be introduced in the Student Residences in order to comply with rule and regulations as stipulated by the Department of Health as a method to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pandemic has revealed

several challenges as a result of the digital divide, lack of preparedness, and other economic factors such as load-shedding and internet connectivity, which they continue play a role in hindering the effectiveness of remote learning. The theme provides a platform for participants to express their concerns about how the COVID-19 pandemic affected them in the Student Residences. Therefore, the theme presents different relevant questions to the theme.

4.5.1.1 The impact of the student residence condition on the learning and well-being of students during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent closure of the university.

It is significant for the researcher to get a clear view of what the participants think about the condition of the Student Residences toward their well-being and online learning during the pandemic and the university subsequent closer during lockdown. This was to assist the researcher in identifying whether the chosen group of participants understands and has experience of staying at the Student Residences during the pandemic and can answer precisely about the main theme of the study. As a result, all participants showed that they have experience staying in Student Residences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As one participant was able to provide an overview of the experience in the Student Residences during the pandemic, he stated that "*The Student Residences condition were not conducive to learning due to the lack of access to other learning materials such as books from the library. Students were not allowed any movement without a valid reason, such as health-related matters. The experience had a negative effect on my mental health and had affected my academic performance."*

Another participant said: "*The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closure of the university had a significant impact on students living in residences such as shared living spaces where noise can be a major distraction that impacts concentration. Additionally, the sudden shift to online assessment came with a lot of challenges such as technical and network issues."*

And another participant has expressed that: "*It negatively affected my studies because I was scared of my life. The pandemic forced us to move home where we were forced to use technological devices that we were not familiar with. Poor internet connection*

was the main issue in studying at home after the subsequent closer proximity to the university." Most participants have shown that the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in the student residences and the subsequent closer of the university have negatively affected them in such a way that it increased the level of anxiety. This has also given the researcher confidence that the answers provided was accurate as a result of the understanding and direct experience of the participants on the phenomenon.

4.5.1.2 The preferred type of accommodation and housing characteristics, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data collected indicate that most of the participants showed that the type of accommodation that is preferred during the COVID-19 pandemic is the type that is not shared with enough ventilation and that way the number of them interacting with others was low and the risk of contracting the virus can be reduced. Other participants mentioned that most of the rooms in the student residences are fairly small and congested to some degree and suggest that there should be designated cleaners in the common areas such as shared kitchen, living areas, and in the bathrooms since student cleaning is not that effective.

Another participant pointed out that: *"The appropriate accommodation during COVI-19 would be single rooms with bathrooms, high-speed Internet access, study area, and kitchen facilities in the unit to ensure a safer and more comfortable environment for learning and wellbeing."* This single room accommodation with all necessary equipment to support students with their academic activities such as attending online classes in an open space with enough ventilation and none sharing space would be more suitable for such emergencies of COVI-19 pandemic.

Most participants emphasise that a single room can be used to implement their own health and safety measures, and staying alone in a single room can also reduce the risk of spreading the virus. A single room can also serve as an isolation and quarantine space if one is contaminated.

One participant mentioned that: *"A flat – in a flat the bedroom, toilet, and kitchen are in one place / room, which means that there would have been no communication with the living partners or the management of the living room as that would reduce the risk*

of contracting the virus" Practically it means that in a bachelor-style accommodation there will not be unnecessary movement as there would be everything inside this type of accommodation.

Another participant mentioned that the type of accommodation that they prefer is "*the one with good ventilation and natural light to reduce the risk of airborne transmission and boost mood"* while the other participant stated: *"I would prefer a lower cloaked accommodation to reduce the risk of exposure and maintain social distancing easily and a place with large windows to maintain positive mood and productivity while spending more time indoors."* This can be interpreted or concluded that most of the rooms in the Student Residences do not have enough space for ventilation with small windows and are not conducive to academic activities and most of them are sharing rooms which do not comply with COVID-19 rules and regulations as stipulated by the Department of Health.

4.5.1.3 The arrangement that was in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the Student Residences.

It is crucial to note that under normal circumstances programs were implemented in the Student Residences to facilitate living and learning aspect. Due to the COVID- 19 pandemic, most of the activities in the Student Residence were discontinued to prevent the spread of the virus. Therefore, Student Residences had to implement new measures in the University halls of residences as stipulated by Department of Health before students can be repatriated back in Student Residences. Most of the participants stated that the University Residence was providing them with the necessary PPEs, such as hand-sanitizers and they were provided with face masks. As this participant states that: "*We were provided masks, sanitizers, and hand soap again following social separation and visitors were not allowed."*

Student Residences according to most of the participants played an important role in reducing the spread of the virus amongst the students when repatriated back into the halls of residences by educating students about measures that need to be followed when inside the Student Residences. The information was distributed through the university communication channel and other information was distributed through the notice boards which tells the students to wear their mask when they are in an open

space, adhere to social distancing, wash hands frequently, and no visitors allowed. The following participants explains measures that were put in place at the Student Residence to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic:

"*They provided us with free hand sanitizers, distance land markers to regulate the distance between individuals in an area of shared space, and free face masks were provided (in boxes in each residence).*"

"Some residences were converted into a quarantine or isolation area and our rooms were disinfected to remove the virus because it was airborne transmitted. Outside, they put sanitizers for everyone and placed a board guiding students on how to avoid being contacted by the virus".

"A few people were allowed back into the residences, at each entrance to the residence there were signs that no mask was allowed, they had foot pedal sanitizers at each entrance to the residence and there were markings on the floor measuring the social distance."

The researcher with the information collected from the participants mentioned above and from other participants can conclude that measures were put in place by the Student Residence of the University under study to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.5.1.4 Compliance by the Student Residence Administration with COVID-19 pandemic measures and regulations as stipulated by the Department of Health.

According to WHO (2020) it was concluded that, to minimize the spread of the virus, everyone should adhere to the stipulated hygienic protocols. Therefore, it is quite interesting to note that students in the Student Residences are actually adhering to the protocols. Therefore, the change in hygienic behavior would mean that even after the pandemic good hygienic behaviour will still be maintained. Compliance begins with adherence to guidelines issued by public health authorities, and these guidelines are typically based on scientific evidence and aim to mitigate the spread of Covid-19. They may include requirements such as wearing masks in common areas, maintaining physical distance, regular hand hygiene, and cleaning and disinfection protocols for shared spaces. Student Residence Administrations must ensure that these guidelines are clearly communicated to all students in the Student Residences.

The majority of the participants agree that the Student Residence Administration at the selected tertiary institution strictly adhered to the COVID-19 pandemic measure and regulations as stipulated by the Department of Health and also gave reason why. The following are some of the responses from participants about the compliance of the Student Residence Administration with the measures and regulations of the COVID-19 pandemic:

"Student Residence Administration yes, it was complying with COVID-19 measures by enforcing the wearing of masks, social distancing and frequent sensitization."

"Yes. Residence had strict measures in place such as discipline should you find that you do not adhere to the measures that were implemented, and they implemented various protocols to ensure a safe living environment, such as wearing masks and social distancing measures."

"Yes, they were, they did not allow social gatherings, for example, 5 people in the residence kitchen were not allowed to be there at the same time but at least 3, they regularly cleaned common areas such as kitchens, bathrooms and living areas, and frequent refills of hand sanitizers and they also enforced social distancing."

"Yes, because the university had increased the frequency of cleaning and disinfection in shared spaces such as bathrooms and kitchens and also places hand soap in the bathrooms for washing of hands."

Few participants believed that the Student Residence Administration did not comply with COVID-19 pandemic measures and regulations as stipulated by the Department of Health. They only mentioned minor issues which resulted in not complying, and those minor issues they included the issue of social distancing which was not easy to monitor and maintain, and the issue of sharing bathrooms. As this participant has stated: "*There was no compliance because we were sharing bathrooms*".

Provided the two opposite findings even though those who disagree are few, the researcher can conclude that there are different dilemmas when it comes to compliance with the COVID-19 pandemic by Student Residence Administration, as some of the students in the Student Residences intentionally neglect measures and regulations of COVID-19 which can result in putting other students who complying at risk of getting contaminated by the virus.

Compliance with the COVID-19 pandemic involves adapting to changing circumstances, such as outbreaks or new variants of the virus. Student residence administrations should have plans in place for quarantine procedures, testing, and contact tracing.

4.5.2 Challenges faced by students in the Student Residences during COVID-19 pandemic.

Students living in Student Residences faced several significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic such as: Isolation and loneliness as many students experienced increased feelings of isolation and loneliness due to restrictions on social gatherings and limited interactions with peers. The health condition was also a major challenge, as students were concerned about their own health and safety, as well as that of their fellow residents. Fear of contracting COVID-19, especially in shared living spaces, added stress and anxiety. The disrupted academic experience that resulted in the transition to online learning posed challenges, particularly for students living in Student Residences with unreliable internet access or inadequate study spaces. The switch to virtual classes also affected their ability to collaborate with peers and participate in extracurricular activities.

4.5.2.1 Difficulties experienced in Student Residences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to WHO (2020), it is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared, or angry during a crisis. As students were slowly being brought back to campus in a phased manner, most of the students were experiencing challenges in adapting to the new regulations and measures that were introduced and implemented to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in residences. Most of the participants revealed that the most common challenges they faced when returning to the Student Residences during the COVID-19 pandemic included the issue of isolation and loneliness, health concerns, disrupted academic experience, financial stress, uncertainty about residence policies, emotional well-being, and limited support systems.

Other participants indicated: "*Having to move from my room to quarantine in another home without being given the opportunity to decide whether or not to isolate at home. Moving from postgraduate to undergraduate residence*".

“In the Student Residences we were forced to stay in our rooms alone without visitors and I had no one to talk to and being stuck alone in the room was quite stressful.”

“During COVID-19 I faced difficulties such as visiting my classmates and friends since we were not allowed to visit each other. Students who did not comply with the rules and regulations were putting other students at risk and creating a conflict with members of the residence”.

The researcher can comment that the main problem that most of the participants mentioned is the issue of isolation and loneliness as they were not allowed to visit each other and gatherings were also not allowed which causes stress and anxiety as they were not used to being locked inside their rooms.

Participants indicated that the introduction of online learning was a huge effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the national lockdown and COVID-19, most of the institutions introduced blended learning, which Ibrahim and Nat (2019) as an “effective approach to passive knowledge engagement of a massive number of students, which also increases learning outside of the traditional face-to-face learning environment”. There was a huge transformation among students as they were not used to relying solely on online learning. For effective online classes, the Student Residences had to increase the strength or provide students with a strong internet connection for them to be able to attend classes inside their rooms.

Most of the participants are complaining about poor WIFI connectivity in their residences as they were expected to keep up with their school work; they further mentioned that the transformation of online learning is so difficult on them since they cannot connect properly like the rest of their classmates and this means that some students were mainly behind with their schoolwork due to poor WIFI connectivity in some residences.

The researcher can conclude that most of the students in the Student Residences have been experiencing similar challenges that were brought by COVID-19 pandemic, mainly the issue of isolation, and loneliness, gatherings not allowed and poor internet connectivity in certain residences. Students have been struggling to adapt to the new norms and protocols within Student Residences such as practicing physical

distancing, wearing of masks and adhering to quarantine or isolation requirements if exposed to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.5.2.2 Necessary support and equipment from Residence Administration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The transformation is mainly noted on a communication basis as well as on an interaction basis between students and Residence Administration personnel. Before the pandemic and lockdown, all residences had programs running to ensure students engaged in residence they are assigned to, but since they have been phased during the pandemic those engagements were no longer there. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Residence Administration personnel had to play a crucial role in providing support and giving necessary equipment to students facing challenges and also had to ensure that all students in Student Residences comply with the new norms and measures brought by COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the responses made by the participants on the issue of support and equipment provided by Residence Administration personnel to the students in the Student Residences on their responses, they emphasized that they were getting the support and provided with necessary equipment for them to continue with their academic activities and to stay safe and protected against the pandemic. Here is how the participants according to their responses believed they got typical support and equipment from the Residence Administration personnel:

Communication and guidance - Residence administration frequently communicated updates on health guidelines, residence policies and available resources through university student keyaka email address and informational posters. Clear communication helped students understand the rules and protocols in place.

Health and safety measure – Residence administration ensured that residences followed strict health and safety protocols. This included providing hand sanitizing stations, distributing masks, there was an ambulance strictly for students with symptoms of COVID-19, and implementing regular cleaning schedules for high-touch areas such as common spaces and bathrooms. And few participants complained that some of them were getting PPEs once a month such as masks, taking time to refill

their pedal sanitizers and their pocket hand sanitizer, believing that it was not enough to sustain them the whole month as they were getting them once a month.

Technology and infrastructure support - Recognizing the increased reliance on technology for virtual learning, Residence personnel facilitated access to reliable WIFI internet connections, which was a bit of a challenge as students always complained about the poor connection and was affecting students' academic progress.

Support for quarantine and isolation – Residence Administration assisted students who needed to quarantine or isolate due to COVID-19 pandemic exposure or systems. They provided essential supplies, meals, and regular check-ins to ensure students well-being during this period, and this was done in collaboration with Student Health Centre. There were Student Residences that were converted into isolation or quarantine areas.

Overall, based on the majority of the responses by the participants, it can be concluded that Residence Administration personnel played a critical role in supporting students in the Student Residences during the pandemic by providing both assistance and emotional support, and few participants believed that they were not given full support and necessary equipment. Helping to navigate the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, and their efforts contributed to fostering a safe, supportive, and conducive living environment where students could continue their academic pursuits and personal growth despite unprecedented circumstances.

4.5.3 Assessment of effect of the *New Normal* on students in the Student Residences due to COVID-19 pandemic.

4.5.3.1 Positive / Negative change brought about by the *New Normal* caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Student Residences to support students academically.

The *New Normal* brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed brought both positive and negative changes to Student Residences, influencing their academic support in various ways. One participant mentioned that: "*Overall*, *the New Normal brought both benefits (enhanced digital resources, flexibility and virtual support) and challenges (limited social interaction, technical issues and increased stress) to student residences, affecting academic support and student wellbeing."*

Positive changes

Most participants believe that the *New Normal* caused by COVID-19 has brought positive changes in the following ways: First, through technological integration, whereby many students have experienced an increase in access to technology for learning that includes online classes, digital textbooks, and educational apps. This accessibility improves your ability to conduct research and access up-to-date information from the comfort of your home.

Secondly, it has brought flexibility in such a way that the shift to remote or hybrid learning models means that students often have more flexibility in managing their study schedules. This flexibility can allow better time management and personalized learning approaches. Remote learning often allows students to learn at their own pace and revisit materials as needed.

Lastly, improved safety and health awareness, where there has been increased awareness of health and safety measures, encouraging cleaners and more hygienic living environments in the Students Residences. This awareness can contribute to overall well-being and possibly reduce the spread of diseases beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Negative changes

Although other participants emphasized that it has brought negative changes such as; Social isolation where remote learning can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness as students may have fewer opportunities for in-person interactions with peers and their lecturers. This lack of social interaction can affect mental health and academic motivation.

Unequal access to resources whereby not all students have equal access to reliable internet, suitable study spaces, or necessary technology for remote learning. This inequality can broaden existing educational disparities based on socioeconomic status or geographic location. Financial constraints also served as a disadvantage where some students may face financial challenges in acquiring essential technology or resources needed for remote learning, preventing their academic progress and participation.

Learning effectiveness where some students may find it challenging to adapt to remote learning environments, missing out on the interactive and collaborative aspects of traditional classroom setting. This could potentially affect their academic performance and engagement. Internet connectivity issues, software glitches, and other technical difficulties were disrupting learning sessions, affecting concentration and learning continuity.

The researcher can conclude based on the participants' contributions that while the *New Normal* has introduced technological advances and safety measures that can support students academically, it has also presented challenges related to social interaction, access to resources, and learning effectiveness. Balancing these factors is crucial for ensuring that students receive adequate academic support, and Student Residences should also implement permanent measures that will support students in the Student Residences during these unprecedented times.

4.5.3.2 Suitability of student residences for studying, attending online classes, and writing tests/exams.

Most of the Student Residences on campus typically provide various amenities and environments that cater to studying, attending classes, and writing tests/exams. The following is an overview of how these Residences support academic activities as stipulated by the participants:

- Study space

Most campus residences offer designated quiet study areas or study lounges where students can concentrate without distractions. These spaces are conducive to reading, studying, and completing assignments. Other participants mentioned that the design of their rooms is in a way that has all the equipment to support them do their academic activities such as study table, study lamp, study chair, book shelves, and free internet connection.

"*Yes, like the rooms are well-spaced, there is a study table, lights, and a chair that makes it easy for students to study at any time they want*".

- Attendance in class

Proximity to classes as the On-campus residences are typically located within walking distance or a short commute from academic buildings and lecture halls. This proximity makes it convenient for students to attend classes promptly without delay in transportation. Student residence internet connectivity generally offers reliable internet connectivity, which is crucial for attending virtual classes or accessing online course materials from the comfort of student rooms.

"*Student residences on campus can be suitable for studying, attending online classes, and writing tests/exams offering benefits such as convenience: close proximity to classes, libraries, free internet connection, and other academic resources."*

- Tests and exams facilities

During tests/exams periods, residences often designate specific dining halls as study area/venue. These spaces are organized to provide a quiet and controlled environment conducive for tests/exam preparations.

"*Yes, all common rooms or dining rooms are made available to students to study, attend classes, and write tests/exams while adhering to the COVID-19 pandemic measures*".

- Additional Support Service

Student Residence personnel are typically available to provide guidance and support to students living in residences. They can assist with academic resources, resolving housing issues, and navigating campus life; there are also Student Residence Life talk programs offered by the Student Residence personnel. Community spaces where there are common areas within residences, such as lounges or community kitchens, foster a sense of community among students, and these spaces can also serve as informal meeting spots for group study sessions or academic discussions.

"*Absolutely, the residences provide good study areas which allow us to study with our fellow peers. Furthermore, living with peers' means that there is an understanding that studying needs to happen*".

In general, according to the participants, Student Residences on campus are designed to support academic success by providing conducive study environments, convenient access to classes, and facilities for writing tests and exams. These amenities aim to

enhance the overall learning experience and contribute to students' educational achievements during time at university.

4.5.3.3 Comments, additions and recommendations on the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Student Residences.

Provided the experiences mentioned above, participants were given a platform to raise comments, additions, and recommendations on what can be done to solve and improve the existing crisis, which were raised as follows.

- Improved hygiene

Participants revealed that they are now more aware of their hygiene due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sang & Dewi (2020) state that hand hygiene is extremely crucial to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Most of the participants stipulated that everyone is now aware of the importance of being clean and everyone is playing their part in ensuring that all areas are clean and maintained.

As one participant mentioned: "*I am shocked that even our cleaners are doing a splendid job, before COVID-19 our kitchens were always dirty. I do not want to mention the bathrooms, but since we came home under level 3 of lockdown, I can really see a change. All places are clean and even myself I make sure to clean my room and COVID-19 actually transformed me to a clean freak*"

- Investing in digital resources and education

The university should invest in advanced technology skills, where students who are still behind in adapting and having the ability to use e-learning platforms without facing difficulties should be considered. Most of the participants mentioned that the university should invest more in online academic activities, including student residences, as online learning will still remain during the post COVID-19 pandemic. As another participant mentioned that "*The Student Residence Administration had done its best to provide a more conducive learning environment for the students during COVID-19. However, they could have done better by providing more COVID-19 equipment such as enough masks, sanitizers, and thermometers. They could also have found a more effective way to deal with noise during the day to support the study periods of other students who can study during the day only*".

- Improved Internet connection

There should be a network coverage or signal that is not affected by load shedding. Attending online classes in their rooms should not be affected by poor networks so that there can be progress and consistency in sticking to the academic work plan provided. Subsequently, another participant added that the network strength is not enough inside their rooms but strong in the living areas, which is not convenient for their online classes as there is too much disturbance.

"*We have an issue with Wi-Fi connection only in the living room and attending classes in the living room is not convenient when you live with other people (students) because you could get disturbed while attending in the living area".*

- Student Residence Structure

Most of the participants added that the University should consider converting the double rooms into single rooms so that everyone should occupy their own spaces without sharing and for a convenient online class attendance. The structure of the building should be one in which the students do not share bathrooms, and the rooms should have bigger windows for ventilation.

Student residences should also think of ways to have residence programs online as the way of living in a *new normal,* and both students and residence personnel should adapt to those implemented residence online activities as it will take time for things to get back to normal and some will remain even after the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the analysis and interpretation of data collected in response to the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in the Student Residences at the university under study. The study population included only postgraduate students in the Student Residences at the university under study with the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Student Residences and participated in the study by answering semi-structured interview questions. From the analysis of data, it is evident that the main issues that students were faced with since they were returned in a repatriated manner back into the Student Residences environment, were the introduction of online learning, which most struggled with at first through and the fact that hygiene was improved and increased, which is a positive achievement. Some

students stated that their stress levels were elevated in relation to coping with the transformation that was taking place at the Student Residences.

The lack of resources was also observed, where most students did not have relevant resources, making it difficult for them to cope with the transformation that is taking place. Internet connectivity issues and studying in residences were the other main concern experienced by the students. All these issues were due to the huge transformation in the Student Residences due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is still a need to look into the progressive issues such as network connectivity, the convention of double rooms into more spacious single rooms with enough windows for ventilation, and technical issues for academic activities in the Student Residences.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters discussed literature relating to the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in the student residence at a tertiary institution. The research design and methods used to select participants and gather data were discussed together with the study findings. The present chapter provides a summary in addition to the conclusions and recommendations of the study. The study aimed to experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in the student residence at the selected tertiary institution, South Africa. The summary is presented in relation to the three objectives of the study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

5.2.1 Determine the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic on students in Residence Administration

The study revealed that most of the participants reported that there was limited access to campus resources, such as libraries and study spaces, which hindered students' ability to succeed academically. Internet connectivity was also an issue for students staying in student residences as it was difficult for them to attend or write tests / exams due to poor network connectivity. The findings also revealed that staying in a double or shared room was challenging, as some students were not fully adhering to COVID-19 pandemic measures, which result in putting other students in a shared room at risk of contracting the virus.

The results further revealed that students are dealing with many issues that lead to high stress levels. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) attest to the fact that social distancing is a public health action that can make people feel lonely and isolated and, thus, can increase stress and anxiety. Most students are currently staying in single or double rooms, and no visitors are permitted at the institution under study and no gatherings are permitted. Therefore, most of the students felt lonely, which increases stress levels.

It is also crucial to note that both students in the selected tertiary institution took their health and hygiene more seriously. Most of the participants indicated that it was necessary to stay safe and take care of their health, which was a huge transformation for others, especially students who did not follow basic hygiene procedures before the pandemic. According to Badrick (2017), about the issue of internet connectivity, it cannot be denied that what attracts and keeps students in student residences is the matter of how strong the Wi-Fi connectivity is in that area. Badrick (2017) further states that university Internet users expect sustained connectivity that will not fail them.

Ntshingila (2020) states that since institutions started implementing the on-line learning protocols it was noted the living circumstances and finances of all students vary and some are not pleasurable, and the students from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer the most during this time. With the incorporation of Van de Laar's conceptual framework (2020) of resilience in higher education into this study, it has been shown that the shift to the use of technologies the selected tertiary institution had a huge impact, since 90% of students come from marginalized backgrounds. Therefore, this was a huge transformation for the students as they are expected to be resilient despite the challenges faced.

The participants again stated that rapid changes in guidelines and protocols required students to be flexible and adaptable, which could be overwhelming for many, and also adjustments in communication strategies from Student Residence Administration to students sometimes lead to confusion or lack of information regarding policies and resources. These challenges highlighted the need for robust support systems and adaptive strategies within the Student Residence Administration to help students navigate the complexities of the pandemic.

5.2.2 Establish the challenges faced by students in the Residence Administration during the COVID-19 pandemic

Regarding this objective, the findings revealed that students faced various challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic in student residences, namely;

- Isolation and Mental Health: Many participants reported feelings of isolation due to lockdowns and social distancing measures. The inability to interact with peers and participate in social activities took a toll on their mental health.

- Remote Learning Challenges: Transitioning to online learning posed significant challenges, including difficulties with technology, lack of participation in virtual classes, and the struggle to maintain motivation without the structure of in-person classes.
- Housing Concerns: Some students faced uncertainty about their housing situations, with changes in residency policies and concerns about safety in shared living environments.
- Support Services: Residence Administration had to adapt their support services to meet new needs. This included providing mental health resources, virtual events to foster community, and guidance on navigating academic challenges.
- Health and Safety Protocols: Students had to adjust to new health protocols within residence halls, such as mask mandates, social distancing, and enhanced cleaning measures, which affected their daily routines.
- Adaptability and resilience: Despite the challenges, many participants' demonstrated adaptability and resilience, finding new ways to connect and engage with their peers, through virtual platforms or small in-person gatherings.

Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the living and learning experiences of students in the Student Residence Administration, highlighting the importance of support systems during difficult times.

5.2.3 To assess the effect of the new normal on students" in Residence Administration due to COVID-19 pandemic

Regarding this objective, the findings revealed that the "*new normal*" resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has had several effects on students in Residence Administration. Participants highlighted the following key areas of impact:

- Adaptation to hybrid learning: Most of the participants have had to adjust to a mix of in-person and online classes. This hybrid model has changed how they engage in their studies, often requiring greater self-discipline and time management skills.
- Increased Digital Interaction: With social distancing measures, students have relied more on digital platforms for communication. Although this has allowed for continued connection, it may lack the depth of face-to-face interactions.

- Health and Safety Awareness: Students have become more aware of health and safety practices, such as hygiene and social distancing. This increased awareness has influenced their behaviour and interactions within student residences.
- Mental health considerations the ongoing uncertainty and changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have led to increased stress and anxiety among students. Residence Administration in collaboration with the Student Health Center had to prioritize mental health resources and support services to address these challenges.
- Flexibility in Policies: According to the Department of Health to accommodate the changing needs of students, Student Residence Administrations had implemented more flexible student residence policies, such as adjusted student residence admission policies, the process of allocating rooms to the students, and as well as the introduction of new measures in the student residence in order to comply with COVID-19 pandemic regulations.
- Focus on Inclusivity: The new normal has highlighted the importance of inclusivity in student residence life, as students from diverse backgrounds face unique challenges. Enhanced support systems and resources have been developed to address these disparities.
- Skills Development: Most of the participants stated that the students had to cultivate adaptability in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Skills such as problem solving and innovation have been crucial to navigate the new normal.

The new normal has reshaped the experiences of students in the Student Residence Administration, requiring ongoing adjustments and support to foster a positive living and learning environment.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Managing the COVID-19 pandemic in student residences requires a multifaceted approach to ensure the health and safety of all residents while minimizing disruptions to their academic and social lives. The following recommendations are made in accordance with the objectives of the study:

- One of the main experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in student residences was the structure of the buildings, where the single and double rooms were small with not enough windows for ventilation. The researcher recommends that student residence administration should consider converting double rooms into single rooms, which will allow affected students in future to be in isolation or quarantine inside their rooms. Again, the structure of the building (e.g., student rooms and common areas) should be in a way that they have bigger windows for enough ventilation.

- There were several challenges that students faced in student residences during the COVID-19 pandemic, some of them caused stress, anxiety, and the feeling of loneliness. Some of the challenges were the issue of poor internet connectivity, which affected their online academic activities while in the room, the adherence of COVID-19 pandemic protocols as students were struggling to adapt to the new protocols introduced in the student residences and, among others.

  Therefore, the current researcher recommends that the student residence administration in collaboration with ICT install enough Internet routers with increased range and strong connectivity that will help students participate well in academic activities online. More research is recommended that student residences implement regular testing protocols for students and staff, especially if there is an outbreak or high community transmission. Student residence administration should share clear and updated guidelines with residents regarding health protocols, changes in policies, and what to do if they experience symptoms or are exposed.

- Adapting to the *New Normal* in student residences after the COVID-19 pandemic involves integrating practices that ensure ongoing health and safety while accommodating evolving needs and behaviours. Many students find it difficult to adapt to sudden new measures and are forced to comply with updated or newly implemented policies in student residences. Therefore, the researcher recommends that the administration of student residences develop and communicate contingency plans for potential outbreaks, including how to

handle an increasing number of cases and how to provide support to affected students.

Implementing these recommendations can help create a safer environment in student residences and support the well-being of students during the pandemic. Again, more research is needed on the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in student residences because most of the literature found was very limited and mostly from abroad. Furthermore, the researcher suggests that by intergrading these recommendations, student residences can navigate the New Normal effectively, ensuring a balance between safety, academic success, and a positive living experience. Furthermore, future research needs to consider the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in student residences by staff or personnel in Residence Administration.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations of the study were identified:

- The sample used was small compared to the number of students in the student residences at the selected tertiary institution. As such, the findings of the study cannot be generalised to the entire population of South African universities.
- Only post-graduate students were targeted in post-graduate hostels, as they had experience staying in student residences during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- All study participants were post-graduate students and interviews were conducted during the day on weekdays. Some of the participants were not comfortable with voice recording, which resulted in not recording some sessions and deviating in writing down their responses while interviewing. Therefore, the interviews took longer than anticipated.

The study was not limited to any ethnic group, which allowed all ethnic groups to participate in the study, but only one ethnic group participated.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic brought positive and negative experiences in student residences with the introduction of the new measures in place to curb the

spread of the virus. The study explored the various experiences the Covid19 pandemic has had on student residences. The study findings showed that the main issues that students were faced with since they were returned in a repatriation manner back into the student residence environments were the introduction of online learning, which most struggled with at first mostly due to lack of internet connectivity in the student residences, and the fact that hygiene was improved and increased, which is a positive development.

Some students said that their stress levels were elevated in relation to coping with the transformation that was taking place in the student residences. The issue of insufficient resources was also noted, where most of the students did not have relevant or sufficient resources, which made it hard for them to cope with the transformation that is taking place.

The findings of the study also revealed that the main issues were around the repatriation of students back to student residences, where there was not a clear system of doing this. And this was a very clear indication that it was all due to the transformation from what was regarded as normal previously, which is now regarded as a new normal of doing things within student residences. The other issue raised was the issue of accessing PPEs, as most had not received proper directives regarding this matter. Internet connectivity issues and studying in residences was the other main concerns that were of particular interest to students. All these issues were due to the huge transformation in student residences, due to Covid19.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

Project title: **Managing Student Residences During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Public Administration Perspective at a Selected South African Tertiary Institution**

Project leader: **Phetama Albert Mailula**

I ……....hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the following project: “Experiences of COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in the Student Residence Administration at the University of Limpopo, South Africa.”

I understand that:

1. My responses will be treated with confidentiality and only be used for the purpose of the research.
2. No harm will be posed to me.
3. The research project aim has been explained to me.
4. I do not have to respond to any question that I do not wish to answer for any reason.
5. I agree that the interview session should be recorded.
6. Access to the records that pertain to my participation in the study will be restricted to persons directly involved in the research.
7. Any questions that I may have regarding the research, or related matters, will be answered by the researcher.
8. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw my participation at any stage.
9. I understood the information regarding my participation in the study and I agree to participate.

Signature of interviewee **Signature of interviewer**

_____

_____

Signed at_____ on this ____ day of _____20____

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Objective one: To determine the experiences of COVID-19 pandemic on students in th Student Residence Administration;

- How have student residence conditions impacted your learning and well-being during the pandemic and the subsequent closure of universities?
- If you have had the chance to choose, which type of accommodation, housing characteristics would you prefer especially during Covid-19, and why?
- What arrangements were in place to limit the spread of Covid-19 in the University halls of residences?
- Based on your experience in residences, do you think student residence administration were complying with Covid-19 measures and regulations as stipulated by Department of Health, support your answer?

Objective two: To establish challenges faced by students in the Student Residence Administration during Covid-19 pandemic;

- What difficulties did you experience in the student residence administration during the pandemic?
- Did you get necessary support and equipment from residence administration personnel during those difficult times, please elaborate how?

Objective three: To assess the effect of the *New Normal* on students in the Student Residence Administration due to Covid-19 pandemic;

- Do you think the *New Normal* caused by Covid-19 has brought the positive/negative changes into the students' residences to support you academically, elaborate?
- Are the students' residences on campus suitable for studying, attending classes and writing tests/exams, give a brief detail?
- Any comments, additions, and recommendations regarding to the experiences had in the Student Residence Administration during Covid-19 pandemic?

APPENDIX C: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL LETTER

University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 3935, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: tukiso.sewapa@ul.ac.za

TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING: 18 March 2025

PROJECT NUMBER: TREC/21/2024: PG – Amended

PROJECT:

Title: Managing Student Residences During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Public Administration Perspective at a Selected South African Tertiary Institution
Researcher: PA Mailula
Supervisor: Prof. SK Mokoena
Co-Supervisor/s: N/A
School: Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership
Degree: Master of Public Administration and Management

PROF. KM CHUENE
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.

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APPENDIX D: GATEKEEPER PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

University of Limpopo
Office of the Registrar
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 2407, Fax: (015) 268 3048, Email: Kwena.Masha@ul.ac.za/Retha.Balie@ul.ac.za

12 March 2024

Ms. PA Mailula

Email: Phetana.Mailula@ul.ac.za

Dear PA Mailula,

GATEKEEPER PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

TITLE: EXPERIENCES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC AMONGST STUDENTS IN THE STUDENT RESIDENCE AT A SELECTED TERTIARY INSTITUTION, SOUTH AFRICA

Researcher:	**PA Mailula**
Supervisor:	**Prof. SK Mokoena**
Co-Supervisor/s:	**N/A**
School:	**Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership**
Degree:	**Master of Public Administration and Management**

Kindly be informed that Gatekeeper permission is granted to you to conduct research at the University of Limpopo entitled: **"Experiences of COVID-19 pandemic amongst students in the Student Residence at a selected tertiary institution, South Africa".**

Regards,

PROF. JK MASHA
UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR

Cc. Prof. RJ Singh: Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Research, Innovation and Partnerships
Prof. RN Madadzhe: Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning
Dr. T Mabila, Director: Research Development and Administration
Prof. D Maposa – Chairperson: Research and Ethics Committee
Dr. T Sewapa, Ethics Officer
Ms. M Hutamo – Assistant: Ethics Secretarist

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APPENDIX F: EDITOR'S LETTER

Balote Projects (Pty) Ltd

Cell no: 084 255 2164 **Email:** matlou.moloto@gmail.com
P O Box 1106, Faunapark, 0787
Reg No: 2017/113184/07
Tax Ref: 9299915224

EDITING CERTIFICATE- RESEARCH PROJECT

13 September 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves as confirmation that I Matlou Moloto have edited the research of Mr Mailula PA entitled **"Managing Student Residences During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Public Administration Perspective at a Selected South African Tertiary Institution"** to be submitted for the qualification Master of Public Administration and Management at the University of Limpopo.

I therefore, declare that the document is to my knowledge devoid of language errors that may deprive the said persons' work from being accepted to pursue the qualification.

I am contactable at the above contact details should you have queries.

Matlou Moloto (Miss)

Editor's Information: DTech Candidate (Tshwane University of Technology) MPhil Second Language Studies (Stellenbosch) BEd Language Methodology (University of Limpopo) BA Languages (University of Limpopo) Higher Education Diploma (University of Limpopo) memberors

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